

CEO Report

1 Key Highlights

1.1 Welcome to my CEO report for the period covering October to December 2023. In this report I provide a comprehensive overview of Colleges Scotland's work over the period since the last board meeting. I would encourage board members to note the activity of Colleges Scotland in promoting, influencing and amplifying the work of colleges by reading our Daily Monitoring report, monthly Policy Update, regularly email communications and follow Colleges Scotland across our social media channels ([Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#) and [Twitter](#)). You can also see past and current Board information in our [Members Area](#).



1.2 During the eight weeks since we last met in October 2023 to the festive break, the pace of work has not slowed.

2 Policy Wins

Reform to 2026

2.1 Further to the conclusion of the Think the Unthinkable workstream in September 2023, Colleges Scotland has subsequently produced a strategic approach to the delivery of the changes identified by sector leaders and set out a draft plan. The following three priorities from the work areas were agreed by the Colleges Scotland Board in October 2023 and Short Life Working Groups (SLWG) have been established for each:

- Skills Led Regions
- Funding and infrastructure
- Workforce.

2.2 The Funding and Infrastructure SLWG has developed a proposal on what a Single Funding Body needs to deliver for the college sector. The Skills Led Regions SLWG has produced a proposal on an alternative model for the delivery of apprenticeships. Both these pieces of work have been shared with the Minister for Higher Education and Further Education; and Minister for Veterans for consideration and he is continuing to engage with the proposals.

Scottish Education Council

2.3 Colleges Scotland presented a report on School-College Partnerships to the Scottish Education Council, Chaired by the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, in November 2023. This followed a number of Short Life Sub Group meetings focusing on how to deliver seamless school-college transitions, the role of colleges in tackling the attainment gap, in addition to focusing on how best schools and colleges can work collaboratively to support learners at risk of disengaging.

2.4 Council members have welcomed the report and the strong partnership working as a process. Colleges Scotland will continue to engage with Scottish Government officials and local government to take forward the recommendations.

Modern Apprenticeship Working Group (MAWG)

- 2.5** Colleges Scotland, working with sector representatives through the MAWG, has secured a provisional increase of 2% for 2023/24 funding rates for colleges from Construction Industry Training Board (CITB). This represents an improved position for the college sector from CITB's original stance of maintaining funding rates as per those for 2022/23.
- 2.6** Colleges Scotland also met with the Minister during December 2023 for a focused discussion on Modern Apprenticeships and the work of the MAWG. From this discussion it is clear that the continued activity of the MAWG had informed the Minister's statement to the Scottish Parliament on 5 December 2023.

Student Support Funding

- 2.7** In December 2023, the Minister announced further financial support for Scottish students. Undergraduate students will benefit from a £2,400 increase to their annual support package from the start of the 2024/25 academic year. The uplift means funding support for the most vulnerable students, including care-experienced and estranged students is now in line with the student equivalent Living Wage. Colleges Scotland has been advocating for increased funding for learners in various forums including The Further Education Student Support Stakeholder Advisory Group (FESSSAG) and are regularly in dialogue with Scottish Government officials.

3 Ongoing Policy Impact

- 3.1** Colleges Scotland submitted its Draft Budget 2024/25 document on behalf of the sector to Scottish Government and worked with Scottish Government and other stakeholders ahead of the Draft Budget announcement on 19 December 2023.
- 3.2** Colleges Scotland will continue to influence the Draft Budget during its parliamentary process, including engaging with all the political parties as well as ongoing dialogue with Scottish Government. As part of this key work, I presented evidence of the impact of the Draft Budget on the college sector to the Finance and Public Administration Committee on 9 January 2024. Colleges Scotland also submitted written evidence to a number of other parliamentary committees ahead of key meetings, including the Minister appearing at the Education, Children and Young People Committee on 10 January and both the Scottish Government and Scottish Funding Council (SFC) giving evidence to the Public Audit Committee on 11 January 2024.



Infrastructure

- 3.3** The SFC's Infrastructure Delivery Group met on 28 November 2023. Discussions focused on the proposed delivery plan for the College Infrastructure Strategy published in November 2022 and around timescales for the implementation of the respective work packages within the delivery plan. The delivery plan was subsequently published in December 2023, with a strategic baseline of the college sector estate to be progressed in the first quarter of 2024. Colleges Scotland also continued to engage with the SFC and Scottish Government regarding RAAC in the college sector.

Scottish Covid-19 Inquiry

- 3.4** The Scottish Covid-19 Inquiry is examining the key issues and impacts experienced by colleges, their staff, and students because of the pandemic, as part of their work. Colleges Scotland, as well as individual colleges, has been approached to provide written evidence to the Inquiry and will shortly be submitted. Can I thank the Colleges Scotland staff involved in collating this evidence, which has been substantial.

International Education Activity

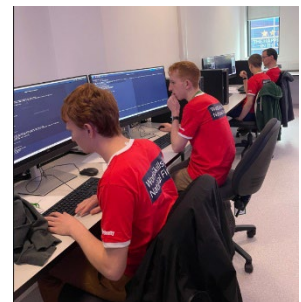
- 3.5** Colleges Scotland has been in consultation with Scottish Government officials over the drafts of their International Education Strategy and ensuring that this accurately reflects the contribution colleges make to Scotland's international education offer. Work is currently ongoing on a final draft, and through this work we will continue to highlight colleges as a contributor towards Scotland's international presence.
- 3.6** Summer 2023 saw the launch of the Scottish Government's Scottish Education Exchange Test and Learn Programme. This was part of the Programme for Government and welcomed funding applications from colleges and universities to help with staff training and inter-institutional alliances. Colleges Scotland has actively engaged with officials in the development of the programme by raising awareness with the college sector and has reached agreement with Scottish Government to establish a new working group with a view to increasing the sectors' engagement with the programme.

Climate Change and Green Skills

- 3.7** Colleges Scotland has engaged with Scottish Government officials on both the Climate Change Plan and the Just Transition Plan. This dialogue in partnership with ESP has reiterated crucial added value of Scotland's colleges in supporting the delivery of activity against the Scottish Government's Net Zero targets. Colleges Scotland has reached agreement with Scottish Government to help inform their development of the Just Transition Plan with regards to skills delivery against key market demands.

WorldSkills

- 3.8** Colleges Scotland attended the WorldSkills UK National Finals, held in Manchester in November 2023, to support Scotland's 45 participants from nine colleges engaging in competition categories ranging from Cyber Security to Heavy Vehicle Technology and Industrial Electronics. Scotland's competitors excelled with 24 medals won and with New College Lanarkshire and City of Glasgow College coming second and third in the overall UK medals table. In attending the National Finals Colleges Scotland also engaged in strategic dialogue with WorldSkills UK and the Scottish Funding Council to explore how Scottish participation and success in WorldSkills can be continued in future years.



Career Review Implementation

- 3.9** Colleges Scotland, working with Skills Development Scotland (SDS), has held a series of Changemaker Group Workshops, with a view to defining an enhanced SDS/college service offer and refreshed Further Education Partnership Agreement that will offer universal access to career development support. This will include the delivery of SDS careers services on a co-located basis within colleges across Scotland and represents a refreshed approach to providing equity and equality of access to career development support.

4 Key Meetings

- 4.1** Prior to the festive break the Director of Policy and Corporate Governance, Andy Witty, alongside Derek Smeall, Principal of Glasgow Kelvin College, gave evidence to the Public Audit Committee to explore the issues raised during the Auditor General's earlier session.
- 4.2** In January, I also took part in a roundtable evidence discussion at the Finance and Public Administration Committee's Budget Scrutiny 2024/25 session.

- 4.3 Stakeholder engagement has continued with productive and informative meetings with Marie Hendry, CDN; Alastair Sim, Universities Scotland; Jim Brown, ESP. During discussions I shared ideas on how colleges can support both members and industry, advocated for support for the college sector, and discussed opportunities for alignment and collaboration on strategic priorities.
- 4.4 Colleges Scotland has taken part in several external events hosted by Prosper (formerly SCDI) and attended their Policy Committee.
- 4.5 Member engagement continued with meetings covering a range of topics with the chair of Glasgow Colleges' Regional Board (GCRB), Janie McCusker; Chair of the Lanarkshire Board, Ronnie Smith; Principal of Dumfries and Galloway College, Joanna Campbell. Principal of West Lothian College, Jackie Galbraith. Also continued with the ongoing Colleges Scotland board inductions with Joanna Campbell, Principal and Chief Executive, Dumfries and Galloway College and Derek Smeall, Principal and Chief Executive, Glasgow Kelvin College.
- 4.6 Strategic dialogue continues with the Minister. Mr Dey has proven that he is keen to continue to actively engage with the sector. The Tripartite Alignment Group led by the Minister which includes the SFC, Colleges Scotland and sector representation continue to meet regularly.
- 4.7 A positive introductory meeting took place with the Director-General for Education and Justice Support, Neil Rennick.
- 4.8 Engagement continues with SFC's CEO Karen Watt on a regular basis, and with senior SFC staff.
- 4.9 There has been political engagement with a number of MSPs.

5 Networking and Presentations

- 5.1 Supported by our Head of Communications and Public Affairs, Jen Johnston, I recently attended the GCRB Board meeting and had a full and engaged discussion with board members on a range of topics affecting the sector. Colleges Scotland has also presented to the Glasgow Kelvin College Board and have upcoming engagement at other college boards throughout 2024.
- 5.2 Andy was a speaker at the *Scotland Policy Conferences* keynote seminar: Next steps for qualifications and assessment reform in Scotland.
- 5.3 Colleges Scotland provided input to the JISC Scotland Stakeholder Strategy Forum. This forum will help sector bodies co-ordinate effectively and efficiently to provide the best support for Scotland's colleges today and into the future.
- 5.4 Andy and I joined sector leaders from across the four nations in Manchester at the AOC International Conference exploring how skills and education are drivers of regional economies. The conference – Driving regional economic development through education and skills: learning from across the UK, Ireland, and beyond – was a great networking opportunity and gave a fascinating insight into other UK issues.
- 5.5 I was pleased to join a private roundtable and dinner hosted by Dame Ann Limb at Manchester College.

6 Communications and Public Affairs

- 6.1 I am delighted to share with you some detail and exciting news about a significant piece of work being driven by Jen – our inaugural **Colleges Scotland Conference**, which will take place on **Wednesday 24 April 2024** at City of Glasgow College. The theme for the day is '*When colleges thrive, Scotland thrives*' and this event will bring together c170 delegates from across education, business, government, and civic society to illuminate the pivotal role that colleges play in addressing critical issues currently affecting Scotland. More detail and invitations will be issued in the coming weeks.
- 6.2 Colleges Scotland has engaged with media on a range of issues including college sector finances, Flexible Workforce Development Fund, a number of SFC reports, green skills, student satisfaction. There has also been wide engagement with media around ongoing industrial action through CES.
- 6.3 Jen has regular engagement with the Scottish Government Special Advisor for Education.
- 6.4 Colleges Scotland has worked with Universities Scotland, NUS Scotland, and SFC comms colleagues on a range of issues.
- 6.5 Colleges Scotland provides the secretariat to the Scottish Parliament Cross Party Group on Skills and works jointly with Universities Scotland on the Cross Party Group on Colleges and Universities. Dates for the 2024 meetings will be confirmed in due course.

Colleges Scotland
January 2024