



Scottish Funding Council

Promoting further and higher education

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Comhairle Maoineachaidh na h-Alba

A' brosnachadh foghlam adhartach agus àrd-ìre

21 September 2016

Margaret Cook  
Chair  
Glasgow Colleges' Regional Board  
City of Glasgow College  
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### **Update on operational fundable body status**

We met on 24 August 2016 to discuss the SFC's feedback from the Board observation and recent interviews with the assigned college Principals and the Executive Director of GCRB. The observations and interviews formed part of SFC's consideration of how GCRB is working as it progresses to fully operational fundable body status as outlined in Laurence Howell's letter to you on 2 June 2016.

We agreed at the meeting that I would write formally to you to provide our feedback and confirm next steps. Overall this was a positive exercise and key points are outlined below.

### **Board observation at the GCRB meeting on 1 July 2016**

SFC senior staff confirmed that the Board demonstrated that it was working more effectively. It has made a great deal of progress since the last observation back in October 2015. There were robust discussions where the members that were present at the meeting put forward their points of view. This was particularly evident on the conflict of interest paper where a decision was made to postpone an agenda item until further discussion and clarification was possible on certain board members' ability to take part in the discussion and vote.

As a result of this issue it was not possible for SFC to observe the discussion on the allocation of funding to the assigned colleges. However, we understand that the Board has since taken action to resolve the issue and at the Board meeting on 29 August the postponed item was discussed and a decision taken.

Critically, the evidence on the day was that the Board was engaging more in the strategic level discussions required of it to operate appropriately in Glasgow Region.

### **Interviews with Principals and the Executive Director**

SFC provided an indicative set of questions to the three Principals and the Executive Director in advance of the meetings. We were also clear to outline that the purpose of the discussion was to focus on the progress and effectiveness of the current management and collegiate arrangements which support the operation of the GCRB, including the various support services that are in place and a view of their sustainability.

Although there was a range of different views expressed across all four interviews there were some agreement on specific areas, including the following.

- **Staffing.** GCRB needs to keep the number of staff at the centre to a minimum and utilise the skills and expertise of the colleges wherever possible.
- **Role of the Executive Director.** We heard comments that indicated that over the last year this role has been critical in progressing the key issues which will move the Board forward to full fundable body status and it will continue to be so in future.
- **Services provided by the colleges.** All respondents confirmed that they were content with the collegiate arrangements in place for the colleges to contribute on financial, HR and governance issues. Given the recent issues around Governance and the need for independence, there was acknowledgement that GCRB might in future need its own independent governance advisor/Clerk to the Board.
- **Structures in place to deliver the Regional outcome Agreement.** There was confidence expressed that the structures in place to deliver the Glasgow Region Outcome Agreement over the last few years have worked well and this has been the responsibility of the Colleges' Learning and Teaching Group working with the GCRB senior staff member. **A key success has been the delivery of the Glasgow Region Curriculum and Estates Plan 2020 which has been delivered to the timeline and costs outlined.** However, the respondents noted that the skills and expertise needed to deliver may change over time, as will the time commitment required – particularly from senior college staff but also from administrative staff. The Principals highlighted this as both a cost and a risk to the colleges that may be underestimated
- **Interaction between GCRB members and Board members of the assigned colleges.** Some respondents highlighted the need for more interaction. GCRB confirmed that there are plans to do this, starting in autumn 2016.

## Next steps

It was clear from SFC's most recent observation and assessment, as outlined above, that the Regional Board (GCRB) and its members have made significant and effective progress in operating effectively as a Regional Strategic Body in line with the post-16 legislation and fulfilling their role in securing coherent provision of a high quality of fundable further and higher education in Glasgow's colleges. SFC is also reassured that the operational and management arrangements have had time to settle in over the last six months following a period of focused activity.

At the same time we acknowledged the persistent underlying concerns and tensions in relation to autonomy and accountability in a multi-college region where both a college board and a regional board have conjoining responsibilities. We are content that the Board is fully aware of these and seeking to mitigate impacts.

SFC confirmed our view with you at the meeting that that there remained some key funding, monitoring and financial actions still in progress which require attention alongside the issues highlighted above. These were:

- to agree the split across the three colleges of the 2016-17 funding allocation – ***now agreed and confirmed with SFC, awaiting final signed AY2016-17 Outcome Agreement;***
- to confirm that the FM is in place with the three assigned colleges and issues around the role of the Accountable Officer have been clarified – ***currently being addressed;***
- to put in place the appropriate procedures and processes required for the GCRB to assume full monitoring, reporting and financial responsibilities as required by a fundable body – ***see below.***

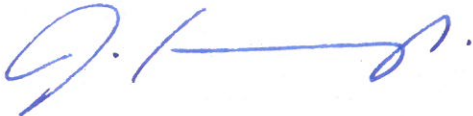
In discussing the last of these issues with you we agreed that SFC would work with the Executive Director over the next month to map out and identify a plan and timeline for ensuring these structures are in place.

Thank you for the invitation to attend the Board meeting in October to discuss this plan with members. Unfortunately I will be unable to be there but the Interim Director for Access, Skills and Outcome Agreements, Michael Cross, will attend the GCRB meeting on Monday 31 October to discuss with the Board progress on the transition phase from October to December 2016.

Following this meeting SFC will make a recommendation to its Council Board in December 2016. Assuming this is a positive outcome then fully fundable body status could be implemented at a date in line with either the Calendar or Financial year 2017.

If you have any follow up queries please do get in touch me or Claire Taylor at [ctaylor@sfc.ac.uk](mailto:ctaylor@sfc.ac.uk)

Yours sincerely



**John Kemp**  
Interim Chief Executive