

JM/MB/WO/212212

Tuesday 17 May 2022

Dear Education, Children and Young People Committee,

I am writing in response to your letter of 25 April 2022 calling for views into college regionalisation over the past decade and how this might inform future sectorial changes in light of the Scottish Funding Council review of the sector.

In response to the questions posed in your letter, I offer the following:

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

Scotland's colleges are now more effectively linked to their wider community of stakeholders, working hand in hand with employers, from large organisations to SMEs and sole traders, to provide high-quality Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET).

Colleges have consistently proven to be responsive, agile organisations, able to work effectively across various priorities and initiatives while providing life-changing opportunities for our learners at the heart of our communities. In addition, colleges have shown during their pandemic response that they are able to deliver an effective blend of hands-on, practical and experiential learning in world-class specialist learning environments alongside online and blended learning activity to meet different needs.

The role of the Regional Strategic Body (RSB) in this regard has been to ensure a cohesive and aligned approach to this area of work. The SFC's Review of the Glasgow Colleges' Regional Board (GCRB) highlighted the significant distance travelled, concluding that "GCRB is meeting its core statutory requirements and has made good progress in delivering additional benefits expected through regionalisation." This has included the achievement of fundable body status, and the establishment of a coherence governance and executive leadership system founded on a collegiate regional approach, and collaboration and contribution from experienced, expert staff across from GCRB and its Assigned Colleges.

This has enabled GCRB to make, "significant progress in developing the governance, structures, capacity and expertise, and relationships needed to deliver a joined-up college system that offers coherent provision to meet the needs of learners and stakeholders across the Glasgow Region and wider."

**How might the sector further improve in the years ahead?**

While significant progress has been made in providing a quick and agile response to the demands of the pandemic, a number of areas require additional focus. These include:

- The evolution and continued growth of Scotland's college digital offering, to fully deliver on the *Digital Ambition for Scotland's Colleges*<sup>1</sup>
- Maintaining and enhancing the focus on student wellbeing, including an evolved and coherent long-term offer in support of learners' mental health
- An evolved college funding and reporting model to better capture the full impact of Scotland's colleges, and to promote future planning and stability via a multi-year funding model
- A re-imagining of Scotland's TVET skills education, to ensure parity of value and esteem with traditional degree routes, and to create a new, internationally prized, TVET suite of qualifications, progressing from school through SCQF7-10 to create an enhanced TVET learner journey and talent pipeline

In addition, there is a recognition of the continued challenges and required next steps in the evolution of Glasgow RSB model.

SFC's Glasgow RSB review reported significant success and progress, but acknowledged that, "there are still mixed views within the assigned bodies themselves about the additional value being added by the RSB and the cumbersome nature of the four-Board arrangement."

Given that, the RSB structure does require continued improvement and evolution to unlock further benefits of a coherent, high-performing Glasgow region, and our on-going collaboration with SFC will seek to appraise options for doing so.

In considering this, it is recognised that there was overwhelming support for retaining the unique, individual identities of the assigned colleges, and for enhancing the effectiveness of high-performing local campuses grounded in their communities. Allied to this, there is much appetite for evolution which unlocks further opportunities for effective collaboration and system-wide efficiency and planning to deliver a stable, sustainable and effective system built on cooperation rather than competition. The continued review work in Glasgow seeks to capture, and appraise, various models for evolving the system in pursuit of these outcomes.

#### **How might colleges adapt in light of current challenges such as those resulting from COVID-19?**

Adaptations in the college sector should seek to address those opportunities for further improvement set out above, with a clear focus on outcomes which benefit and enhance opportunities for learners and their communities.

It is vitally important that college provides a safe, secure and nurturing environment for learners to flourish; that it articulates its key role as the nation's core provider of outstanding Technical and Vocational Education and Training; that it harnesses the opportunities provided by outstanding learning environments, both physical and digital; and that it contributes to economic regeneration.

For Glasgow, it will be vital that we focus on delivering an enhanced and effective structure which prizes both local identity and flexibility while delivering greater regional coherence and stability.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://collegesscotland.ac.uk/our-work/publications/our-digital-ambition-for-scotland-s-colleges>

### What should be the priorities of the college sector in the years ahead?

Aligning local activity with national and regional ambitions while maintaining a core focus on providing benefit to learners and their communities should be considered as a core priority to ensure that unfettered access to high-quality learning, teaching and training meets the needs of learners and industry; doing so in a way which provides greater opportunities and life chances, which effectively aligns with skills needs to support economic regeneration. It will be increasingly important to look after the wellbeing, both physical and mental, of our learners and those providing their education, while unlocking Scotland's potential to become a leading nation in the delivery of TVET education by exploring new qualifications and delivery methods to rearticulate the vital importance of technical and vocational skills education. Colleges are ideally placed to be the core delivery vehicle for qualifications which provide the skills and training for a highly-skilled, agile and creative workforce which prizes lifelong training.

These core priorities could be articulated as follows:

- For **learners**, ensure that they are at the centre of the system, with ensured equality, fairness, lifetime access to learning, skills, qualifications, guidance and information to help find an efficient learner journey with more right turns, effective progression, and appropriate progress.
- For **communities**, ensure that colleges are at the heart of their communities, with effective local decision making, effectively meeting the needs of those most in need to access effective life-changing education opportunities. Colleges will play a key role in strengthening communities and building partnerships that collectively address the challenges and opportunities for economic and social transformation.
- For **colleges**, as anchor institutions at the heart of the Glasgow eco-system, ensure they are enabled to deliver outstanding learning, skills and qualifications at all relevant levels of the SCQF ladder which enhances Glasgow and Scotland's social and economic prosperity, across multiple modes and levels of study.
- For the **Glasgow college system**, our objective is to ensure clear and effective strategic structures, direction and strengthening relationships that deliver enhanced pan-regional planning and collaboration through strategic, coherent, clear governance and management.
- For **Scotland's education system, learners, communities, employers, employees and colleges**, our objective is to ensure that Glasgow's colleges are financially viable for the long term, including through further efficiency gains to secure quality and public value. To ensure the Glasgow college system is affordable, efficient in operating at the right scale, and with others to minimise unnecessary duplication, optimise digital technology, and tackle the climate crisis. The Glasgow college system plays an active role in working with partners to support economic and social recovery and development.

As part of our commitment to delivering these regional outcomes, we manage an annual Programme of Action, seeking to deliver projects which are of direct benefit to our learners and their communities while promoting collaborative, enhanced working across Glasgow's colleges. This work is often done in conjunction with our Student Associations or cross-colleges working groups and external partners. In recent years, this has

included delivery and management of the Glasgow ESOL project, support for care-experienced learners in conjunction with Action for Children, development of entrepreneurial skills in conjunction with Bridge to Business, a regional strategic approach to environment and sustainability work, targeted mental health support, and assistance with digital connectivity for learners during the pandemic.

The SFC review, however, highlighted the challenges of working effectively across, and with, four independent governance structures within the region. It concluded that has in some ways hindered some of the pan regional work that had been proposed within the strategic plan for the Glasgow region.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute the work of the Education Children and Young People Committee.

Yours sincerely

**Janie McCusker**  
**GCRB Chair and Regional Chair for Glasgow**