
Performance and Resources Committee

Date of Meeting	Wednesday 14 December 2022
Paper Title	Scottish Government Skills Delivery Independent Review
Agenda Item	11
Paper Number	PRC2-G
Responsible Officer	Martin Boyle, Executive Director
Status	Disclosable
Action	For noting

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1** On 22 September 2022 the Scottish Government announced the independent review of the skills delivery landscape in Scotland¹, primarily focusing on ensuring that ‘the public body landscape for skills remains fit to meet the challenges and opportunities of the future’.
- 1.2** This review is intended to focus primarily on the functions and remit of Skills Development Scotland (SDS) and its interface with – and role within – the wider skills system, alongside the Scottish Funding Council, and considering the design and delivery of Scotland’s apprenticeship qualifications, regional and sectoral skills planning, and employer engagement.
- 1.3** An initial call for evidence² was launched on 28 October and runs to 23 December 2022, with the review scheduled to conclude in spring 2023.
- 1.4** Given GCRB’s central role in the funding, planning and monitoring of the Glasgow college system, the volume of learners involved in skills development in Scotland, and our wider interest in supporting a coherent, effective skills eco-system for the Glasgow region, it is proposed that the GCRB Executive Director submits a response to the initial call for evidence. The final version of this response will be concluded after the Executive Director attends a workshop scheduled to support respondents.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1** Committee is invited to **comment** upon and **note** the proposed GCRB submission to this national review.

¹ <https://www.gov.scot/groups/skills-delivery-landscape-independent-review/>

² <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-skills-delivery-landscape-call-evidence-behalf-james-withers-advisor-scottish-government/>

3. Report

- 3.1** The following draft is the intended submission from GCRB to the national skills review call for evidence. It will be updated following scheduled attendance at the forthcoming skills workshop for FE/HE.

Skills Delivery Landscape: Independent Review

Call for Evidence Response: Glasgow Colleges' Regional Board

16 December 2022

This is a time of significance for Scotland's education and skills systems, with the nation seeking to manage the significant challenges created by a wide range of issues, including the post-pandemic landscape, an ageing population, Brexit, climate change, the digital industrial revolution and the economy.

A high-functioning skills system can, and must, be part of the coherent response to all of these issues, recognising that an effective talent pipeline of skilled citizens provides greater life chances, improved outcomes in education, health and wellbeing, increased productivity, while providing the critical foundation from which our businesses can thrive.

Progress has been made, and there is now a significantly heightened understanding of the importance of a coherent, effective, agile and well-funded skills system to support the nation's ambitions. Progress has been made in delivering more apprenticeship qualifications, to widening access to 'non-traditional' routes of study in further and higher education, to embedding work placements an in-work learning and assessment as part our education and training offering. A continued focus on the development of opportunities in this space can only continue to raise the profile of alternate education routes.

There is, however, a distance still to travel in delivering a system which is effectively funded, coordinated and positioned to ensure that skills education gains genuine parity of esteem and education value to other routes. There remains opportunity to improve the planning, funding, development of the delivery of apprenticeship qualifications.

And in the widest sense there remains a significant opportunity for Scotland to reinvigorate, and rearticulate, its national approach to the development and delivery of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET).

Glasgow Colleges' Regional Board, therefore, welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the review of the current skills delivery landscape.

The design and delivery of apprenticeship programmes

Where there is evidence of a sound eco-system of partnership and cooperation, the skills system shows clear evidence of flourishing. In these instances, secondary education has embraced the opportunities for diversification and specialisation presented by Foundation Apprenticeships, providing more relevant skills training at an earlier stage, often with effective partnerships between local authorities, colleges and business. Continuing to grow this model and establishing it as the norm across all regions would provide significant benefit to learners and regional economies,

provide viable, high-value non-university routes for learners and providing a template for effective regional multi-organisational cooperation which may be replicated at other levels.

Further work is required to ensure that Foundation Apprenticeships, and multi-organisational partner delivery become the norm, rather than being seen as a threat to traditional delivery in the Senior Phase.

In addition, clearer and more consistent provision and communication is required across the current apprenticeship 'family' of Foundation, Modern and Graduate Apprenticeships. The current post-compulsory landscape is a crowded and competitive one with a range of different qualifications at the same SCQF level intending to deliver the same, or very similar, outcomes. For example, SCQF level 7 currently sees Advanced Highers, Apprenticeships, Higher Nationals and degrees all available, often in the same industries or sectors, often with similar characteristics such as employer placement, TVET skills acquisition, specific-industry focus, dual-purpose progression to employment and/or further study. The skills landscape requires clear, unambiguous delineation of purpose, intention, structure and place in the learner journey to ensure return on investment, added value and removal of duplication and repetition.

More broadly, there remains some concern the genuine ability of all apprenticeship qualifications to fulfil all elements of true apprenticeship, including rich, embedded work placement and wider employability skills development, as opposed to being a duplication of pre-existing qualifications elsewhere. In addition, the ability of all qualifications to remain up-to-date and effectively aligned to industry needs can be impacted by long lead times for development and revision.

Level, volume, progression and intended purpose all require to be explicit, ensuring that key stakeholders, including educators and students, local authorities and business, all have absolute clarity on all aspects of the apprenticeship system. This can only be achieved if it is a part of – rather than apart from – the rest of the education system in schools and colleges.

The unique selling point of delivering or undertaking an apprenticeship qualification in Scotland must be clear to all for the qualifications to have genuine value and long-term positive impact for students and for the nation.

Regional and sectoral skills planning

There is significant opportunity for Scotland to increase the effectiveness of its skills system and to have a positive impact on productivity. The targeting and tailoring of policy, alongside the targeting and tailoring of funding at a regional level is critical. In order to do this in a meaningful manner, funding should be provided with the incentive of meeting regional skills need and disincentivising areas which fail to meet this alignment.

Skills Development Scotland's regional skills data and analysis has become significantly more effective, and the delivery of this rich level of data will be vital in continuing to develop the skills system. The next logical step in this process is for funding to align with regional data, but this is only fully manageable in a system with one clear, coherent and aligned funding system as opposed to the complex multiple-bodies system which currently exists.

Employer engagement

Employer engagement is a vital element of any skills system. We have moved away from the 20th century model of careers for life to a much more complex world of careers changes in which lifelong

learning is of vital importance, and where individuals will be required to regularly update or change their skillset to meet the increased pace of technical and technological change.

Effective, sustainable and consistent interfaces for education to work coherently with employers is important. Sector skills information, rich data on business needs, and clear sight of impending changes will ensure that lifelong learning remains as relevant as possible at all times. Useful forums for whole-system planning and development are vital.

One model could be the formal creation of National Schools of Excellence residing within a specific specialist college. This could then be the lead organisation for convening the cross-parties community of interest, for monitoring and developing qualifications, and for the development of standards. This would also allow Scotland to establish a more clearly articulated network of specialist schools, remove repetition and increase partnership.

SDS and SFC interface and an aligned skills system

From an education and skills delivery perspective there is evident inefficiency in the requirement to work with two separate and distinct organisations in the planning, funding, reporting and delivery of qualifications.

This can lead to an increased administrative burden at various levels. At a strategic level this creates a disjointed approach to regional skills and qualifications planning, and to a regional curriculum which requires to be planned across multiple organisations. Different funding models, timeframes and reporting requirements has a clear impact on the ability to deliver a coherent regional model.

At a management and delivery level this can lead to a complex and disjointed delivery model. More can be done to align all elements of the skills system with the rest of the funding, planning and reporting landscape.

In particular, there would be significant value in moving away from apprenticeship delivery which is tied to short-term bidding and funding models which create uncertainty, prevent long term coherence and bring unnecessary uncertainty to the heart of the system.

Direct funding of apprenticeships to colleges and Regional Strategic Bodies would add clarity, remove bureaucracy and uncertainty and allow colleges as lead regional skills delivery partners to make coherent multi-year plans. Direct funding should come as part of a college or region's block grant along with the rest of its allocation, bringing all elements of curriculum planning into alignment and removing unnecessary regional competition.

The alignment of all elements of Scotland's further, higher and skills education systems would allow for a streamlined, integrated system.

Under such a model, a coherent eco-system of colleges, universities, business and local authorities would be expected to operate effectively and collaboratively to best direct resource. Funding would be specifically made available on the basis of direct evidence of meeting national and regional skills gaps, aligned at a national level to the National Strategy for Economic Transformation and at a regional level to both regional skills analysis data and regional strategy, such as the Glasgow Economic Strategy. Financial incentivisation at a national and regional level could direct availability of appropriate skills education.

TVET Qualifications

More broadly, Scotland has a significant opportunity to refresh and re-articulate the value of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in a broader post-school education and skills landscape.

Globalisation, digitalisation, climate change, demographic change and various other impacts are changing the way we work, learn and live. The OECD has made significant progress in reviewing and developing skills strategies for various nations. There is now clear evidence of countries where there is greater participation, greater investment, and greater output across coherent skills systems, and both the UK and Scotland can learn much from these.

In broad terms, nations which have placed a high value on Vocational Education and Training have made significant progress in heightening the value and esteem attached to vocational and skills qualifications, and to more effectively articulating non-university routes, training and lifelong learning at the heart of improving a nation's productivity.

In order for Scotland to fully unlock the potential in this area, much can be learned from several European nations' 'technical schools' models.

In addition, the 'crowded landscape' at various SCQF levels could be significantly simplified and unified, particularly in vocational training areas. There are significant areas in which Advanced Highers, Modern Apprenticeships, Graduate Apprenticeships, HNC/D, BA and BSc are all available at SCQF 7/8 across similar vocational pathways. This amounts to significant repetition, independent development and maintenance of qualifications, and a lack of clarity for students, parents and carers, and business. The opportunity for clear rationalisation and alignment would be of significant benefit in allowing Scotland to direct finite resources for greater impact rather than continuing to dilute investment and create unnecessary competition across organisations.

Colleges remain the very best place for technical and vocational skills education and training to take place. By refocusing this significant opportunity, we also free up our universities to focus their expertise in their core areas, moving us towards a more clearly articulated tertiary system.

Conclusion

Significant progress has been made in Scotland in developing rich data, building skills-focused qualifications, and beginning to tell the story of the importance of technical and vocational education and training.

There are, however, significant opportunities to improve this system via clarity of purpose, the removal of duplication, confusion and competition in the systems of funding, planning and reporting, and by ensuring skills training resides in the most appropriate place.

There is then real opportunity to innovate and evolve the system to push on and model a future system which is focused more fully on regional skills needs, coherent partnership, and data-led unified funding.

Martin Boyle

Executive Director, Glasgow Colleges' Regional Board

November 2022

4. Risk and Compliance Analysis

4.1 There are no direct risk or compliance issues associated with this report. However, the wider effective delivery of a coherent skills system is of direct importance to the Glasgow college system.

5. Financial and Resource Analysis

5.1 There are no direct finance or resource issues associated with this report. However, the effective funding and management of apprenticeship programmes in the Glasgow college system has a direct impact on finance.

6. Equalities Implications

6.1 There are no direct equalities implications associated with this report.

7. Learner Implications

7.1 The effective, coherent and efficient delivery of a relevant skills system is of direct importance to learners in the Glasgow college system, and as such there is significant value in working towards an improved model.