

SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT EDUCATION, CHILDREN, AND YOUNG PEOPLE COMMITTEE:

COLLEGE REGIONALISATION ENQUIRY

**JOINT SUBMISSION FROM CITY OF GLASGOW COLLEGE, GLASGOW CLYDE COLLEGE, AND
GLASGOW KELVIN COLLEGE**

1. The three Glasgow colleges are pleased to provide this response to the Committee's invitation to contribute to its consideration of the Scottish Government's policy of college regionalisation. This joint response has been developed by the three college Principals, and is fully endorsed by us, the Chairs.
2. By way of context, we should first remind Committee members of the singular challenges our colleges face in delivering for Scotland's largest city:
 - 40% of Glasgow citizens live in the 20% most deprived communities in Scotland (source: Glasgow Economic Strategy 2022 – 2027).
 - the 2020 Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) ranks two of Glasgow's data zones within the bottom 10 in Scotland for domains including income, employment, and skills.
 - low-skills are a challenge: in 2020, over 55,000 Glasgow residents had no qualifications; and while the colleges and their partners are making an impact - the percentage of people with no qualifications fell from 16.4% in 2019 to 12.1% in 2020 – the challenge remains considerable.
 - 134,000 individuals were employed in low paid sectors in 2019.
 - in 2020, over 38,000 people in Glasgow were economically inactive as a result of long-term ill health.
3. The legacy of COVID- 19 presents additional challenges:
 - continued short-term damage to the City centre and the need to support survival of its businesses and jobs. Employers in Glasgow - particularly in the retail and leisure sectors - faced the longest and most significant restrictions during COVID.
 - Despite restrictions easing, the City centre has not recovered: the slow return of office workers, particularly on weekdays, remains a brake on recovery; footfall is 10% down on pre-COVID levels; and there are 500,000 fewer visitors each month.
 - The sectors most affected by COVID are now struggling to attract staff back, with many having moved to new roles when businesses closed or during furlough.
3. This then, is the reality in which we are operating: the twin priorities of supporting economic recovery and driving community renewal demand a period of rapid re- and up-skilling to allow businesses to maximise recovery and growth. Moreover, this work needs to be undertaken in a period characterised by immense pressures on public spending. This backdrop of a challenging present and future is the context in which we address the Committee's questions.

What has worked well in the college sector in the years following regionalisation?

4. The reduction in the number of colleges in Glasgow, from nine to three, laid the foundations for a model that now sees two large community colleges alongside a city centre 'super' College; each of the three colleges has a range of specialisms, and close collaboration between the colleges has seen the development of a number of intra-college progression pathways

across further and higher education. Working through the framework provided by the Glasgow Colleges Group (GCG), the three colleges work in close partnership; through their Principals and Boards, they have successfully collaborated to create a single Glasgow curriculum reflecting a current regional labour market analysis, and comprising a broad range of provision that serves learners from access to graduate levels, and supports businesses from sole traders and SMEs, to multi-nationals. The consolidation of Glasgow's colleges has strengthened partnership working with local authorities, and through them, helped build learning pathways from school to post-school in locations (including community-based provision) throughout Glasgow, and across Scotland.

5. Alongside improved scale and coherence, regionalisation has additionally given the new college regions greater influence in engaging other learning partners, including stimulating new collaborations with universities in Glasgow, and beyond. Finally, one of the Government's prime aims in the regionalisation programme was to secure substantial efficiencies. In Glasgow these were achieved with the implementation of the three-college model, and since then the colleges have collaborated successfully to achieve further efficiencies. We must note, however, that the failure of the Government to retain those savings within the college system – manifest in a series of real-term budget reductions at successive spending rounds – has now reached a point where many colleges, including those in Glasgow, appear compelled to resort to redundancies.

How might the sector further improve in the years ahead?

5. **The college sector needs a refreshed and current mandate from Scottish Ministers**, reflecting the post-COVID environment, the climate challenge, and the priority to secure a just transition to net zero. In the summer of 2019, senior Scottish Ministers commissioned from Paul Little and Audrey Cumberford an analysis of the economic impact of Scotland's colleges. The subsequent Cumberford-Little (C-L) report¹, published in February 2020 delivered that analysis, highlighting the significant economic and social benefits that derived from colleges' work. The Report also identified a series of recommendations² that, if implemented, would address the systemic issues preventing colleges from achieving yet greater impact. These included proposals to improve college/employer engagement; to give colleges greater freedom to develop qualifications aligned with employer needs; to remove other central controls that constrain college innovation; and to establish a new approach to measuring college performance, based on impact. The Report was unanimously endorsed by Scottish college leaders, and warmly welcomed by businesses who noted the recommendation for business support to become the bedrock of college activity. A subsequent report from the Scottish Funding Council³ endorsed many of C-L's recommendations, while, in turn, the Scottish Government response to SFC's report similarly supported C-L's thrust.
6. Nonetheless, over two years on from the publication (and in the wake of a once-in-a-century pandemic that has visited catastrophic consequences upon individuals, communities, businesses, and national economies), we await the implementation of any of C-L's recommendations – despite the certainty that a fleet of foot college sector is more essential than ever in supporting the Scottish recovery. Implementing Cumberford-Little is now urgent

¹ <https://view.pagetiger.com/inlhij/1/PDF.pdf>

² See Annex A

³ <https://www.sfc.ac.uk/review/review.aspx>

since it provides the blueprint for the requisite skills-led response to the damage wrought by COVID.

7. **Alongside Cumberford-Little, the now chronic underfunding of Scotland's colleges must be addressed.** Through successive real terms cuts, Government is putting at risk the benefits of regionalisation, its own investment in colleges, and is undermining colleges' capacity to support employers (particularly our SMEs) in up- and re-skilling across a raft of priority sectors. This position is exacerbated in Glasgow region where the grant paid to colleges by the Scottish Funding Council (despite the challenges the City and the wider Glasgow region face, as set out in paragraph 2 above) falls well below the sector average of £301 per credit; indeed, City of Glasgow's allocation of £250 per credit is the lowest in the sector. Moreover, this funding model 'bakes in' historical inequalities year on year.
8. Consistent with their role proposed in Cumberford-Little – delivering high-quality business support - alignment with the Government's National Strategy for Economic Transformation should be explicitly defined **and resourced** as an essential priority.
9. **Finally, college governance in Glasgow must be reformed**, returning the three Glasgow Colleges to a direct funding relationship with SFC, and removing the added, inefficient governance layer imposed through the Glasgow Colleges Regional Board (GCRB). In this context, the Scottish Funding Council's Review of Coherence and Sustainability (paragraph 5 above) included a detailed review of GCRB performance as part of a wider consideration of all so-called 'Regional Strategic Bodies'. It concluded that *"...now is an appropriate stage in its development for GCRB to begin conversations about further reformation of the structures in Glasgow that will facilitate the continued effective and efficient delivery of education and skills for the region.* In its response to SFC's report, published last October, the Scottish Government said it *"... accepts the SFC's recommendation that Glasgow Colleges' Regional Board (GCRB) and their three assigned colleges explore other organisational options that secure pan-regional planning, further efficiency gains, the financial viability of the constituent colleges, and retain a Glasgow 'front door' for students, employers and stakeholders. We expect that this should now move forward to conclusion with a recommendation made from the SFC to the Scottish Government as soon as possible"* (our emphasis).
11. Six months on, no such conclusion has yet emerged, or been proposed. But GCRB's annual direct costs, at some £500,000 remain a substantial drain on the Glasgow colleges' budget, particularly in the current financial climate, and the further real terms reductions colleges have suffered in the Scottish Government's latest budget. Yet GCRB *additionally* top-slices a further over £400,000 from the Glasgow colleges, meaning its minimum annual total costs run in excess of £900,000, rising significantly further when opportunity costs from senior level participation in GCRB structures at Principal, tier 2 and 3 levels are included. Those costs bring no evident benefit to our learners or other partners – indeed, we regret that GCRB now has a disempowering and de-energising impact across the three colleges, and is often the source of duplication and delay. We cannot emphasise enough our view that the collective successes of the Glasgow colleges, and the excellent joint working underpinning that success, are driven not by the GCRB, but by the three Principals – who, extraordinarily, are not members of the GCRB – working through the long-established Glasgow Colleges Group (GCG). We must make clear to the Committee that the GCRB is an unaffordable impediment - and far from an accelerant - to progress in Glasgow. It must now be disestablished.

Conclusion

12. We hope this submission is of help to the Committee; we should be delighted to provide further information on request, and to discuss with the Committee the detail of our paper. We hope we have made clear the successes of regionalisation, while addressing the systemic, financial, and governance constraints that continue to hold us back. The priority for us is to see swift action from SFC and Government on the three issues we have highlighted – with that action, we are in no doubt that the Glasgow colleges will play a full part in the City’s social and economic ambitions, as well as that of the wider Glasgow region, and of Scotland itself. To coin a phrase from the then Scottish Government’s proposals for post-16 reform that delivered college regionalisation, we must continue to “put learners at the centre’.

Alisdair Barron MBE, Chair, City of Glasgow College

David Newell, Chair, Glasgow Clyde College

Ian Patrick, Chair, Glasgow Kelvin College

ANNEX B – Recommendations from the Cumberford Little Report

Recommendation 1

Ministers should endorse a compelling narrative setting out the purpose of a 21st college that we propose on page 22, and:

- noting our emphasis on lifetime learning and business engagement, promote it consistently across Government, irrespective of Portfolio, to develop a clear understanding across civic Scotland of what a college is for;
- use it to establish short, multi-year, Ministerial guidance, focused on core priorities in support of the purpose;
- develop a transparent and accessible performance regime directly related to the purpose. This should be done by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), working with the sector and other stakeholders. In the context of that work, we are clear the existing target for colleges, focusing on volume, should be replaced by a target that focuses clearly on the impact we want colleges to make;
- to allow colleges better to support business, particularly in pursuit of productivity gains, and inclusive growth, and given the priority of establishing a coherent, flexible, and efficient post-school tertiary system, reconsider the current imbalance between the SFC's college and university strategic funds; and
- again given the ambition for a coherent tertiary system, reconsider the historical balance between the SFC's university and college 'core' funding streams to ensure the allocation of resource is appropriate for today's and tomorrow's economic landscape.

Recommendation 2

Consistent with the purpose we propose for a 21st century college, **Ministers** make supporting business growth a top priority for colleges. To this end, they should:

- ask SG, SFC, the enterprise agencies (inc SoSEP) to work with the college sector - on a 'Team Scotland' basis - to develop mechanisms that incentivise effective and purposeful college/employer engagement; this work should be business centred, and avoid complexity and bureaucracy; in addition, given the integral nature of colleges to business development, growth and productivity, and as we move closer to a knowledge-based economy where the importance of place is becoming more acute, Ministers should ask SFC to consider a strategic alignment between colleges and SDS, SE, HIE, and SoSEP so as to improve joint regional planning, and the development of joint teams to enable regional collaborations with colleges (and universities). This approach would be particularly helpful for PACE related activities, and in those areas where we know we have large scale and critical skills gaps;
- ask the enterprise agencies to work with colleges to explore how their relationship could be strengthened further, using a regional model of business-college/ enterprise agency engagement, avoiding cluttering the landscape in which businesses have to navigate;
- ensure the college sector plays a full part in realising the national ambition of a single portal for businesses. This will help colleges properly understand - and contribute to - the content of the portal, while ensuring college support is clearly identified as a part of the resource available to employers;
- ask the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) to work with SFC, the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF), and the sector to review its post-16 portfolio against the tests of the new college purpose. This should focus on the need to meet the tests of industry-related currency, credibility, and agility, and accommodating employers' wish for short, focused or bite-sized learning interventions. SQA should also consider, with colleges, and SCQF, how they might secure the freedom to design and develop their own qualifications. In addition, and again with colleges, and others where identified below, SQA should investigate:

- how colleges might secure wider recognition for the value of accreditation provided by a range of other awarding bodies, and industry;
- (with SFC) how to enhance the use of college certified qualifications, and more use of ‘micro-credentials’;
- how Ministers can better promote the value of Higher National Qualifications for direct entry into employment;
- the development of a two-year college degree, based on the Higher National Diploma, with additional work- placement content;
- ask Skills Development Scotland and the Scottish Funding Council, as part of the work undertaken by the two bodies on skills alignment, to discuss with colleges the opportunities for greater college participation in each stage of the ‘Apprenticeship Family’
- in line with Scottish Government international ambitions, and our status as “A Trading Nation”, and in the light of the experience and success some colleges have enjoyed in exporting, ask SDI to consider wider opportunities for Scottish colleges’ participation in international visits and trade missions, along with invitations to participate in inward trade missions;
- ask SFC to work with the sector and business representatives to ensure its Outcome Agreements define effective and suitable impact measures for business engagement. SFC should also work with Education Scotland to ensure its quality assurance regime for colleges supports these measures;
- expand the Flexible Workforce Development Fund, allowing colleges to engage and support SMEs and micro- and family-businesses in enhancing productivity;
- Our final recommendation for Scottish Ministers draws on the benefits that our other proposals may generate. Our theme is one of identifying opportunities to reduce unnecessary bureaucratic constraints and central controls that characterise the current system and which, in our judgement, hold colleges back from making the fullest possible contribution to inclusive growth. We invite Ministers to consider if the more coherent tertiary system we propose allows scope for asking the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to revisit its current classification of Scotland’s colleges. Ahead of that process, the Scottish Government should undertake a full analysis of the basis for the ONS decision (now several years old) and compare the position at that stage with the type of regime we propose.

Recommendation 3

The **Scottish Funding Council (SFC)** should:

- work with the college sector, to reform its current funding model, so as directly to incentivise colleges’ agility and speed of response to employer demand. The new model should be transparent, and readily understood, and introduced as quickly as possible, no later than academic year 2021/22;
- working with colleges and universities, establish a means of learner-focused articulation from college to university. This should promote a more coherent tertiary system, incentivising collaboration, co- location, co-funding, and co-investment. This work should also address solutions to the difficulties in the south of Scotland arising from diseconomies of scale resulting from relatively small learner cohorts; the costs and challenges inherent in travel in rural communities; and the relatively low SIMD-defined areas of disadvantage;
- protect the essential diversity of the sector - which is a crucial strength – by considering how best to direct and maximise technological investment in which learner-focused provision and data innovation can be freely shared across and between regions. The SFC should consider the benefits and outcomes associated within a networked system of this kind: this should include consideration of the ‘hub models’ operating in the south of Scotland, UHI, and currently being explored in the Ayrshire region - which themselves help to address, but

which do not yet fully resolve, the difficulties identified for the south of Scotland in the preceding bullet;

- explore how to promote collaborative solutions in considering future capital investment projects; and
- building on existing resources, explore the possibilities of a 'staff college' for the sector to develop the necessary cross- silo leadership we identify as necessary for the years ahead.

Finally, we hope it is apparent from what we say in each of the recommendations above we consider it essential for **all actors** in Scotland's tertiary sector to engage fully with the development of the solutions we propose.