Education and Skills Committee – Pre-Budget 2017/18 Scrutiny
Call for Evidence

1. Introduction

The college sector plays a vital role in the Scottish economy and the provision of skills for Scotland's workforce. We welcome the opportunity to provide a written submission to the Education and Skills Committee pre-budget scrutiny.

2. Overview

As part of our submission to the call for evidence relating to the Enterprise and Skills Review (which covered two of the public bodies under pre-budget scrutiny), Colleges Scotland stated its full support to the Scottish Government’s ambition for Scotland to rank in the top quartile of Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) nations for productivity, equality, sustainability and well-being.

We believe that in order to achieve this ambition, there needs to be a fundamental shift in how the government and its agencies work with colleges, the private sector, universities and other key stakeholders. This includes the agreement of a shared vision, strong leadership both nationally and regionally, together with a better aligned simpler policy and funding framework that is focused on delivering results that directly contribute to our shared vision, which in turn improved opportunities for our economy.

3. Performance

In order to achieve this collective vision, it is important that each of the individual agencies make decisions that support and align to the collaborative approach that seeks to bring a more coherent joined up strategy for the economy, education, skills and employability.

In general, to achieve this we require the following:

- Stronger and more focused co-ordination across the public sector agencies and a decluttering of the organisational-led policies, interventions, funding methodologies and accountability regimes that currently exist.
- Much greater emphasis on innovation and internationalisation which encourages and rewards entrepreneurship and enterprise and seeks to mainstream ‘what works best’ in a more deliberate, timely and agile way.
- Improved recognition of the fundamental importance of skills in delivering a step change in productivity, equality and well-being and the development of a single system approach to achieving that end.
- Better recognition of the national and regional dynamic and a more flexible policy and funding environment that is based on what works best, with much greater emphasis on sharing best practice and intelligence across organisational and regional boundaries to make a real difference.
Regarding specific comments relating to each individual agency, these have been outlined below:

**Skills Development Scotland**

- The skills landscape would benefit from both a continued appreciation of the central role which the college sector plays within the skills pipeline, from primary education through to higher education, as well as the links with employers; and a less complex and administratively burdensome system to monitor activities.

**Scottish Funding Council (SFC)**

- As the college sector’s main funder, SFC has a good understanding of the college sector’s core business, student needs, as well as college structures and delivery mechanisms. There would be benefit from the continued joint work approach to seeking to mitigate against the complexities now experienced by colleges as a result of reclassification as public bodies. There would also be benefit in a review of and reduction in the overall level of data returns.

**Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA)**

- There has been valuable work with SQA on the quality assurance framework for qualifications and systems, and colleges have reported the benefit of the SQA prior verification of assessment process. There would however be benefit in a stronger alignment of the timescale between development of qualifications with the college curriculum planning cycle.

**Education Scotland**

- There has been college sector engagement on the new, revised quality framework and arrangements for supporting quality improvement in Scotland’s colleges. It is too early to assess how this move to an improved quality assurance model, works in practice.

4. Conclusion

We trust that this written submission has been useful in the deliberations of the Education and Skills Committee during its pre-budget scrutiny on the specific public bodies.

Please do not hesitate to contact Colleges Scotland if you require clarification or further information.

Colleges Scotland
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