

## Board Meeting

Date of Meeting	Wednesday 28 May 2014
Paper Title	Vision and Values– Chair’s Reflections
Agenda Item	5
Paper Number	BM1-B
Responsible Officer	Rt. Hon Henry McLeish, Chair of the Board
Status	Disclosable
Action	For noting

### 1. Vision, Values and Voice

- 1.1 A declaration of values, priorities and core beliefs; to help to define our identity, to better connect to the world of education and the social and economic future of Glasgow.**

### 2. Reflections on the sector

- 2.1** We are living in an era of profound and dramatic change where the College sector is facing new challenges, opportunities and a bewildering array of different views and ideas about how education and learning should develop in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. We occupy a world where the credibility, identity and respect for college education cannot be taken for granted: the context in which we operate is being radically transformed and the needs of society, the economy and the Nation are far more demanding and complex.
- 2.2** Our task is to listen, understand, be proactive and be less concerned with looking inwards, and merely reacting to events. Instead we have to be more, inclusive and progressive and once again establish ourselves at the heart of this continuum of education and learning, which is so vital for Scotland’s future.
- 2.3** The loss of income, enrolments and students over the past four years has been relentless and damaging to the capacity of Glasgow Colleges. We are often fragmented, hesitant and lacking in confidence; many people, agencies and organisations seem less sure about what we have to say. We have understandably been busy *talking* about partnerships with business, employers and other countries but we have often failed to build partnerships

between colleges and to establish ourselves as an essential, non-negotiable provider within the education sector.

- 2.4** Colleges are capable of doing a great deal better and our task is to close the gap between aspiration and achievement. We must look seriously and critically at ourselves and take a reality check if we are to learn lessons from our current plight and derive real benefit from regionalisation and mergers and respond more effectively and innovatively to the cuts in public funding.
- 2.5** We have to question and challenge, more effectively, what is on offer to us, be more willing to confront the loss of income and opportunity to other agencies and companies that may be much less equipped to deal with skills, employability and training issues, than we are. We need to change our collective mind set and embrace the idea of transformational change and start to seriously work together. We need to have an 'independent mind' and engage in a more enthusiastic debate with partners and stakeholders. The culture of the sector needs updated and despite the progressive and innovative work being done in individual colleges our collective voice has not been making the same impact. That is why the setting up of the Board is so timely and important. We need a rethink of our role and it is obvious that no amount of minimal make over or tinkering around the edges will resolve our problems and equip us to deal with a new era in education.
- 2.6** It is clear that the Colleges have a great deal to offer and a massive contribution to make to the future of Scotland, the development of human capital and to economic and social renewal. For this to happen we need to use our assets, resources, skills and staff and creative energy more effectively.

The concept of '**life - long learning**' is the hallmark of modern education.

We must promote the importance of **education and learning** in realising the potential of the nation and of individuals.

We have to nurture and develop our country's most valuable and renewable resource- **human capital**.

- 2.7** It is essential that we establish ourselves as a key component of the **school-college-university continuum**, which is so vital to Scotland's future. We are uniquely well placed in this regard to play a key role but we have to impress upon our partners and the Government that we have the commitment and the ideas to do more. Colleges are being challenged by private providers in relation to what has traditionally been done by colleges. As a result those, who have a much narrower definition of education and learning than we do, stand to benefit from our failure to respond to challenges. This is a time to re-confirm the contribution we are making and can make to employment, youth

unemployment, employability, skills enhancement, industrial change and business development; this is a tough battle to win.

- 2.8** We have also to be aware of the changing priorities within Government and how this affects our approach to curriculum. Dealing with the problems and tackling the opportunities that lie ahead requires us to renew, rethink and reinvent our approach to enable a reinvigorated, modern and relevant college sector. We have the resources, the people, the staff and the good-will to do more to meet the challenges that lie ahead.
- 2.9** Our **voice**, as a Board which has to be relevant and focussed, be heard and listened to. We need clear and considered **values** and a **vision** which embrace the spirit and purpose of progressive educational thinking. College education embraces institutions, people, curriculums and courses but it should also be a **cause** in which we believe and can enthuse and inspire. In this often soulless and managerial world in which we live, where the definition of education is being narrowed, we need to rekindle that passion about the intrinsic worth of education and learning. We need to establish a more clearly defined role in the education, skills and learning landscape.

### **3. Change as an opportunity**

- 3.1** We are in a period of unprecedented change which is likely to accelerate rather than diminish. At every level-global, European, UK and Scotland- social, economic, information and technology, political and demographic change- and constitutional change - are constantly reshaping the context of supply and demand within which we operate. Being responsive, to the threats and opportunities change creates will be a key part of our new approach. Anticipating change is much better than merely reacting.
- 3.2** In Glasgow we face major changes in our economy, public expenditure, education and, within the college sector itself, mergers and regionalisation. As a sector intimately involved in skills we are trying to improve specific aspects of our economy which continue to hold Scotland back and put us behind our major competitors. Factors, such as our competitiveness, productivity, growth rates and business growth and entrepreneurship, could be improved. Unemployment remains high and nearly 100, 000 young people in Scotland are without work: the quality and variety of opportunities on offer to them are not as good as they might be. In partnership with business and Government we need to do more.
- 3.3** Austerity, public sector cuts and a redrawing of educational boundaries pose a threat to progressive education. Fighting for finance in this competitive environment requires a sharper and more hard-headed approach to Government and financial agencies. The Government's drive for 'more from less' may be challenging but, this is our new reality,

which is likely to persist for some time, and so our ability, to add value and, to demonstrate a return on investment and value for money becomes even more important. We have to prove to government we can do much better than some of our competitors and as a result we can win back more funding-and ensure better accountability, higher quality and a more inspiring education. The commercialisation of education, training, skills and learning may not be in the nation's best interests.

- 3.4** There are other pressing problems that require greater attention from the sector and more investment and resources. Scotland and the UK are amongst the most unequal countries in Western Europe. In Scotland poverty, deprivation and inequality cast a long shadow over our society and economy as well as forcing nearly one in five Scots to live on or below the breadline. Levels of social mobility are also way behind other countries and remain a key indicator of modern, progressive politics and education. The potential of our country cannot be realised if so many people are excluded and marginalised and when the contribution of so many is held back because of unequal opportunities. In this regard educational inequality and the lack of social mobility are issues we can do something about: our role in this is obvious but still under developed. Life- long learning, which embraces an ambitious view of education in contrast to current attempts to narrow and play down the importance of education, is the vehicle for educational change and social progress. Progressive education is about inclusion, continuity, integration, collaboration, consistency and excellence. Tackling educational inequality must become a higher priority for Government and the College sector.
- 3.5** We need to talk up the benefits of education at a time when there are far too many voices talking down the importance of education and learning and who seek instead to promote a narrowing of expectations, a curtailment of the options available to the less advantaged; extolling the virtues of a narrow definition of employability and arguing for more privatisation and commercialisation of public education. We need to have an enthusiastic advocacy of the alternative. We need to engage and promote the best of education and learning and the social and economic benefits which flow from this. This is about our confidence and self-belief in the cause of life-long learning.
- 3.6** We should also remind ourselves that literacy remains a key issue and increasingly the digital divide is creating a new form of inequality where thousands of disadvantaged Scots are excluded from serious and affordable access to the new information age. The internet is an important part of education and learning and we should work with others to ensure equal access.

#### **4. Vision**

- 4.1** We should have a vision which inspires, enthuses and educates: our vision requires strong college commitment and dedicated leadership.
- 4.2** There is considerable strength in the diversity of the sector. Individual colleges have a strong local brand, however, we need to establish a strong Glasgow brand and a clear and well-articulated definition of what we do, what we strive to do and our desired impact – a vision.
- 4.3** Education has to be seen as more than the acquisition of knowledge and skills. Our students are not merely consumers and learning should not be seen merely as training. We are in danger of being caught up in what is measureable and quantifiable and we can tend to forget that learning has a much wider and deeper meaning and value: problem solving; learning to learn; acquiring the capability and capacity for intelligent choice; exercising personal responsibility; becoming a confident person and elevating the idea of self-worth. Education and learning is also the best way to tackle poverty and inequality and enhance social mobility. It is the route to participation and active citizenship. It makes for greater tolerance and understanding in our society. It provides solidarity in communities. It tackles ignorance and injustice; but more than anything it is about the equal worth of every one in society.
- 4.4** In simple terms, we need to redefine what colleges are for in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

#### **5. Thoughts on a vision**

- 5.1** Glasgow should be seen as the Learning Capital of Europe for its diversity, equality of opportunity, excellence and innovation. Glasgow working together will be more effective than 3 colleges working on their own.
- 5.2** Our task is deliver quality, excellence and high standards.
- 5.3** Our task is to deliver education and learning to students, businesses and communities and ultimately to deliver added value to Scotland in social and economic terms. Our major aim should be to help to improve the quality of life in Scotland.
- 5.4** Our task is to contribute to economic renewal, by being responsive to communities and by promoting a culture of fairness and equality and accountability to the wider public and to taxpayers.

- 5.5** We should be the dynamic nucleus at the heart of communities; promoting a shared agenda of activities which provide the central role of learning and skills to young people and adults. We should see the college as a central player in a network of partnerships with our closest educational allies. We are uniquely well placed to link with schools and universities, offering both HE and FE and widening the scope of hope and opportunity for thousands of young people. Social inclusion is what we do – but more needs to be done to clearly articulate this.
- 5.6** Our ethos should be about serving, being responsive and accountable to communities, businesses and government and designing services with them.
- 5.7** We should be looking for parity of esteem and added value not profitability or commercialism.
- 5.8** **Life-long learning** is the key concept. **Education** is the product which determines the success or otherwise of modern countries, businesses and societies. **Learning** is the process by which we constantly improve. **Human capital**- the most important renewable resource-is the most precious quality of life idea. We need to have all of this at the heart of what we do.

## **6. Values**

- 6.1** Some people feel that in the hard headed commercial world we live in values are less important. Nothing could be further from the truth. The college sector recognises that our students and the public should be aware of **what** we do but they should also be aware of **why** we do it.

### **6.2 Educational Philosophy**

Fairness, justice, freedom, excellence, equal access and inclusion

Equality, equal access to educational opportunity, social mobility, self- improvement, self-esteem and confidence

All of these contribute to the idea of the equal worth of every individual.

### **6.3 Choice**

Students should have real choice not just options determined solely by cuts in finance, transitory targets, bureaucratic outcomes or short term demographic changes. We are currently supply led and are less able to be responsive to wider need and demand.

#### **6.4 Ambition**

We should be on the front foot, anticipating and driving our own and shared agendas for change, developing inspirational thinking and policy and be more proactive in pursuit of educational objectives. We should be less on the receiving end of other people's initiatives and suggestions, and be seeking parity of esteem with our partners and stakeholders.

#### **6.5 Respect**

We need to be more inclusive and reach out, rather than being pre-occupied by our own concerns. Our approach must be about partnership, collaboration, cooperation, joint ventures and joint working; this is the key to real success.

Within the sector we should build more respect and trust and seek to understand each other more and engage in constructive dialogue. Diversity is a strength of the sector.

#### **6.6 Humanitarianism and Internationalism**

In the long traditions of Scotland we have a deep humanitarian concern for others at home and abroad. It is important that this continues to be recognised in the work that we do. Our compassion, our instincts and our broad humanity provide a unique backdrop for international development.

#### **6.7 Ethics and Governance**

We have to decide and define what is morally right and ethically just in what we do; honesty, integrity, compassion, courage, honour, responsibility, participation, respect and fairness. We expect the highest standards; in this context we believe excellence and equity of access are not mutually exclusive.

#### **6.8 Innovation**

We need to work beyond established parameters and perceived boundaries, to take initiative and generate innovation and support new ideas, modernity and responsible entrepreneurship.

#### **6.9 Enterprise**

Our sector is a key to the development and success of business, commerce and industry. Our commercial activity is important as we equip students for the world of work. A closer relationship with business is essential and based on a better understanding and mutual respect there is far more to be achieved.

#### **6.10 Inspiration**

*The mind is not a vessel to be filled but a fire to be ignited.*

*Develop a passion for learning.*

*If you do, you will never cease to grow.*

Plutarch

**Rt.Hon. Henry McLeish, Regional Chair for Glasgow Colleges Regional Board, May 2014**