

Colleges Scotland Response to Purpose and Principles for Post-School Education, Research and Skills – August 2023

General Comments

Context

The Scottish Government published the [Purpose and Principles for post-school education, research and skills](#) on Wednesday 28 June 2023. This accepted a number of the recommendations in the recent Skills Delivery Landscape Review, which called for major change in the skills delivery system to improve outcomes for learners and employers, as well as other reports on educational reform.

Purpose and Principles, which sets out some areas of change which might contribute in bringing stability to Scotland's colleges, is timely given the sector is on an unsustainable trajectory and operating in a wider system which is characterised by a cluttered landscape around education, training, skills delivery, and work-based opportunities in Scotland. There has also been a historically missed opportunity to capitalise on the sector's expertise and capability. All of us want the needs of learners, communities, employers, and the economy to be at the centre of planning and decision-making for how skills are delivered now, and in the future.

Clarity is Required

Through the implementation of the Purpose and Principles the Scottish Government has to provide clarity for the college sector, which could in part be done by strongly reflecting and delivering on the recommendations as established by James Withers in the Skills Delivery Landscape Review. In doing so the Scottish Government must integrate and align the implementation of the recommendations of the Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment.

In addition, the colleges sector has undertaken its own work over the last 12 months to identify purpose and what needs to change, through a workstream called Think the Unthinkable.

Stability and Sustainability is Required

Stability, and creating a sustainable future for colleges is vital, as students deserve to learn in colleges that are thriving, ambitious and strongly connected to industry, and re-enforce to businesses and the public sector that colleges are the go-to place for skills training and high-quality qualifications. On that basis, we need to ensure that the Scottish Government now provides a clear statement of intent for the college sector and establish a clear purpose for colleges, that take into account the sector's own position.

In this paper we provide some initial views from the college sector, along with a RAG status, in order to allow ongoing dialogue with Scottish Government and other key stakeholders. Key for RAG status is as follows:

Red	Do not support the recommendation
Amber	Support the recommendation in principle, whilst acknowledging further details are required
Green	Support the recommendation

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Principle	Comments	Role of the College Sector	RAG Status
Principle 1 - Transparent, Resilient and Trusted What Scottish Government will do: - Lead the development of a new model of public funding for all forms of provision. - Investigate the options to deliver a single funding body, including tuition and living cost support, paying regard to issues such as the status and scope of the body's responsibilities - Include responsibility for overseeing all publicly funded post school qualifications (except degrees) and the underpinning occupational standards and skills frameworks as part of the new qualifications body.	Streamlined, flexible public funding which prioritises learners and learning that will best deliver against intended outcomes is required to allow colleges to fulfil their maximum benefit. One potential funding model for colleges could be as follows: A level of core funding to cover fixed costs and resource following the student, on an equitable basis throughout all parts of the system. Suitable and sustainable investment in infrastructure, digital and climate change mitigations. It is important to recognise that not all resource can follow the learner, there needs to be funds retained at an institutional level to cover core costs. The introduction of a single funding body would reduce confusion in a complex landscape, where multiple funding streams exist, each with their own cultures, rules and reporting mechanisms. The implementation of a single funding body would cut down significantly on bureaucracy and provide the opportunity to respond flexibly to regional needs. The Art of the Possible workstream has also identified this as a key ask to Scottish Government. There is an opportunity here to ensure the overall funding model strengthens school-college partnerships.	The college sector will ensure that its provision is learner-centred and offers value for money. Colleges will strengthen their partnerships with local schools by ensuring improved funding equates to improved provision for learners, increasing the appeal of college to senior-phase pupils. Colleges will play a leading role in building what the future looks like. We also have the operational understanding to test the impacts on changes to guidance, policy or direction. As we are involved and consulted from the start of such processes, we can support the shaping and implementation of the changes required, both short term and long term.	

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	College-university partnerships must also be strengthened through equal funding at undergraduate level demonstrating parity of esteem and ensuring colleges can provide HNC/D students with the same quality of experience. This would include equity of careers support. The college sector broadly welcomes the recommendations of the Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment Final Report. We have previously commented on the Muir Report, and we would agree with the focus of a vision that serves learners and Scotland in a way that creates a culture shift. However, within the review there is a focus on schools, and we need to ensure that the work and position of colleges is recognised.		
Principle 2 – Supportive and Equitable What Scottish Government will do: Within financial constraints, build on manifesto commitments and undertake a review of student support for part-time learners to improve the parity of support on offer, especially for those who are returning to learning and may have other caring or	Any redeveloped model must be supported through additional funding and not the re-allocation of existing funding to accommodate this change. The ability for any learner to access financial support for living costs up to the living wage equivalent would make part-time or flexible study more accessible and affordable. The complex interaction with the benefits system also requires addressing. It is important to ensure that full and part-time learners are treated equitably to make education accessible for all. Given the financial challenges many are facing through the cost of living crisis	The college sector will support all learners. We will promote any improved support package to those eligible and support them with any application process. This will help attract prospective learners to the college sector and enrich their student experience.	

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work-related responsibilities. Develop a model for student support and engagement that takes account of all provision pathways and not just further and higher education, including considering apprenticeships and CLD.	there is potential shift from full-time to part-time learning which has to be recognised.		
Principle 3 – High Quality What Scottish Government will do: - Build on the work of the recommendations from the Careers Review to consider options for embedding careers advice and education within communities, educational settings and workplaces across Scotland; including options for future delivery of national careers services; - Build a comprehensive understanding of the post-school qualifications landscape to inform processes for developing, funding, assuring and	Colleges are supportive of an improved careers service offering, which provides personalised, and lifelong career support to all learners at any stage in their career journey. This also supports the principles of the recent careers review. The college sector should be actively involved in the implementation of recommendations stemming from the Reviews and in advising on changes to current practice. College sector leaders have developed the concept of skills-led regions, in which colleges will be the leading body in the planning and delivery of skills, including apprenticeships. For there to be a cultural change towards a parity of esteem across the post-school landscape staff must be trained, with suitable resource and funding provided to ensure this is done successfully.	In regard to embedding careers advice, colleges will: - Work with regional partners on provision of careers advice - Undertake gap analysis - Enhance the professional development and training of our staff The college sector will push for recognition of prior learning, including the provision of clear guidance on how this is applied across the tertiary education sector. The college sector will make greater use, and support others to do the same, of the SCQF framework to map a range of suitable pathways for learners. The college sector will use its collective knowledge and expertise to advise how changes should be implemented, ensuring as little disruption as possible to the learner and operational processes.	

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approving publicly funded qualifications, and actions for wider reform of the qualifications landscape - including improved articulation with the senior phase. • Lead work to inform future approach to apprenticeship development and delivery as part of an integrated landscape of pathways. • Work with institutions, public bodies and unions to ensure that staff at all levels are supported and empowered to deliver the high-quality work required by students, society and the wellbeing economy, in keeping with fair work principles.			
Principle 4 – Globally Respected What Scottish Government will do: • Use and improve Study in Scotland materials as part of approach though NSET to talent attraction and retention.	It must be ensured that colleges are able to access any international/EU staff and student exchanges to ensure colleges are globally respected. Colleges need to be involved in the planning and developments in each of the respective Scottish Government workstreams. Successful inward investment must be underpinned by a skilled workforce, delivered by colleges. Colleges are critical to the delivery of	Colleges will continue to evidence their role as providers of international education opportunities for learners, including for those learners from the most-deprived communities in Scotland.	

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- Take forward a pilot international mobility programme co-designed with sector representatives. - Continue to seek to influence the UK Government to secure future association to Horizon Europe and other EU research programmes and ensure Scottish interests are protected regardless of outcome.	this skilled workforce, and the delivery of future skills pipelines in key growth areas for Scotland. Colleges should play a stronger role in innovation, and in particular in distilling innovation practices with the employers they engage with, which differs from the research carried out by universities. This unique role in innovation must be recognised and strengthened.		
Principle 5 – Agile and Responsive What Scottish Government will do: - Take responsibility for skills planning – developing an approach at a national level that works with partners to set clear priorities. Enhance and embed the role of employers in shaping system planning priorities, pathways and provision. - This will be supported by a regional approach that builds on existing regional economic partnerships and has employers and local	A key output identified through the Art of the Possible workstream is the need for the college sector to be the leading planner and provider of skills and modern apprenticeships, which would support the ‘Think Colleges First’ principle. A single point of skills planning would bring efficiencies to the current process and allow colleges greater autonomy around decision making and planning. Colleges have the knowledge and expertise of managing this at an operational level, but also the vision required to deliver national skills planning more effectively.	The college sector will play a leading role in supporting the transition from the existing to the new for national skills planning. Colleges will work closely with their local SMEs and key industry partners to establish their skills needs and use funding to deliver responsive and tailored training. This will help to upskill workforces and increase business productivity, thus ensuring greater impact in their communities. Colleges will work with SMEs and key industry partners to: - Increase employer engagement - Progress innovation - Identify regional issues, needs and gaps	

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providers, in particular colleges, at the centre.		The college sector will ensure that the needs of employers are met through establishing strong working relationships and delivering on skills demand, via their Community Planning Partnerships.	

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