

Board Meeting

Date of Meeting	Monday 31 October 2016
Paper Title	Glasgow City Council Commission on College and Lifelong Learning
Agenda Item	16
Paper Number	BM2-M
Responsible Officer	Robin Ashton, GCRB Executive Director
Status	Disclosable
Action	For Information

1. Report Purpose

- 1.1** To provide members with an update on the work of the Glasgow City Council Commission on College and Lifelong Learning.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1** The Board is invited to:
- **note** the update on the work of the Commission;
 - **note** the findings from call for evidence, attached as Annex 1; and
 - **request** a further update on the work of the Commission at a future meeting of the Board.

3. Background

- 3.1** In February 2016, Glasgow City Council established a College and Lifelong Learning Commission chaired by Councillor Judith Fisher.
- 3.2** The City Council uses commissions to provide in depth analysis and recommend solutions to particular policy challenges and they frequently follow a Select Committee model, issuing calls for evidence and hearing from and questioning expert witnesses.
- 3.3** There are seven elected members on the Commission, reflecting the political balance of the Council, along with gender balance and geographical representation. There are also representatives from GCRB, the Glasgow Colleges, Glasgow University, SFC, City Council Education Services, the Chamber of Commerce, STUC and Glasgow Life.

- 3.4** The Commission is examining current funding levels, rates and types of participation in the college sector in Glasgow, and looking at barriers to participation in college learning to identify possible solutions to tackle these barriers.
- 3.5** The initial work programme for the Commission has included:
- a review of current college and lifelong learning provision offered within the city, including data on funding levels and rates and types of participation in College Learning in Glasgow;
 - a literature review of existing evidence in this area; and
 - a call for evidence to gather in views and experiences of participation in the College sector.
- 3.6** Attached as Annex 1, are the findings from call for evidence. These are grouped into three broad groups:
- situational barriers (personal circumstances);
 - institutional/structural barriers; and
 - dispositional barriers (attitudinal/confidence).
- 3.7** General themes highlighted by the organisational and individual responses to the call for evidence are an emphasis on the cost and availability of travel to college, and how this can be prohibitive to learners, concerns about the college mergers and perceived centralisation of courses, creating a 'two-tier' system and creating barriers for those who need to travel, alongside concerns that the focus on under-25s has reduced provision for return/adult learners, and the pressures that DWP/Jobcentre restrictions and rules can have on learners, prohibiting them from taking part in college learning.
- 3.8** Following discussion of the call for evidence findings, the commission has agreed to look in more detail at:
- college student funding arrangements (e.g. funding available, bursary and travel allowance criteria, etc.)
 - childcare support provision (e.g. funding available, availability of crèches, etc.)
 - application and enrolment data for Glasgow residents, including detail on reasons for conversion rates.
- 3.9** The Commission is planning produce its final report in Spring 2017.

4. Risk Analysis

4.1 The call for evidence findings suggest that a range of barriers to college learning exist and if actions to reduce or remove these are not identified and implemented, then there may be a risk to GCRB aims to widen access for regional residents.

4.2 To mitigate the risk, the GCRB and Glasgow college executives are participating fully in the work of the commission, and will use the findings to inform regional planning at both strategic and operational levels.

5. Legal Implications

5.1 No legal implications are identified.

6. Financial Implications

6.1 A significant focus of the call for evidence findings is on the availability of student support funding. Further analysis of this may lead to the identification of funding needs not currently being addressed within existing funding arrangements.

7. Regional Outcome Agreement Implications

7.1 The findings and recommendations of the City Council commission will be used to inform the development of the 2017/18 to 2019/20 Regional Outcome Agreement.

Annex 1. Colleges and Lifelong Learning Policy Commission, Call for Evidence Summary of Findings

Background

The Colleges and Lifelong Learning Policy Commission (CLLPC) carried out a Call for Evidence in order to gather not only personal views and experiences, but also any wider research relevant to the work of the CLLPC. Participants were invited to submit information via two online questionnaires (one to gather personal experiences, one to gather general reflections on barriers/solutions etc.), as well as a dedicated email address.

A webpage on the Council's website was set up, hosting information about the CLLPC, with details of the Call for Evidence and how to get involved (www.glasgow.gov.uk/CLLPC). Members of the Commission were asked to distribute details of the Call for Evidence throughout their networks, and a schedule of promotion on social media and online was undertaken.

The Call for Evidence took place from 22nd August – 30th September 2016, with 43 responses to the general survey, 19 responses to the personal experience survey, and 8 emails.

The following document summarises the responses. Information about the barriers and solutions have been categorised in to groups:

- Situational Barriers (Personal Circumstances)
- Institutional/Structural Barriers
- Dispositional Barriers (Attitudinal/Confidence)

Organisational responses were received from:

GCVS

LEAD Scotland (Linking Education and Disability)

Glasgow Colleges Regional Board and Glasgow Colleges

Educational Institute of Scotland(EIS)/Further Education Lecturers' Association

EIS Glasgow Regional Committee

Possibilities (organisation for disabled people in North Glasgow)

Bridgeton Community Learning Campus

Thenu Housing – Learning Works Project

Swamp Creative Media Centre

Glasgow Disability Alliance

STUC

One Parent Families

General Themes

- Emphasis on the cost and availability of travel to FE, and around the city, and how this can put pressure, or be prohibitive to learners.
- Emphasis on general financial costs being prohibitive.
- Concerns about the college mergers and centralisation of courses, creating a 'two-tier' system and creating barriers for those who cannot physically travel due to disability, and those who cannot afford to travel frequently.
- Concerns that the focus on under-25s has reduced provision for return/adult learners, and mechanisms to cater for them – childcare/crèches, part-time/evening courses etc.
- Concerns about the pressures that DWP/Jobcentre restrictions and rules can have on learners, and prohibit them from taking part, or achieving fulfilling employment (One Parent Families Submission).

“If you are over 26 years of age and you are on benefits and are claiming housing benefit, it is not possible to go to college because if you exchange your job seekers allowance for a bursary you lose your housing benefit thus rendering you in danger of eviction for non-payment of rent. The only solution to this currently is if the student applies for a payment from the college hardship fund to try to cover the costs of the rent. This is too precarious a position to put yourself in as you are not always guaranteed a payment from the hardship fund from a college. The college bursary application process is very rigorous, with a lot of evidence required to fit the criteria for receiving a bursary; this can be very off putting for those on benefits or have been working in low paid jobs. The process is too intrusive and can cause individuals to give up the process of application even if they have been successful at interview”.

Personal Experience Survey

If you are not studying, but would like to, what is preventing you?

- Money
- Transport
- Timing of courses (during day when working)
- Admission criteria and restrictions
- Caring responsibilities
- Lack of car park
- DWP restrictions

What, if anything, could be done to make it easier to do a college or lifelong learning course?

- Timing (more evening provision of courses)
- Smaller establishments (current college very big and noisy)
- Employers offering day release
- Taster courses (try before you buy)
- More places available
- Easier to follow information/websites
- More variety for professional development
- *“Devolve DWP and revamp it”*
- Joined up housing/council tax benefit services
- Easier access for mature students (consider work/life experience)

“It's many years since I studied at night school but would love to go back. Money and caring responsibilities prevent me”.

“I cannot afford to undertake the study I want. What I am interested in is during the day when I work”.

General Survey Responses

What are the barriers, if any, to participation in College and Lifelong Learning in Glasgow?

Situational Barriers (Personal Circumstances)

- Poverty/ financial cost
- Life commitments
- Disabilities – physical and learning
- Caring/childcare responsibilities
- Lack of digital skills
- Many drop out around Christmas time from stress or lack of money to continue
- Lack of qualifications
- Literacy difficulties

Institutional/Structural Barriers

- Transport costs/links
- Availability of courses (particularly part-time)
- College websites and documentation - confusing
- Lack of places available
- Concerns about merging of funding and student support departments
- Accessing non-IT applications
- Lack of flexibility of academic term times
- Lack of flexibility in courses
- Colleges not good at marketing what courses are on offer
- Teaching methods may not suit all learners
- Communication difficulties between learners and colleges – can be intimidating and a long process
- College mergers have destabilised staff and learners
- College mergers lead to concern of a 'two-tier' system, with limited curriculum offered in local/community based colleges, and fuller, more advanced curriculum offered in city centre. This impacts travel costs, learner mobility, caring commitments, and confidence
- Concerns about range of progression routes to university, and the clarity of this for learners
- Significant drop in part-time learners (core of lifelong learning)with reductions in day and evening part-time provision
- Sharp drop in ASN provision for adults with learning disabilities in colleges in recent years – exacerbated by austerity cuts, and loss of community based facilities
- Concerns about cuts to curriculum areas such as Creative Industries – believe was based on questionable evidence
- Perceptions that places have reduced and specifically target younger people
- Funding cuts

- Lack of finance information/knowledge about what entitled to
- Lack of career support
- Restrictive criteria for bursary and SAAS awards
- Affordable and suitable childcare
- Poor school preparation
- Internal processing of funding support for non-native speakers – support for completing applications
- Concerns about affecting benefits – traps people – very stressful
- Having to apply for hardship or discretionary funds when already at time of pressure can be too much for some people – should be offered at the start
- Lack of choice in subjects in school and college
- Erosion of community based and outreach provision – affecting vulnerable learners

Dispositional Barriers (Attitudinal/Confidence)

- Lack of confidence
- Lack of motivation
- Feeling too old in comparison to other students
- Negative experiences at school

Who in particular do you think is affected by these?

- Low income groups
- Those with few qualifications
- Those with caring responsibilities
- Those in poverty
- Unemployed
- Those with disabilities and chronic health conditions
- Most reductions in student numbers are women and over 25s (Audit Scotland 2016 report)
- Those who cannot travel easily, for disability or confidence reasons
- Care leavers
- Adult returners to education
- First generation attendees of HE or FE
- Refugees and asylum seekers
- Young parents
- Older learners
- Those with negative experiences of structured learning
- Young people
- Single parents
- People living in deprived areas
- Part-time learners
- Those with poor literacy skills

- Those who have experienced homelessness
- Those who do not want to lose benefits by studying full-time
- Young, white males
- ESOL learners

What could be done to remove these barriers?

Situational Barriers (Personal Circumstances)

- Discounted childcare
- Shorter introduction courses
- Travel concessions for learners
- Local student travel support

Institutional/Structural Barriers

- Better promotion of activities
- Make use of distance learning
- More publicising of the direct link between courses and employment
- Greater awareness of funding options
- Clear, simple websites that are easy to use
- Working in collaboration with places people go (doctors surgeries etc.)
- Funding – to restore lost places, extend community provision, meet demand for part-time study
- People on benefits should be allowed to claim a bursary
- Strongly marketed Lifelong Learning campaign that is community based, with joined up provision of colleges and community learning providers
- Include stories from successful adult learners in the People Make Glasgow campaign
- Flexible, shared lifelong learning budgets for priority areas to ensure local learning needs can be addressed
- Improve guidance and information services to meet individual needs
- Review arrangements to fund City of Glasgow new build – to avoid this dominating FE provision
- Meaningful collaboration between colleges – clear entrance and progression routes
- Genuine understanding of learner needs RE travel, childcare timetabling, learner support
- Meaningful engagement with elected teaching staff reps, stakeholders, learners and support staff
- Full and proper EQIAs
- Reform of college boards to make them more representative of the communities they serve – more representation from elected staff and TU reps
- Colleges working in partnership with communities groups

- Increase funding of those most 'at risk' of not staying on the course
- Information available in different formats (audio), easy to access and understand
- Take in to account work experience in application criteria
- Ability to accept paper-based applications
- ESOL specialist support
- More liaison between training companies and training initiatives
- More community based adult learning opportunities
- Focus on continuous improvement – specific example of college where if everything is fine, then no changes made
- Rethink how benefits are handled for people on full-time courses
- Flexible course timings
- More variety of part-time provision
- Earlier engagement and support at pre-application stage
- Financial advice and planning
- Faster processing of bursaries
- A body to mediate between the council and young people RE schools
- Tailoring learning support
- More counsellors at school level
- More teaching support for those with learning disabilities

Dispositional Barriers (Attitudinal/Confidence)

- More focus on confidence building and making it less intimidating

Email Responses

Barriers to participation in college and lifelong learning

Situational (Personal Circumstances)

- Transport issues / cost
- Lack of pre-entry requirements
- Physical / disability / mental health issues
- Childcare issues / caring responsibilities
- Poverty

Institutional/Structural

- Lack of knowledge / information / advice / guidance (where to start, funding, courses and entry requirements etc.)
- Financial impacts / issues to benefits
- Physical barriers (inaccessible buildings, lack of accessible affordable transport)
- Lack of support for transition / progress / pre-entry
- Lack of understanding / awareness / support for people with disabilities
- Funding issues (paying for support)
- Lack of support for community based learning to progress to next stage
- Limited information on current needs within the city (adult literacies, ESOL needs)
- Concerns about STEM subject courses not being filled, and lack of female representation (Councillor Dalton)

Dispositional (Attitudinal/Confidence)

- Age (too old to start learning again)
- Confidence / self-esteem / aspirations

Who is most affected by these barriers?

- Single parents / learners with caring responsibilities
- Learners with a disability / physical / mental health issues
- Students from poor backgrounds / experiencing in-work poverty
- Students over 25yrs olds
- Learners who have not engaged since school / had a bad experience at school
- Those who lack formal qualifications
- Students with additional support needs

- Learners with English language support needs
- Students with confidence / communication issues
- Students with care experience

Solutions to remove barriers

Situational (Personal Circumstances)

- Improved childcare provision
- Discounted / free transport
- Improved / Additional support for learners (for those going back to education, transition and progression)
- Community based learning

Institutional/Structural

- Better / clearer / easy to understand information about courses, costs, funding etc.
- Wider / increased promotion of lifelong learning to individuals, families, communities and employers
- Reasonable adjustments made to accommodate disabled learners
- Flexible courses (start times, days of the week etc.)
- Better / more partnership working
- Additional / improved support for learners with additional needs
- Full understanding / mapping of adult learning needs in the city
- Supporting skills for life and expanding work-based learning opportunities between schools/colleges and employers

Dispositional (Attitudinal/Confidence)

- Age appropriate groups / smaller groups (particularly for lone parents, older learners who have been out of education, learners with confidence issues)
- Pre-course / introductory learning (helps to build confidence, support with essay writing, study tips etc.)
- Mentors / key named people allocated to aid / help new learners and anyone with additional needs