

Education and Culture Committee
Scrutiny of the 2013-14 Draft Budget

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Provision for 16-19 year olds

The Cabinet Secretary has indicated that he expects colleges to play a full part in ensuring that all 16-19 year olds have access to appropriate learning opportunities. This is clearly an important objective, however the issues involved in achieving this objective need to be considered.

Table 1 Age profile of students in colleges in Scotland

	Under 16	16-18	19-24	25-59	60-64	65 & over	Overall	Number of students
% of full-time	3	44	32	21	-	-	100	79,571
% of all students	17	21	18	40	2	2	100	337,098

Source: SFC Infact Database

From Table 1 it can be seen that 16-18 year olds (these are the age-bands which the SFC uses in analysing student data) currently account for around one fifth of all college students, but 44% of full-time students. SFC data also indicates that 51% of 16-18 year olds in colleges are engaged in full-time study. The most recent Scottish Government data indicates that there are in the region of 31,000 16-19 year olds who are not in employment, education or training. We are also aware of the significant reductions in college budgets, and that these will have a continuing impact over the coming years. This then leads to a series of issues:

- what types of course will the additional 16-19 year olds undertake
- will these be full-time or part-time
- what qualifications, if any will, they lead to
- what progression opportunities will they open up
- what will be the implications for older students, who also are a very important part of the college student profile; will they be displaced to create additional opportunities for these younger students?

The Cabinet Secretary has also indicated that he would like where possible for additional provision to be made available for 20-24 year olds. Similar issues arise with respect to this objective.

Overall it is important that, if additional numbers of 16-19 year olds (or 20-24 year olds) are to be admitted to colleges, they are studying on programmes which will lead to relevant qualifications and progression opportunities. In this respect it is also important that, if Skills Development Scotland (SDS) is providing some additional

funding for this purpose, this is part of a coherent programme of collaboration with the colleges, which will deliver appropriate progression opportunities.

Providing qualifications which are fit for purpose

The Cabinet Secretary has noted in his letter of guidance to the SFC that it is important that courses and qualifications are fit for purpose, and in particular he has noted the extent of 'non-recognised qualifications', and the need to ensure that where possible college courses should help people to progress to employment. This is an important challenge for colleges, given their changing role in contemporary Scottish society. It is however a complex issue. Table 2 provides an indication of the extent of provision in Scotland's Colleges, and provides data which allows some comparison between 2001-02 and 2010-11.

Table 2 Qualification aim of students in Scotland's Colleges

	2001-02		2010-11	
	No of Students	wSUMS*	No of Students	wSUMS*
Qualification aim of study	%	%	%	%
HNC	6	10	6	10
HND	4	11	5	11
HN Units only	1	1	1	1
Other HE level qualifications	3	2	3	2
S/NVQ L1	-	1	-	1
S/NVQ L2	4	9	3	6
S/NVQ L3	2	6	4	6
Adv Higher/ Higher & Intermediate	4	6	14	22
Access	-	1	1	2
Other FE level qualifications	40	41	31	32
Courses not leading to recognized qualifications	36	12	30	7
Total	100	100	98	100
N	441,422	2,261,847	341,630	2,448,309

Source: SFC Infact Database

[* wSUMs are weighted SUMs; SUMs are Student Units of Measurement, and are based on 40 hours of student contact. They are the basis on which funding is allocated by the SFC to the colleges]

Table 2 provides a statistical summary of all the provision in Scotland's Colleges. By providing wSUMs data alongside headcount data, it allows comparison between the headcount numbers of students registered in colleges, and the relative importance of different forms of provision in terms of college funding.

It can be noted that participation in courses not leading to recognised qualifications has declined over this time period. It can also be noted that the significance of this type of provision is much less when considered in terms of wSUMs rather than headcount numbers. This is because much of this provision is part-time, and often involves relatively limited periods of attendance at colleges. Some of it may also be commercial fee earning provision. The Cabinet Secretary has also noted that some of these courses can have a very useful function in providing access routes back into education for adult returners.

This table also indicates the range of courses and qualifications provide by colleges in contemporary society. While most of these courses will be broadly vocational it can also be noted that in a number of cases they provide opportunities for students to progress to further study and higher levels of qualifications. Thus a number of HNC/D programmes now have a primary function of enabling students to progress to bachelor degrees rather than entering the labour market directly (Ingram and Gallacher 2011). This has been recognised by the SFC and the Scottish Government with the emphasis which they have placed on arrangements which enhance opportunities for articulation between college courses and university degrees.

Regionalisation

The Cabinet Secretary has indicated an objective of achieving a major restructuring of the college sector on regional lines. Associated with this a significant programme of mergers and new forms of collaboration is planned, and indeed is already underway. It is envisaged that through this a more rational and cost effective pattern of college provision will be established. The need for a reorganisation of this kind is widely recognised. However some caution is required when considering the implications of current proposals.

- College mergers can be complex, difficult and time-consuming processes, and the savings they result in may take some time to be realised. At a time of economic stringency and cuts in the college budget there is no evidence that this is a quick fix.
- The local nature of college provision has been of considerable importance in providing access routes back into education for many college students. There is also evidence that community based provision can be of particular importance in this respect (Gallacher et al 2007). However there is also evidence that provision of this kind is vulnerable when rationalisation of provision takes place. It will be important that locally based provision is not lost in the process of merger and reorganisation.
- Existing proposals for governance provide for regional and local colleges and boards in multi-college regions. Local college boards will be chaired by the college principals, who will also appoint senior staff members to these boards. There is widespread concern that rather than improve arrangements for good governance in large regions such as Glasgow this will give very significant additional power to the principal, and it is difficult to see how the regional board will be able to exercise effective control. This problem is further exacerbated in Glasgow, given that a number of complex mergers are still underway. It would appear that there is a need to reconsider the relationship

between the regional and local boards in a large multi-college region such as Glasgow, and the composition of the local boards.

4 Differentiation, stratification and outcome agreements for universities

The Cabinet Secretary has recognised the diversity which now exists within the higher education sector in Scotland. Some indication of the extent of this diversity can be seen from the fact that while ‘ancient’ universities receive 71% of the SFC funding to support research, the 1960s universities receive 23% and the post 92s only 5% (the small specialist institutions receive the remaining 1%).

Table 3 Social background of entrants to Scottish universities

	% of young full-time entrants from NS-SEC 4,5.6 & 7		% of young entrants from state schools	
	2003/04	2009/10	2003/04	2009/10
Ancients	20	19	73	77
1960s	28	27	93	92
Post 92s	37	35	96	95
Scotland	27	26	86	87

Source: HESA Widening Participation PIs

From Table 3 it can be seen that the Scottish higher education system is not just a differentiated one, but also a stratified one. Despite numerous policy initiatives to widen access to higher education it is clear that major inequalities still exist within the system. The Cabinet Secretary has suggested that the outcome agreements which will help shape the funding allocated to each higher education institution (HEI) should reflect this diversity and be linked to measures which are designed to widen access to higher education. It is clear that different institutions will respond to this in different ways, but it will also be important that all of them should be developing appropriate responses, and be expected to provide evidence of the work they are undertaking to address the issue of widening participation.

References

- Gallacher J, Crossan B, Mayes T, Smith L & Watson D (2007) Expanding our understanding of the learning cultures in community based further education. *Educational Review* 59:4 pp 501-517
- Ingram R and Gallacher J (2011) HN Tracking Study: Final Report. Centre for Research in Lifelong Learning, Glasgow Caledonian University.