

Scottish Parliament Social Justice & Social Security Committee

Inquiry into Addressing Child Poverty through Parental Employment

Written submission – Colleges Scotland (08 June 2023)

Key Stats

- 236,730 students in Scotland's colleges (SFC 2020/21)
- College age profile: Under 16 years – 17%; 16-24 years – 40%; 25 years and over – 43% (SFC figures 2020/21)
- Men 47%; Women 51%; Other/prefer not to say 2% (SFC figures 2020/21)
- Full-time 21%; Part-time 79% (SFC figures 2020/21)
- College is the most popular destination for those from the lowest socio-economic backgrounds with 36% of school leavers from SIMD20 moving into further education (SG School Leaver Destinations Report 2023)
- Colleges deliver 23% of all higher education in Scotland (SFC figure 2020/21)
- 25% of entrants to higher education courses in colleges are from the 20% most deprived areas (SFC figure 2020/21)
- 41% of full-time first-degree entrants from the 20% most deprived areas progressed to university after graduating college (SFC figure 2020/21)
- 7,665 students progressed with an HNC/D from college to university – 58% entered into year 2 or 3 at university, and 25% of those were from the 20% most deprived areas (SFC figures 2020/21)
- 35% of students have considered dropping out of their course due to financial difficulties, a quarter of students (25%) had been unable to pay their rent in full on one or more occasions, and around two thirds (64%) have experienced mental ill-health as a result of financial pressures. (NUS Broke Report).

Colleges, child poverty, and parental employment

Colleges are anchor institutions in local communities, providing a focal point not just for education but also community engagement and, crucially, action and impact in relation to poverty.

Scotland's college student population has traditionally come from more deprived backgrounds, with colleges offering a people the skills, knowledge and experience needed to take on new opportunities to study and to work. Without colleges, fewer people from more deprived backgrounds would have the support and opportunity to gain the qualifications that can be a passport to better work and greater wellbeing.

Colleges regularly engage with parents on their own learning needs when they accompany their children to a college open day, as well as targeted parent information sessions in the context of school-college partnerships.

Choosing college is a route out of poverty, but students have to be able to afford to come to class and complete their course so that they can move into good careers.

Many colleges are using their own budgets to provide free breakfast or soup to students alongside other mitigations like referral to foodbanks and money advice. However, college budgets are falling and student support is being cut in real terms as well, so there does need to be a much more sustainable way to help our students.

College learners deserve parity of investment and Colleges Scotland has consistently called for stronger, longer-term funding to help colleges thrive. The gap between secondary school, college and university funding should be closed as soon as possible.

Funding Per Student	2022/23
Secondary School	£7,657
College	£5,054
University	£7,558

Currently, college funding is to cover the teaching element, but colleges require additional resource to ensure a great learner experience, equity of opportunity and to ensure the necessary support for those cohorts of students requiring additional interventions.

The impact of learning at college is significantly stronger for learners at college than at university, who are already well placed to succeed. Equity of funding and parity of provision for college learners will develop learners as individuals and ensure that those learners at greatest disadvantage have the greatest opportunities to succeed. For example, care-experienced students make up **10%** of enrolments to full-time FE and **4%** to full-time HE.

In the absence of equity of funding and parity of provision for college learners, and the absence of sustainable investment in the college sector, there will be a reduction in learner pathways out of poverty, and a reinforcing of the disadvantages that these learners face, directly undermining the overarching Scottish Government ambitions of Equality, Opportunity and Community.

Amidst the cost-of-living crisis, it is clearer than ever before that colleges are more than places of learning and are key public sector assets in supporting the delivery of social justice and the national mission for tackling child poverty.

The college sector has the ability to drive and facilitate actions and interventions to create safe spaces and support learners. Colleges, working in partnership as part of multi-agency approaches, are actively mitigating the impact of poverty in all of its forms on students and communities and creating far reaching opportunities for students.

For young people, college is the most popular destination for those from the lowest socio-economic backgrounds – 38% of school leavers from SMID20 move into further education – compared to a figure of 28% of school leavers overall. There has to be a college place waiting for them when they make that choice. Colleges also provide that effective pathway for adults to give them a route to a brighter future out of poverty and gain a qualification which can increase their household income.

Colleges provide multilevel progressive curricula, blended or online courses to ensure student have maximum opportunities to access courses. They work in communities, schools and parents on employability programmes (e.g. ESOL, adult literacy and numeracy, job clubs, digital skills etc) and provide access to adult learning including pathways into higher education. They also work with employers on workforce

development/upskilling and reskilling and provide access to adult learning including SWAP, access courses and articulation from HNC/D into degree with advanced standing.

Key Publications

- Colleges Scotland/CDN: Pathways from Poverty: Current Challenges and the Role of Colleges (<https://www.cdn.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/CDN-Pathways-from-Poverty-Report-1.pdf>)
- Colleges Scotland/CDN: Pathways from Poverty – Colleges for Communities (<https://www.cdn.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Pathways-from-Poverty-Colleges-for-Communities.pdf>)
- NUS Scotland: Broke - How Scotland is failing its students (<https://www.nus-scotland.org.uk/alarming-research-on-student-poverty>)
- NUS Scotland: Cost of Survival ([https://www.nus-scotland.org.uk/cost_of_survival_report#:~:text=NUS%20Scotland's%20latest%20Cost%20of,considering%20dropping%20out%20\(19%25\)](https://www.nus-scotland.org.uk/cost_of_survival_report#:~:text=NUS%20Scotland's%20latest%20Cost%20of,considering%20dropping%20out%20(19%25)))
- Colleges Scotland/Mental Health Foundation: Thriving Learners (<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/our-work/research/thriving-learners>)

Colleges Scotland
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