

Colleges Scotland Briefing – Education and Skills Committee

Introduction

Ahead of the Education and Skills Committee meeting on Wednesday 29 June 2016 regarding the Cabinet Secretary's statement on the Scottish Government's plans for Education and Skills, Colleges Scotland wishes to provide you with some information on the college sector in Scotland which may be pertinent to your discussions. Colleges Scotland is the representative organisation for all colleges in Scotland. Scotland's colleges are seeking to maximise their potential to deliver:

- Sustainable and innovative institutions
- Skilled and successful learners
- A stronger economy and fairer society.

Fair access for young people, regardless of background and circumstances, is at the heart of what colleges stand for. Colleges promote fairness, offering people life chances and equality of opportunity to learn. Enrolling in college helps those with low or no skills to move towards employment and supports those with few or no qualifications to achieve a better education.

Colleges work in partnerships with schools, local authorities, universities and employers to provide opportunities for people to gain skills, improve employability and career prospects or gain a higher education. Approximately 20% of higher education is delivered by colleges. Colleges offer professional and technical qualifications and provide opportunities for people to upskill, reskill and contribute to the economy.

Widening Access

Colleges Scotland welcomes the acknowledgement from the Cabinet Secretary that colleges have a role to play in widening access alongside the universities and fully support the findings expressed in the Commission on Widening Access final report. This whole system approach would be beneficial as the college sector has already demonstrated its ability and willingness to tackle inequalities, to reduce the attainment gap, and to deliver education to learners from some of the most deprived postcodes and those furthest from the workforce. This approach would also have subsequent savings to the public purse due to the recognised lower costs of delivering higher education in colleges.

The Sutton Trust report¹, published in May 2016, also highlights the vital role that the college sector has played in widening access, stating that "The improved access for disadvantaged students in Scotland ... has been met almost entirely by the expansion of sub-degree programmes in Scottish colleges. Since 2006, 90 per cent of all the growth in entry into Scottish higher education by disadvantaged students has been through sub-degree courses in colleges".

Closing the Attainment Gap

We believe that colleges are uniquely placed to make a real difference to attainment levels in Scotland. Colleges work in partnership with schools, local authorities and other agencies to provide highly effective 'alternative curriculum' provision for young people in schools at risk of disengaging and non-attenders. These include programmes designed to develop core and personal skills and a

¹ The Sutton Trust, May 2016, *Access in Scotland - Access to higher education for people from less advantaged backgrounds in Scotland* http://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Access-in-Scotland_May2016.pdf

variety of experiences that build relationships with disengaged young people and begin to bring the college environment, and learning itself, within their comfort zone.

Fairness and Equality

Colleges play a vital role in generating social capital by taking a disproportionate amount of students from socio-economic deprived backgrounds, and hence bringing a contribution to delivering equality and fairness across Scotland. Both of these activities contribute to closing the attainment gap due to the disproportionate number of students from the 10%, 20% and 40% most deprived postcodes, providing those furthest from the workforce with qualifications and skills to enable them to enter the workforce, and hence address the underlying causes of poverty.

This vital role fulfilled by colleges helps break the cycle of deprivation and enables people who may not otherwise have done so to access work – increasing a person's life chances. Colleges also assist students in retraining and upskilling, hence allowing them to find different work.

Colleges are an articulation route to universities for some students who may have not been fully served in their pre-16 educational experience. Colleges also help deliver equality and fairness through admissions and student support policies that recognise the different needs of minority groups, and colleges are working towards ensuring gender balance.

Colleges Scotland believes that colleges have a vital role to play in lowering the barriers to entry to further and higher education for disadvantaged groups and look forward to contributing to the work of the Commissioner for Fair Access.

Developing the Young Workforce

The college sector is a key deliverer of the Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) strategy and is actively engaged in school-college partnerships and producing a skilled workforce. Colleges Scotland believes that colleges have the capability to act as vocational hubs, working in close collaboration with local authorities, schools and other local economic agencies, to develop vocational pathways that match regional and national demands and stimulate the interest of young people in career opportunities. These links between colleges, schools and local authorities can also allow greater interaction to help deliver economic development.

Colleges Scotland believes that the proposed new 'education regions' and 'school clusters' outlined in the Cabinet Secretary's statement will have implications for existing school-college partnerships in respect of DYW. Colleges Scotland would welcome the opportunity to be part of these discussions.

Expansion of Childcare

Colleges Scotland believes that the proposed expansion of childcare will have an impact on the college sector. The large estimated increase in the number of nursery workers will need to be trained in colleges, and Colleges Scotland will expect the additional costs associated with this for colleges to be factored into the development of this policy, and fully funded by the Scottish Government.

Student Support

Colleges Scotland supports the implementation of a standard and fair system for student support funding would provide students with adequate financial support, as well as reasonable certainty on the support they are likely to receive for the duration of their study. Colleges Scotland is of the view that nobody should be financially worse off by attending college than they would be on benefits and we fully support measures to improve student support to ensure that all students can attend college, regardless of their personal circumstances or background.

National Bargaining

National Bargaining has been reintroduced to the sector following an absence of over 20 years, which has seen the creation of the National Joint Negotiating Committee (NJNC). This has established a set of common conditions of service and pay scales across the sector. New contracts

of employment cannot simply be related to pay, and a negotiated balance has to be struck to ensure any new model is sustainable and inclusive of conditions of service, hence a new flexible contract is required which will allow delivery of the Workforce for the Future.

To produce innovative and sustainable institutions together with skilled and successful students, a vision and a strategic work plan to deliver a Workforce for the Future is required. The environment within which colleges operate has changed greatly over the past few decades and it is clear that the environment may change even more rapidly in the coming years. It is important that colleges have the capacity to deliver the type of learning that society, the economy and individuals will seek in the future – learning that is increasingly personalised and flexible, increasingly assisted by and delivered by sophisticated interactive technologies, and, of course, tailored to employers' requirements and in line with students' preferences, needs and aspirations.

Creating a fit for purpose, cost effective and professional workforce to meet the needs of the college sector in the future is a challenging and extensive project, and will not be delivered without significant new and recurrent investment. This change programme will not be dissimilar to other significant public sector reforms. If the college sector is to be truly transformational it needs a Workforce for the Future. This work programme envisages delivering a new flexible contract, with many key milestones that deliver for both lecturing and support staff, and ensure students are at the heart of what colleges continue to do.

Review of Enterprise and Skills Agencies

Colleges Scotland understands the need to review the remit and role of the agencies involved in skills and training in order to ensure that they respond to changes in the environment and are able to fulfil the government's policy ambitions. Colleges Scotland would wish to play the fullest possible role in supporting this review. We believe that colleges will have a key role to play in achieving the government's ambitions and that regionalisation provides a model, based upon collaboration and partnership, which would greatly add value to the work of the agencies. This is a significant review therefore it is essential that colleges are involved in this, particularly given the emphasis on innovation and STEM.

Colleges Scotland
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