

Board Meeting

Date of Meeting	Monday 19 June 2023
Paper Title	Fit for the Future: Skills Review introduction
Agenda Item	9
Paper Number	BM6-D
Responsible Officer	Martin Boyle, Executive Director
Status	Disclosable
Action	For Discussion

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1** The report of the Independent Review of the Skills Delivery Landscape, entitled *Fit for the Future: developing a post-school learning system to fuel economic transformation*, was completed and submitted to Scottish Ministers by report author James Withers this month. It considers the skills functions and remits of Scotland's national public bodies. It makes 15 recommendations, and is clear in its intent to support the successful delivery of Scotland's *National Strategy for Economic Transformation*.
- 1.2** The report has been broadly welcomed by a wide range of bodies, and Colleges Scotland has also supported the report's publication. Colleges Scotland's background briefing note on key elements of the report is provided as an appendix to this paper.
- 1.3** Colleges Scotland, Glasgow college Principals and the GCRB Executive Director were all participants in the review and contributed to workshops and engagement sessions. It is of note that the role of college education is given significant prominence in the report, alongside clear intent on increasing the national value of college-based education. There is also significant comment on the benefits and continued importance of regionalisation.
- 1.4** In summary, the report recommends that the Scottish Government takes an active lead in the delivery of national skills planning (Recommendation 3), for greater regional autonomy aligned to regional economic policy (Recommendation 4), underpinned by a new infrastructure for funding and delivery (Recommendations 5 and 6), coherent qualifications pathways (Recommendation 8 and 9), an employer-led infrastructure which can support regional planning and investment, and feed into national policy (Recommendation 12), and a renewed role for the enterprise agencies with respect to workforce planning as an integrated part of business development (Recommendation 13).
- 1.5** The GCRB Executive view is that this is a clear, relevant, well considered and ambitious report which provides a clear template and places college education at an important place in the nation's development.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1** Board members are invited to **consider** and **comment** on the publication.

3. Report

3.1 The report can be found here:

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/fit-future-developing-post-school-learning-system-fuel-economic-transformation/documents/>

4. Risk and Compliance Analysis

4.1 There is no immediate risk or compliance requirement associated with this report, though it may have wider implications for GCRB and the Glasgow college region as national education reform is progressed.

5. Financial and Resource Analysis

5.1 There is no immediate finance or resource implication to this report.

6. Equalities Implications

6.1 There are no immediate equalities implications in this report, though there are wider implications to the delivery of equitable college education should the recommendations be adopted and delivered.

7. Learner Implications

7.1 There are no immediate learner implications in this report, though there are significant opportunities to deliver benefits to college learners should the recommendations be adopted and delivered.

Independent Review of the Skills Delivery Landscape Background

The Independent [Review](#) of the Skills Delivery Landscape, undertaken by James Withers, was published on Wednesday 7 June 2023. It is clear that the strong advocacy and input by Colleges Scotland directly to James Withers, and the Review, has resulted in several key messages that are helpful to the college sector being recognised and included.

Scottish Government, in its communication with Colleges Scotland, has stated that the publication of this Review is the first step on the path towards system wide reform across lifelong education and skills and that they look forward to working with the college sector as the Scottish Government reflects on the detail of the Review recommendations.

Scottish Government also said that they are committed to working in partnership with Colleges Scotland and the college sector as we seek to build a system that is fit for the future. We will now work with Scottish Ministers and officials to maximise the opportunities presented by this report and continue to ensure members and learners are best served by the outcomes.

Opportunities

Colleges are mentioned in the very first page of the document, in James's Foreword, and it is clear from the narrative that he recognises and values the role of colleges that will be essential to deliver the ambitions of the Scottish Government, both in terms of the National Strategy for Economic Transformation (NSET) and its priorities around Equity, Opportunity and Community.

The report also highlights that there are too many tensions and complexities in the system, including around funding. The recommendations for a single funding body and a re-designed process for funding also align with the Think the Unthinkable work.

At the Think the Unthinkable Convention 5 held on Tuesday 6 June 2023, the senior sector leaders endorsed the outputs from the 4 Transformational Theme Working Groups. The timing of this work being facilitated by Colleges Scotland will now allow maximum traction with Scottish Government and other key stakeholders, as this aligns with the headlines from this Reviews, and also allows constructive input into the Scottish Government's workstream on Purpose and Principles.

The need for a stronger narrative from Scottish Government in their Purpose and Principles work is highlighted by Withers and the college sector would support that, contributing our outputs from the Think the Unthinkable workstream. Withers also emphasises that decisions need to be made with the learner at the centre and the importance of having regional autonomy and some suggested new regional structures. There is much to explore here in regard to outputs from the Think the Unthinkable workstreams.

Summary of Recommendations in the Withers Review

Structural Recommendations

The five structural recommendations are:

- To move responsibility for national skills planning from Skills Development Scotland (SDS) and Scottish Funding Council (SFC) to the Scottish Government. (Recommendation 3)
- To establish a new single funding body, which brings together responsibility for all post-school learning and training funding functions from SFC, SDS and, potentially, the Student Awards Agency for Scotland (SAAS). (Recommendation 5)
- To give the new qualifications body a clear remit for overseeing development and accreditation of all publicly funded post-school qualifications and the underpinning skills frameworks and occupational standards. (Recommendation 8)
- To substantively reform SDS to focus on the development of a national careers service, with a mission to embed careers advice and education within communities, educational settings and workplaces across Scotland. (Recommendation 11)
- To give the enterprise agencies a clear remit for supporting businesses with workforce planning as an embedded and integrated part of business development and planning. (Recommendation 13).

Operational Recommendations

These five structural recommendations are supported by a further ten operational recommendations, focused on governance and processes:

- New culture of leadership from Scottish Government (Recommendation 1).
- Define success and end the division in language and philosophy (Recommendation 2).
- Establish areas of strategic workforce opportunity and need and empower regional partners to develop their own solutions (Recommendations 3 and 4).
- Build a new model of funding for post-school learning provision, with simplicity and parity of esteem as core values (Recommendation 6).
- Provide funding options for living costs for those who want to study parttime/flexibly (Recommendation 7).
- Review post-school qualifications, using SCQF as a foundation, to create clear learning pathways underpinned by a universal skills framework and occupational standards and to drive further modularisation (Recommendation 9).
- Develop a new, national, lifelong and digital training record to chart skills development through life, connecting into a revitalised careers service (Recommendation 10).
- Expand the remit of the existing DYW network to establish a national employer board and a series of regional employer boards which put employer views at the heart of skills planning, national strategy and the development of post-school learning system. In doing so the Scottish Apprenticeship Advisory Board (SAAB) should be wound up (Recommendation 12).
- Explore greater private sector investment in the post-school learning system and, in particular, in the provision of in-work learning opportunities (Recommendation 14).
- A new, clear map should be developed to direct users into the system (Recommendation 15). Colleges Scotland

Colleges Scotland, June 2023