

## Performance & Resources Committee Meeting

Date of Meeting	Monday 14 December 2015
Paper Title	Common Application System Project
Agenda Item	7
Paper Number	PRC2-C
Responsible Officer	Alan Sherry
Status	Disclosable
Action	For discussion

### 1. Report Purpose

- 1.1. To provide members with an update on the progress made in developing a Glasgow Region student application process.

### 2. Recommendations

- 2.1. The Committee is invited to:

- **note** the contents of this report.
- **note** the progress made in developing a Glasgow Region student application process.
- **note** the assessment of college guidance practitioners with regard to the implementation of one application portal for the Glasgow region and;
- **comment** on further development of a regional approach to the application process.

### 3. Background

- 3.1 Members will recall that following consideration of a range of alternatives the Glasgow Colleges' Regional Board (GCRB) requested that The Glasgow Colleges' Group (GCG) take forward a project which would develop a common online application focused on full-time applicants for the region. This project had two distinct elements. The need for a technical solution which would enable data to be shared transparently across three Management Information Systems (MIS); and the information, advice and guidance element which is central to the approach taken by the three assigned colleges in the application process.

#### **4. Management Information System**

- 4.1.** A technical project team was established, led by Fares Samara of City of Glasgow, with a budget of £30k. The team has developed a software tool which links effectively the three MIS databases, extracts various course information details and facilitates the online applications process. The technical solution can communicate with each MIS and extract information such as the total number of applications, application per subject area, can identify potential multiple applications from individual students and provide summary information on a regional basis. In addition the solution can be extended to provide information relating to protected characteristics, postcodes and previous education experience. This summary information would provide student application data at a regional basis which may be used to inform the development of the Regional Outcome Agreement (ROA), monitor the implementation of the in-year ROA and inform curriculum planning across the region.
- 4.2.** Working with Advice/Guidance colleagues the technical project team has also developed a draft regional application form, with an ability to access course information from all college websites. and a portal which could host a single online application form as agreed by the three colleges. The portal would 'pull' essential course information, gather application data and 'push' the gathered application forms to the three college MIS databases.
- 4.3.** This stage of the project is now completed and has been beta tested with a small number of staff and students.

#### **5. Information, Advice and Guidance**

- 5.1.** An advice/guidance group was established to inform the development of the regional application form and to consider the wider information, advice and guidance support required by learners seeking to access college programmes. The advice/guidance group welcomed the development of the on-line regional application form however recognised that this only covered full-time programmes there would require to be a college document for other modes of attendance hosted by the individual colleges.
- 5.2.** There was considerable concern that learners would not be able to access the advice/guidance they require in order to make an informed decision if all information and applications were accessed on-line through a Regional Portal.
- 5.3.** The group highlighted the diversity of the college learner cohort and the high number of learners who delay application decisions to the commencement of the academic year. As these learners, in the main, have few or no qualifications there was concern that the regional approach may be a barrier to participation without effective guidance interventions.

#### **6. Multiple Applications**

- 6.1.** There had been a concern that the ability for learners to send off more applications would lead to less well considered and more speculative multiple applications for programmes offered in all three colleges which may place an additional burden on the application/admissions procedure at time of high demand, inflate waiting lists and create bottlenecks within the admissions system leading to a poorer service.

A small scale review of 2,779 applicant records was undertaken by the advice/guidance group which identified that multiple applications accounted for fewer than 20% of all applications in overlapping curriculum areas, with only 5% of this set applying to all 3 Colleges. In addition the review found that applicants were more likely to apply to a College based on availability of transport links from their home location which is in line with previous research on participation in college provision.

## **7. Next Steps**

- 7.1.** To date the project has delivered a common application form which could be used by all three colleges. A technical solution is available which provides a common portal for the hosting of the application process and the means to produced regional level data on applications. However there has not been the opportunity to effectively trial the system with learners to ascertain the impact which it may have on the quality of their experience. In addition there remain concerns with regard to providing appropriate information, advice and guidance. Depending on the discussion at this meeting and consideration by the three colleges, these issues will now be addressed.
- 7.2.** It is worth noting that the Joint Information Services Council (Jisc) will be undertaking a feasibility study with Scottish Funding Council on developing a shared on-line application process.

## **8. Risk Analysis**

- 4.1** Appropriate steps have been taken to ensure the technical solution is robust and secure. There potential risks to the quality of information, advice and guidance available to learners from a single applications system. In addition there may be an increase in learners making more multiple applications which may lead to a deterioration in the level of service provided.

## **9. Legal Implications**

- 9.1.** The data sharing implication of this project have been considered as part of the project.

## **10. Financial Implications**

- 10.1.** To continue to develop the common application project will require additional resources which the colleges have not allocated a budget.

## **11. Regional Outcome Agreement Implications**

- 11.1.** The collection of regional data may assist in the development of the 2017/18 ROA and the monitoring of the 2016/17 document.