

# Colleges Scotland's Submission to the Education and Skills Committee – March 2018

## 1. Introduction

Colleges Scotland is the collective voice for the college sector in Scotland, representing its interests with the aim that colleges are at the heart of a world-class education sector that is recognised, valued and available to all.

Colleges Scotland, as the membership body, represents all 26 colleges in Scotland, which deliver both further education and around 28% of the provision of all higher education in Scotland.

## 2. Area of Focus

The key area of focus for the college sector is to ensure that the approach to widening access - long championed by colleges - supports the Scottish Government in its priority of delivering inclusive economic growth by providing the skilled workforce required by industry and widening access to education and skills training to all, both of which contribute significantly to increasing Scotland's productivity and strengthening the economy.

To achieve this, there are a number of key issues that Colleges Scotland would like to ensure the committee is mindful of, and these are laid out below:

## 3. Colleges as the Providers of Opportunities

As noted in final report from the independent Commission on Widening Access, [A Blueprint for Fairness](#), the college sector in Scotland provides "*crucial alternative routes into higher education and can play a powerful role in expanding the limited applicant pool resulting from the school attainment gap*".

Indeed, the [Initial Destinations of Senior Phase Pupils, No.2: 2018 Edition](#) report, published on 27 February 2018, points to 26.8% of young people picking a further education course (up to Scottish Credit Qualification Framework (SCQF) level 6) straight from school, and 40.7% of those young people electing to go from school into a higher education (SCQF level 7 and above) course. In academic year 2015/16, colleges delivered 28% of all higher education provision in Scotland.

Bringing those statistics together, it is clear that colleges are the destination of choice for young people leaving school and taking the next step on their learner and work journey. More specific analysis is not possible at this stage, as the collection of data on specific institutions is not a mandatory field and may not be completed on every data return.

## 4. Key Considerations

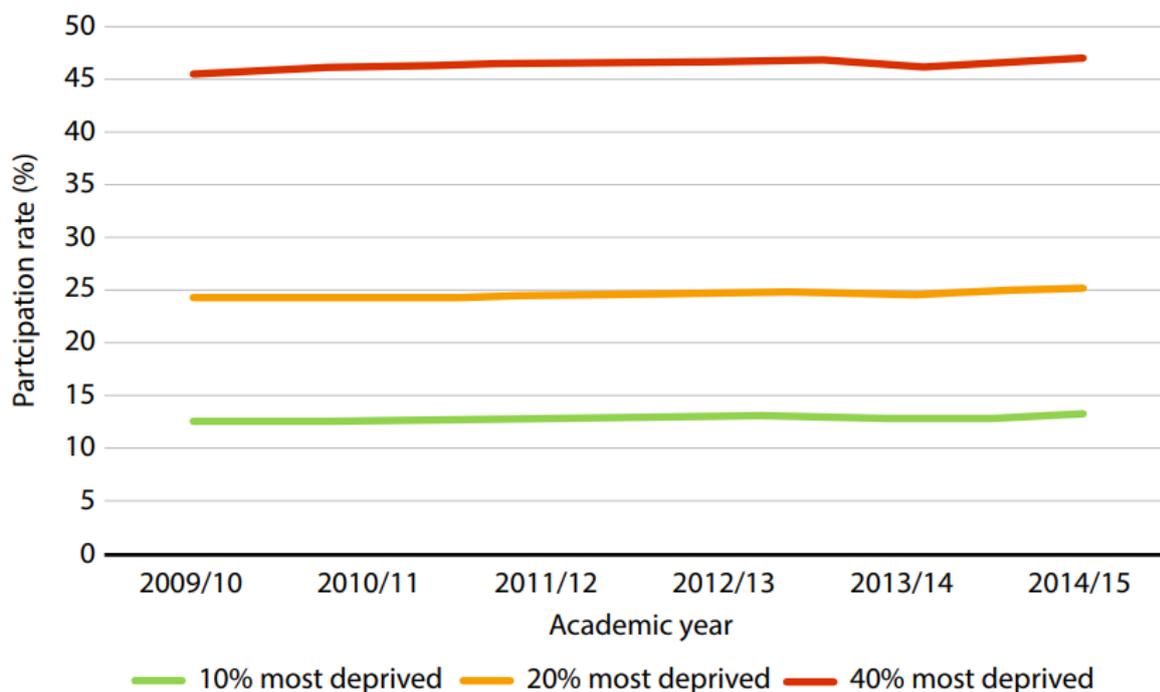
### College Qualifications are Valuable and Respected by Employers

Colleges in Scotland deliver a myriad of education and training courses from those which support social inclusion, to those which meet specific employer need, to those which exist as the next

step on a pathway to the next level of education or employment. When it comes to Higher National (HN) qualifications, designed in partnership with industry, these courses produce work-ready graduates with up-to-date industry-specific skills who are ready to add value in the workplace and fill skills gaps. 81% of Scottish employers recruiting college leavers found them well prepared for work<sup>1</sup>.

## Colleges Widen Access to Higher Education

Any narrative around widening access must recognise the value of higher education accessed and delivered in colleges. The graph, produced from data published in the Scottish Funding Council's [Learning for All: Measures of Success, 2016](#) report illustrates the proportion of higher education students in colleges, grouped by the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD).



When it comes to fair access to higher education, students from the 10%, 20% and 40% most deprived communities in Scotland, as measured by SIMD, have been consistently overrepresented in colleges. Colleges effectively bring higher education opportunities into the heart of communities in areas of multiple deprivation. This is a success story for Scotland and should be noted and celebrated as such.

There are a plethora of reasons why colleges do so well on widening access. School-college partnerships, which offer school pupils the opportunity to undertake short or medium college courses whilst in the senior phase as part of their curriculum, not only provide a different subject specialism and mechanism of study but also successfully demystifies the learning environment in a college campus.

This early introduction to independent learning should not be underestimated when it comes to empowering young people to expand their ambitions. Similarly, college roots extend into the communities in which they are sited, offering local opportunities to mature learners, including those most distanced from the labour market and education. These approaches, built on a foundation of partnership, also underpin the development of articulation.

<sup>1</sup>

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/373769/14.11.11.\\_EPS\\_2014\\_-\\_Main\\_Report\\_full\\_V2.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/373769/14.11.11._EPS_2014_-_Main_Report_full_V2.pdf)

## Articulation is the Jewel in the Crown of Scottish Education

Articulation is a process unique to the Scottish education system. Underpinned by the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF), articulation is the process by which students finishing college with an HN qualification progress directly onto the next level of study at university, so a graduate with a Higher National Certificate (HNC) at SCQF level 7 would be able to progress directly to Year 2 at a partner university, while graduates with Higher National Diploma (HND) qualifications at SCQF level 8 would be able to progress directly to Year 3 of their degree. This mechanism allows students to make the most efficient and streamlined journey through their education whilst also delivering value to the public purse.

Currently, the majority of articulation is done by the five post-92 universities which have traditionally been recruiting institutions rather than selective. Colleges Scotland is working with Universities Scotland on a National Articulation Forum, with the aim to expand articulation and ensure learners can progress with full credit for their qualifications.

Colleges Scotland has engaged thoughtfully with the Learner Journey Review and looks forward to playing an important role in implementing any recommendations or further work from this process.

## Retention and Attainment

Any endeavours to widen access must also focus on ensuring these students are supported and empowered to stay in education, and to succeed on par with their peers. However, current data collection and analysis on retention and attainment does not include baseline achievements and there is no mechanism to assess distanced travelled for learners. The inclusion of such data collection would be particularly powerful in early identification of learners who may need additional support to achieve their ambitions.

Five colleges are currently undertaking a pilot project with Scottish Government Improvement Advisors, using improvement methodology, with the express purpose of identifying barriers to retention and attainment and adjusting policies, processes and practice as appropriate to mitigate impediments. The initial call for participants saw most colleges note interest, and the sector as a whole is keen to note and replicate learning from this work.

## EU Funding Programmes for Employability

The various funding programmes received by colleges in Scotland are used primarily to provide employability training for those Scottish domiciled people who are further from the workforce. That is, provides vital training to allow individuals to move on from their current circumstances, and to be in a position to enter the workforce and contribute positively to society. Employability training allows people to move from drawing on public funds to contributing tax for the benefit of public finances and the economy. There are two main college projects which are significantly funded by the EU and which make up the bulk of college income derived from the EU. These are:

- Developing Scotland's Workforce (DSW)
- Youth Employment Initiative (YEI).

The table below sets out the EU funding received directly by the college sector in relation to programmes under the European Social Fund (ESF):

£m	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
DSW	4.3	4.3	13.3
DSW – Highlands & Islands	2.8	5.5	7.0

YEI	13.9	14.9	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>21.0</b>	<b>24.7</b>	<b>20.3</b>

In addition, a recent survey of the college sector undertaken by Colleges Scotland identified a further approximately £1.5m of direct EU funding through other programmes that some colleges received. These other programmes included European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), Erasmus and Creative Europe.

The committee should note the sums received by the college sector from the EU. These funds support the provision of vital training to allow individuals to move on from their current circumstances, and to be in a position to enter the workforce and contribute positively to society, and the loss of this funding will impact on the availability of opportunities in the college sector.

## 5. Summary

Colleges have a significant, positive impact on inclusive growth and on widening access, as well as in providing opportunities for skills training and education in the communities in which our campuses are sited.

Our consistent and long-term inclusive practice continues to successfully extend opportunities to those most distanced from the labour market and from education. It is vital that partnership approaches between schools and colleges, colleges and employers, colleges and universities, and colleges and third sector organisations continue in order to ensure Scotland has the skilled workforce required to meet employer need, and that this workforce is developed in an inclusive and holistic manner, all of which contributes to a growing economy in Scotland.

Colleges Scotland  
March 2018