

Colleges Scotland Follow-Up Information for Education, Children and Young People Committee – College Regionalisation Inquiry Follow-up – February 2025

Introduction

Colleges Scotland is pleased to provide additional information as requested by members of the Committee in session last week, in addition to providing further detail on some of the topics as covered in discussions.

Key Points

Skills Planning In Other Regions

The Committee sought further information regarding the delivery of Skills Planning within other regions of the United Kingdom.

Greater Manchester Model

Skills planning takes place both locally and regionally, through the Combined Authority and the Chamber of Commerce, with the Local Skills Improvement Plan being the key driver for skills planning.

Colleges in Greater Manchester have collaborated to respond to this Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP), focusing on key sector areas including education workforce, construction, health, digital and engineering and manufacturing with main cross-cutting themes of digitization and net zero. With support from the Local Skills Improvement Fund, the LSIP addresses skills gaps in these areas and enables the colleges to implement a collaborative approach to enhance the curriculum offer.

A Joint Oversight Board is also in place, which includes official representation from national government officials and Greater Manchester officials, as well as employer representation and the college sector. The wider model includes a partnership of providers, local authorities and government agencies to focus on and highlight key priorities along with a series of employer boards focused on key areas of priority for the region also feeding into the system intelligence and insight on sector needs.

West Midlands model

This is based on four pillars of an Employment and Skills Strategy 2024-2027: Building Stronger Communities, providing a good education up to level 2 (*broadly equivalent to GCSE in academic terms*) for those who need it, moving people into employment and reskilling/upskilling to support the regional economy and Net Zero. Annual planning takes place through strategic conversations with grant providers (FE Colleges and Local Authority Adult Education) and commissioning of specific provision via Independent Training Providers.

This planning is informed by regional data (employment and deprivation demographics), emerging sectoral needs, issues, challenges and opportunities identified through termly regional Performance Panels. Colleges have actively inputted into the Combined Authority Regional Skills Plan to take joint ownership of the challenges facing the region, with the plan proposing for partners to support colleges to develop their capacity and capability required to respond to skills needs in the region.

Northern Ireland

Annual curriculum plans are developed by colleges and directly informed by region census need on qualification levels, subject and sector skills need using data provided by a Skills Barometer, a published analysis document directly informed by employers, in addition to being in line with Ministerial priorities.

Wales

There are four Regional Skills Partnerships (RSPs) that inform skills planning at a regional level. Each RSP produces tri-annual Employment and Skills Plans which then inform Welsh Government funding priorities. The RSPs are funded by Welsh Government but are also closely aligned to the various City Deals and (Regional) Growth Deals which are supported by UK government funding, as well as public and private investment. Detail of the four RSPs can be found [here](#).

Individual colleges in Wales also have well established employer networks and convene regular employer engagement events and meetings. Colleges are also well connected with the various employer and economic forums in their area, as well as being involved in discussions around economic development at a local and regional level.

Careers, Information Advice and Guidance

Committee members also sought information regarding the ongoing implementation of the Career Review in the college sector, and the steps being taken by colleges to support learners on this agenda.

Skills Development Scotland are currently co-located in five college campuses across Scotland, providing a key connection between careers information and the learning and teaching activity for learners through college links with communities, whilst benefiting the public purse by consolidating the operating costs of services.

Colleges Scotland continues to represent the college sector on the Career Services Collaborative, working with partners to oversee change and improvements to the current career services operating model. The sector is also working with Skills Development Scotland in implementing the SDS-College Careers Partnership Agreement (SCCPA), with the socialisation of the new approach across college stakeholders being the primary focus, in addition to identifying both the strengths and any unintended consequences of this model.

Colleges continue to provide support for all learners in Career Pathways choices, providing face to face and digital support as well as supporting careers events in schools and holding careers events in colleges.

Mental Health and Wellbeing

In evidence, Joanna Campbell referred to an Active Campus Network, which had been supported by Scottish Student Sport. This Network has been supported with funding from sportscotland and is delivered in partnership between sportscotland, Scottish Student Sport and Colleges Scotland.

It helps to put sport and physical activity at the centre of college life, supported by an 18-strong team of Active Campus Co-ordinators. The First Minister announced £1.45m of new investment in September 2024 to ensure that the programme will continue to deliver over the next two academic years.

[Data from the first year of the project](#) has shown a significant increase in sport and physical activity across the college sector. There were over 30,000 visits from participants to more than 3,500

Active Campus sessions in 23/24. This represents a 79% increase in visits and 31% increase in sessions from baseline data at the start of the initiative.

Outcomes Framework and Assurance Model

As advised to the Committee, the Scottish Funding Council has taken a revised approach to assurance and accountability, which has replaced the previous assurance and accountability agreements from this Academic Year onwards. As this is a recent change which the sector is in the process of implementing, we would be happy to update the Committee on this development following the conclusion of this Academic Year.

Colleges Scotland
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