Curriculum planning and alignment in Scotland's colleges

A thematic aspect report by Education Scotland on provision in Scotland's colleges
on behalf of the Scottish Funding Council

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Transforming lives through learning

Contents

1. Introduction and methodology

Introduction

Scotland's colleges have a wide-ranging mission. They strive to meet the needs of a diverse range of stakeholders, including individual learners, local communities, regional and national bodies and the national and international economies. At an individual level, the curriculum offered in Scotland's colleges aims to enable people to develop skills and capacities which will improve their working, personal and community life.

Colleges have undergone significant change over the recent past, particularly during the last five years. College sector reforms, including regionalisation, associated Regional Outcome Agreements (ROA) and college mergers have changed the context in which colleges plan their curriculum. Regional Skills Assessments (RSA) and Skills Investment Plans (SIP) generated by Skills Development Scotland (SDS) are now key drivers in informing curriculum planning. The role of colleges in local Community Planning Partnerships (CPP) has also evolved over recent years. This task will evaluate how well colleges are aligning their curriculum to meet the needs of employers and communities at local, regional and national levels.

In preparing this report, inspectors visited a sample of five colleges and drew on the findings of published Education Scotland reviews of colleges and other relevant publications and reports.

Education Scotland's publication, *External quality arrangements for Scotland's colleges, August 2013*[1], specifies that Education Scotland will produce a number of thematic aspect reports each year. This report is one of a suite of reports by Education Scotland commissioned by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) to evaluate provision in colleges for supporting learner success. Colleges should act on the recommendations contained in these reports. College inspectors will monitor action towards implementation of these recommendations as part of their normal dialogue with colleges and will wish to discuss issues arising from thematic aspect reports during annual engagement visits.

Methodology

Each college in the sample was visited once during the fieldwork. During the visits, inspectors discussed issues with managers, curriculum teams and college stakeholders, including employers. The five colleges visited during the fieldwork for this report are listed in Appendix 1. Inspectors also held discussions with SFC Outcome Managers and SDS staff.

Inspectors undertook desk analysis of relevant documents. This included a review of individual college ROAs, SDS RSAs, programme information and other external reports. In addition to the evidence obtained from the five colleges involved in the fieldwork, reviewers also examined the evaluations contained in annual engagement visit reports for 2014-15 and in college external review reports published between January 2014 and June 2016.

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[1] https://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/Images/ExternalQualityArrangementsColleges2013_tcm4-813723.pdf

2. Summary of key findings

Strengths

- Colleges have well-established and comprehensive curriculum planning processes which take good account of local, regional and national priorities when designing the programmes they offer. They use a wide range of approaches and arrangements to support them in aligning their curriculum to stakeholder and industry needs.
- Colleges' strategic objectives and curriculum are aligned well to relevant national and regional concerns. They take good account of Scottish Government and SFC priorities, set in the context of their local and regional economies. Curriculum plans are modified regularly, taking account of these priorities, to address the known and emerging skills needs of different parts of the economy.
- Colleges have effective and positive collaborative arrangements with a wide range of local and national employers and industry partners, including sector skills councils. They use their relationships with employers well to inform programme design and content.
- Colleges are using RSAs routinely as important tools in planning their curriculum. RSAs provide helpful information which complements local intelligence obtained directly by colleges through their industry and community partners.
- Where legacy colleges have merged to form a single institution, there has been considerable work carried out to align and rationalise the curriculum portfolio. This has resulted in a more comprehensive and coherent curriculum offer which provides a wider range of progression routes for learners.
- Curriculum teams are central to the success of the planning and delivery processes. Most curriculum teams meet regularly throughout the academic year to consider a range of curriculum issues and evaluate the quality of provision.

Areas for development

- Most colleges are now offering Foundation Apprenticeship (FA) programmes in conjunction with school and local authority partners. However, practical issues around common timetabling across local authorities and schools are providing a challenge to the implementation of FA programmes in some regions.
- Some colleges have invested heavily in data analysis and intelligence gathering. However, some colleges are not making sufficient use of individual local authority skills assessments or SDS's *Data Matrix* to support planning processes.
- Curriculum teams review their programmes regularly through self-evaluation activities. However, robust post-course destination data is not always fully available and colleges are working to increase the use of this within course self-evaluation processes.

3. Background and content

Matching skills to economic demand – a strategic approach

In order to compete successfully in a rapidly changing global economy, Scotland needs a workforce equipped with a broad range of skills, knowledge and attributes. Scottish Government has articulated this priority in successive strategic documents, including *Skills for Scotland: Accelerating the Recovery and Increasing Sustainable Economic Growth*[2] (2010) and *Scotland's Economic Strategy*[3] (2015).

A key Scottish Government document, *Putting Learners at the Centre: Delivering our Ambitions for Post-16 Education*[4] (2011), proposed a number of major reforms to support the ambition for all young people to have a place in post-16 education or training. In particular, the report considered how best to align Scottish Government investment in learning and skills with its ambitions for jobs, growth and life chances. The report argued:

> *The post-16 system has a central role to play here: in delivering the technical and core skills, and the qualifications, at all levels necessary for a particular job and for their long-term career; in developing people's ability to think critically; and in building their wider attributes - such as enterprise, initiative, adaptability, and entrepreneurship.*

> *Doing this effectively demands a clear, continued and purposeful dialogue with employers about what it is they need – looking as far ahead as possible. We know it is difficult to predict the shape of our labour market in the years ahead but our learning providers need to be as clear as possible about the skills, qualifications and wider attributes learners will need to be successful in the future. And we have a similar duty to learners, so that they focus on the knowledge and attributes we know will be important whatever direction our economy moves in.*

Scottish Government identified the importance of work in partnership with employers and recognised that the post-16 system offers businesses cost-effective opportunities for workforce development. It acknowledged there were a number of mechanisms already in place to identify employer needs and to help reflect them in post-16 learning provision, and in some cases, the arrangements worked well. However, they contended these were neither consistently nor comprehensively applied; nor were employers equally good at defining their needs.

The report concluded that there was a need to develop a strategic approach for improving the alignment of Scottish Government investment in learning and skills with jobs and growth, consistent with the needs of employers and the wider economy. To that end, SFC were asked to:

- allocate its resources to meet the needs of regions – taking account of demographics and regional economy – rather than historical allocations based on colleges' past performance;
- identify national provision and resource it to meet national needs (e.g. land-based industries);

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[2] http://www.gov.scot/Resource/Doc/326739/0105315.pdf
[3] http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0047/00472389.pdf
[4] http://www.gov.scot/resource/doc/357943/0120971.pdf

- put new expectations on colleges to plan their courses to prepare students for careers in industries where there will be a good chance of them getting a job; and
- focus funding on nationally recognised qualifications and units.

More recently, the report of the *Commission for Developing Scotland's Young Workforce, Education working for all![5] (2014)* reviewed Scotland's approach to vocational education and youth employment. Scottish Government's response *Developing the Young Workforce, Scotland's Youth Employment Strategy[6] (2014)*, articulated the role the college sector will play in realising these goals. In their response, Scottish Government stated clearly their objective for a world-class system of vocational education, in which colleges work with schools and employers to deliver learning that is directly relevant to getting a job, as a mainstream option for all young people in the senior phase of secondary school. This will involve a number of important changes over the seven years of the Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) programme to help achieve the ambitions of the programme.

The role of colleges in meeting skills demand

Colleges have a strong tradition of working constructively with employers and community partners to develop and deliver programmes which meet local and national needs. Colleges provide a very wide range of opportunities for people to develop skills and obtain recognised national qualifications. In terms of alignment with jobs and growth, the Education Scotland report *Preparing learners in Scotland's colleges for employment or further study[7]* (August 2011) highlighted many strengths in this respect, whilst acknowledging the challenges around balancing employer-led and learner demand. The report noted the following strengths:

- *Scotland's colleges have established, over long periods of time, very good intelligence about local and regional economies and this intelligence has informed very well the development of appropriate portfolios of provision;*
- *all colleges have long-established and successful partnerships with employers and employer organisations;*
- *all colleges offer short course opportunities for those in employment. Many colleges have very extensive provision of this type;*
- *colleges contribute significantly to the training and education of Modern Apprentices;*
- *Increasingly, full-time programmes in many colleges incorporate a period of work placement in provision, particularly at Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) levels 4-6; and*
- *the increased focus in colleges in recent years on the development of learners' employability skills has had a positive impact on their readiness for work and on their value to employers.*

However, the report also noted a number of areas for development:

- *although core and essential skills are included in most programmes, teaching staff do not always make sufficiently clear to learners the importance to employers of these essential skills, including employability;*

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[5] http://www.gov.scot/resource/0045/00451746.pdf
[6] http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0046/00466386.pdf
[7] http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/inspectionandreview/Images/FINALPLSCE_tcm4-712952.pdf

- *in many subject areas in many colleges, advisory groups are not effective in bringing employers and programme teams together for the benefit of the college, employers and learners;*
- *in general, colleges do not have robust or comprehensive data about the destinations or next steps of their learners; and*
- *very few colleges plan their provision with reference to the broad groupings of the Standard Industrial Classifications. As a result, it is difficult for colleges to evaluate their provision against employment patterns.*

Recent post-merger evaluations by SFC provide evidence that benefits for learners and stakeholders are now being realised, including a clearer alignment to community partners' planning arrangements and a closer interface with the needs of employers through college industry advisory groups. Annual engagement visits to colleges by Education Scotland in 2014-15 identified a number of important strengths around curriculum planning, including:

- strong strategic commitment to partnership working with key stakeholders;
- arrangements with key partner agencies which inform effectively direction and planning of provision; and
- clear commitment to the principles and recommendations of DYW.

Learners undertake college programmes for a wide variety of reasons. For many, college offers an opportunity to gain skills and formal qualifications which will help them access employment, promotion or further studies. For others, particularly learners who had a previous negative experience of formal learning, it represents a second chance to succeed. Often learners lack confidence about their skills and abilities and colleges recognise how important it is that the learning process does not reinforce previous negative experience.

Regionalisation and outcome agreements

Putting Learners at the Centre: Delivering our Ambitions for Post-16 Education, outlined a structural shift towards regionalisation which would be responsive to local need, but within the frameworks established at national and regional levels. SFC were charged to work with the college sector to develop the most efficient arrangements for delivery of college provision in regional groupings, and to reflect such groupings in its funding arrangements. In some instances, mergers were already being planned and in other instances college boards and SFC were urged to agree on the best and most efficient structure for serving a local area. Scottish Government also asked SFC to begin the process of funding colleges regionally from academic year 2012-13, although it was recognised that it might take more time to migrate fully to the new approach.

In parallel, Scottish Government set up a review to examine the performance management, governance and accountability arrangements of colleges, to reflect the importance attached to regionalisation, efficiency and local delivery. The *Report of the Review of Further Education Governance in Scotland*[8] (2012) conducted by Professor Russel Griggs, reported to Scottish

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[8] http://www.gov.scot/resource/0038/00387255.pdf

ministers with a set of recommendations, which was considered would deliver the desired outcome. The report concluded:

The regional structure, we feel, gives the best platform on which to build for the future. On the one hand a more cohesive and consistent sector, while on the other maintaining its links with the communities it serves. It also allows policy to be more nationally managed where that is appropriate.

Since then the Scottish college landscape has changed significantly. 2014-15 was the first full academic year of the operation of the new regional structure of ten single-college regions and three multi-college regions. The creation of larger colleges operating on a regional basis, through merger, has led to a reduction in the number of publicly funded colleges from 42 in September 2012 to the current number of 25. Outcome agreements were introduced in academic year 2012-13 and are intended to enable SFC and colleges to demonstrate the impact of the sector and its contribution to meeting Scottish Government priorities. SFC describes the intention of the outcome agreement process is to enable:

- relationship-based engagement, to ensure SFC's decisions take account of the context within which colleges operate and so that SFC can differentiate its approach where it is appropriate;
- curriculum and investment planning based on economic, industry, labour market and demographic evidence;
- consistent methods of reporting through an outcome agreement document to ensure that a fair interpretation of college impact is made and to enable SFC to interpret impact consistently at a regional and national level; and
- a means by which college regions can discuss with SFC their broader aspirations.

One of the intended benefits of regionalisation was to improve the planning and coordination of skills provision within a region. SFC, in its most recent *College Regional Outcome Agreements- Summary of Progress and Ambitions*[9] (2016) commented:

Colleges are evidencing closer alignment to the work of CPPs and their contribution towards priorities and outcomes contained within single outcome agreements. The latest set of outcome agreements continue to provide evidence of closer integration with Local Authorities – particularly Education Departments as part of the DYW response and schools-college partnership work. The new regional structures allow for increased coherence and efficiency of partnership working with schools at a strategic level. Many colleges were well-embedded in their CPPs before regionalisation, but this was not consistent across regions. The new structure has provided clarity around single points of contact and removed unnecessary competition and duplication between colleges and other partners.

Since their implementation in 2012-13, ROAs have evolved, taking account of the changing economic and college sector. Earlier ROAs often contained a greater emphasis on college and regional structures and governance. In the most recent set of guidance to colleges from SFC for delivering ROAs, places a greater emphasis on new Scottish Government priorities and an

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[9] http://www.sfc.ac.uk/web/FILES/Funding_Outcome_Agreements_2016-17/College_Outcome_Agreements_Summary_2015-16.pdf

increased focus on the statutory responsibilities set out in the Equality Act 2010, Scottish Specific Duties. The changes relate to:

- DYW – responding to the Government's Youth Employment Strategy;
- addressing gender imbalances in the most imbalanced subjects;
- mainstreaming equality and diversity for staff and students;
- better meeting the needs of care experienced young people; and
- carbon reduction.

Regional skills assessments and skills investment plans

SDS is Scotland's national skills agency delivering a range of careers, skills and training services across Scotland. It provides a comprehensive range of labour market intelligence to inform different perspectives on skills, learning and work. An important component of SDS's labour market intelligence is the set of RSAs developed in partnership with Scottish Enterprise, SFC and the Scottish Local Authorities Economic Development Group. The RSAs, with data available at regional, local authority and *city deal area*, support SDS and partners to identify particular needs and propose appropriate responses for different geographical areas of Scotland. Now in their third year, and developed in partnership, the purpose of RSAs is to provide a single, agreed evidence base on which to establish future investment in skills, built up from existing evidence. They aim to:

- support SFC and regional colleges, strategic bodies and college boards in negotiating ROAs;
- provide a framework for aligning SDS's investment in individuals and businesses;
- assist partners in planning their strategic investment in skills; and
- highlight gaps in national and regional skills evidence.

A powerful tool within the RSA process is the *Data Matrix*, designed to support the refresh and update RSAs. The matrix is a publically available, Excel-based tool which holds 87 indicators, sorted by theme and geography. The 2016 *Data Matrix* consists of the following seven workbooks:

- economic performance;
- people and skills supply;
- profile of the workforce;
- education and training: Further Education (FE) and Higher Education provision;
- education and training: Modern Apprenticeship and Employability Fund provision;
- deprivation; and
- skills mismatch.

In addition to RSAs, SDS has produced ten SIPs published for key economic sectors in Scotland, such as energy and creative industries. These describe the challenges in relation to skills across key industry sectors in Scotland. SIPs detail the economic and labour market situation, trends in skills and qualification supply and employers' perspectives on the key skills issues affecting sector growth. SDS has now extended this approach to include Regional Skills Investment Plans (RSIP), which recognise the diverse needs of regions across Scotland. This work builds on regional skills assessment data and presents a response to the particular challenges, opportunities and drivers at regional level. The RSIP for the Highlands and Islands

enterprise area is the first of these regional plans. Work has already begun to extend this to other regions in the coming year.

SDS also operate *Research Online*[10], which provides free access to more than 8,000 labour market intelligence reports and provides a single gateway to the most recent and relevant labour market intelligence.

SDS appointed a number of Regional Skills Planning Leads (RSPL) in the second half of 2015. RSPLs have a key role in working with stakeholders, including college principal and SFC outcome managers, to support regional skills and curriculum planning. This planning is aligned to the evidence base which includes SIPS, RSA and demand statements for apprenticeships. The evidence base is being extended this year, partly in response to feedback by the college sector.

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[10] https://www.researchonline.org.uk/sds/index.do

4. College approaches and arrangements for identifying and prioritising curriculum needs

Colleges have well-established and comprehensive curriculum planning processes which take good account of local, regional and national priorities within programme design. They use a wide range of broadly effective approaches and arrangements to support them in aligning their curriculum to stakeholder and industry needs. Many arrangements are well established and build on a strong history of creative and constructive working with local employers and partners. Other arrangements are relatively new, addressing fresh priorities and responding to changes in their operating environment. For example, regionalisation and accompanying college mergers have presented both opportunities and challenges for colleges as they re-align their curriculum in the light of structural change and align the curriculum more closely to identified economic and social need.

Strategic drivers

Colleges' strategic objectives and curriculum are aligned well to relevant national and regional concerns. They take good account of Scottish Government and SFC priorities, set in the context of their local and regional economies. Annually, SFC receives a letter of guidance[11] from the Cabinet Secretary outlining the government's expectations for colleges and universities for the coming year. Institutions are also expected to take account of the published Programme for Government and Scotland's Economic Strategy. For example, in 2015-16, these priorities included:

- highly efficient and effective regional structures for colleges, including structures in multi-college regions;
- high-quality, effective learning;
- access to education for people from the widest range of backgrounds;
- learning which prepares people well for the world of work and successful long-term careers, and in doing so supports our ambitions for economic growth;
- meeting the challenges set out by the DYW report; and
- addressing the underrepresentation of women on the governing bodies of colleges and universities and at senior levels, and gender balance among student intakes for some key subjects.

College plans and curriculum are modified regularly, taking account of these Scottish Government priorities, to address the known and emerging skills needs of different parts of the economy. For example, many colleges are working closely with partners to support the delivery of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) provision to meet the needs of employers and the economy. This includes the Information and Communications Technology digital and low carbon sectors, which are identified as current priorities in Scotland's Economic Strategy.

A number of colleges in Scotland have achieved *STEM Assured*[12] status, an important kite mark offered by the New Engineering Foundation, which provides external validation for the quality of their STEM provision.

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[11] http://www.sfc.ac.uk/aboutus/letterofguidance/letterofguidance.aspx
[12] http://stemfoundation.org.uk/product/stem_assured

STEM Assured is a standard that provides independent, industry-backed validation of the quality of an institution's science, technology, engineering and mathematics provision. It is an outcome-based standard that provides a useful catalyst for helping educational institutions forge new partnerships and create new revenue stream opportunities. Providers are assessed against a robust framework that benchmarks their capability to design and deliver STEM programmes that keep pace with emerging technology and the evolving needs of employers.

By achieving the *STEM Assured* status, an institution can demonstrate that:

- its STEM-related provision is of a consistently high quality and aligned with current and anticipated industry requirements;
- its provision provides a multi-disciplinary context to its students to reflect real world needs and scenarios;
- its employability and related transferrable skills are embedded into the curriculum and reflect their learners' journey;
- it is committed to continual improvement and innovation of its provision to ensure that it keeps pace with rapid advances in technology and the changing jobs market; and
- it has clear engagement processes with employers and key stakeholders.

All three colleges in the Glasgow region have worked together to achieve *STEM Assured* status, the first time this has been awarded at a regional level. The colleges have also produced a regional STEM strategy and are aiming for a 12% increase in energy, engineering, construction and manufacturing provision within their ROA.

Developing the Young Workforce

Over the years colleges have played a central role in responding to the needs of young people, and more recently in implementing the DYW programme. Colleges have played a central role in the introduction of new vocational pathways in the senior phase of Curriculum for Excellence. The early adopter programme was a small scale intervention to support and secure early regional responses to DYW. The intention was that these early responses would enable the sector to learn from practical activities how best to overcome barriers when trying new approaches. Seven regions were identified for the early adopter programme: Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire; Dumfries and Galloway; Edinburgh; Fife; Forth Valley; Glasgow; and West Lothian. In practical terms, the early adopter programme expanded the range of provision on offer and the reach of that provision to more secondary schools. In addition to this, the projects provided pathway offers that had more of a focus on progression routes. This made this provision different to other or previous school/college provision. Full details of the programme is contained within the *Evaluation report for the SFC Early Adopter Programme[13]* (2016).

Many colleges are now working with partners to build on the lessons from the first pathways. The intention is to expand these more widely so that all schools have the opportunity to offer high quality pathways informed by regional and national labour market demand, in partnership with colleges. For example, in West Highland College University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI), a local employer/school group is providing a useful perspective on DYW objectives. The

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[13]

http://www.sfc.ac.uk/web/FILES/Corporate_publications_Evaluation_report_for_the_SFC_Early_Adopter_Programme_SFC/SFCCP042016_Evaluation_report_for_the_SFC_Early_Adopter_Programme.pdf

group, although still in its early stages of operation, is facilitating closer partnership working in the areas of vocational delivery, work experience and placements and Modern Apprenticeship/FA delivery.

Colleges are liaising directly with key staff in local authorities as well as working closely with individual school managers to plan curriculum options for school pupils in their senior phase. These discussion are often informed by labour market intelligence and RSAs to ensure that employability and vocational skills are developed in the appropriate curriculum areas. However, although the learning opportunities offered may now align better with regional employment demand, actions to influence young people's understanding of this, require further development. The publication of a *DYW Career Education Standard (3-18)*[14] in September 2015 provides a framework which may help to address some of these issues, although implementation is still in its early stages.

Most colleges run short taster programmes for young people attending school in a number of vocational areas to encourage them to explore options. For example, at Glasgow Clyde College, groups of pupils studying at SCQF level 4 from local schools are given the opportunity to try out a wide range of vocational options prior to choosing SCQF level 5 subjects.

A key pillar of the DYW programme is the development of FAs. SDS, alongside other partners, is working with industry to increase the range of work-based learning opportunities for young people in the senior phase of secondary schools. Currently seven FA frameworks are available as part of the DYW offer:

- FA Business Skills;
- FA Civil Engineering;
- FA Engineering;
- FA Financial Services;
- FA Information Technology;
- FA Social Services Children and Young People; and
- FA Social Services and Healthcare.

Other FA frameworks are currently being considered for future development and inclusion.

Most colleges are now offering FA programmes in conjunction with local authority and secondary school partners. However, practical issues relating to common timetabling across local authorities and schools continue to provide a challenge to implementation of FA programmes and other school-college partnership work in some regions. This is consistent with the evaluation of the SFC Early Adopter Programme which found:

> *It is probably no coincidence that some of the projects such as (but not exclusively) Fife, West Lothian and Edinburgh that we have been particularly impressed by, have through excellent partnerships with their local authorities and schools, overcome the barrier of timetabling. For those regions that have not overcome this issue, perhaps we need to consider how vocational pathways can be better embedded within curriculum options, with sufficient time allocated to this curricular option. Regions with common timetabling within learning communities aligned to college timetables, or local authority wide common timetabling, provide examples of solutions to the challenge.*

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[14] https://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/Images/CareerEducationStandard0915_tcm4-869208.pdf

Engaging with employers

Colleges have effective and positive collaborative arrangements with a wide range of local and national employers and industry partners, including sector skills councils. They use their relationships with employers well to inform programme design and content. For employers, this involvement with colleges enables them to influence curriculum design, so that college programmes contain the necessary mix of skills and knowledge that are of greatest benefit to learners seeking employment.

The Education Scotland subject-based report on *Engineering*[15] (2015) outlined the many advantages for colleges collaborating with industry and sector agencies and these apply across all subject areas. These advantages include:

- *staff gain a good knowledge of the employer's operations for programme planning and tailoring of courses;*
- *industrial updating and professional development for staff;*
- *work placement opportunities for learners;*
- *group site visits to companies;*
- *input from employers at careers events;*
- *guest lectures; and*
- *guidance for learners with interview techniques.*

Many colleges have in place formal arrangements to gather the views of employers, such as employer advisory boards. For example, Glasgow Clyde College holds *External Review Boards* annually, where employers are invited to discuss the curriculum and give feedback on delivery. This allows employers the opportunity to influence curriculum content, identify gaps in programmes and help ensure that learners are more work-ready. Other colleges hold events such as employer breakfasts and employer partnership dinners, enabling college staff and local employers to meet and discuss a range of curriculum issues. However, some colleges find it difficult to engage directly with employers, particularly when working with smaller companies who don't always have the staffing capacity to participate in college-based discussions. In response to this, many colleges use other ways to consult with employers, such as through surveys, delivery of continuing professional development for employers or when arranging work placements for learners.

Most employers are very positive about their partnerships with colleges. Many have frequent and regular contact with college staff and find colleges receptive and responsive, for example by tailoring aspects of the training received by their apprentices. At Dumfries and Galloway College, the college took the decision to discontinue programmes in plastering and to replace them with '*mixed trade'* courses. This decision was informed by analysis of post-course destination data and direct feedback from employers regarding current industry needs. However in some instances, colleges are unable to respond immediately to local employer demand. At West Highland College UHI, strong engagement with local employers and SDS has identified the need for more provision in the STEM curriculum. In response, the college is seeking to expand its engineering and construction portfolio, but is currently unable to due to lack of suitable facilities and resources.

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[15] http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/Images/EngineeringAspectReportFinal2_tcm4-869218.pdf

The most recent Audit Scotland report, *Scotland's Colleges 2016[16]* (2016), reflected the views of two employer groups and commented:

> *. . . . . while they supported the regional approach, there was variable evidence that it had changed how colleges were engaging with their members and responding to the labour market. The Federation of Small Businesses suggested that having a better understanding of employers' skills needs and involving employers in curriculum reviews would help colleges deliver improvements.*

However, the evidence collected for this report demonstrates that colleges are making considerable effort to engage with employers and take account of their views. Employers' views are being incorporated routinely by curriculum teams to shape and influence the curriculum content and portfolio offer at most colleges.

Case study: Dumfries and Galloway College – Employers influencing programme content

In October 2015, local key employers from Dumfries & Galloway were invited to take part in a pilot to look at the design of a new computing programme at Higher National level. The Scottish Qualifications Authority qualification frameworks are based on a set number of core/mandatory subjects, colleges can then choose from a list of other topics/subjects to then build the full qualification. Optional units provide colleges with the opportunity to tailor the qualification to meet local, regional and sometimes national demand from students, employers and the wider industry. Planning to date had provided the college with three possible frameworks of technical skills streams which they wished to present to a group of employers to get their input before we take development of the new qualification forward for a proposed delivery to start in September 2016. The current three identified streams were:

- Cyber Security;
- Web Development; and
- Application Development.

A meeting was held in November 2016 attended by employers and representatives from the college's Computing team. It was very interesting to note the sometimes extreme of employer views based on the type of organisation they represented. Some employers were negative towards including ethical hacking and data forensic topics, whilst others felt that benefits from some of these topics would complement data security and other key attributes of what they felt were lacking in their new employees. Soft skills were continually being raised during the discussions and the concept of transferable skills from certain technologies and methodologies were key to ensuring a qualification that meet the needs of several employers. It was also important for learners to have embedded skills that enabled them to transfer and reflect on their own skills and experiences to be able to apply them to a new project or different problem situation.

Learner views were also sought separately from the current cohorts studying at SCQF levels 6 to 8. The collation of the above gave a very informed selection process to create the now planned Higher National Certificate Computing course for next session. It is planned to repeat the above process for the Higher National Diploma which will be delivered in session 2017/18.

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[16] http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/uploads/docs/report/2016/nr_160825_scotlands_colleges.pdf

Engaging with community partners

Colleges have a long history of working constructively with community partners to develop and deliver programmes which meet the needs of people in their local communities. Many of these programmes involve community-based provision for adults and school-college vocational programmes for young people in local secondary schools. Almost all colleges engage actively with community partners and are valued and visible partners on local CPP groups. Education Scotland's thematic aspect report on *Colleges and Community Planning*[17] (2013) identified key strengths in how colleges engage with community partners around curriculum design. These included:

- *almost all colleges have built up good links over time with local authorities, either at strategic level or within various departments, to develop and deliver programmes which meet the needs of people in their communities well. Colleges also work well with a range of external partners, many of whom operate outwith the CPP, to deliver outcomes for learners in their communities.*

- *there are good examples of colleges taking the lead within CPP thematic groups on themes such as employability and skills. This has increased understanding by CPPs about the range and nature of college provision and resources. It has also ensured that college programmes and services are aligned well to identified needs.*

Most colleges make good use of informal and formal approaches to gathering stakeholder views and feedback. For example, West Highland College UHI uses *Community Engagement Groups* very well to plan and deliver programmes which meet the needs of a diverse range of learners, in particular those who reside in very remote locations. The college places importance on supporting full and part-time learners to access provision locally. Many learners have achieved success as a result.

Glasgow Clyde College Community and Learning Development staff are represented on various forums including Adult Learning Area Partnerships and CPPs. This helps to identify provision to respond to need, for example, programmes on sport and recovery requested by Addiction Services. The college also delivers eight integrated funding programmes across Glasgow, including in literacy, numeracy and family learning. Programmes are designed to enable progress from introductory levels with no formal qualifications, to university. The college also uses formal Memoranda of Agreement with community partners which lay out a framework of shared values and business activities. This transparency ensures both partners have a clear understanding of their individual and shared responsibilities.

Use of regional skills assessments by colleges

Colleges are using RSAs routinely as important tools in planning their curriculum. RSAs provide helpful information which complements local intelligence obtained directly by colleges through their industry and community partners. The current versions of RSAs are viewed by colleges as being more relevant and useful than previously, since the RSA geographical boundaries have been altered to align them with SFC ROA areas.

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[17] http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/Images/CollegeandCommunityPlanningReport170513_tcm4-757870.pdf

Some colleges have to take account of more than one skills assessment when their catchment area covers more than a single local authority region. For example in Glasgow, colleges use the RSA for Glasgow college region in addition to the local authority developed skills assessments and economic development strategies to inform curriculum planning. In Glasgow, an important finding of the curriculum review was that the combined volume of creative industries delivered by the three colleges was significantly greater than the employment opportunities within the region. As a result the ROA and individual college targets have been adjusted to reflect the analysis of skills needs.

The RSA for the Highlands and Islands covers a wide geographical area, calculated by aggregating the data from the six individual local authority areas that make up the ROA area. Although helpful in providing a general direction for UHI colleges, individual colleges often find the RSA is not specific enough at local level to provide an accurate overview for planning. Colleges often rely more on their local networks of employers and community partners to gather information about local needs and skills requirements. Both SDS and colleges are aware of some of the limits of data within RSAs and RSIPs and there is opportunity for further joint work to identify and fill the gaps.

Some colleges have invested heavily in data analysis and intelligence gathering. For example, in Ayrshire College sophisticated use of data at all levels is instrumental in supporting comprehensive curriculum planning. This includes detailed use of information gathered from the SDS *Data Matrix* tool. Close working with SDS colleagues has supported college staff to access the data and use it effectively to identify trends. However, some colleges are not making sufficient use of individual local authority skills assessments or SDS's *Data Matrix* to support planning processes. Often college staff are unfamiliar with and unaware of the potential of the *Data Matrix* tool.

Regionalisation and regional outcome agreements

Colleges are now familiar and experienced in dealing with planning issues around regionalisation and ROAs, as a consequence of the sector reforms begun in 2011. Regionalisation and college mergers have created a significant opportunity for the recently formed larger colleges to respond more effectively to the needs of learners and employers in their region. Where legacy colleges have merged to form a single institution, there has been considerable work carried out to align and rationalise the curriculum portfolio. This has resulted in a more comprehensive and coherent curriculum offer which offers a wider range of progression routes for learners than in individual legacy colleges. Most staff recognise that mergers have provided an opportunity to enhance provision by diversifying the curriculum, sharing good practice and developing further initiatives. The external review of New College Lanarkshire[18] (2015) identified this clearly and reported the following example:

> *Different curriculum areas, brought together in the new college, are exploring potential synergies to enhance the curriculum offer and skills development. For example, staff from the dental nursing section and computer-aided design (CAD) section are working with a local dental practice. They are developing training to support the use of CAD and computer-aided manufacture in the design and creation of dental prostheses.*

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[18] http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/Images/NCLanarkshireFullRev290515_tcm4-863888.pdf

In single-college regions, particularly where legacy colleges have merged to form a new institution, stakeholders value the single point of contact and the removal of unnecessary competition and duplication between college.

In the three multi-college regions, curriculum planning processes are more complex by nature of the number of partners involved, and different regional structures have been put in place to support the ROA process and curriculum planning. Overall these arrangements are working effectively, although in some regions the processes are still developing to their full potential. The following two case studies for Glasgow and the Highlands and Islands regions give additional detail about the different approaches taken.

Case study: Multi-college regions - Glasgow

Glasgow Clyde College, in the run up to merger, developed a set of guidelines which incorporated a number of drivers, including national priorities, to informed a curriculum plan for the new college. This approach was further developed by the Glasgow region and became their template for curriculum planning. The three colleges making up the region developed the ROA 2014-17 taking into consideration the regional context (Glasgow City, East Renfrewshire, East Dunbartonshire), demographics, the needs of the communities and workforce training requirements. This has been the pattern for the development of successive ROAs since then. The three Glasgow colleges, in partnership with the Regional Chair and SFC developed and published a comprehensive set of principles on which their curriculum plans are based. These principles are that curriculum decisions should:

- *meet the needs of learners, employers and communities;*
- *support access and social inclusion;*
- *maintain the breadth, depth and coherence of curriculum provision at all three colleges encouraging high aspirations while avoiding unnecessary duplication;*
- *provide appropriate access for learners which takes account of the physical environment of buildings, deprivation information, local transport, employer links/engagement, placement and employment opportunities;*
- *provide clear progression and articulation routes to enable learners to move to more specialist provision across the three colleges;*
- *make the most economic and effective use of public investment in the college estate and other resources in order to enhance the quality of the learning experience;*
- *take account of provision offered by education partners across the region and support effective partnership working to maximise the benefits for all stakeholders;*
- *ensure that all three colleges in the city remain both educationally and financially sustainable; and*
- *be based on comprehensive evidence and analysis.*

In Glasgow, eight regional *curriculum hubs,* corresponding to economic sector groupings, were established. These *hubs* provide a forum for all senior curriculum managers across the three colleges to review in more detail the alignment of their curriculum to economic and social needs. *Curriculum hubs* have produced regional curriculum maps which identify vocational progression pathways across the study options and employment opportunities within different economic sectors. *Hub* members have also developed common entry qualifications and a Regional Admissions Working Group, comprising admissions and guidance staff, has been established to support a consistent approach to programme applications.

In addition, the three Glasgow colleges developed a five-year Curriculum and Estates Plan for the Glasgow region. This set out how, following significant regional restructuring, the colleges could work together, transferring activity and staff between colleges, to provide a more coherent, outcome-focused and higher quality regional curriculum. However, it is apparent that the resource required to jointly plan curriculum in this multi-college region is substantial with senior managers, in particular, spending considerable amounts of time on regional work.

Case study: Multi-college regions – the Highlands and Islands

The *Post-16 Education (Scotland) Act 2013*[19] makes the University of the Highlands and Islands Court accountable for all college and university-level education in the Highlands and Islands. The Further Education Regional Board, a university court committee, oversees the delivery of FE activity in the region. It has the responsibility for ensuring that the nine colleges which deliver further education in the region, and which form the university partnership, work together to meet the needs of their respective communities as well as those of the wider area. The FE curriculum is coordinated and managed at regional level by the *Senior Curriculum Management Team (SCMT)* made up of senior curriculum staff from all partner establishments. The *SCMT* is currently undertaking a tertiary (up to SCQF level 6) curriculum mapping exercise across all subject areas. This exercise aims to harmonise the curriculum offer, and support consistency of approach. In addition, a gap analysis will identify where there is under or no provision either at regional or local level. Although still at an early stage of its development, managers recognise that the *SCMT* has the potential to impact on the local curriculum. Potential benefits include access to resources from partner establishments (e.g. networked delivery of programmes) which could extend the offer locally and help to combat the challenges presented by often low numbers wishing to access provision. This is particularly important to those learners located in very remote island communities.

SFC outcome agreement mangers work productively and closely with their allocated regional colleges to agree on priorities and targets for the period of the ROA. Patterns of demand vary and the ROA process is supporting a movement towards a needs-based distribution of activity so that regions with greatest demand have a greater supply of college places. Outcome agreement managers work with regional college senior staff through and labour market intelligence to reach agreement on changes in activity level.

College planning processes

As outlined throughout this section of the report, college curriculum planning is impacted on by a range of influences. Colleges draft their portfolio through discussion with curriculum managers and direct consultation with partners, stakeholders and employers. Many colleges stage curriculum planning events which provide a forum for cross-college discussion and decision on curriculum delivery. This allows colleges to make further programme amendments to align the curriculum as closely as possible to employer and stakeholder needs.

Central to the success of the planning and delivery processes are curriculum teams, which usually include all of those staff who may be involved in delivering programmes or supporting

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[19] http://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2013/12/pdfs/asp_20130012_en.pdf

learners during programmes. Teams are likely to include specialist curriculum staff as well as specialists in areas such as essential skills, where these are delivered discretely. Most curriculum teams meet regularly throughout the academic year to discuss a range of issues. Including evaluation of potential qualification accreditation and how well this meets employment needs. Teams have freedom to use a range of qualifications and awarding bodies. Where no appropriate existing qualification is available, some colleges use SCQF credit rating for bespoke college-created programmes.

Case study: Ayrshire College – SCQF credit rating for bespoke programmes

Ayrshire College has been actively using its' ability to credit-rate to help meet the needs of local employers and charitable organisations. Most of the organisations whose programmes have been credit-rated are publicly funded bodies or charities. There are currently 19 live programmes in the SCQF database which have been credit-rated by the college – 17 of which are third party programmes. These programmes are owned by a range of community partners, such as South Ayrshire and East Ayrshire Councils and Ayrshire and Arran NHS. These organisations value highly this service as it enables them to create and deliver bespoke programmes that meet a local need. It also provides their candidates, who are often long-term unemployed people with few or no formal qualifications, the opportunity to gain a recognised qualification.

College engagement with employers has identified a skills gap in relation to some of the essential skills within their non-advanced programmes. As a result of this feedback, the college has revised the unit *Skills for Life, Learning and Work* at SCQF levels 4, 5 and 6. The revised unit has recently been approved by the Credit Rating Committee and will be included in all non-advanced courses at SCQF levels 4, 5 and 6 in session 2016/17. This will mean that all learners at this level will be given the opportunity to achieve a certificate confirming their achievement of the essential skills that employers have said are looking for.

All managers feel they have the autonomy and freedom to make decisions around curriculum planning. They are encouraged to adapt units and outcomes to ensure learners gain the appropriate skills for progression to employment. All programmes place great emphasis on employability skills and many plan work placement or work experience components as part of the learning experience.

Curriculum teams also review their programmes regularly through self-evaluation activities. They use a range of feedback mechanisms to evaluate the quality of provision. Often adjustments are made to delivery in response to feedback from learners. However, robust post-course destination data is not always fully available and the colleges are working to increase the use of this within course self-evaluation processes.

5. Land-based education and training – a national strategy

Scotland's Rural College

In November 2011, the Scottish Government and SFC published a joint consultation paper *College Regionalisation: Proposals for Implementing Putting Learners at the Centre*[20] which represented the next step in the Scottish Government's plans to reform post-16 learning in Scotland. The paper noted:

> *We think some colleges may not fit with the regional model, and need a slightly different national approach . . . . . . in the case of the land-based colleges, we would expect them also to work with the regions in which they have major campuses to ensure that provision remains coherent.*

Scotland's Rural College (SRUC) was founded in October 2012 as a result of the merger of Barony, Elmwood and Oatridge colleges and the Scottish Agricultural College. The formation of SRUC has created Scotland's first national small specialist institution delivering tertiary education, research and consultancy services to a wide range of stakeholders in agriculture, land and the rural sectors.

The provision of land-based education and training is delivered in part through the regional college structure and in part by SRUC as the National Provider. It was recognised that there was a need to establish a set of structures to facilitate the process of planning and coordinating of land-based provision across the sector. In 2013, the National Land-based Providers Group (NLBPG) was established and during its first year of operation established two short-life working groups to consider the demand and supply of provision within the Agriculture and Animal Care and Veterinary Nursing sectors. In the autumn of 2014, SRUC was asked by SFC to lead on the development of a National Strategy for Land-based Education and Training. The objectives of the project were:

- the development of a cohesive land-based curriculum strategy for the sector;
- identification of current and future employment trends and curriculum requirements; and
- the development of a workable strategy to ensure delivery across SRUC and NLBPG colleges and where appropriate, to allow realignment to meet future regional and national needs.

Case study: SRUC – The National Strategy for Land-based Education and Training

The small team undertaking this review conducted a detailed series of interviews and engagement activities with employers, learners, industry sector groups, Lantra and colleges offering land-based provision. The variability of employer engagement with colleges in some land-based sectors was of importance. For example, in animal care, despite organising two meetings for the sector, invitations were declined and both meetings were cancelled. This may be simply a reflection of the employer profile of the sector, with many small businesses being unable to attend the meetings due to conflicting business demands. The issue of accurate

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[20] http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2011/11/e15115412/link

labour market data was also identified as an issue. During the national strategy review, all RSAs were reviewed but there was little mention of land-based activity in individual assessments. As yet there is no SIP for the land-based sector.

The report, the *National Strategy for Land-based Education and Training*[21] (2015), provides a comprehensive analysis of the land-based industries sector with emerging messages and key recommendations for 11 identified industry sectors:

- agriculture;
- animal care;
- aquaculture;
- environmental conservation;
- equine;
- farriery;
- game keeping and wildlife management;
- greenkeeping;
- horticulture;
- land-based engineering;
- trees and timber; and
- veterinary nursing.

The report also includes a number of common cross-sectoral priorities of strategic importance to the future of land-based education and training in Scotland. Two of these findings, relevant to this current report are:

Industry engagement by college centre providers is limited across several land-based sectors. Although there are many good examples of a close working relationship with some industry sectors such as Gamekeeping and Land-based Engineering, this is not always the case. The weakening of industry links over time has, on many occasions, resulted in centres becoming less aware of the emphasis placed by employers on the development of embedded practical skills training within Scottish Qualifications at levels 4–7. There is a need for a more centralised and coordinated national approach to enable more effective engagement with industry.

Labour market intelligence data available to the land-based sectors and the authors of this report was limited and is now at least five years out of date. More recent Skills Development Scotland Regional Skills Assessment Reports (2014) and the Skills Investment Plan for the Highlands and Islands did not provide sufficient detail of the land-based sectors. The lack of nationally available labour market intelligence data made it difficult to assess employer demand accurately.

For colleges which offer land-based provision, there is an expectation that during outcome agreement discussions, institutions must review the regional distribution and demand for land-based courses and explore opportunities for collaborative growth or rationalisation with other colleges. SFC expects institutions to continue to engage with the NLBPG to ensure a collective and cohesive approach to land-based education. For example, SRUC is working with Edinburgh College and North East Scotland College to transfer the provision of Animal Care

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[21] http://www.sfc.ac.uk/web/FILES/ReportsandPublications/national_land_based_strategy.pdf

and Veterinary Nursing programmes to SRUC from academic year 2016-17. Similarly, SRUC are also progressing the transfer of sport provision at Ayr to the University of the West of Scotland.

6.   Recommendations

Colleges should:

- continue to use a range of information related to economic and social needs to review and align their curriculum delivery to meet stakeholder and industry needs;

- continue to work productively with local authorities and schools on DYW and find practical solutions to any barriers around the local implementation of FA programmes;

- continue to work with SDS to ensure all necessary college staff are aware of the full range of labour market intelligence available and develop the skills on how best to utilise the *Data Matrix* tool; and

- work with SFC and SDS to improve the availability and quality of post-course destination data to inform the review of programmes and curriculum.

Education Scotland should:

- monitor the above recommendations through on-going engagement with colleges.

College Development Network should:

- draw on the findings of this report to support colleges to take forward the recommendations.

Appendix 1

Colleges visited during the fieldwork

Ayrshire College
Dumfries and Galloway College
Glasgow Clyde College
Scotland's Rural College (SRUC)
West Highland College UHI

Appendix 2

Glossary of terms

CAD	Computer Aided Design
CPP	Community Planning Partnership
DYW	Developing the Young Workforce
FA	Foundation Apprenticeship
FE	Further Education
NLBPG	National Land-Based Providers Group
ROA	Regional Outcome Agreement
RSA	Regional Skills Assessment
RSIP	Regional Skills Investment Plan
RSPL	Regional Skills Planning Lead
SCMT	Senior Curriculum Management Team
SCQF	Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework
SDS	Skills Development Scotland
SFC	Scottish Funding Council
SIP	Skills Investment Plan
SRUC	Scotland's Rural College
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
UHI	University of the Highlands and Islands

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