

Report of Responses to the Scottish Government Consultation Putting Learners at the Centre:

Delivering our Ambitions for Post-16 Education

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Ministerial Foreword

In September last year I launched *Putting Learners at the Centre*, a consultative paper setting out my ambitious proposals to reform post-16 education.

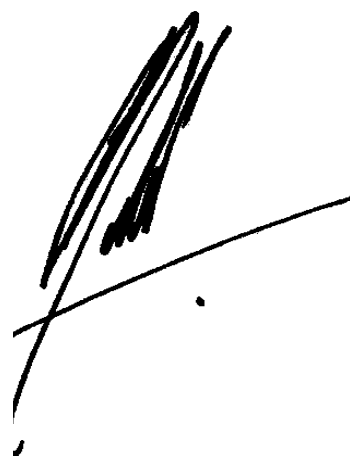
This report marks the conclusion of that formal consultation period and I want to thank everyone who has taken the time to contribute their views either through written responses or as part of the consultation discussions.

My principal intention is to refocus our existing systems so that they are driven by the needs of learners and not by the needs of institutions. I was therefore very pleased to see that those intentions were strongly supported in the consultation responses.

In taking these reforms forward, the fundamental challenge we have to address is getting the balance right between having a flexible system that provides the best possible choices for learners, but making that sustainable and reducing unnecessary duplication. In doing so, we must also ensure that quality of provision and opportunities for developing and enhancing skills continues to be at the heart of the learner journey.

One key theme which emerged from the consultation was both a need and support for the development of stronger partnerships. This was apparent across a majority of the responses and it will be critical to our success. Such partnerships are developing all over the country, and the consultation highlighted this, but I will stress again, that we all need to break down barriers to make this the norm.

I stated above that this report marks the end of the formal consultation period. However I want to make clear my ongoing commitment to these reforms. I will continue to work with our partners across the education landscape to ensure they are implemented for Scotland's learners.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several overlapping, sweeping strokes that form a stylized, abstract shape. The signature is positioned in the lower right quadrant of the page.

Context

In *Putting Learners at the Centre: Delivering Our Ambitions for Post-16 Education*, we made clear the Government's core purpose of achieving sustainable economic growth, and set out our aims for reform in this context. Those aims were and are to better connect the constituent parts of the post-16 system in such a way as to improve the sustainability of post-16 education and training delivery, align it more explicitly with our ambitions for jobs and growth and, by so doing, continue to improve people's life chances.

A refocused, more connected landscape will ensure better use of funding, clearer information routes for individuals and employers and smoother pathways for Scotland's learners towards and into employment, particularly younger learners or those whose skills are lacking or require updating. At the same time we cannot afford to forget our more vulnerable learners, whose progression through learning towards and into employment can, of necessity, involve more circuitous routes than those of more traditional learners.

Consultation

When *Putting Learners at the Centre* was published on 14 September 2011, some of the work detailed within it was already underway. This included, for example, the extensive activity from *Building A Smarter Future*, our 2010 consultation on Higher Education in Scotland. And only a few days before publication, on 11 September 2011, the First Minister announced the Opportunities for All initiative within the Programme for Government, with its promise that every 16 to 19 year old in Scotland will be offered a learning or training place if they are not already in a job, apprenticeship or in education.

The formal consultation period ended on 23 December 2012, during which time 324 responses were received. All of the responses, where permission was not refused, have been published alongside this report.

During and since this formal consultation period, the reviews of university and college governance by, respectively, Professors Ferdinand von Prondzynski and Russel Griggs were conducted and completed. Additionally, a simultaneous consultation focused on college regionalisation was launched through the Scottish Funding Council. On 1 February 2012, subsequent to this activity, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning welcomed the governance review findings and also confirmed what will in future be a twelve region model of college provision.

This consultation report must therefore be read in the light of a number of different strands of work which were already, are now, or will subsequently be underway. The responses we received to this consultation are therefore critical in honing our existing plans where necessary, as well as in determining the future direction of travel for the post-16 landscape.

Summary findings

Recurring Themes

Whilst the responses received were many and varied, containing a wealth of useful views, information and suggestion, there were several recurring themes that emerged across all areas and questions of the consultation.

Most noticeable, was the extent to which responses focused on improving and enhancing the experience of the learner, whether raising a concern with or supporting a particular proposal. We welcome this very clear and positive evidence of the dedication and commitment to Scotland's learners shown by post-16 institutions, support agencies, training providers and other stakeholder organisations.

Related to the above was a prevalent concern as to whether reforms would take adequate account of the needs of more vulnerable learner cohorts such as those with additional support needs or complex needs. This concern also extended to other groups such as older learners or single parents.

Another recurring theme of concern was how best to introduce and implement reforms amidst such a challenging economic climate, with its associated funding constraints. Often this was coupled with concerns as to the necessary timescales for reform i.e. it might be possible to achieve reforms with less funding or less time, but not with less of both.

Throughout the consultation responses was a strand of continuous recognition of, and support for, clear and accessible information, advice and guidance. This was highlighted as important not just for individual learners or their families, but for the agencies and institutions who would feed into the available information, and for employers looking to utilise straightforward recruitment and information routes.

From nearly all respondees, encompassing a wide range of sectoral interests, there also came a very strong and positive endorsement of, and support for, new, more or improved collaborative working across the post-16 landscape, in order to better serve Scotland's learners.

Summary actions we will take in light of responses

As well as recurring themes from the consultation responses, we have also identified what many of our Next Steps will be, which can be found at the close of each section of the report. Wherever possible, we have used these areas to indicate any changes to our proposals, to highlight potential legislative steps and to offer reassurance that relevant concerns will be fed into our ongoing equality impact assessment activity.

Efficient, flexible learner journeys

As we set out within our Putting Learners at the Centre consultation, we are committed to placing learners at the heart of our reforms, ensuring they have access to a flexible and fair system which provides a wide range of opportunities to progress through their learning.

We highlighted the range of significant work that has already been carried out in this area, including the publication of the Careers Information, Advice and Guidance strategy; the introduction of 16+ Learning Choices; the development of the Talent Scotland Graduate Placement Programme; the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence and last but not least the commitment within Opportunities for All to offer an appropriate place in post-16 learning for all 16-19 year olds.

We also discussed and raised proposals to gain advanced entry to university from school and the potential offered by the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework as a means to help deliver smoother and better progression into and through learning. We also additionally discussed the role of SCQF in our proposals to increase the volume of articulation from a college HNC/D course into the second or third year of a university degree course.

Whilst a number of other related areas were also raised, the specific consultation questions relevant to this section were as follows:

1. *How can we ensure delivery of an appropriate place in post-16 learning for **all** 16-19 year olds? What are the priority actions?*
2. *In considering the proposed package of measures for improving the learner journey, where should the focus be to improve pathways for all learners? What actions are required to make progression more coherent for learners?*
3. *How effective is the SCQF in promoting flexible learner journeys? Are there any barriers and, if so, how could they be overcome? How could the SCQF be used more effectively to deliver our aims?*
4. *What more can the Government and its partners do to encourage more articulation between colleges and universities?*
5. *What scope is there to make the transition from school to university more effective for learners, while reducing unnecessary duplication?*

There was overall strong support on the need for efficient, flexible learner journeys, with further very strong endorsement of the benefits of improved collaborative and partnership working between all partners involved in supporting learner journeys and pathways.

A starting point provided by respondents was the importance of incorporating issues around transition from school when taking forward the Opportunities for All commitment, particularly the transition from school to college. There was a call for the continued backing of, for example, school college partnership activities which help schools meet the Curriculum for Excellence commitment to vocational

opportunities and also feed into later discussions and decisions about post-16 learning options.

Many respondents merged their question 1 response with the later question 6 on how best to ensure delivery of the Opportunities for All commitment to the most vulnerable learners. Priority actions therefore tended to focus on the provision of soft skills support; clear pathways through learning options and a continuing focus on literacy and numeracy. The development of technical skills and work ethos were also suggested.

This very positive and strong focus on the learner experience was reflected in the nature of concerns that were raised around progression. Whilst the idealised view or aim of learner progression would be a smooth journey to employment, respondents were keen to point out that in practice this was not the case for all learners. Many made the point that progression was often neither linear nor vertical and instead was frequently achieved, particularly for those with additional support needs, through the repetition of courses (or course levels) and through linked learning in the home or community. There was specific concern that if a narrow definition of progression was carried through into, for example, funding arrangements or legislation, it would result in some learners being unfairly penalised.

The responses on the question of advanced entry to university from school, via a baccalaureate or Advanced Higher, or from college to university via articulation elicited similar technical responses, but markedly different attitudinal responses depending on the area of the post-16 education system from which they were responding. Technical issues centred around whether the SCQF was sufficiently focused on content and performance to provide a strong enough basis for transition, as well as the difficulties in the associated 'mapping' or bridging programmes into degree programmes that might be required. The majority view on the SCQF was that, although it was an excellent and respected framework, its full potential was yet to be realised.

Sectoral divisions in responses were also apparent on the broader question of encouraging more articulation between colleges and universities, where college respondents tended to support, and universities tended to oppose, the use of legislative measures to achieve this. Alternative approaches such as building on the existing regional articulation hubs or setting a condition of grant around the creation of articulation agreements were proposed, as well as suggesting additional funding could be made available to support the collaborative development of articulation agreements across all colleges and universities.

Whilst views differed, responses demonstrated throughout a positive awareness of and focus on the needs and experience of the learner. Suggestions received which further evidence this included ensuring that effective bridging programmes were in place to support the learner transition from college to university; that articulating students did not displace school leavers and that articulation be a learner choice rather than a requirement. A small minority of respondents felt that the quality of teaching across the post-16 landscape could usefully have been considered within the consultation, a point that recurred in responses to the performance, governance and accountability chapter. There was also considerable consensus and

endorsement of improving the learner experience through the availability of accessible information, advice and guidance throughout the entirety of the learner journey.

Next Steps

We welcome the very positive response we received from respondees on the collaborative activity required to ensure efficient, flexible learner pathways, in support of our aims to improve sustainable provision, jobs and growth and life chances.

We acknowledge respondee concerns around the participation and progression of more vulnerable learner cohorts; we also acknowledge the further exploration of issues surrounding use of the SCQF and the differences of view within the post-16 system in relation to articulation. We will therefore continue to explore these and other identified issues as we take forward our reform activity and will factor in concerns raised within our equality impact assessment activity.

We will ensure that the senior phase of the Curriculum for Excellence is enhanced to support better transitions from school, whether this is into college, university, training or employment.

We will also consider what can be done to promote progression through the system by developing clearer pathways and continuing to improve our information, advice and guidance.

We will produce new guidance on community learning and development and we will consider whether legislation could be used to strengthen the role of CLD.

Widening Access

Our stated aims on widening access are to keep all young people in learning after 16; improve provision for those young people who have dropped out of learning and increase the opportunities for young people to access, in particular but not exclusively, higher education.

Whilst we set out the substantial steps that have already been taken in these areas, including Activity Agreements, the SFC's widening participation strategy and our commitment to no university tuition fees, we acknowledged there was more to be done.

Our proposals covered a wide range of related areas including full roll out of Activity Agreements, the role of CLD, improved delivery of Career IAG by Skills Development Scotland and the consideration of statutory routes to improve access to university.

We asked for views on this through the below four key prompt questions:

6. *What do we need to do to ensure the Government's commitment, through Opportunities for All, to post-16 education and training for all 16-19 year olds is delivered to more vulnerable young people? What are the priority actions?*
7. *What more could the Government and its delivery partners do to improve retention and progression, building on Opportunities for All?*
8. *How can we maximise the contribution of Community Learning & Development to widening access? What examples of good practice can we build on?*
9. *What do we need to do to help more people from the most deprived backgrounds get a place at university? How can we frame this in legislation?*

There was a strong level of response to this section of the consultation, mirroring many of the responses to the efficient, flexible learner journeys chapter, and which evidenced the clear commitment of post-16 delivery bodies and institutions to their learners. A main concern raised throughout was the extent to which budget constraints and the economic climate might impact on the priority given to widening access.

As mentioned in the previous section, many respondents merged their response to question 1 and 6 on the priority actions associated with delivering education and training to the more vulnerable young people within the 16–19 age group. As well as the importance of support for all at transition points was the added view that, particularly for those with complex needs, any ongoing support arrangements needed to be additionally enhanced before and after transition points occurred. Other than the priority areas already mentioned in the previous section, such as developing soft skills and continuing to focus on literacy and numeracy, was a suggested priority action to develop flexible and accumulating blocks of learning, which were seen as being more appropriate to some groups of learners than more traditional courses of learning.

The issue of improving retention and progression was again one which carried across from the efficient, flexible learner journeys section. There was recognition and endorsement of the need for better learner pathways through increased partnership working between and across agencies, employers, support organisations and learning institutions. Again, clear careers information, advice and guidance was seen as critical to improvements in this area.

The question of how to maximise the role of community learning and development in widening access generated a number of positive responses and examples of existing good practice. Respondee highlighted the value to be gained from early engagement with CLD approaches and organisations, given its ability to deliver flexible support and learning to those with complex or chaotic lives. Examples of existing strong partnerships and activity involving CLD practitioners included their inclusion in the delivery of Activity Agreements, community and college ESOL and adult literacy courses and the management of learning centres in partnership with colleges. Some respondees called for greater acknowledgement of the current and potential valuable role of CLD, as well as greater definition around its responsibilities in the delivery of post-16 education.

Suggestions to help more people from the most deprived backgrounds get a place in university tended to focus on the key importance of contextualised admissions, in acknowledgement that ability to learn and achieve was not necessarily directly linked to a student's prior attainment. There were mixed views on the introduction of statutory quotas or statutory Widening Access Agreements, although general agreement that such agreements should have involvement from the student at development and sign off stages. Articulation, raised in the previous section, was also seen as a means to encourage and support university places for some learners.

Next steps

There are a number of pieces of work / projects currently being undertaken to better understand the issues surrounding participation, retention and progression and we will be feeding the consultation responses into these projects and their associated equality impact assessment activity.

We will legislate to support our activities to widen access to higher education and will work with the Scottish Funding Council, the NUS and universities to build on the SFC's report into improving articulation, advanced entry and flexible learning in HE.

We will continue to discuss and develop the role of CLD through discussion with stakeholders. We will also factor the cross-cutting role of CLD across post-16 reform activity, including the forthcoming legislation.

Aligning non-advanced learning and skills with jobs and growth

In our consultation we discussed our aims for a competitively equipped Scottish workforce, focusing on the acquisition of technical and core skills that would meet the needs of employers now and, wherever possible, in the future. We also indicated the priority we attached to the gaining of employability skills by both young people and those with low or out of date skills.

In the context of the Government's Economic Strategy, we set out proposals for a strategic approach to improve the alignment of Government investment in learning and skills with jobs and growth, in a way that would be consistent with the needs of employers and the wider economy.

To help with our thinking, we asked five questions within the consultation, as set out below:

- 10. What are the advantages and disadvantages of prioritising investment in learning and skills which support jobs in key and high participation sectors?*
- 11. How do we best target our resources in support of jobs, growth and life chances? For example, should we focus on level of qualification, age groups or labour market status?*
- 12. Do we have the right systems and structures in place for articulating employer needs (locally, regionally and nationally) and those of the wider economy?*
- 13. Which of the existing structures are effective and could be applied more widely; which are ineffective and can be improved?*
- 14. How can we maximise the contribution of community learning & development to improving people's job prospects? What examples of good practice can we build on?*

There was a significant volume of responses to this section of the consultation, with broad support for reform aims and a variety of views and suggestions on how best to take forward reform implementation.

There were mixed views on the issue of whether to prioritise investment in key and high participation sectors. Colleges raised the risks of over-specialisation, including skilling learners for jobs that might not subsequently exist and the adverse impact on the diversity of provision that is often seen as a strength of the college sector. Employers were keen to ensure that prioritisation would take SMEs into account, as they make up the majority of Scottish employers. A similar point to this was raised in the later consultation section looking at co-investment opportunities.

There was broad consensus on the need to target resources, with a recognition of the need to ensure groups outwith the suggested areas would not be disadvantaged as a result, particularly older learners. Most respondents agreed with proposals to prioritise those furthest from the labour market or with low skills, and were additionally keen to suggest targeting resource at courses and qualifications designed to improve the employability or core skills such as communications, numeracy and IT skills that employers are known to want.

Respondees expressed different views on whether we had the right systems in place for articulating employer needs, depending on which area they were representing in their response, although the overall view was that more work was needed to get it right. All agreed, however, that there was a need for fewer, not more, intermediaries.

Suggestions for improvement included a clear - ideally single - source of information for employers; faster qualification development to ensure currency and relevance and more exchange programmes for college and industry staff to improve understanding.

The strength of CLD in training and developing volunteers for the public and third sectors was raised by some respondents, and suggestions on how to maximise its contribution to people's job prospects included a stronger, more defined role in the provision of information, advice and guidance and capitalising on its ability to offer flexible training and support.

Next Steps

We welcome the range of views that have come forward and the insights into how the system works for employers on the ground. We acknowledge that the current system for employer engagement with skills can often seem complex, with too many intermediaries. We are exploring how best to ensure that the system is easier and less complex for employers to navigate.

Maintaining Scotland as a global leader in university research

In Putting Learners at the Centre, we set out our aim to maintain Scotland's world leading position in university research and to maximise its contribution to increasing sustainable economic growth.

We set out some of Scotland's key achievements, including the international recognition of our research pools and our success in attracting funding from the UK Research Councils. In our proposals, we focused on maximising, improving and enhancing those areas in which we already have high quality and a strong international reputation.

We therefore asked four key questions within the consultation, as set out below:

- 15. How best can we maximise the impact of our excellent research?*
- 16. How can we help Scottish universities and businesses collaborate more effectively in bidding for European funding?*
- 17. How can the quality and coherence of PhD training be improved?*
- 18. What would be the main activities of a single knowledge exchange office? What activities are best left to individual universities?*

Respondee welcomed the recognition of Scotland's world leading position, and supported the need to maintain this. Across responses to all four questions was a recognition that increased collaboration would bring benefits. Encouraging pooling and inter-disciplinary approaches were seen as relevant to both applied and 'blue skies' research.

Bidding for European funding was viewed as a bureaucratic and overly complex process, generating a suggestion that this could be countered by support from a central advisory unit. Suggestions to improve the success of bids for European funding included nationally thematic or a 'Team Scotland' approach to bids, as well as collaborative bids with colleges, other universities and Community Planning Partnerships. Alternative suggestions included development grants and tax breaks for SMEs involved with EU consortia.

Improving the quality and coherence of PhD training was again viewed as something which could be achieved by building on collaborative models such as the research pooling graduate schools and doctoral training centres. Several respondents highlighted the importance of maximising links with employers through placements and industrially-led projects. Others suggested some form of standardised yet flexible training, perhaps linked to SFC grant conditions. As well as welcoming the recent additional funding for international postdoctoral exchanges, there was a call for the reinstatement of the Scottish Overseas Research Student Awards Scheme.

A single Knowledge Exchange Office was acknowledged by respondents as holding a clear appeal for businesses looking for a single route into accessing Scottish

research and expertise. A wide range of activities of such an office were suggested. Some felt this could be achieved through a different 'Scottish portal' or federated model approach. However, some identified a risk that this might imply that knowledge exchange was no longer core business and result in a reduction in knowledge transfer funding for universities.

Next steps

We welcome the widespread recognition of the need to continue to support Scotland's excellent research and the need to build on our strengths. The Scottish Funding Council's indicative grant letter to universities last December sets out how it plans to support this from 2012-13.

This includes increasing the focus of the Research Excellence Grant on 3* and 4* research and a £5 million increase in the research postgraduate grant. A consultation on the coherence, quality and employer relevance of postgraduate provision with industry groups, the UK Research Councils and universities will soon be underway.

An Easy Access IP model or similar will also be in place by 2012-13 as a condition of grant for universities in receipt of research and knowledge exchange funding.

We support the view that knowledge exchange remains a key mission of every university. The development of a single knowledge exchange office for Scotland will offer simplified contract support for business to exploit university innovation while still ensuring that each HEI maintains its capacity to engage directly with businesses in the creation of intellectual property. It will also take account of Interface and the wider knowledge exchange landscape, reducing bureaucracy. A working group involving the university and business sectors is being established to explore these and other issues.

Fair and affordable student support

Within the consultation, we set our aim to ensure we had student support arrangements that supported participation, retention and progression in learning. Alongside this, we were clear that the financial climate demanded that we make available resource go as far as it can.

In this context, we set out proposals related to work already underway and also work planned to get underway during 2012. This included reviewing the current arrangements for EMA and non-advanced student support; eligibility, and creating a simpler system.

Our specific questions in relation to this section were:

- 19. Given the financial constraints, should we prioritise an entitlement-based approach or the level of payment each student receives? What other options are there?*
- 20. How can FE bursaries and EMA be targeted fairly and more effectively?*
- 21. Should delivery of financial support - irrespective of where people learn - be centralised? What are the pros and cons of this approach?*
- 22. Should student support arrangements align with our ambitions for jobs and growth? If so, what might this look like in practice?*

Respondee welcomed the Government's commitment to ensuring fair and affordable student support arrangements and raised a number of useful issues in relation to the work which will be carried forward.

Overall, an entitlement based approach was preferred, although responses tended to focus on more general issues of fairness, including the provision of supplementary support or 'positive discrimination' for the most vulnerable. A particular theme was in relation to support arrangements for part-time FE students. On this topic, the majority call was for an equal and consistent set of support arrangements, regardless of whether a student was full- or part-time; this also extended to the Government's commitment to a minimum income of £7,000 for the most vulnerable higher education students, which – whilst welcomed - respondee felt should be extended to include all students.

The call for consistency was repeated in responses on better targeting EMAs and FE bursaries. This applied, in particular, to aligning attendance criteria, an issue which was seen as unduly impacting on groups such as single parents, and resolving eligibility issues around overlapping age groups.

There was some support for a centralised delivery model or a centralised system that allowed for some local discretion. The majority, however, felt that the current local delivery model held significant advantages in terms of flexibility and responsiveness to local and individual need. The question of aligning student support arrangements with jobs and growth elicited stronger views, with a clear

majority expressing concern at any suggestion that student support should vary depending on the subject being undertaken.

Next steps

We welcome the suggestions received in response to consultation proposals. We will continue to explore many of these issues with stakeholders and others and will formulate a number of options during 2012 for implementation in future years. We will announce firm plans for HE support by the summer for implementation in academic year 2013-14. Firm plans for changes to FE support, being drawn up with NUS Scotland, are also in preparation.

Effective and sustainable delivery

As we set out in the consultation, our aim is to ensure we have the right delivery models in place to deliver the key reforms which will help deliver our strategic priorities of jobs and growth, sustainable provision and life chances.

This included discussion and proposals around the broad post-16 institutional landscape, college regionalisation and changes to the role of the Scottish Funding Council. Following the commencement of the consultation period, we worked with the Scottish Funding Council to issue a separate, specific consultation on the detail around college regionalisation, the findings of which have also been summarised within this section. Decisions of some key issues, taking account of responses to that consultation, have since been taken.

Three linked consultation questions were highlighted for this section; as below:

- 23. What are the pros and cons of our proposals for the regionalisation of colleges? Are there other criteria we should consider in determining the optimal regional structure?*
- 24. What more could the Government and its delivery partners do to improve collaboration between post-16 learning, including CLD and employment support services?*
- 25. What are the pros and cons of the new leadership and support role envisaged for the SFC? What lessons can we learn from successful change management elsewhere?*

Overall there was support for the proposals, particularly on the learner benefits to be gained by having better aligned services, delivered through collaborative or partnership working.

On the second, broader question of improving collaboration across the post-16 landscape, several respondents cited the Single Outcome Agreement process and the National Performance Framework as a catalyst to bring partners together. Many respondents were keen to reference some of the existing robust local employability partnerships which have been developed within the broader framework of Community Planning Partnerships. There were several suggestions, repeated in some of the responses to the section on Simplification, that the new regional colleges be included within CPPs on a statutory basis.

On the proposals regarding college regionalisation, the majority of respondents recognised that such a significant shift in delivery offered a number of opportunities to improve and enhance learners' college experience, as well as reducing unnecessary duplication and cost of provision through the sharing of services, such as IT, on a regional basis. These opportunities also extended to the potential creation of coherent, regional curricula that could better meet learner and employer needs through the ability to take account of both local and national supply and demand requirements.

The joint consultation conducted by Scottish Government and the Scottish Funding Council generated similar general views and points to those set out above and below, plus much more detailed information than was applicable to the broader consultation. A summary report of the specific regionalisation consultation is attached as an Annex to this report.

The two main recurring issues were the challenge of addressing timing and funding issues associated with implementing a regional model, which might result in decisions that did not take account of existing advantageous relationships or situations and the need to ensure that the creation of regional institutions did not adversely impact on local provision required by learners with additional support needs. In relation to this, respondees strongly welcomed the Government's intention to protect local access-level provision.

The evident support for better alignment of services was broadly carried through in responses to the proposed changes to the role of the Scottish Funding Council in light of other reform proposals set out across other areas of the consultation. In particular, there was recognition of the existing high level of knowledge and expertise within the SFC, particularly in terms of its understanding the public value of its investment, which would provide a helpful basis for managing the development of a new leadership and support role. Respondees welcomed the opportunities for increased employer recognition and a greater focus on learners' employment prospects. There were conflicting views on whether the proposed changed SFC role would generate closer or more distanced relationships with fundable bodies and with the Scottish Government, plus further conflicting views on whether either type of relationship was to be welcomed or not.

Responses to the supplementary request for examples of successful change management which could be drawn on, elicited very little response, although there was significant general support for sector driven change and some support for the adoption of a private sector approach.

Next Steps

We welcome the strong support, particularly from the college sector, on a move to regionalised colleges. We acknowledge the opportunity to develop more coherent curriculum on a regional basis; the need to protect local access provision to colleges on a regional basis, the need to consider the role of the SFC in light of regionalisation, and the need for 'fit for purpose' governance arrangements.

As a result we will develop collaborative regional models across Scotland, supporting structural change where necessary. We will also develop proposals to enhance the strategic role of regional colleges, building on existing strategic partnerships, including CPPs (see below). Alongside this, we will develop priorities for future college provision, to inform funding priorities which meet local regional and national need

We will include within our equality impact assessment activity the development of priorities within the college sector, particularly in relation to the needs of learners outwith the Opportunities for All guarantee. We will also include the impact of

regionalisation, with particular reference to the travel patterns of learners.

In terms of our legislative approach, we will consider the implications of making colleges statutory members of CPPs, taking due account of the outcomes of the current joint review of community planning. We will also consider the legislative implications of changes to college governance, consistent with our regionalisation strategy, and the adequacy of the current statutory duties of the SFC, with particular consideration of its ability to secure provision on a regional basis.

Simplifying funding and increasing income generation

In Putting Learners at the Centre, we identified our top priority as being to ensure the sustainability of post-16 learning, which required more strategic investment of Government funding.

We identified the next fundamental step as reforming our funding mechanisms, incentivising institutions and providers to deliver our requirements in a sustainable way. This included a move towards a regional model of colleges in Scotland, as set out in the previous section; working with SDS, the SFC and local authorities to develop aligned pre-employment programmes from pooled budgets and maximising the leverage of Government funding through co-investment with employers.

We therefore asked for views and suggestions on the following four questions:

- 26. What are the pros and cons of the proposed needs-based regional commissioning model for colleges?*
- 27. Is there a market for co-investment with employers? If so, how do we select the employers with whom we might co-invest in order to maximise the leverage of Government funding? On what basis should Government funding be made available?*
- 28. In what circumstances would it be appropriate and fair to expect people to pay for their learning?*
- 29. What are the advantages and disadvantages of pooling funding for pre-employment support? What lessons can we learn from examples of pooled funding elsewhere?*

There was broad support for the Government's aim of simplifying funding and increase income generation, which garnered a significant mix of views and suggestions.

As well as the more general suggested pros and cons of the regional college model elicited by the previous section, respondents identified the stronger position regional colleges entities would have in forging solid links with schools, local authorities, universities, support agencies and employers, which would aid learner pathways. The statutory inclusion of regional colleges on Community Planning Partnerships was raised by some and linked with what some respondents identified as the potential for colleges to become wider and stronger strategic players in Scotland's delivery of education, jobs and growth.

Some respondents expressed a concern that regional commissioning – and the regional model generally – could be taken too literally. These respondents felt strongly that colleges should still be able to work with, for example, universities and employers outwith their region, particularly if existing links were already strong and productive. Similarly, a danger was flagged that whilst regionalisation provided greater opportunities for a regional college entity to develop some specialisms, there should be no barrier to these being delivered nationally.

The issue of co-investment elicited a number of views from respondents, which, although broadly supportive of the Government's aim, suggested that suitable opportunities might, in the current economic climate, be limited both in number and to large employers only. Focusing only on the large employers, however, was seen as potentially accentuating Scottish skills gaps, as the majority of employers in Scotland are SMEs.

More positively, the current Modern Apprenticeship scheme was suggested as an effective existing model of co-investment with employers, as was the collaborative model exemplified by the Fife Economic Partnership. A further suggestion was to focus on companies with identified potential for growth and to consider market testing the capacity for co-investment through time-defined pilot schemes. Some respondents suggested the regional college model would also assist in the development of co-investment models with employers, although this should not displace or replace core college delivery to learners.

The circumstances under which learners might be asked to pay for their learning elicited strong and straightforward responses. A clear majority stated that learning should be free, with frequent mention made that the Government's policy positions on college and university students should be the same.

A smaller cohort of respondents did, however, suggest that paying for learning might be appropriate for leisure courses; for those who had already received and utilised public funding and for those who were already in employment. These respondents, however, also stated that the primary consideration should always be whether an individual could afford to pay for their learning.

In general, respondents indicated that they were in favour of a pooled approach to funding, mainly for reasons related to reducing the complexity of current funding streams and creating a more efficient and consistent approach. Several examples of pooled funding were offered, drawing attention to their capacity to deliver – in particular - pre-employment training support.

Next Steps

We welcome the recognition of the enhanced strategic role of regional colleges and the strong support for the need for greater collaboration between Post-16 delivery bodies. We welcome the range of views that have come forward and recognise the challenges around the current approach to funding for pre-employment support.

We acknowledge that regional boundaries should not create barriers and the need for greater collaboration to ensure better outcomes for learners and employers. We acknowledge that the current funding picture is complex, with a variety of funding streams, varying compliance and eligibility requirements, and that pooling could reduce the potential for duplication and overlap of funding and services, and instead enable a more efficient use of funding and consistency of approach.

Having set the direction of travel on needs-based funding for colleges in 2012-13, we will move to full implementation in 2013-14 as well as consider the scope for

increased efficiency and alternative income streams in regionalised colleges, making them and the sector more sustainable. We will also ensure, with the SFC, that the impact of moving colleges to a needs based funding model is equality impact assessed.

Performance, governance and accountability

In the consultation, we set our aim to create a system in which learners and employers are confident Government funding delivers teaching and learning of the highest possible quality at all levels.

We acknowledged the different arrangements in place across colleges and universities and were clear that we wanted to address what is an insufficient focus on performance outcomes across both sectors. We also wanted to review the current governance arrangements for each, in order to clarify whether they were delivering the right level of transparency and democratic accountability, given the level of public funding they receive.

At the time of the consultation launch, reviews into the governance arrangements of colleges and universities had already been announced, and have now been completed. Whilst the results of these reviews will inform how we take forward any required new governance arrangements, we also wished to explore the effect our general package of reforms related to non-advanced learning and skills might have on college governance arrangements.

Given our earlier consultation on Higher Education, Building A Smarter Future, we also acknowledged that activity was further developed in relation to quality and performance management issues in universities than it was across colleges and training providers.

Bearing all this in mind, we asked the following four questions:

30. *Given the proposed changes to post-16 provision (non-advanced learning and skills) and delivery set out in this document, what are the key considerations for governance?*
31. *What measures should form the basis of our performance management framework for colleges and training providers in order to improve outcomes for all learners?*
32. *How do we ensure a strong focus on improving outcomes for those furthest from the labour market? What are stakeholders' experiences of this?*
33. *What are the advantages and disadvantages of an enhanced role for Education Scotland in supporting continuous improvement in the college and skills sectors?*

Many respondents advised that their views on governance had already been fed into the college and university governance reviews, which ran concurrent to the Putting Learners at the Centre consultation. Key considerations mentioned, however, included the need for student representation on Boards; transparent recruitment processes for Principals and Board members; the need to ensure employer representation and creating rigorous accountability processes without a burdensome level of required administration.

Nearly every respondent was broadly in favour of an outcomes or output based approach to performance management measures, provided it allowed for natural and necessary fluctuations in demand.

Suggested performance management measures which recurred throughout the responses included student progression, retention, employability and transferable skills, sourcing EU funding, priority group enrolments and the financial robustness of institutions. Many of the suggested measures, indeed, linked closely to the priority areas and actions identified by respondents in earlier sections of the consultation.

Whilst one view was that performance management outcomes should only be for aspects over which institutions had full control, another was that outcomes could be developed which took account of the necessary partnership working which would, for example, assist in achieving positive student destinations. Related to partnership working was the view expressed by a few that there was a need for cross-cutting professional standards, with outcome based joint CPD and training.

Several respondents stated that performance frameworks should align with the existing Single Outcome Agreements. Some additionally identified accurate baseline and ongoing data capture as critical, particularly if used for individual support intervention or outcomes were to be linked to funding. Linked to this was the view that if regional college performance measures were used, it was important that regional data could be easily disaggregated into local Community Planning Partnership areas.

As well as suggesting an outcome related to meeting priority enrolment targets, respondent suggestions on improving outcomes for the most vulnerable included protecting places for older learners; improved links with community learning and development and ring fencing of funding for learning support funding.

There was general support for the proposed enhanced role of Education Scotland in supporting continuous improvement across college and skills sectors, although there was a concern over whether it currently had the capacity and resource to encompass this broader scope of activity. Whilst there was some cautious support for the transferral to Education Scotland of some of the functions held by Scotland's Colleges, there was a call for further investigation to ensure the benefits to be gained were clear and that college interests would not be diluted as a result of any such change.

More generally, however, respondents tended to agree the proposed enhanced role was a 'good fit' with the existing role and responsibilities of Education Scotland. This included the opportunity for robust monitoring, improved consistency and impartiality and the potential for strong joint working and skills analysis with Skills Development Scotland.

Next Steps

We welcome the support for an outcomes/output based approach to performance management and the broad range of views expressed on how governance and accountability can be strengthened.

Alongside this, we acknowledge the importance of maintaining and enhancing the quality of Post-16 learning. In line with this, during 2012-13 we will give careful consideration to Education Scotland's potential role in supporting quality enhancement and assurance in the college sector, and beyond.

From 2012-13, we will introduce outcome agreements with regional colleges. We will also ensure that the quality of college provision is maintained and enhanced as regional colleges develop, giving further consideration to the development of appropriate assurance structures. Additionally, we develop proposals for college governance, that align with our regionalisation strategy and support effective and accountable regional colleges. We will consider any necessary legislative steps that may be required to take this forward.

Implementing Putting Learners at the Centre: Responses to the College Regionalisation consultation

Background

The College Regionalisation consultation paper was issued jointly by the Scottish Government and the Scottish Funding Council in November 2011 as part of the next step in the Government's plans to reform post-16 learning in Scotland, building on the pre-legislative paper *Putting Learners at the Centre*, published in September 2011. The key aims of the reforms are:

- To focus much more on delivering outcomes;
- To plan, fund and deliver on a regional basis; and
- To align funding more closely with need.

Overall response to the consultation

There was overwhelming support for the proposal to move to a regional model for Scotland's college sector. Only one response out of 83 overtly criticised the proposal.

In terms of the proposed regions the main issues raised in the responses were:

- whether Clydebank College should sit within the Glasgow region or the West;
- whether it was appropriate for James Watt College to serve two regions (the West for its Inverclyde campus and Ayrshire for its Kilwinning campus);
- whether Perth College should be part of the Highlands and Islands or Tayside;
- whether West Lothian College should be part of Edinburgh and the Lothians or Central.

Regional estimates of need

The vast majority of respondents were supportive of the principle of funding based on need, although many colleges commented that we had proposed too narrow a set of indicators and that they would like to see how the indicators are weighted and the impact on colleges when the indicators are modelled.

The main issues raised in the responses were:

- the focus on 16-24 year olds and concern about the impact of this on older learners, particularly groups with particular needs such as lone parents, the unemployed and those in low value jobs;
- the absence of an indicator to reflect employer/industry need;
- the absence of an indicator to reflect poverty and deprivation;

- that the 'low skilled' indicator should take account of the credit value, as well as the level, of qualifications attained;
- that the indicators should take account of the accessibility of university provision; and
- that some regions of the Highlands & Islands felt at risk of disadvantage if the Highlands & Islands is treated as a single region.

On the question of how often the allocations should be rebased, the majority were in favour of a cycle of at least three years, with a year's notice of any change. This is consistent with the colleges' (and their partners') planning cycles. It was also suggested that SFC provide an annual update on trends to facilitate planning, and that changes should be capped to reduce volatility.

Outcome agreements

To summarise the responses to this section:

CPP partnerships: the extent to which these should form the basis for outcome agreements clearly depends on how engaged colleges are with them already. Several calls for statutory responsibility for colleges on CPPs for learning and teaching post-16 and only one respondent saying they were not in favour of this option.

Several respondents expressed concerns around colleges being asked to take responsibility for outcomes over which they have little or no control.

There was broad consensus that indicators must include some hard-to-measure elements but no indication of how that might be done. Some respondents made general references to 'best practice' and one referred to an existing toolkit for the third sector.

There was general agreement that a template or framework should be used but not on which one – suggestions included PSIF, CPP and more generally learning from other organisations where outcome agreements have driven improvements.

Several respondents supported Scotland's Colleges view that year one agreements should focus solely on regional structures. There was also concern that the timescale of April 2012 is too ambitious to deliver meaningful agreements.

There were some comments around how and by whom regional need is defined. One respondent queried what happens when there is no consensus on regional need.

Several respondents made references to parity with universities, ie that both should be measured using the same criteria and that it would be unfair if only colleges were to be measured in this way.

Needs based funding

Consultation responses generally indicated support for a simplified approach to funding courses consisting of a subject based payment; a payment reflecting the

additional costs of teaching students with additional needs and a rural infrastructure payment. The main points raised in the responses were:

- Avoid creating more complexity as a result of attempts to simplify the system.
- Model impacts of changes and consider carefully pace of change.
- Be clear about what should be eligible for Council funding (specifically non-recognised qualifications).
- Undertake subject costing work to inform subject prices in the subject-based payment part of funding.
- Take forward consideration of how student numbers should be measured. However, views were mixed on whether we should keep SUMs or use FTEs.
- Review the student support system in the context of regional distribution of places.
- Although there was agreement that funding arrangement should have an element that reflects the additional costs of teaching students with additional support needs, there was not clear consensus on how this should be done.
- Virtually all responses that mentioned the issue indicated that we should not increase the percentage of a course a student must undertake to allow the course to count towards a college's student numbers (for funding purposes) from 25 per cent to 50 per cent.
- General agreement that capital maintenance funding should take account of student numbers, building condition and investment in estate. There were also some calls that investment in equipment and technology should not be overlooked.

Numbered List of Consultation Questions

1. How can we ensure delivery of an appropriate place in post-16 learning for **all** 16-19 year olds? What are the priority actions?
2. In considering the proposed package of measures for improving the learner journey, where should the focus be to improve pathways for all learners? What actions are required to make progression more coherent for learners?
3. How effective is the SCQF in promoting flexible learner journeys? Are there any barriers and, if so, how could they be overcome? How could the SCQF be used more effectively to deliver our aims?
4. What more can the Government and its partners do to encourage more articulation between colleges and universities?
5. What scope is there to make the transition from school to university more effective for learners, while reducing unnecessary duplication?
6. What do we need to do to ensure the Government's commitment, through Opportunities for All, to post-16 education and training for all 16-19 year olds is delivered to more vulnerable young people? What are the priority actions?
7. What more could the Government and its delivery partners do to improve retention and progression, building on Opportunities for All?
8. How can we maximise the contribution of Community Learning & Development to widening access? What examples of good practice can we build on?
9. What do we need to do to help more people from the most deprived backgrounds get a place at university? How can we frame this in legislation?
10. What are the advantages and disadvantages of prioritising investment in learning and skills which support jobs in key and high participation sectors?
11. How do we best target our resources in support of jobs, growth and life chances? For example, should we focus on level of qualification, age groups or labour market status?
12. Do we have the right systems and structures in place for articulating employer needs (locally, regionally and nationally) and those of the wider economy?
13. Which of the existing structures are effective and could be applied more widely; which are ineffective and can be improved?
14. How can we maximise the contribution of community learning & development to improving people's job prospects? What examples of good practice can we build on?
15. How best can we maximise the impact of our excellent research?
16. How can we help Scottish universities and businesses collaborate more effectively in bidding for European funding?
17. How can the quality and coherence of PhD training be improved?

18. What would be the main activities of a single knowledge exchange office? What activities are best left to individual universities?
19. Given the financial constraints, should we prioritise an entitlement-based approach or the level of payment each student receives? What other options are there?
20. How can FE bursaries and EMA be targeted fairly and more effectively?
21. Should delivery of financial support - irrespective of where people learn - be centralised? What are the pros and cons of this approach?
22. Should student support arrangements align with our ambitions for jobs and growth? If so, what might this look like in practice?
23. What are the pros and cons of our proposals for the regionalisation of colleges? Are there other criteria we should consider in determining the optimal regional structure?
24. What more could the Government and its delivery partners do to improve collaboration between post-16 learning, including CLD and employment support services?
25. What are the pros and cons of the new leadership and support role envisaged for the SFC? What lessons can we learn from successful change management elsewhere?
26. What are the pros and cons of the proposed needs-based regional commissioning model for colleges?
27. Is there a market for co-investment with employers? If so, how do we select the employers with whom we might co-invest in order to maximise the leverage of Government funding? On what basis should Government funding be made available?
28. In what circumstances would it be appropriate and fair to expect people to pay for their learning?
29. What are the advantages and disadvantages of pooling funding for pre-employment support? What lessons can we learn from examples of pooled funding elsewhere?
30. Given the proposed changes to post-16 provision (non-advanced learning and skills) and delivery set out in this document, what are the key considerations for governance?
31. What measures should form the basis of our performance management framework for colleges and training providers in order to improve outcomes for all learners?
32. How do we ensure a strong focus on improving outcomes for those furthest from the labour market? What are stakeholders' experiences of this?
33. What are the advantages and disadvantages of an enhanced role for Education Scotland in supporting continuous improvement in the college and skills sectors?



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