

**The Lanarkshire Board: RSB Response to SFC on the Call for evidence to ‘A Review of Coherent Provision and Sustainability in Further and Higher Education’:**

**A summary of key points in the response is given below and this is followed by the more detailed response to the questions asked in the Call for Evidence.**

- What is the expectation of colleges? Clarity on this issue determines what should stop and what should be done differently and this requires national agreement.
- We should be careful not to lurch from one policy/strategy to another. What we really need is a unifying clarity around what we’re trying to achieve and how we’re going to do it.
- Mixed messages from the various agencies which interact with colleges often inhibit progress, consequently serious thought needs to be applied to how to get publicly funded organisations to be better aligned in policy and operational matters. A radical look at how the sector is led, managed and administered to deliver agreed national outcomes is overdue.
- Leadership at a national level is probably the single most important requirement for a sustained, successful contribution to our economic recovery from the education sector.
- Funding arrangements should be focused on agreed priority areas for economic and social outcomes. A review of college funding needs to happen at pace to ensure colleges are able to meet their core budgets. This will provide security to meet the economic and social needs of communities. It is important that there is an environment that allows for rapid response and innovation.
- There needs to be enablement of partnerships with Scottish industry and colleges and it is also important for colleges to support industry and SME’s to articulate what current and future skills are actually needed in terms of training and to emphasise the importance of investment in training for future profitability and success. This is where new digital activities may play a key role in connecting with both large and small organisations. There are also major issues to address in how the colleges relate to the environment and regional economies in which they operate. Recent discussions (at Colleges Scotland and elsewhere) have highlighted the relatively marginal role for colleges at strategic levels within regional structures throughout Scotland at the present time.
- Should there be government challenge funding for new hubs to drive collaborative projects and partnerships? This might bring the key partners including industry to the table and make it more than a talking shop?
- The sector response to COVID 19 and the switch to on-line delivery within days has demonstrated the strength of leadership in Scottish colleges and the dedication of staff to educational and training delivery to students. There is strength and resilience in the sector that should be recognised and encouraged. Maintaining staff expertise in teaching and support, even in a challenging funding environment, will be required to ensure we can meet the current and future needs of students.
- There is also much progress in on-line delivery that should not be lost post COVID and this offers both students and business and industry flexibility in delivery and may offer opportunity in times of financial constraint. This is an area which should be explored with non – traditional partners such as the Open University, the BBC and industry partners with national policy support from the Scottish Government. Digital poverty remains an issue and, while individual colleges have been dealing with this, the issue deserves more attention at government level with a policy rolling out for schools and colleges.
- Colleges have participated in international programmes such as Erasmus and their international expertise could be lost for staff and students unless the UK government maintains access to these programmes or funds links differently. There is also the success in the World Skills programme and the current bid for a Scottish World Skills hub for international training and links to business. There is greater recognition of vocational skills in other countries and we should assess and apply where possible what makes this work better in other countries.

## **Introduction and context**

The Lanarkshire Regional Strategic Body – The Lanarkshire Board - welcomes the ambition for a review of coherent provision and sustainability for post 16 education bodies and is committed to supporting the SFC in pursuing this brief on behalf of the Scottish Ministers.

Scotland is rightly proud of its traditions in education for its people and has a plethora of worthy and high performing organisations and institutions which have national and international reputations, however the speed of change in the modern world is relentless and often prevents us from looking dispassionately at how things may be done better. Therefore, even before the major impact of Covid-19 on our economy and society, a fundamental review of the sector was probably necessary. The current requirement to produce an economic recovery plan following the devastating circumstances of our post pandemic world, makes this urgent. Unfortunately, as a result, the need for haste will undoubtedly distract from the more thoughtful reflection that would be preferred if things were different. The short timescales for response at a particularly challenging time for senior staff and Boards will mean these initial consultations will undoubtedly receive less consideration from experienced and knowledgeable people within education than the topic would merit and, therefore, it is hoped that subsequent phases and calls for evidence will be able to accommodate this. Nevertheless, the content of this initial response is firmly grounded in the experiences of the RSB – the Lanarkshire Board - with input from senior staff at New College Lanarkshire and our colleagues at South Lanarkshire College (SLC).

It is important to reflect on the fact that there have been a number of policies and strategies some of them quite recent that have been introduced and all are in the same areas as we're being asked to comment on again now for example:

- . The regionalisation agenda (and what that was supposed to drive with SMEs, representative bodies/organisations, local authorities and the like);
- . Developing the Young Workforce;
- . The Scottish Government's own Economic Strategy and 15-24 Learner Journey Review
- . The Enterprise and Skills Review - plus associated Board;
- . The Commission to Widen Access;
- . The Apprenticeship/Flexible Workforce Development Fund; and never mind legislation like the Post 16 Education Act and ongoing discussions about a fairer and more equitable distribution of resources within the sector.

The opportunity to contribute is welcomed, however, we should be careful not to lurch from one policy/strategy to another. What we really need is a unifying clarity around what we're trying to achieve and how we're going to do it. This should be based on the good and meaningful elements of what we have now and given time to further bed in and evolve as times and situations change. Stability and strong foundations will be the bedrock for future generations.

The Lanarkshire RSB acknowledges the challenge that the region has faced in the past with the fall- out in the 1980's from the closure of the Ravenscraig Steel Works, the subsequent demise of heavy industry with the resulting jobs losses and the ensuing deprivation that impacted on our communities. SME's have played a key role in the successful economic regeneration in the region. The prediction post COVID is for another swathe of job losses and the colleges in Lanarkshire will have a key regional role to play in skills updating, training young people for the future and in industry and agency partnerships helping to drive recovery.

## Consultation Question A

***a) What do you think works well in the current further and higher education arrangements that we should keep in order to secure Scotland's inclusive social and economic recovery from the current pandemic? How can we best preserve and strengthen those features of education, research and innovation in Scotland that we most prize, in a very challenging funding environment?***

### Response to A

In the main, what works well in the current environment, is delivery for students. Colleges are traditionally good at this and there is excellent delivery in the sector. We must remember in any changes we introduce that student learning and training is what we do and that to maintain and enhance this should be our *raison d'être*! Many colleges have also been particularly effective in delivering the Scottish Government aim of addressing the attainment gap between students from differing social and economic backgrounds. They have enabled learners from the most disadvantaged areas in Scotland to achieve well and progress to be economically active citizens.

Clear, straightforward and equitable access to relevant, challenging and worthwhile education services are a defining characteristic of the College tradition within Scotland. Serving as anchors for the community, colleges thrive as a result of their strong partnerships with a myriad of players across the public, private and not-for-profit sectors. In this time of emergency (and thereafter) we believe that is imperative that colleges retain and deepen their accessibility to education for our communities and provide clear paths to career opportunity. Our principal commitment is to the full and complete advancement of the Lanarkshire region. We recognise that our purpose must be to protect, support and advance the economic, social and cultural health of the communities of Lanarkshire.

To that end, we believe that what works well in the current arrangement (and therefore should be retained and advanced in order to secure the recovery of our region) includes:

- The delivery of relevant, informed, high quality learning that supports the realisation of our students' potential and secures the on-going development and enhancement of their careers and lives;
- The provision of excellent professional, technical and creative education that meets the requirements of the Lanarkshire people and our regional economy;
- The maintenance of strong partnerships with employers in order to strengthen and enhance their Institutional prospects for the long-term good of the region;
- Close collaborations with businesses in order to secure stable prosperity through the sharing and on-going provision of ideas, talent, skills and learning;
- The adoption of widening access strategies that contribute to the achievement of better levels of social justice in the region.

Scottish colleges have significant partnership with key stakeholders. This includes working with schools and employers to develop and deliver learning which meets the needs of a diverse range of learners, industry, communities and higher education institutions. For example, in Lanarkshire at NCL we have set up a business hub to service the entire region with membership of SMEs to help break down the barriers to local companies accessing the college campuses. We have also committed senior members of staff and a Board member to join the Board of the Lanarkshire Chamber of Commerce and Trade. These initiatives show early promise and will help to drive changes in our evolving curriculum. Furthermore, SLC is also well networked with local businesses and universities with the aim of adopting a cohesive and integrated approach to developing key research, business opportunities and associated education and training in a parallel initiative.

The sector response to COVID 19 and the switch to on-line delivery within days has demonstrated the strength of leadership in Scottish colleges and the dedication of staff to educational and training delivery to students. There is strength and resilience in the sector that should be recognised and encouraged. Maintaining staff expertise in teaching and support even in a challenging funding environment, will be required to ensure we can meet the needs of students. Given the disproportionate impact that COVID-19 is having on the most disadvantaged in society, the inclusive strategies and arrangements colleges already have in place to support equity of outcomes and indeed high levels of outcomes for the most disadvantaged in society, will be an essential tool for the Scottish Government to help rebuild a fair, wealthy, healthy and green Scotland.

There is also much in on-line delivery that should not be lost post COVID and this offers both students and business and industry flexibility in delivery and may offer opportunity in times of financial constraint. This is an area which should be explored with non – traditional partners such as the Open University, the BBC and industry partners with national policy support from the Scottish Government. Digital poverty remains an issue and, while individual colleges have been dealing with this, the issue deserves more attention at government level with a policy rolling out for schools and colleges.

### Consultation Question B

***b) What do you think colleges, universities and specialist institutions should stop doing, or do differently, in order to contribute effectively to an inclusive social and economic recovery? (You may wish to comment on teaching and skills development, sectoral and employer needs and employability, research, innovation and knowledge exchange, widening access and equalities issues.)***

### Response to Question B

Colleges need to engage more effectively with businesses in their respective areas – especially SMEs in order to have a better understanding of employers’ needs. While many colleges take some pride in their present involvement with business, the vast majority of SMEs that make up the foundation of the Scottish economy, are not engaged with their local colleges. If we are really going to see the colleges serve our joint efforts to help the country recover from the impact of Covid, more needs to be done. There needs to be enablement of partnerships with Scottish industry and colleges along the same lines as industry partnerships with universities with apprenticeship schemes being part of this connection. It is also important for colleges to enable industry and SME’s to articulate what current and future skills are actually needed in terms of training and the importance of investment in training to future profitability and success. This is where new digital activities may play a key role in connecting with both large and small organisations.

Ironically the current situation lends itself to a reprioritising of our aims and objectives and put more emphasis on this area of work.

There are also major issues to address in how the colleges relate to the environment and regional economies in which they operate. Recent discussions (at Colleges Scotland and elsewhere) have highlighted the relatively marginal role for colleges at strategic levels within regional structures throughout Scotland at the present time. Engagement at operational level appears to have improved over the past few years, but any input from colleges at a planning and senior level is unusual. If we are to see the colleges contribute meaningfully to Regional Partnership arrangements in the future, we have to make sure that the traditional partners in these structures, (the Local Authorities, Scottish Enterprise etc.) acknowledge and welcome what colleges bring to the table.

A key issue is access to Labour Market Information and the fact that it cannot currently be accessed quickly enough impedes the capability to modify the curriculum and to respond to change. There is also the question as to how can a “rapid response” and innovation environment be enabled to allow for some risk and trying out new forms of delivery while a rigorous audit and compliance environment is maintained.

Recognising the very significant financial challenges that the sector will face it is imperative that a “whole systems approach” must be adopted by the sector. This means that the sector must stop:

- Failing to give full and fair credit to previous learning within the “system chain”;
- Adopting bureaucratic methodologies and archaic funding approaches that inhibit flexibility and innovation in new programme development, teaching delivery and assessment;
- Failing to promote innovations in curriculum content / design and delivery methodologies that are regionally specific / relevant;
- Over-complicating outcome agreements through the addition of diverse, complex and competing targets;
- Under-mining the value of colleges through the inclusion of initiatives that ought to be restricted to delivery by secondary school specialists;
- Excluding the voice and expertise of the College sector in the development of significant government-led economic, social and cultural initiatives.

In terms of doing things differently, the College Sector must:

- Recognise and realise its potential for the delivery of the country’s STEM advancement agenda;
- Promote education, training and mentoring in entrepreneurship and new business creation;
- Prioritise and commit to the development of innovation and creativity in business, the economy and society in general as a central purpose;
- Move to better and more effective forms of open access to support the needs of external partners, industry and the community – such as through a revision to the College teaching calendar;
- More clearly align the development of career paths for students. This would require a change in the role and function of SDS so that colleges could better integrate career preparation for students in a fuller and more relevant manner into curriculum disciplines.
- Ensure that partnership agencies and colleges collaborate to be much more strategic in their planning mind-set. Currently, long term planning is difficult for colleges due to the short-term nature of funding allocations.
- Build on the success of the Flexible Workforce Development and Developing the Young Workforce programmes.

### Consultation Question C

***c) How can colleges, universities and specialist institutions best support Scotland’s international connectedness and competitiveness in the post-pandemic, post-EU membership environment?***

### Response to Question C

Colleges have participated in international programmes such as Erasmus and they have skills in delivering international partnerships and activity in vocational training and education with European and other international partners. This international expertise could be lost for staff and students unless the UK government maintains access to these programmes or funds links differently. There is an opportunity for colleges to play an even greater role in the development of globally minded citizens. As a result of the UK’s withdrawal from the EU, the loss of the Erasmus programme will massively limit the opportunity for

college students to study and learn abroad. NCL is one of the country's leading participants in the Erasmus programme. Many of our students identify this to be a highlight of their College experience – indeed, for it to be a life-changing moment. This initiative has done much to improve confidence and extend our students' ambitions. We need to ensure that there is a credible and creditable alternative to the Erasmus programme.

There is also the success in the World Skills programme and the current bid for a Scottish World Skills hub for international training and links to business. It is interesting in Germany that the German national winners met with Angela Merkel which perhaps shows a much higher focus and recognition there of vocational training and links to industry and the governments involvement in college /training industry partnerships. Have there been any studies of what makes the connection with industry and skills better in Germany and in other countries? It might be interesting for the SFC to carry out a fast track research review on what makes vocational and skills training and industry links work internationally to inform the current debate.

Colleges' should also collaborate and partner with other organisations and institutions already active in this area, for example, Scottish Enterprise, SCDI, Chambers of Commerce and others. colleges are good at learning and teaching, particularly when skills and craftsmanship are required. We need to make sure colleges provide this to any lead organisation which is acting internationally on Scotland's behalf.

Scotland's international connectedness can be best supported by:

- Forming closer support relationships with the country's leading International engagement organisations (such as Scottish Enterprise, SCDI, Chambers of Commerce) and with our leading export companies and universities, in order to develop coherent, credible and relevant education programmes that will improve the capability of our businesses to compete and flourish globally;
- Integrating global perspectives fully into our programmes so that our students develop a mature, ambitious and well-informed international mind-set which they can then apply within their respective career paths;
- Securing strong international college partnerships in order to facilitate the international exchange of ideas and experience in teaching and learning, curriculum development and student development;
- Support firms in the development of their staff to be internationally connected and confident in their strategies for the advancement of strong international trading networks.

#### Consultation Question D

***d) What opportunities and threats does the post-pandemic environment hold for colleges, universities and specialist institutions? For institutional leaders, how are you planning to address these challenges and opportunities?***

#### Response to Question D

It is widely anticipated that there will be a fundamental increase in Scotland's unemployment situation post pandemic. This will represent the biggest challenge to Scotland's progress in economic and social recovery and colleges must play a major part in supporting businesses and individuals as a result. Companies will need skilled, knowledgeable staff to help rebuild their capacity and capabilities, while individuals will need to embrace retraining and enhanced skills to enable them to remain in meaningful employment and/or develop their existing job or retrain and develop for a new career.

In Lanarkshire, both NCL and SLC will engage in this activity by building on our developing regional partnership with Local Authorities and other key stakeholders to ensure our curriculum development is

faster and more responsive to changes and opportunities in the local economy. We shouldn't look to train people for jobs that don't or won't exist in the medium term.

We also shouldn't forget the excellent work many colleges do in bringing education and employment opportunities to those people in our communities who are traditionally distant from positive experiences in this regard. It is undoubtedly a major threat that in the need to address the more immediate concerns of a post pandemic economy in Scotland, the joint challenges of access and inclusion must not be relegated from our core objectives. Similarly, any lessening of commitment to those within our society with additional support needs will carry a long term cost.

Mixed messages from the various agencies which interact with colleges often inhibit progress, consequently serious thought needs to be applied to how to get publicly funded organisations to be better aligned in policy and operational matters. There often appears to be too many organisations with a role and engagement in further and higher education. A radical look at how the sector is led, managed and administered to deliver agreed national outcomes is overdue.

Structural change is not a panacea, but we must face the inevitability that some change will be necessary to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of education in Scotland and to protect some of the more important aspects of what we do at a time of limited funding.

With respect to opportunities, we note there is a chance to:

- Develop and advance new forms of partnership working with public agencies and business that recognises the important role and contribution that the colleges can bring as regional organisations.
- Secure new, deeper and more innovative collaborations with Local Government;
- Harness and extend the power of new digital technology capabilities in order to improve our own business systems effectiveness;
- Adopt new forms of technology to order to support, enhance and extend learning;
- Refresh and modernise the curriculum as a matter of urgency so as to ensure that it better matches the needs of our regional communities.

Among the threats identified, we note:

- The possibility that the widening access agenda may be further challenged as a result of poor levels of digital proficiency / digital poverty;
- The challenges associated with Covid-19 may exacerbate the distance from tertiary education faced by key groups in our region, (such as those in our communities with additional support needs);
- The opportunities for students to engage in crucial work-based experiences will be significantly limited / removed;
- High levels of youth unemployment may result in de-motivation and dis-engagement by students.

## Consultation Question E

***e) What forms of collaboration within the tertiary education eco-system would best enable a coherent and effective response to these challenges and opportunities?***

### Response to Question E

The colleges working together should look strategically at their capabilities and specialisms for the future. Specifically, each region should focus on;

What their region requires and what they have proven to be good at. i.e. not all colleges should try to do the same things. There should be more recognition and co-operative working to refer and direct students to other colleges who are recognised as specialists in particular areas.

In terms of collaboration, we should widen thinking to be co-creators with relevant, external partners and non-traditional partners where appropriate. colleges inevitably face limitations of resource and so we must consider how we collaborate in order to ensure: effective digital delivery; the development of new curriculum content that is current, relevant and of value to our communities; we need to collaborate in order to support and encourage entrepreneurial activities; partner with external experts in order to advance the possibilities of STEM etc. The new Automotive Hub at NCL which is a partnership with local government, industry and Strathclyde University is an example of the potential for this form of new collaboration. This collaboration will require as suggested above, much better engagement and knowledge of what their region constitutes and what the businesses in the area require.

The strong inter-college and inter-regional collaborative work sharing best practice in both formal and informal settings should also be further developed and encouraged to fast track efficiency, effectiveness and continuing good practice. The collaborative initiatives between colleges and also between colleges and universities through organisations such as EAUC, ESP, HEFESTIS, the Glasgow City Regional colleges group (Lanarkshire, Glasgow and Inverclyde regions) are a starting point for collaboration across regions and across the sector and may act as a springboard along with new industry and key stakeholder hubs for colleges to provide effective and efficient outcomes for learners and employers as we re-build the economy.

Should there be government challenge funding for new hubs to drive collaborative projects and partnerships? This might bring the key partners including industry to the table and make it more than a talking shop. This could be along the lines of the research centres of excellence that brought universities together in certain fields to collaborate. Perhaps the government needs to take a more active role with industry and vocational training? It has programmes in knowledge transfer / spin offs etc. with industry and universities but less in vocational training.

Three forms of collaboration within the tertiary education sector have been identified as follows:

- The alignment of colleges and Universities, through the formation of new partnerships which secure the delivery of the first two years of degree programmes (as well as other forms of pre-entrance programmes), by utilising the teaching expertise, skills and knowledge of College staff;
- The development of new, flexible forms of course accreditation by Universities in favour of Professional, Technical and Creative programmes delivered by colleges;
- The establishment of Priority Centres where the skills and experiences of colleges and Universities are pooled in order to clearly and directly address the specific needs and requirements of regional communities. For example, such centres could focus upon the advancement of specific business clusters in a region or within a cluster of specialism and expertise.



## Consultation Question F

***f) How can SFC, alongside government and other enterprise, skills and education-focused agencies, best support colleges, universities and specialist institutions to make their full contribution to Scotland's inclusive, green and education-led recovery? In particular, you may wish to draw out: How scarce public resources should be prioritised to drive recovery, Particular areas of collaboration between agencies that would best support the sectors' contributions, Adaptations to SFC's funding and accountability frameworks to promote agile and collaborative action by the sectors to build Scotland's recovery, How SFC's funding and accountability frameworks should ensure that equality and wide access to educational opportunity are promoted as key elements of the recovery for younger people and adults, What support SFC and government could give institutions to adapt to a changed environment.***

## Response to the Question F

If the colleges are to take their place as a major contributor to the economic recovery, four things need to happen;

- 1) Leadership at a national level. This is probably the single most important requirement for a sustained, successful contribution to our economic recovery from the education sector. Institutional silo thinking and lack of policy and operational alignment and consistency within many of our major delivery organisations has been detrimental to our national interests in the past. There is plenty of evidence from previous initiatives which show this. Developing a strategy is important, but implementation is even more so! Subsequently making the assumption that all agencies will get behind an agreed strategy and cooperate and collaborate to achieve objectives in the national interest, isn't going to work. There will need to be some serious ownership of the national strategy at a political level to continue to drive for positive and agreed outcomes.
- 2) Inspiration! More marketing at a national level to inspire young people and adult returners to seek roles in new and emerging technologies. Serious advocacy for professions in STEM fields and emerging sectors such as logistics and renewables will be required to secure the next generation of employees for companies in these sectors. It isn't enough to leave student recruitment in these critical fields to individual colleges at a local level. A national, high profile initiative to support this work is needed.
- 3) Funding arrangements should be focused on agreed priority areas for economic and social outcomes. A review of college funding needs to happen at pace to ensure colleges are able to meet their core budgets. This will provide security to meet the economic and social needs of communities. To complement core funding for colleges, additional money to meet agreed national objectives could be made available through "Challenge Funds" with the additional incentive of match funding for any private sector funds secured. This will have to be carefully considered in relation to the current ONS designations for colleges. However, project funding is no substitute for sufficient core as it can drive short term behaviours rather than developing longer term strategic approaches to learners needs.
- 4) SFC and the wider skills system must be able to respond more quickly to rapidly changing economic priorities and to back that up with speedy and flexible funding offers to the colleges themselves.