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Crumbling colleges raise fears over £775m repair bill

♦ 'Extreme concerns' for sector made worse by Raac found in seven institutions

EXCLUSIVE

Calum Ross
Education Correspondent

SNP ministers have been told Scotland's colleges have "extreme concerns" about the impact of an escalating £775 million repair backlog that is being exacerbated by the discovery of dangerous crumbling concrete at several sites.

Sector leaders say there is an ongoing battle to keep some buildings "wind and watertight", with many badly in need of maintenance or total replacement.

The problems have been made worse for seven of the nation's 24 colleges which have been found to contain reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (Raac), a collapse-prone construction material. It has emerged UHI Moray expects to completely close a wing of its building this winter amid concerns about the impact of snow and rain on its Raac roof. Borders College faces a bill of about £4.5m to remove Raac from Galashiels Campus.

West College Scotland, meanwhile, has seen the book value of its building plummet from £1.8m to zero as a result of Raac, and there has also been a reduction at Glasgow Clyde College's Cardonald campus. And Dundee & Angus College is considering "all options" after Raac was found at its Kingsway Campus, which is too old for long-term repair work to be "financially viable".

With some colleges close to being "technically insolvent", sector leaders have warned the Government they do not have any funding to "undertake

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Care Service plans not dead, says Robison

Alexander Brown

Finance Secretary Shona Robison has insisted plans for a National Care Service are not dead, despite the Scottish Greens formally withdrawing their support. Members overwhelmingly voted for a motion against the plans at the party's conference in Greenock yesterday. The decision means the minority SNP administration, which relies on

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Exclusive: 'Extreme concerns' for crumbling Scottish college buildings as Raac pushes repair bill towards £800m

By **Calum Ross**

Education Correspondent

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Colleges Scotland has laid bare the sector's need for investment

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With some colleges close to being "technically insolvent", sector leaders have warned the Government they do not have any funding to "undertake unexpected repairs of this magnitude".

The pressures are mounting at a time when Scotland's colleges have been battling for their future as a result of [a 17 per cent real terms funding drop](#) since 2021/22.

In a new submission to the Scottish Government ahead of Budget talks, umbrella body Colleges Scotland said: "To deal with the immediate deficit and to prevent colleges from becoming technically insolvent, there is a critical requirement for the Scottish Government to deliver a restoration of funding to the college sector, to match the level of funding received by the sector in 2021/22, which has declined year on year since.

"This will total £100.5m, as the funding in 2021/22 was £732.8m and the funding for 2023/24 was £675.7m."

On top of the £100.5m, the sector is asking for a further £116m to cover other expenditure, such as inflation and staff pay awards. That money would be for day-to-day revenue spending.

The Budget submission also lays bare how an additional £250m of capital funding would be required to take college buildings back to "baseline condition", as well as a £525m to replace buildings that are "life expired".

This £775m total capital investment requirement does not include money needed to help colleges meet net zero targets, or to deal with Raac.

The Colleges Scotland submission said: "As noted in the Education, Children and Young People Committee's report on College Regionalisation, as well as in the Audit Scotland briefing on Scotland's Colleges 2023, there are extreme concerns about the significant level of backlog and life cycle maintenance required to ensure that the college estate is wind and watertight, to improve the adverse learning environment and subsequent impact on learners.

"This comes in addition to any costs that will be incurred (both now and in the future) by those seven colleges currently responding to issues in relation to Raac."

It is now more than a year since the alarm was raised about Raac in the wake of the UK government's decision to [close more than 100 schools in England](#), days before the end of the summer holidays.

Last week, it was announced that East Lothian Council could demolish [the huge Brunton Hall theatre and office building in Musselburgh](#), following the discovery of Raac, which was often used in public buildings between the 1950s and 1990s.

UHI Moray said the entire roof of its [Speyside Wing](#) consists of Raac slab. The top floor of the building is fully closed and the slabs are being supported by props and timber supports as a temporary safety measure.

The college is preparing to fully close the Speyside Wing when the weather worsens over winter, due to the risk posed by snow and high wind.

Scottish Borders College said Raac had been confirmed in its campus in Galashiels, in several areas. Urgent remedial work was fully completed and confirmation was received from an independent structural engineer that the buildings are safe for use and no further works required at this time, although the Raac is now being monitored regularly.

Initial estimates based on benchmark data indicate a cost of about £4.5m to remove Raac from Galashiels Campus.

Meanwhile, a spokesperson for Dundee & Angus College said Raac was present at its Kingsway Campus in Dundee, one of the college's three sites, although there has been no need to limit use of the affected buildings.

However, the spokesperson added: "Given the age of the Kingsway Campus [constructed in the 1960s], it is unlikely that the longer-term works required to fully replace areas impacted by Raac would be financially viable.

"Consequently, D&A College is engaging with the Scottish Funding Council and Scottish Government about our short-term needs and its longer-term college infrastructure and estates vision."

Edinburgh College has found Raac in the automotive workshops and electrical workshops of its Sighthill Campus.

Dr Graeme Jackson, interim chief executive of Colleges Scotland, said: "The presence of Raac in seven colleges in Scotland is concerning, and I'm grateful for the swift action taken by college principals to control or remove access to affected areas.

"The individual colleges do not have any funding to undertake unexpected repairs of this magnitude and the situation has to be resolved as a priority."

Dr Jackson added: "We await the Scottish Government draft Budget announcement in December to see a firm commitment to investing in college infrastructure that will support the development of the skilled workforce needed in a modern, thriving Scotland."

Several Scottish colleges have new or recently-built campuses, including Forth Valley College's Falkirk Campus, Fife College's Dunfermline campus, as well as City of Glasgow College and UHI Inverness.

A Scottish Government spokesperson said: “The Scottish Government takes Raac seriously and we have established regular meetings to ensure that best practice is shared across both public and private sector bodies impacted by Raac.

“The Scottish Government is kept regularly updated by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) on efforts to gather information on the scale of the problem in the college sector and the SFC intends to conclude work on the first phase of a College Infrastructure Investment Plan early in 2025, which will explore solutions to wider concerns around the college estate.”



UHI Moray

Borders College faces a bill of about £4.5m to remove Raac from Galashiels Campus.



Scottish Borders College campus. Picture: Michael Gillen | Michael Gillen



Raac safety measures at UHI Moray | UHI Moray