

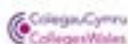
The College of the Future

The UK-wide final report
from the Independent
Commission on the
College of the Future

October 2020



The Independent Commission on the College of the Future is kindly supported by:



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The Commissioners wanted to pay special thanks to Lewis Cooper, Philippa Alway and David Cragg for the work they put in to make the Commission a success. Their advice, support, organisation, inspiration and management of the Commission's work has been first class and we owe a lot to them.

Foreword



Sir Ian Diamond

Chair of the Independent Commission on the College of the Future and the UK's National Statistician

What do we want and need from our colleges from 2030 onwards, and how do we get there? These were the simple, yet fundamental questions our Commission set out to answer when we began our work in Spring 2019.

In light of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, we are now publishing this report in a totally different context. The long-term challenges facing the economy and wider society have not changed since we started this process: the issues relating to the climate crisis, technological developments, demographic changes, poor productivity and endemic regional and social inequalities are still top of the agenda. The huge difference is that the pandemic makes addressing these challenges all the more immediate and brings them into starker focus. The issues set out through this report must be front and centre of the policy agenda as we seek to achieve a skills-led recovery to the ongoing health crisis, and to rebuild healthy, connected and cohesive communities.

Thriving societies built on the foundations of fairness and sustainability need strong, collaborative and inclusive colleges that empower people with the skills they need to get on in life, support better productivity and innovation of businesses, and strengthen every community's sense of place. This report is a rallying cry for radical and decisive action in order to enable colleges to fulfil that role within a more joined-up, all-age education and skills system, allowing individuals ultimately to have greater agency and opportunities right across their lifetimes.

A strength of this Commission is that, for the first time, it has taken a four nations perspective on the current and future role of colleges and college systems across the UK. This approach has meant we can draw on and distil the rich diversity of policy and practice across the four nations as well as engaging college leaders, practitioners and policy makers in shaping our conclusions and recommendations. We also recognise an emerging and important shared trajectory, which our report echoes and endorses.

Thriving societies built on the foundations of fairness and sustainability, need strong, collaborative, and inclusive colleges

This report sets out recommendations for reform and renewal of the college systems with important implications for colleges and their governments in each of the four nations. At the same time, we fully respect and acknowledge the different policy and operational contexts in which colleges are working. We will therefore be publishing nation specific reports later this year, setting out focussed recommendations relevant to their individual circumstances. We hope that this should, in turn, provide a basis for ongoing collaboration in the exchange of policy and practice across the four nations. All are important - but there are three elements that must be priorities for all governments.

1 Upskilling people across the UK by making it possible for everyone to learn throughout their lives, whatever route they choose to take – with a statutory right to lifelong learning.

This must be supported by (1) equity across student finance and maintenance support for further and higher education to ensure everyone can live well whilst gaining the skills they need, and (2) a statutory entitlement in each nation to all English-Northern Irish-Welsh Level 3/ Scottish Level 6 qualifications, unlocking the opportunity for more people to progress to more advanced levels of vocational education and thus the skills needed for the economy of the future.

2 Backing business, driving innovation and addressing skills gaps.

Colleges must be empowered to develop a unique service for local employers for training and upskilling future and current employees and innovation support. The development of new ways for employers to make the education and skills system work for their needs should include sector specialist ‘employer hubs’. Colleges will also expect to work with employer groups in the design of the curriculum.

3 Creating an impactful post-16 education and skills system that addresses unproductive competition between institutions.

This will ensure that everyone can access high-quality education and learning that works for them. Each nation must affirm a 10-year strategy that will deliver on national priorities for the economy and society and clearly sets out the transformational role that colleges play for people, businesses and communities.

Elements of what we set out in this report will be familiar to many – drawing on past practices or principles which are agreed but not always enacted. Given that many of these themes have been discussed for some time within each of the four nations, our central call is for action. And given the challenges we face, not least and most immediately because of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, now really is the time.

If we achieve this vision, colleges will be recognised and rewarded by governments across the UK as having an important role at the heart of public policy. Parents and guardians will aspire for their children to attend college as an equally prestigious route as university. People working in colleges would recommend it as a place to work – where remuneration is fair and reflects their expertise, where they have clear development opportunities, where the leadership is diverse and fully reflective of the communities that they serve and where all staff are able to focus on what is best for their students and their community. Employers will see the college network as a key source of strategic support – as a place they turn to as they seek to innovate and develop. And people of all ages will see their local college as a place of learning and support throughout their lives.

I wish to thank our Commissioners and expert panel for their invaluable contributions. Crucially, I want to thank the many thousands of people who have engaged with us throughout our work – including college leaders, staff and students, employers of all sizes, universities, schools, independent training providers, trade unions, students’ unions, politicians and civil servants in national, regional and local governments, academics and so many others who have contributed and been consulted throughout our process. The ideas in this report reflect a collective optimism of those we have spoken with for an expanded role for colleges in delivering the change our society and economy needs – and an urgency to put this into action.



About us

The Independent Commission on the College of the Future was launched in Spring 2019 as a UK-wide, four nations process, asking two simple questions: what do we want and need from colleges from 2030 onwards, and how do we get there?

The Independent Commission was commissioned by the Four Nations College Alliance – which brings together college leaders, their representative bodies and senior government officials from across the four nations of the UK.

The Commissioners chaired by Sir Ian Diamond – have held roundtable and workshop events with a broad range of individuals and organisations across the UK. They are supported by an expert panel, who have been feeding in throughout the process.



The Independent Commission has benefited from learnings across the four nations of the UK, drawing lessons and insights from reform trajectories and from exemplary institutional practices. As part of its work, the Commission has:

- Hosted or presented at over 150 events across the UK, including with college senior leaders, governors, staff and students, employers, universities, schools, local, regional and national governments, unions and many others.
- Invited international experts from the Basque Country, Ireland, Finland, Slovenia, the Netherlands and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to contribute to the Commission's thinking – including with a public seminar held jointly with the British Academy in September 2019, with over 100 stakeholders and members of the public.
- Published a Progress Report reflecting themes emanating from early engagement with a consultation process in November 2019, receiving over 60 responses from a wide range of organisations and individuals.
- Published a vision for the college of the future in July 2020, accompanied by a set of essays from education and skills experts.
- Published a report exploring the relationship between the NHS and the English college system in September 2020 as an example of how the Commission's thinking can drive change with this important employer.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

WHAT DO WE WANT AND NEED
FROM THE COLLEGE OF THE
FUTURE BY 2030?



The Commission's vision for the college of the future

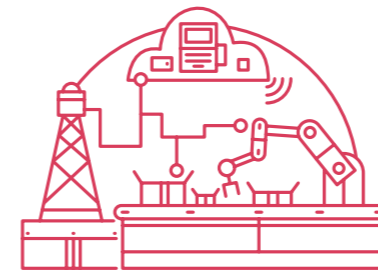
Colleges are a fundamental piece of the education and skills system

Colleges transform lives and are at the heart of communities across the UK's four nations. They are a fundamental piece of the education and skills system as centres of lifelong learning and as anchor institutions within their communities. Despite all of this, all too often, college resources and expertise can be poorly understood, under-utilised and insufficiently funded in relation to other parts of the education and skills system.

Colleges can and must play a strong and central role in responding to challenges and transformations, from global megatrends like climate change to immediate crises such as COVID-19, as well as the changing demands, aspirations and expectations of people, employers and communities. That is why the Independent Commission on the College of the Future is calling for a new vision for colleges.



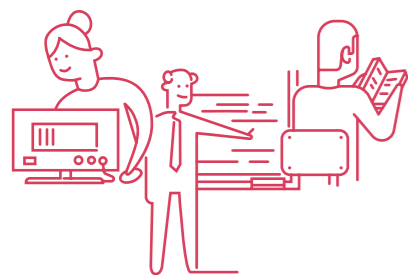
The college of the future will empower **people** throughout their lives with the skills they need to get on in life, support better **productivity** and innovation of businesses, and strengthen every community's sense of **place**.



For **productivity**, colleges will provide strategic advice and support for employers to drive business change, innovation and future workforce planning.

Across the UK, we suffer from poor levels of productivity – and key changes mean that employers of all sizes have big challenges and opportunities to respond to, across the climate emergency, industrial revolution 4.0 and changing relationships across the world.

The college of the future will play an expanded role in innovation and knowledge transfer, whilst also equipping employees with opportunities to develop new skills.



For **people**, colleges will be a touchpoint throughout their lives and in a changing world.

The changes and challenges that we face mean that people need to be able to engage with education and training throughout their lives to have the skills and opportunities they need for good jobs and to live well.

The college of the future will offer flexible and blended learning and guidance to empower each person to get a job, progress in their career and be an active citizen.



For **place**, colleges will have the resources and funding to play an even greater role in fostering healthy and connected communities.

Colleges are important anchor institutions in communities across the UK, but this dimension is not sufficiently supported or incentivised.

The college of the future will position this role as a central part of their strategic mission, such as by promoting public health and social inclusion.

How do we realise this vision for the college of the future by 2030?

A nation-specific education and skills strategy

Recommendation 1

National strategies for education and skills to support economic growth, industrial change and lifelong learning.

Governments need to articulate a ten-year vision for education and training. From schools through to adult skills, this would enable individuals of all abilities and circumstances, regardless of age or their career stage, to continue to learn, train and reskill, and would support better connection and coordination between delivery partners.

Each nation will develop its own national strategy which supports its respective industrial/economic strategy. This will be based on a whole government approach with better integration across employment and skills to enhance lifelong learning, social inclusion and active ageing - and to facilitate stronger partnerships nationally and locally/regionally. National strategies will provide a flexible implementation framework for college networks/regional colleges which they can apply in their individual contexts. Working closely with employers and other key partners, they will support the development of the whole workforce as well as initial education with opportunities for everyone to progress in their careers and actively contribute to their community.



A networked approach

Recommendation 2

College network strategies to meet local priorities across the tertiary education system.

Governments must introduce a duty on colleges to develop strategies across appropriate economic geographies that identify local and regional needs and priorities in line with the national strategy. These will be developed in consultation with employers and other key stakeholders, especially other education providers, and will deliver a coordinated approach to the learning and training offer. They will align to the local industrial structure, economic development plans and employment needs, strategic employer engagement, workforce development and local investment plans, including capital investment.

This also requires a matched duty on other tertiary providers to collaborate, including universities, schools, independent training providers and adult community learning providers. This will be reinforced through institutional/network outcome agreements across the appropriate economic geography, focused on long-term systems priorities.

Recommendation 3

Colleges as anchor institutions within the wider local and regional ecosystem.

Colleges must have a recognised role as key anchor institutions in the local community, supporting wider community action and services as well as providing education and learning. The new college network strategies will help build stronger partnerships with other public and private agencies and civic partners and their wider investment plans locally and regionally. This will seek to ensure a more coherent and connected approach not only on skills and learning but in relation to colleges' wider civic role, adding value to the existing ecosystem in a range of areas including business enterprise, public health, lifelong learning, eliminating digital exclusion and supporting social integration. Key partners will include employers and employer representative bodies, universities, schools and adult and community learning providers, the NHS, local authorities, student and trade unions and relevant charities.

A lifetime service

Recommendation 4

A statutory right to lifelong learning.

For people to fulfil their potential, there should be a statutory right for people to be able to upskill and retrain throughout their lives through access to affordable and relevant lifelong learning opportunities. This should include a statutory free lifetime entitlement to studying or training up to English-Northern Irish-Welsh L3/Scottish L6 – essential as the minimum platform which enables people to secure good quality jobs in a modern economy. This entitlement should allow free choice for all adults across all publicly-funded tertiary education and training providers.

Funding should be equalised across further and higher education routes, with students able to access the maintenance support they need to engage in education and training, based on the following principles:

- i) Equal maintenance support across loans and grants is available for individuals in further and higher education and advanced skills training, adequate to an individual's needs whether part-time or full-time, so that everyone has the opportunity to pursue the route best suited to them throughout their lifetime.
- ii) Flexibility in the use of the entitlement and any associated maintenance support in grants and/or loans so that individuals able to build up their skills over time to match both their evolving career development needs and their personal circumstances.
- iii) Unemployed people do not lose their welfare benefits where they use their entitlement to reskill/retrain full-time in areas of identified job opportunities and skills shortages.

Recommendation 5

Skills guarantee for a post-COVID economy and future labour market changes.

COVID-19 has had a major impact on a range of sectors, causing large-scale dislocation and accelerating radical wider long-term changes taking place in the labour market. People affected need targeted investment on top of the lifetime learning entitlement to upskill, retrain and reskill to help them find work in higher demand priority sectors. This offer should supplement any previous qualifications an individual has to help them maintain relevant skills, including in strategic priority sectors such as the green economy. The Skills Guarantee would provide free training to upskill employees at all levels including English-Northern Irish-Welsh Level 4/Scottish Level 7. It should allow maximum flexibility to meet sector needs and to enable upskilling of employees over time in line with the needs of the business. Incentives should be offered to SMEs in the form of a contribution to wage replacement costs to encourage uptake and to contribute to productivity improvements in the wider economy.

Delivering with and for employers

Recommendation 6

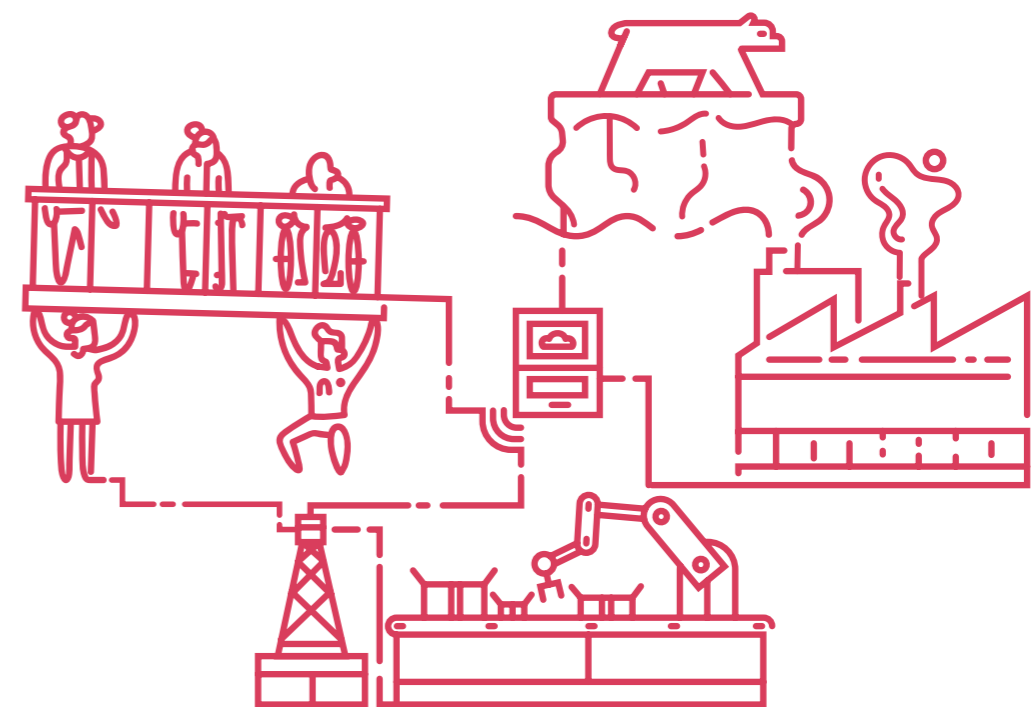
A new strategic partnership with employers.

Colleges need close strategic partnerships with employers, nationally and locally/regionally to ensure that the new national and network strategies (recommendations 1, 2 and 3) meet the needs of employers as well as people and their communities. Major employers find it easier to engage, so colleges will need to reach out to SMEs and work closely with employer representative bodies, with significant scope for strengthening partnerships with sectoral networks too at national, regional and local levels.

Recommendation 7

A new support service to employers.

Colleges have an expanded role to play in providing a business support and brokerage service to employers. This will provide the basis for establishing recognised sector/skills-focused employer hubs appropriate to the local labour market priorities. Greater coordination between partners locally/regionally will open up the facilities and expertise of colleges to provide more enhanced support to employers. It will encourage innovation by employers, support long-term workforce development plans and help move to a higher productivity, more technologically enabled and net-zero carbon economy.



Mission-driven funding, governance and accountability

Recommendation 8

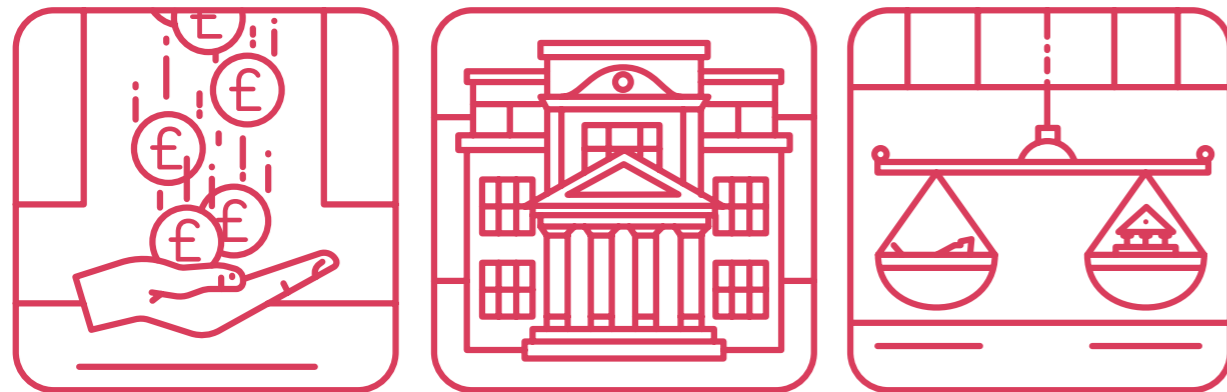
Stable funding and accountability frameworks for colleges.

Ensuring that colleges can take a long-term strategic focus and reinforcing strategic investment in colleges, the sector must be funded on the basis of three-year, block grant funding settlements, reflecting a trust-based strategic partnership between colleges and governments. This should be based on high-level strategic outcome agreements focused on strategic impacts, aligned to the agreed local network strategies.

Recommendation 9

A strategic relationship with governments and simplified processes.

Oversight systems across the four nations must be simplified, driving efficiency, engendering greater trust and enabling better strategic coordination to deliver for systems outcomes across people, productivity and place. This must include developing a single post-16 education oversight and funding body within each nation (or, in the case of NI, a coordinated approach within government). This will be crucial to ensuring a coherent lifelong education service, and to addressing nugatory competition between colleges and with other education providers.



Leading the way

Recommendation 10

An ambitious future college workforce strategy.

Colleges need the best people who are fully empowered to deliver on this vision. To ensure this we must see colleges working with governments across the four nations to develop ambitious college workforce strategies, based on a comprehensive review. A new social partnership between colleges, unions, employers and governments within each nation would oversee key strategic priorities, including:

- Ensuring and recognising the professional status of the college teaching workforce and the ongoing evolution of the profession with a focus on continuous personal development, an expansion in secondment opportunities and a focus on developing diverse routes into the sector with a much more porous relationship with industry.
- Recognising and responding to changing aspirations and expectations of people, employers and communities, and the implications of this across both pedagogy and delivery – including a focus on staff development opportunities and wellbeing.
- A proliferation in support functions including across careers advice, business support and student representation.
- Significant investment in the digital skills of the college workforce.

The status of the college workforce should be further developed and extended through the establishment of a new UK-wide teaching network.

Recommendation 11

Diverse and representative systems leaders.

Colleges must be led by systems leaders who reflect the communities within which they are based and the students they serve. College representative organisations must review representation in leadership structures with a focus on systematic, mandatory data collection on college leaders and governors by protected characteristics, including across race, gender, sexuality and disability. This data must be used to identify gaps in diversity and to develop targeted recruitment and development programmes in under-represented groups.

The Four Nations College Alliance should work with partner organisations across the UK to champion systems leadership capacities and competences including through the ongoing peer development programme.

Chapter one

CONTEXT

THE CHALLENGES OF TODAY
AND TOMORROW



Context

Whilst the skills and labour market challenges in each nation in the UK vary, there are a number of common trends

The world is changing at a rapid pace – with longstanding global trends being met with more immediate and more local challenges. There is a need to make decisions and take action to mitigate the impact of these complex and interdependent challenges, and lead the way in shaping a fairer, more sustainable and prosperous future for all.

“Combined, megatrends are creating pressure for people to develop new and higher levels of skills, as well as to continue upskilling throughout life and to use their skills more effectively. Many of these same trends are also creating opportunities for people with the right skills to proactively transform our economies and societies for the better.”

OECD Skills Strategy 2019 - https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/oecd-skills-strategy-2019_9789264313835-en

With colleges at the intersection of so many policy areas, from education, training and employment to innovation and social inclusion, it is important to identify the trends that are transforming the world. Whilst the skills and labour market challenges in each nation in the UK vary, there are a number of common trends.



Ageing population

A demographic time-bomb is ticking, with replacement demand far outstripping the supply of young people entering the labour market. Indeed, by 2030, the population of those aged 65 is projected to increase by 42 per cent, while the percentage of those aged 14-64 is forecast to grow by 3 per cent (UKCES 2014). Challenges in terms of replacement demand are exacerbated by a lack of high-quality work experience opportunities for young people and employers' reliance on prior experience when recruiting (UKCSED 2011; Purcell et al 2017). At the same time, the economic fallout from the coronavirus has taken the UK into uncharted territory, with fears that an additional 640,000 18-24-year-olds could find themselves unemployed this year alone (Resolution Foundation, 2020).



Climate change

The challenge posed by the climate crisis is existential, and the consequent changes are already greatly impacting on our lives and our world (IPPC, 2014). To mitigate the magnitude of global warming and the climate crisis, urgent action must be taken. This means dramatic changes to industries, with people needing to develop skills in new areas and continued change to the way that people live. The Committee on Climate Change (2020) has argued for governments across the four nations to develop coordinated strategies for a net-zero workforce, integrating relevant skills into education frameworks. The Committee has additionally argued that education systems have a wider role to play supporting the transition to a net-zero economy and preparing for the risks of climate change including the need for greater public awareness and understanding, and the need for technical skills in the workforce.



Globalisation and changing trading relationships

The increasing interconnectedness of the world and the changes in the environment mean that people and goods will move around the globe in new ways. Migration flows will shift to follow the changes in economic demands and employment opportunities. Reverse migration is likely where there are areas of decline in the UK. At the same time, the UK's withdrawal from the European Union means changes in the immigration and trade policies of the UK with reductions in EU migrant labour in many higher-skilled technical occupations are exacerbating the current pressures on the supply of skilled labour, which is critical to the UK's place in the world (Cedefop, 2019). Trade deals could have a significant impact on different industries, placing significant pressures on local, regional and national economies, in addition to academic cooperation and exchange (Dhingra et al, 2016).



Industrial revolution 4.0

Advances in information and communications technologies (ICTs), artificial intelligence (AI), virtual reality (VR) and robotics are profoundly changing the way people work, learn, communicate and live. This has the potential to support smarter and more agile ways of living and working in future, requiring a different skillset and fundamentally changing notions of career pathways – with increasing emphasis on higher and more specialised skills, and a consequent need for lifelong learning. At the same time, there are stark challenges around digital inclusion (in the workplace, in accessing public services, and in participating in society), the displacement of jobs with task automation, and concerns around privacy and safety (CSJ, 2019). The global pandemic has accelerated the application and development of new technologies, responding to and creating new demands – as well as highlighting shortcomings in digital infrastructure, resources and skills across all sectors.



Equality, diversity and social inclusion

The slowdown in social mobility is impacting directly on the labour market and the supply of skilled workers, with a disproportionate effect on groups who continue to suffer from structural disadvantage and discrimination (intersectionally, including across class, race, gender, sexuality and disability) – who consequently struggle to get both into quality jobs, and to subsequently progress. There are also longstanding regional inequities, notably in communities previously economically dependent on traditional industry, and with many rural and semi-rural communities struggling with ongoing urbanisation (2070 Commission, 2020). All of this risks being exacerbated by the economic fallout from the pandemic with the UK economy having shrunk by 24.5 per cent from February to May 2020 (ONS, 2020) and anticipated to suffer significantly over the longer term. Vulnerable workers, including in the hospitality and retail sectors, have been hit hardest and are likely to particularly struggle to recover.



New approaches to growth

With a growing population and climate change at the same time as economic uncertainty, there are increasing calls and movement towards an approach to growth centred around sustainability and inclusivity. With an emphasis on universal services, responsible business and good work to avoid social exclusion and environmental degradation, this requires a different approach from the state at a national level and anchor institutions at a local level.

Colleges across the four nations

Northern Ireland

Population: 1.8 million people

6 regional colleges educating over 80,000 students per year on 148,000 courses and employing 3,500 staff.

There are 64,000 adult enrolments and 84,000 enrolments from young people aged 19 or under.

The Department for the Economy is responsible for the policy, strategic development and financing of the statutory FE sector in Northern Ireland.

Wales

Population: 3.2 million people

13 colleges educating over 122,000 students per year and employing 7,500 staff.

College provision includes nearly 20,000 people in work-based learning courses.

There are 47,000 young people (under 19) and nearly 75,000 adults studying at Welsh colleges.

Colleges in Wales are funded directly by the Welsh Government and are subject to inspection by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales (Estyn).

Scotland

Population: 5.3 million people

26 colleges within 13 regions, educating over 270,000 students per year including 47,000 people studying a degree level course and over 10,000 modern apprentices.

There are 110,000 young people (under 19) and 154,000 adults studying in Scottish colleges who collectively employ approximately 11,000 staff. Colleges in Scotland are funded by and accountable to The Scottish Funding Council.

England

Population: 53 million people

238 colleges educating over 2.2 million students per year, employing approximately 111,000 full time equivalent staff.

Training provided to more than 1.4 million adults including nearly 137,000 degree level students and 195,000 adult apprenticeships.

Education and training for 16-18 year-olds reached 669,000 people, plus an additional 69,000 apprentices.

Colleges are funded principally by the Education & Skills Funding Agency (ESFA), while higher education provision is regulated and funded via the Office for Students (OfS).

The college system

Across the college sectors in the UK there is a strong consensus that these challenges require an ambitious, holistic and sustainable post-16 skills and education system. Throughout the work of the Commission we have seen that colleges stand ready to build on the economic and social purpose that is embedded in their history to meet the rapidly changing needs of the labour market and communities. Whilst colleges are taking steps to deliver on these interconnected agendas, current policy and investments in each of the four nations must be renewed and reformed in order for colleges to play their fullest role.

Chapter two

WHAT DO WE WANT AND NEED FROM THE COLLEGE OF THE FUTURE?

VISION – FOR PEOPLE, PRODUCTIVITY AND PLACE



Colleges – at the heart of communities and public policy

Colleges are a vital public asset sitting at the heart of communities right across the four nations of the UK

The college of the future will have a central role to play in responding to global megatrends, as well as to more immediate and more local challenges. And colleges in turn will have to respond to consequent changes in demands, aspirations and expectations from people, employers and communities.

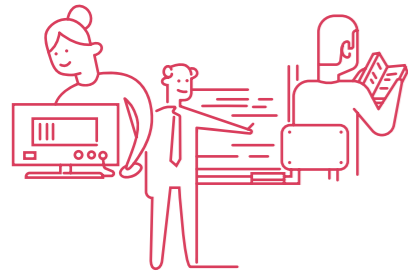
Colleges are a vital public asset sitting at the heart of communities right across the four nations of the UK – and their potential is tremendous:

- Colleges have phenomenal reach. They are one of very few institutions that are open to all parts of the community, for people of all ages, whatever their circumstances, abilities and aspirations. The potential for greatly expanding this reach is immense.
- Colleges provide a critical pivot between all other parts of the education and skills system, as well as offering a tremendous breadth of provision themselves – and can and must be centres of lifetime learning.
- Colleges hold relationships with employers of all sizes, and are a critical link between the labour market and skills system – supporting employers with meeting current and future skills needs, and supporting people with transitions into new jobs and new sectors.
- Colleges are often one of the largest employers within a locality themselves – representing an important part of the local/regional economy in their own right.

People need to be able to engage with education and training throughout their lives.

Despite all of this, all too often, college resources and expertise can be under-utilised and their potential is not fully realised. They can suffer from being poorly understood and recognised, by policy makers, the media and the wider public. They are poorly funded in relation to other parts of the education and skills system, particularly when compared to universities. And changes in their policy remit have at times impeded their capacity to align across different areas of public policy. Given pressures on resources and time, this in turn has challenged their ability to network as they may have done in the past.

Realising this full potential requires a new vision for the role that the college of the future can and must play in addressing the core changes and challenges set out in chapter one. The college of the future has a remit across people, productivity and place.



For people, colleges will be a touchpoint throughout their lives as the world changes. Flexible and blended learning and guidance will empower each person to get a job, progress in their career and be an active citizen.

The changes and challenges that we face across the UK, and internationally, mean that people need to be able to engage with education and training throughout their lives. This will be needed as people adapt to technological changes and to changing practices; as we ensure that people in low-skilled, low-pay sectors are not left behind, as disadvantaged groups suffer from limited opportunities to get into good quality jobs and progress within them; as we move urgently towards a carbon-neutral, green economy; and in responding to changes in the labour market and economic shocks.

The case for lifetime learning also reflects the kind of society we want to live in. A genuine culture and system of lifetime learning is crucial to ensuring increased opportunities for people to be active, healthy and socially and politically engaged.

A genuine culture and system of lifetime learning is crucial to ensuring increased opportunities for people to be active, healthy and socially and politically engaged

This means a radical shift, with colleges providing a genuinely lifetime service to people. For adults, methods of learning will need to modernise and innovate alongside developments in ways of working and living in a modern economy. This requires an increasingly flexible and personalised service complementing independent learning and accommodating other pressing and competing priorities in a modern world, including across working and caring responsibilities. This will require a more modular offer and the use of micro-credentials, supplementing existing longer qualifications, ensuring that people have a genuine choice that is flexible to their needs and priorities at the time.



CASE STUDY

Building essential skills

The Skills Builder Partnership brings together more than 800 organisations including educators, employers and impact organisations around a common mission: to ensure that one day, everyone builds the essential skills to thrive.

Newcastle College has been working with Skills Builder since 2019, embedding the approach across college life. As part of the students' Personal and Social Development programme, the Skills Builder Framework underpins the skills and behaviours that all Level 1, 2 and 3 students work to develop. Learners and tutors have regular opportunities to reflect on the skills, considering areas of strength and development while also linking them to work experience and employer engagement sessions. Students log their progress over the year to build up a comprehensive record of examples, clearly demonstrating their skill development.

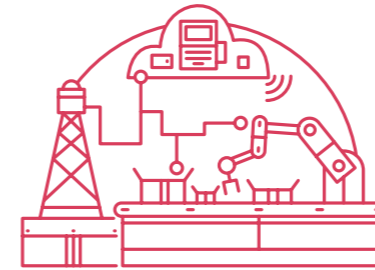
After seeing the work of Newcastle College through a wider employability working group, Sunderland, Hartlepool and Northumberland Colleges created a coordinated approach to developing the essential skills of their students. They have embedded the essential skills in teaching and learning policies, as a regular agenda item in staff and parent meetings, in displays across the sites and through a skills-based rewards system to recognise student achievement.

In the context of ongoing technological advances, a flexible, personalised lifetime service must crucially include a radical expansion of the online and blended offer colleges deliver to people. This will require serious investment in digital infrastructure, resources and college staff expertise and capacity.

Alongside this increasingly blended offer, colleges' physical estates and resources will remain critical – and as we describe below, the role that colleges must play in place-making will only become more important in addressing social and regional inequalities and more vulnerable communities who risk being hit hardest by changes in the world of work, climate change and technological changes.

This will have to be supported through funding and student finance that ensures that cost is not a barrier to engagement with lifetime learning opportunities – and ensuring that pathways across all aspects of the education and skills system are equally valued and supported.

It will also mean colleges offering much more informal support, with people of all ages using the college estate to support independent learning, to access high-quality skills and careers advice and guidance, and as a hub, incubating entrepreneurship.



For **productivity**, colleges will provide strategic advice and support for employers to drive business change, innovation and future workforce planning.

Across the UK, we suffer from poor levels of productivity (ONS, 2018), and are particularly ineffective at transferring ground-breaking innovations in process, design and technology into routine, day-to-day use by SMEs and micro businesses, which make up over 95 per cent of businesses across the UK (BEIS 2020). The need to innovate is critical, as employers respond to the pandemic, take up the benefits offered through technological innovations and seek to adapt at pace to deliver a net-zero carbon economy.

Addressing these long-standing challenges requires concerted and coordinated action from governments. Colleges have a key and expansive role to play as a part of this agenda, working in close partnership across local, regional and national systems, as a key strategic support to employers.

Colleges can and must play a central role in convening, coordinating and providing high quality strategic support to employers, across innovation and skills, and in stimulating demand, particularly from SMEs and micro businesses. This must become recognised as a core part of what a college networks delivers, in close partnership with universities, local authorities, business chambers, trade unions and others. This is vital as part of a skills-led recovery from the current recession, as we redress long-standing regional and social inequalities and as we move towards a sustainable, net-zero carbon economy supported by a green technology revolution.

A more expansive employer service would provide a mechanism for stimulating demand from employers, coordinating strategic engagement and building new deeper relationships between employers and the education and skills system. This would see colleges working closely with universities, employer representative bodies, local government and others, to play an expanded role in innovation and knowledge transfer, whilst also equipping employees with opportunities to develop new skills.

Currently, where employers do seek to engage with the education and skills system, they report finding it hard to locate the 'front door'. The offer in terms of strategic support to employers can sit across a wide range of different organisations right across the education and skills system, with local authorities and others. And different local and national government departments and agencies can also fail to align effectively.

Smaller employers in particular will often have limited capacity, expertise and experience which limits their ability to reflect on scope for innovation, or a lack of awareness of the opportunities that are available to them and their business. This points to a need for a much more expanded and joined up effort to stimulate employer aspirations and demands.

SUMMARY

The Cumberford-Little Report on one tertiary System in Scotland

At the direct request of Scottish Ministers, the Principals of Scotland's two largest colleges published a report in February 2020 highlighting the economic and social impact of Scotland's colleges. Across several themes ranging from strategic direction, accountability and performance to innovation and exporting, the subsequent Cumberford-Little Report ("One Tertiary System: Agile, Collaborative, Inclusive") illustrated the already significant impact of Scotland's 13 college regions, and identified the potential to do much more in support of the Scottish Government and the conditions necessary to realise that potential.

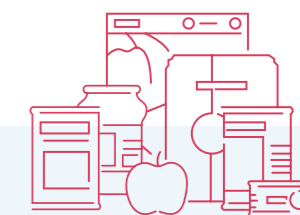
The report identifies the significant economic impact colleges already have – not least, an annual boost to Scottish GDP of some £3.5bn. Authors Audrey Cumberford and Paul Little set out a series of recommendations for Government and its partners, with a starting point of defining the purpose of colleges in Scotland which they said should place employer support as colleges' cornerstone, such that colleges provide world-class lifetime learning, and high quality business support. They went on to identify the need to pay greater attention to Scotland's SME and micro-business communities which form the overwhelming majority of the country's business base. They argued that funding, accountability, performance, and quality regimes must align and support the pursuit of the new purpose, pointing to the need for systemic change in creating of a fully integrated tertiary system in Scotland.



For place, colleges will have the resources and funding to play an even greater role in fostering healthy and connected communities.

Colleges are important anchor institutions in communities across the UK, but this dimension is not sufficiently supported or incentivised. Placing this role as part of their strategic mission, the potential capacity of colleges can be significantly enhanced.

Changes set out in chapter one raise stark challenges for communities across the UK, and as ever these challenges risk hitting already marginalised communities hardest. Colleges can and must play a significant and expanded role in promoting public health and social inclusion, including through addressing digital poverty and literacy, providing digital hubs to people of all ages who are able to access infrastructure, resources and basic training. This requires working closely with other community partners, including adult and community learning providers, local authorities and others, to develop coherent joined-up strategies.



CASE STUDY

Opening the doors for a community response

Langley College unlocked the doors to its teaching kitchens to allow the One Slough Community Response team to store and make food for the vulnerable and those self-isolating in Slough. College staff turned out to support the effort which saw volunteers preparing nearly 100,000 hot meals for the community. Alongside providing access to their kitchen facilities, Langley College has also been designated the One Slough Community Response Hub. The college is being used to sort, store and dispatch food throughout the community and is the base for a Virtual Call Centre.

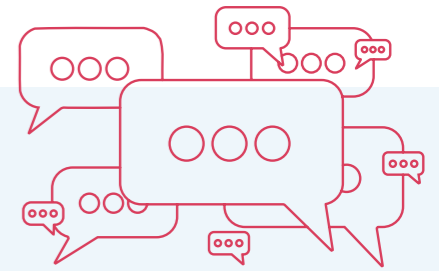
CASE STUDY**Keeping the community active**

Grŵp Llandrillo Menai are enrolled on the Active Ambassadors Programme and have been working hard to support their local community during the COVID-19 outbreak. They are providing support through various means including collecting shopping, making time to work at local supermarkets and using technology to connect virtually so as to keep in touch and to spread positivity. Ambassadors are also supporting GLIM Rygbi to design a weekly Wellbeing Calendar for all staff and learners, ensuring helping everyone to keep mentally and physically healthy during this difficult time.

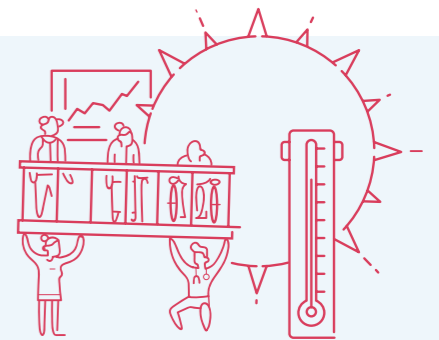
Colleges at their best are one of the few places where all parts of a community will come together – and as they become touchpoints available to everyone throughout their lives, the role that colleges will play in deepening social inclusion and cohesion and tackling discrimination needs to be given greater prominence. This must also include the college estate genuinely being recognised and used as a community asset – with sport and performing arts facilities for example being used by local partners, and colleges playing an active role with other community partners in supporting health and wellbeing strategies.

Colleges reflect the concerns of their communities and help to develop people's understanding of the world they live in. Colleges have an important role to play in reflecting on and responding to social movements for justice and human rights – including across Black Lives Matter, environmental activists and youth movements by creating opportunities for learning, debate and civic engagement amongst their students and the wider community, providing an important avenue for political education and engagement.

Colleges at their best are one of the few places where all parts of a community will come together

CASE STUDY**Keeping students connected**

Fife College delivered nearly 300 devices to students in order to support remote learning during the coronavirus outbreak. Delivered while adhering to social distancing rules, laptop devices were dropped off at the homes of college students across Fife. The vital equipment is also being delivered to Fife College students who live further afield, including those in Edinburgh, Tayside, Clackmannanshire and Perth & Kinross. Staff are making the deliveries as part of the College's commitment to ensure students still have the opportunity to learn during the coronavirus pandemic.

CASE STUDY**Colleges and universities driving change on the climate emergency**

The Climate Commission was created to address the climate emergency and drive change across the FE and HE sectors. The Commission is a partnership between Association of Colleges, EAUC, GuildHE and Universities UK to establish a comprehensive plan for sustainability in the sector. At the centre of the plans is the FE Climate Action Roadmap, which provides clear actions and guidance on how colleges can respond to the climate emergency and be net-zero emissions by 2050 at the latest.

College leaders and students were at the heart of creating the Roadmap and to ensure no-one is left behind, the Roadmap is organised in three levels – from colleges who are just starting to address sustainability, to colleges with a clear approach and who are models for others to learn from. The Roadmap is to be used by Principals and their leadership teams, but also their students who should be partners in co-developing and implementing the college's approach. With capacity and resources being a challenge for all colleges, the Roadmap highlights activities in terms of cost and time to allow colleges to choose how to build up to longer term initiatives.

The Climate Commission also has an influencing role with key sector bodies to ensure the policies and drivers are in place to support colleges in their journeys.

CASE STUDY**How sport and wellbeing in colleges supports place-making**

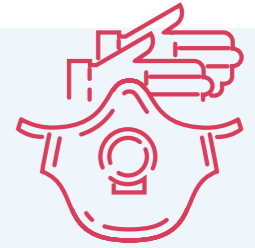
Sport England's Tackling Inactivity in Colleges (TIIC) fund has invested £5m over the last two years which has enabled 49 colleges across England to engage with over 23,000 students. Significantly this includes over 11,000 inactive young people who are now regularly active. The fund is targeted at students in lower socio-economic groups and females. Participant surveys demonstrate wide ranging benefits from participation including better physical and mental health, personal development, better engagement at college and enhanced social inclusion.

College staff do not only impact their own student body but use their unique skill sets and volunteer student workforce to make a difference in their communities through strategic local partnerships. For example, Tyne Metropolitan College (part of the Tyne Coast College group) have engaged over 3,000 people in their community outreach programme this year alone. Supported by funders including Sport England, Active Partnerships, Street Games, AoC Sport, various national governing bodies and local charities like Family Gateway, staff and students at the college have delivered active programmes in schools, local sports clubs, care homes and at their on-site facilities.

As sectors and policy continue to intersect, another example of colleges making a difference through their sport departments can be seen at Walsall College where student volunteers deliver physical activity sessions to young people at risk of committing, or being a victim of, violent crime. In partnership with West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner and The Inspire Foundation, this valued programme provides a diversionary activity for vulnerable young people in the local community.

Sources:

Sport England Tackling Inactivity in Colleges: Year 2 Report. Sept 2019.
Tyne Metropolitan College Sports Development Annual Reports 18/19 and 19/20.

CASE STUDY**Innovating to help keep the health and care sector safe**

North West Regional College (NWRC) produced 1900 face guards at its Product Design Centre (PDC), which were delivered to medical and care staff in the local community during the COVID-19 pandemic. The team at the college's state-of-the-art campus in Limavady also produced a number of aerosol boxes, which mitigate infection risk to health professionals during intubation procedures. PDC Manager Philip Devlin said: "We are fortunate to have staff that are willing to be innovative and we came up with a modified Computer Aided Design (CAD) to utilise a laser cutter to rapidly speed up the process that has seen us increase production speed tenfold." The college's Business Support Centre has also developed a range of more than 20 online training programmes that are available to businesses and their employees. These are 100 per cent funded via the Skills Focus programme.

Chapter three

HOW DO WE GET THERE?

A STRATEGY FOR DELIVERING FOR PEOPLE, PRODUCTIVITY AND PLACE



Realising the vision

Delivering for this vision across people, productivity and place requires colleges operating in new ways, with systems renewal across the four nations. Here we set out eleven recommendations for taking this forward.



RECOMMENDATIONS

National strategies for education and skills to support economic growth, industrial change and lifelong learning.

College network strategies to meet local priorities across the tertiary education system.

Colleges as anchor institutions within the wider local and regional ecosystem.

A statutory right to lifelong learning.

Skills guarantee for a post-COVID economy and future labour market changes.

A new strategic partnership with employers.

A new support service to employers.

Stable funding and accountability frameworks for colleges.

A strategic relationship with governments and simplified processes.

An ambitious future college workforce strategy.

Diverse and representative systems leaders.

A networked approach within a nation-specific post-16 strategy

A nation-specific education and skills strategy

Recommendation 1

National strategies for education and skills to support economic growth, industrial change and lifelong learning.

Governments need to articulate a ten-year vision for education and training, from schools through to adult skills enabling all individuals of all abilities and circumstances and regardless of age or their career stage to continue to learn, train and reskill, and supporting better connection and coordination between delivery partners.

Each nation will develop its own national strategy which supports its respective industrial/ economic strategy. This will be based on a whole government approach with better integration across employment and skills to enhance lifelong learning, social inclusion and active ageing and to facilitate stronger partnerships nationally and locally/regionally. National strategies will provide a flexible implementation framework for college networks/regional colleges, which they can apply in their individual contexts working closely with employers and other key partners, to support the development of the whole workforce as well as initial education with opportunities for everyone to progress in their careers and actively contribute to their community.



The relationship between education and skills policy and other areas of public policy, such as health and energy, should form an integral part of the nation-specific post-16 education and skills strategy

Governments must articulate a long-term vision for the post-16 education and skills system that sets out education and training priorities within each of the four nations from schools through to adult skills and training. This must, ultimately, enable everyone, regardless of age or their career stage to be able to study, up-skill and retrain throughout their lives. It must describe the role that colleges play together with others in delivering a vital strategic service to employers. And it must describe the wider role colleges play in place-making, as anchor institutions within their communities.

This nation-specific strategy must in turn describe the complementary relationship of different component parts of the system. This will ensure that colleges sit coherently alongside other parts of the education system. The relationship between education and skills policy and other areas of public policy, such as health and energy, should form an integral part of the nation-specific post-16 education and skills strategy.

Strategic alignment with government priorities

There is a critical need for national post-16 education and skills strategies to be aligned with both industrial/economic and social inclusion strategies.

Alignment with other areas of government policy is vital too. Across each of the four nations, there is a need to ensure that colleges are able to play their fullest role in key government priorities, across climate change, regional inequalities, productivity and social justice – all of which requires strategic alignment nationally and within localities.

Defining the role, scope and purpose of colleges

A national strategy must describe the role that colleges have to play for people, productivity and place within a coherent, connected and collaborative wider education and skills system.

National strategies should ensure that colleges have clarity about the scope and role in respect of other parts of the education and skills system. This means addressing nugatory competition across the education and skills system where it exists, in each of the four nations.

CASE STUDY

Weston College driving mental health partnerships across North Somerset



Weston College has been the driving force in building mental health partnerships across North Somerset, forming an integral part of community mental health care. Their award-winning Body and Mind framework established a regular programme of activities and support sessions linking exercise with wellbeing to engage the community and build resilience.

By linking the college's HR, mental health, sport, welfare and inclusive practice teams, it has reduced staff absence and increased student achievement and attendance. Additionally, the College was invited to join the 'Futures in Mind' committee as a Champion of Change to help transform mental health provision in North Somerset. It has trained over 200 organisations in Mental Health First Aid and shared its best practice in workforce development mental health strategies with over 300+ employers

The creation of the college's Health and Active Living Centre in 2019 (with simulated training wards, patient simulation technology and state of the art gyms, sport therapy and condition management technology) was designed to encourage a more active lifestyle whilst bridging the skills gaps across the region's health and social care. Driven by its Principal Dr Paul Phillips CBE, the concept of college led urban regeneration has been achieved through strong partnerships with the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), local authorities, social care partners and health trusts.

"We firmly believe the commitment and dedication the college has shown towards building mental health partnerships has been second to none. The impact of this has meant that the college is an integral part of community mental health care and have seamless links with CAMHS and GPs meaning that students' mental health care is as collaborative as possible. The college is recognised as a Beacon by the community due to the college's innovative and dynamic partnership."

Colin Bradbury
Area Director – North Somerset,
NHS Bristol, North Somerset & South Gloucestershire CCG

There are five key considerations which help support more cohesion and efficiency:

1. Ensuring provision across the education and skills system is complementary, redressing areas of nugatory competition and duplication

- Unproductive competition can particularly manifest itself across 16-19 provision between colleges and schools, as well as in some systems across higher education.
- A national strategy should set out expectations about the role different parts of the system play, which then provides a framework to be applied locally/regionally.
- Much of this ultimately requires coherent oversight at a more regional/local level.

2. Ensuring a strategic partnership with employers

- A nation-specific strategy should set out expectations for a joined-up approach to strategic employer support, ensuring that institutions develop coordinated employer engagement strategies, and ensuring that research and development within universities feeds into the wider education and skills system, who can offer this coordinated approach to strategic employer support.



3. Developing pathways, articulation and a lifetime careers advice service

- Education and skills across 14-19, adult education and workforce development can currently lack clear articulation and pathways for learners – with at times inefficient repetition across phases, and missed potential for deeper coordinated across 14-16 provision.
- A national strategy must set out a vision for lifetime learning – including in delivering a holistic lifetime careers and skills advice service.

4. Describing the place-making role of colleges

- Colleges have a critical role to play as community anchor institutions, as a critical part of the national infrastructure – across public health, social inclusion and the urgent transition to a net-zero carbon economy, amongst other things. It is critically important that this role is captured within national strategies, with alignment to other relevant areas of public policy.
- This in turn must be articulated within college network strategies, based on close consultation with other relevant partner organisations.

5. Coordinating approaches to workforce development

- Significant changes in labour market demands, an ageing college workforce, technological innovation and the aspirations and expectations of people mean that supporting the ongoing skills development of the college workforce is a core priority.
- To ensure that the required investment in the college workforce is efficient and effective, nation-specific strategies should set out approaches that will be coordinated nationally and across networks. This might be through secondments into industry and through drawing on expertise that will exist across providers within a locality. A particularly pertinent example is improving digital skills, which requires urgent focus.
- A social partnership model within each nation should bring together government, colleges, trade unions, student unions and employers to set out a college workforce strategy.

Collaborative college networks

A networked approach

Recommendation 2

College network strategies to meet local priorities across the tertiary education system.

Governments must introduce a duty on colleges to develop strategies across appropriate economic geographies that identify local and regional needs and priorities in line with the national strategy. These will be developed in consultation with employers and other key stakeholders, especially other education providers, and will deliver a coordinated approach to the learning and training offer. They will align to the local industrial structure, economic development plans and employment needs, strategic employer engagement, workforce development and local investment plans, including capital investment.

This also requires a matched duty on other tertiary providers to collaborate, including universities, schools, independent training providers and adult community learning providers. This will be reinforced through institutional/network outcome agreements across the appropriate economic geography, focused on long-term systems priorities.

Recommendation 3

Colleges as anchor institutions within the wider local and regional ecosystem.

Colleges must have a recognised role as key anchor institutions in the local community, supporting wider community action and services as well as providing education and learning. The new college network strategies will help build stronger partnerships with other public and private agencies and civic partners and their wider investment plans locally/regionally. This will seek to ensure a more coherent and connected approach not only on skills and learning but in relation to colleges' wider civic role, adding value to the existing ecosystem in a range of areas including business enterprise, public health, lifelong learning, eliminating digital exclusion and supporting social integration. Key partners will include employers and employer representative bodies, universities, schools and adult and community learning providers, the NHS, local authorities, student and trade unions and relevant charities.

Colleges work best when effectively networked with each other

Colleges work best when effectively networked with each other across an appropriate economic geography. Networks allow colleges to avoid inefficient competition that can otherwise exist whilst also playing a much more proactive and strategic role in stimulating demand of people and employers.

This better enables colleges to (a) collectively and individually respond to the local economy and labour market demands, including in responding to economic shocks and in major investment opportunities (b) to ensure a coherent holistic strategic offer to people, productivity and place, and (c) to develop a coordinated approach to strategic stakeholder engagement, across the education and skills system, with employers and with other public service providers. In this way, networks are able to offer a service that is holistic and consistent, but is context appropriate.

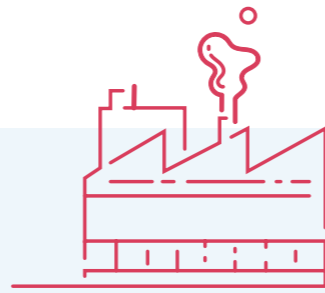
Attributes of a networked college system

A networked approach allows college to deliver much more coherently and effectively for people, productivity and place.

- Stimulate and coordinate demand from people, employers and communities, and play a coordinated strategic role across economic and social policy.
- Ensure that for both people and employers there is 'no wrong door' to engaging with the education and skills system.
- Agree specialisms to ensure sufficient provision across the network, with the right mix and balance combining efficiency and effectiveness.
- Coordinate sector-focused strategic support for employers across innovation and skills through employer hubs and services for people through the wider network, including lifetime careers and skills advice and digital skills centres.
- Convene employer engagement to the benefit of the whole system. This is the case in terms of specialisms across sector-focused 'employer hubs', digital hubs and coordinated lifetime careers and skills advice.
- Provide an interface for deeper alignment with other parts of the education and skills system – including allowing for clear pathways and articulation between schools, colleges and universities, a tertiary systems approach to employer and strategic stakeholder engagement and for a coordinated approach to digital transformation.
- Strategically collaborate with other partners – including with the NHS, with Job Centre Plus and with employer groups.
- Development of a coordinated and comprehensive workforce development programme for staff across the college network.

A networked system has to start with ensuring alignment between colleges within an economic geography – but must also include effective strategic alignment with schools, universities and other education and training providers. This is the means through which a network offer can offer a comprehensive service both for lifelong learning for people and strategic support to employers, which meets the needs of diverse communities across a locality. This is the logical next step for the systems in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, and must be a part of systems reforms in England.

Embedding a networked approach means that strategies must be developed in close collaboration with relevant partners – including employers and employer representative organisations, universities and schools, as well as relevant community organisations, trade unions and student unions and the NHS. Ensuring effective consultation with these key partners would be a basic expectation of governments in agreeing network strategies. And developing a networked approach across tertiary systems also provides scope for developing sectoral networks and partnerships between relevant organisations where they do not currently exist.



CASE STUDY

Colleges and university collaborate to deliver innovation in construction

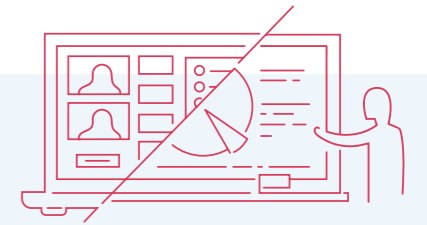
A pan-Wales enterprise led by University of Wales Trinity Saint David (UWTSD) Group and involving Coleg Sir Gar, Coleg Ceredigion, Coleg y Cymoedd and Coleg Cambria is ensuring that the Welsh construction sector has ready access to innovative training solutions nationally across Wales. The hub and spoke delivery model of the Construction Wales Innovation Centre (CWIC) uses employer intelligence to make sure the right skills are in place to meet the current and future industry demand both reactively and proactively.

Spokes provide an integrated career development pathway between operatives, trades and professional construction occupations, under guidance provided by the Swansea-based Hub. They actively work together and share best practices. This is contributing to new levels of collaborative working between the education sector (schools, FE, HE and private providers) and the construction industry.

The CWIC met and exceeded its three-year planned targets to responsively and flexibly meet the needs of the Welsh construction industry. The training offered by CWIC across Wales has focused upon developing and delivering innovation and outcomes are assisting companies to grow and prosper through skills development.

“It is vital we have the right training in place to create the workforce of the future. CITB funding for CWIC has enabled key partners across Wales to come together and deliver the skills needed by construction firms and the Welsh economy.”

Mark Bodger
Partnership Director
CITB Cymru



CASE STUDY

Greater Manchester Colleges' Group as a key strategic partner to the Mayor and Combined Authority

Greater Manchester Colleges Group (GMCG) is made up of nine colleges who work together with key strategic partner to translate policy to action and ensure skills and employment strategies are implemented effectively across Greater Manchester (GM). Representing 70,000 learners in GM, and as anchor institutions in communities, GMCG has recognised collaboration as fundamental to avoid unnecessary competition, share expertise, and provide a powerful voice for the sector. As a result of college collaboration, GMCG is now represented on all key GM Strategic bodies and is the first point of call for the CA and Mayor, not only on skills issues but challenges affecting health and wellbeing of local communities.

Collective initiatives co-developed with the CA and Mayor include:

- Joint project between colleges to deliver high quality digital and blended learning across all colleges in response to COVID-19
- Collectively tackling mental health issues for learners and staff developing services
- College secondee to Violence Reduction and knife crime Unit, leading to shared protocols, increased training for staff and students
- Development of FE/University Partnership with Principals and Vice Chancellors charting way forward for progression, social mobility and a shared vision for adult learning
- Plans for a GMCG Skills Specialisation Pilot providing a strategic place-based delivery of higher level technical and vocational skills to meet current and future needs
- Developing and implementing an effective plan for the devolved Adult Education Budget, responsive to the needs of learners in different parts of GM

“I welcome the collaborative approach taken by the Greater Manchester Colleges Group, as it provides the opportunity to create strong strategic relationships between employers and FE colleges in Greater Manchester. The proposed development of a high quality network of skilled technical education at Level 4 and 5, is exactly what GM needs to support GM employers to address skills requirements and meet the productivity aspirations of the GM Local Industrial Strategy.”

Mo Isap, Co-Chair of the Greater Manchester Local Enterprise Partnership, and the Founder & CEO of IN4.0 Group

Lifetime learning service for all ages and abilities

A lifetime service

Recommendation 4

A statutory right to lifelong learning.

For people to fulfil their potential, there should be a statutory right for people to be able to upskill and retrain throughout their lives through access to affordable and relevant lifelong learning opportunities. This should include a statutory free lifetime entitlement to studying or training up to English-Northern Irish-Welsh L3/ Scottish L6 – essential as the minimum platform which enables people to secure good quality-jobs in a modern economy. This entitlement should allow free choice for all adults across all publicly funded tertiary education and training providers.

Funding should be equalised across further and higher education routes, with students able to access the maintenance support they need to engage in education and training, based on the following principles:

- i) Equal maintenance support across loans and grants is available for individuals in further and higher education and advanced skills training, adequate to an individual's needs whether part-time or full-time, so that everyone has the opportunity to pursue the route best suited to them throughout their lifetime.
- ii) Flexibility in the use of the entitlement and any associated maintenance support in grants and/or loans so that individuals able to build up their skills over time to match both their evolving career development needs and their personal circumstances.
- iii) Unemployed people do not lose their welfare benefits where they use their entitlement to reskill/retrain full-time in areas of identified job opportunities and skills shortages.

Recommendation 5

Skills guarantee for a post-COVID economy and future labour market changes.

COVID-19 has had a major impact on a range of sectors, causing large-scale dislocation, accelerating radical wider long-term changes taking place in the labour market. People affected need targeted investment on top of the lifetime learning entitlement to upskill, retrain and reskill to help them find work in higher demand priority sectors. This offer should supplement any previous qualifications an individual has to help them maintain relevant skills, including in strategic priority sectors such as the green economy. The Skills Guarantee would provide free training to upskill employees at all levels including English-Northern Irish-Welsh Level 4/ Scottish Level 7. It should allow maximum flexibility to meet sector needs and to enable upskilling of employees over time in line with the needs of the business. Incentives should be offered to SMEs in the form of a contribution to wage replacement costs to encourage uptake and to contribute to productivity improvements in the wider economy.

Colleges must act as a touchpoint for people throughout their lives. The changes set out in chapter one demonstrate the clear need for people to be able to reskill and retrain throughout their lives, in response to changes in the world of work, technological change and the need to move towards a carbon-neutral economy and respond to the impacts of climate change.

But this also reflects an ambition regarding the societies we want to live in. A much more holistic lifetime education and training offer is also about supporting people to live full and flourishing lives, to develop their capacities as democratic citizens and to support good ongoing health and wellbeing.

This is set out clearly in the UN Sustainable Development goals (4.3) – which says that by 2030 we must ensure that globally everyone has equal access to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education. This can and must be delivered as a key priority across the four nations.

The table below shows the correspondence of levels established between national qualifications framework and the EQF.

European Qualifications Framework (EQF)	Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England / Northern Ireland (FHEQ)	Regulated Qualifications Framework England / Northern Ireland (RQF)	Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW)	Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)	The National Framework of Qualifications for Ireland (NFQ IE)
8	8	8	8	12	10
7	7	7	7	11	9
6	6	6	6	10/9	8/7
5	5/4	5/4	5/4	8/7	6
4		3	3	6	5
3		2	2	5	4
2		1	1	4	3
1		E3	E3	3	2/1
		E2	E2	2	
		E1	E1	1	

Credit: QAA

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic speaks to both these economic and social cases. This is on the one hand with an expanded role for colleges as being critical to ensuring a successful skills-led economic recovery – and on the other, with people suffering from social isolation and ongoing poor health standing to benefit considerably from access to educational opportunities.

This requires affirming a statutory entitlement to lifetime learning. This means crucially ensuring that financial support is available to people right through their lives, supporting part-time and flexible learning and ensuring that you receive adequate support whatever path you take – ensuring genuine parity across the post-compulsory education system. This means ensuring that people do not lose welfare benefits because they are engaging in education and training. And it means developing ‘Lifetime Skills Accounts’, which allow people to accumulate credits right throughout their lives.

Crucially, student funding and finance needs to reflect the specific additional support that particular student groups will need – including across childcare costs, travel costs, additional funding to support disabled students as required and support for specific course related costs that could otherwise pose as a barrier to fair access.

There are many other important considerations too, as we ensure that education becomes a genuinely lifelong service.

Student funding and finance needs to reflect the specific additional support that particular student groups will need.



CASE STUDY

City & Guilds designs digital credential certification in hospitality

City & Guilds, in partnership with the Worldchefs Association, the global professional body for chefs, has designed a certification for hospitality professionals. The key aim in its work with the Liverpool City Region was to create a more dynamic and flexible offer and reward people for doing their jobs well. The certification offers a framework to recognise the skills and experience of people working in hospitality at all levels. The framework is underpinned by a range of job roles, from work experience and entry level job roles to senior management posts, which reflect how people within the industry progress. The recognition of skills is through the use of digital credentials that can be claimed and aggregated in more flexible ways than conventional qualifications. Although COVID-19 has temporarily changed the hospitality landscape, skills continue to be the most valuable currency both for employers and those in a job or looking for a new job. The digital credential framework identifies technical and common skills which support progression in career and transition across careers.



CASE STUDY

Colleges collaborating to drive data driven innovation skills in Edinburgh and South-East Scotland city region

Borders, Fife, West Lothian and Edinburgh Colleges worked together collaboratively with the Data Driven Innovation Skills Office of City Region Deal to design and deliver learning opportunities to support the development of data literacy skills within Edinburgh and South East Scotland.

With the growing importance of the use of data to support social change, improve services and create economic growth, they identified an important opportunity for all learners to develop and enhance their data skills. To create better opportunities for future employment, the initiative takes an inclusive approach and is open to all learners, regardless of previous qualifications, including those unemployed, women returner groups, ethnic minority groups and those in the region disadvantaged through poverty.

Opportunities for study on ‘Into Work’ data science-based courses are currently on offer and delivered at Borders College and West Lothian, Edinburgh and Fife Colleges will be providing similar opportunities in the near future. An initiative aimed specifically at supporting women returners will be launched at Fife College in November 2020, supported by Equate Scotland. This will involve study of Data Science for Finance. Full-time learners on a range of programmes in Business and Social Science will also benefit from range of data subjects. Edinburgh College will be considerably scaling up this offer in 2021/22 and expects the positive change will be felt by the region’s digital and data skills sector in 2022.

Collectively these initiatives enhance skills, providing better-skilled employees and future employees and increasing opportunities for current students, with a positive impact on local economies.

A new approach to qualifications for adults

The college of the future will have to deliver a much more flexible, personalised service. This must see a more modular offer and the use of micro-credentials, supplementing existing longer qualifications (Gauthier, 2020). This must also see deeper articulation and clearer pathways between different parts of the education and skills system. This can also be supported through the development of Lifetime Skills Accounts, enabling people to build up skills over time in a flexible and personalised way appropriate to their needs (LWI, 2016).

Digital transformation

Being accessible to more people and employers will require ongoing focus on digital transformation (Jisc and AoC, 2020; Colleges Scotland 2020), moving towards more advanced blended and modularised learning and digital platforms for employers. Much of this should be coordinated at the national level rather than within college networks, for cost and efficiency reasons. Significantly, the online offer cannot be seen as a cost-saving measure, and is in no way cheaper to deliver than in-person learning and it will have to be supported by dual professional teaching staff to ensure resources are up-to-date and that there is quality engagement throughout with learners. Digital transformation also critically includes coordinated ongoing investment in the digital skills and capacity of the college workforce.

A holistic approach to lifetime skills and careers guidance

Colleges are a natural community hub, and as such have a duty towards the whole community as the home for lifetime skills and careers guidance (Barnes et al, 2020). A new lifetime skills and careers advice and guidance service would be hosted within colleges, where appropriate – and where holistic services already exist, will build strong links to complement this, ensuring a coherent and connected community service. This must also include quality information and guidance about available student finance.

An active society

Colleges are well placed to positively impact upon the health and wellbeing of people in their local communities. Using a skilled staff and a student volunteer workforce, colleges have demonstrated an ability to reach out to those with the biggest barriers to participation in physical activity in order to improve physical and mental health and promote personal and social development. These should be embedded within college strategies, creating a social movement for an active society.

Addressing digital poverty

Colleges have a central role to play in addressing digital poverty and digital exclusion. Working in a networked manner, colleges should establish digital hubs, where communities can access not just resources and facilities, but also expert guidance and training. The college of the future will work with other key civic partners to eliminate digital poverty – and this is an example of principles that will be set in new college outcome agreements. This must also see colleges playing a leadership role in galvanising local services and resources, with local authorities and others (Corke, Rhodes, Frampton, 2020).



Strategic partner to employers on skills and innovation support

Delivering with and for employers

Recommendation 6

A new strategic partnership with employers.

Colleges need close strategic partnerships with employers, nationally and locally/regionally to ensure that the new national and network strategies (recommendations 1, 2 and 3) meet the needs of employers as well as people and their communities. Major employers find it easier to engage, so colleges will need to reach out to SMEs and work closely with employer representative bodies – with significant scope for strengthening partnerships with sectoral networks too at national, regional and local levels.

Recommendation 7

A new support service to employers.

Colleges have an expanded role to play in providing a business support and brokerage service to employers. This will provide the basis for establishing recognised sector/skills focused employer hubs appropriate to the local labour market priorities. Greater coordination between partners locally/regionally will open up the facilities and expertise of colleges to provide more efficiently and enhanced support to employers. It will encourage innovation by employers, support long-term workforce development plans and help move to a higher productivity, more technologically enabled and net-zero carbon economy.

The college of the future will play a key role in offering strategic support to employers across innovation and skills

A networked approach to colleges allows for a much more expansive, strategic support offer to employers. The college of the future will play a key role in offering strategic support to employers across innovation and skills. This will be delivered through specialisation across relevant college networks within appropriate economic geographies – with the development of new ‘employer hubs’.

Employer hubs will be sector or skills focused, and will convene and coordinate strategic support for employers and innovation and skills. This will involve working collectively across the college education and skills system, with economic/employment agencies and employer networks to identify and meet the skills and productivity needs of the wider economy. Employer hubs will reflect both existing specialisms across the college network, and the needs and priorities of employers, the workforce and the community.

CASE STUDY

College leads on life science specialism



The Life Science Hub is recognised as the lead in the occupational area and manages FE college collaborations with occupational specialists from the six colleges of Northern Ireland. Its aim is to provide a consistent high quality educational provision for learners and employers across Northern Ireland through economic engagement, curriculum review, future scoping, CPD and supporting the Life and Health Science Sectoral Partnership activity.

Its activity focuses on analysis and prioritisation of business needs and curriculum development to support the growth of the Northern Ireland Life and Health sector. The Hub supports progression pathways by reviewing and aligning Higher Education provision, providing clear articulation routes from entry level programmes.

An example of this is the Higher Level Apprenticeship (HLA) in Applied Industrial Sciences. It is the only one of its kind in Northern Ireland and remains current, flexible and fit for purpose for local Life Sciences industry. The HLA supports employment in a variety of industrial science fields and provides articulation to a range of Higher Education pathways upon successful completion.

The Life Science Hub also leads research into the skill set of sector college workforce. Skills gaps identified are addressed with focused continuous professional development (CPD) delivered as contextualised training to directly support the curriculum and embeds effective use of new technical skills relating to the industry.

Employer hubs will have to be highly networked, with effective planning and inter-agency working – with the development of new strategic partnerships with universities, Catapult Centres and private sector networks – ensuring that employer hubs complement and align effectively with existing provision and specialisms across other providers. This will naturally also involve aligning the work of colleges with regional industrial strategies/local economic development and with other local/regional governments where they exist. And crucially, this will have to be informed by robust data and analysis, with strong coordination with national governments.

A sector or skills focused employer hub will serve as a resource which is available for employers to use. This will include:

- Strategic advice and guidance in workforce skills and their role in shaping innovation and business development.
- Specialist teachers/trainers and advisers with knowledge and experience of cutting-edge industry practice and technological advances.
- Advice and demonstration facilities for local employers on new technology and processes with access to state-of-the-art equipment.
- Prototyping facilities to support product development and innovation.
- Materials bank for specialist learning materials for the whole network with particular focus on online learning.
- Support in the transition to more sustainable, greener practices.

An employer hub will likely provide leadership and coordination of provision across the college network for their particular specialism. This will involve on the supply-side, convening and coordinating sector-specific support across a network; and on the demand-side, playing a much more active role with others to understand and stimulate employer demand. This is likely to include:

- Development and delivery of full and part-time higher technical and professional programmes at English-Northern Irish-Welsh L4-5/ Scottish L6-7.
- Development and delivery of specialist workforce development and tailored in-company retraining programmes for businesses across the relevant sector.
- Co-ordination of employer services to include student placement, apprenticeships and local employer compacts to tackle key recruitment needs.
- Support to employers in developing their own, in-house training capacity, individually and collectively, to enable more and better on-the-job learning and higher quality work placements and apprenticeships.

Colleges acting in a networked manner in strategic alignment with other key partners will furthermore significantly strengthen the scope for working with sectoral networks of employers at the national, regional and local levels – and for developing capacity, expertise and infrastructure where required.



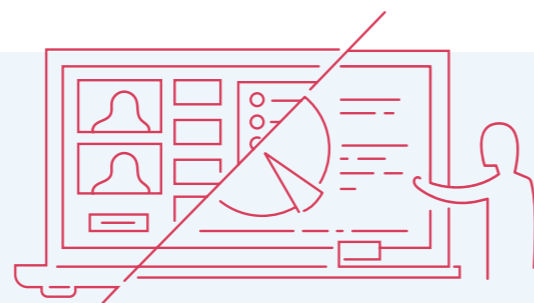
CASE STUDY

College leads research and practice in maritime safety

City of Glasgow College hosts a state-of-the-art maritime faculty, including the 'Oxygen Depletion in Enclosed Spaces' project, which ensures its research-based work supports upskilling and safety in the sector. In 2018 City's STEM & Innovation team, with funding from the Maritime Education Foundation (MEF), addressed the need for better safety training and developed a programme of blended learning to teach seafarers about the dangers of oxygen depletion. Through its work and collaboration with industry, the maritime sector now better knows how to act to reduce the likelihood of accidents caused by oxygen depletion inside confined and adjacent spaces. City's maritime students have benefited from two pilot courses, giving them clear visualisations of the dangers of oxygen depletion in enclosed spaces and more than 1000 students world-wide have upskilled themselves through its free online course. College staff too have developed and upskilled through the developmental opportunities, including research experience. The maritime research community has benefited also from its contribution the better understanding of oxygen depletion.

"This project and the resulting online course are raising the awareness of dangerous spaces. This type of project is important for the College as we develop graduates ready safely to enter the labour market. It also allows us to work collaboratively with industry to solve global issues and in this case, save lives"

Dr Linus Reichenbach,
Project Manager
City of Glasgow College

CASE STUDY**Belfast Met leads ICT as curriculum hub**

Belfast Met was awarded the Queen's Anniversary Prize in 2019 in recognition of its excellence in Further Education training in Information and Communications Technology. It was designated Curriculum Hub for the Digital ICT sector in Northern Ireland in 2017, and continues to make a vital contribution to 'leading the city to work'.

As the designated Curriculum Hub, they are the lead college in Northern Ireland for education and training in ICT and are recognised by the Government and IT sector as a Centre of Excellence.

Alongside the leading-edge delivery of programmes to support business, the College's outreach programmes include coding clubs for young people and summer technology camps for 16-19 year old female learners. Another example is a partnership with the BBC Academy and Accenture to bring the BBC's Make it Digital traineeships to Northern Ireland as a way of enabling young people not in education, employment or training to take up career opportunities in the creative industries.

The college has also provided significant support to SMEs in recent years working through the Skills Focus to upskill and reskill employees and through the Assured Skills Programme to place over 1,400 graduates into employment in the professional and financial services sectors in Northern Ireland. Given this success in the digital sector the College has also been working to support the development of the Employability and Skills strand of the Belfast City Deal, worth £850m over the next ten years, which will be a key part of the economic recovery strategy for Northern Ireland supporting digital innovation, tourism and hospitality and advanced manufacturing.

CASE STUDY**College tailors provision through strong and strategic employer partnerships**

Coleg Cambria – Institute of Technology (IOT@Cambria) hosts two state of the art Engineering and Advanced Manufacturing facilities providing training to support current and future skills needs and grow partnerships with engineering employers in North Wales and the North West region.

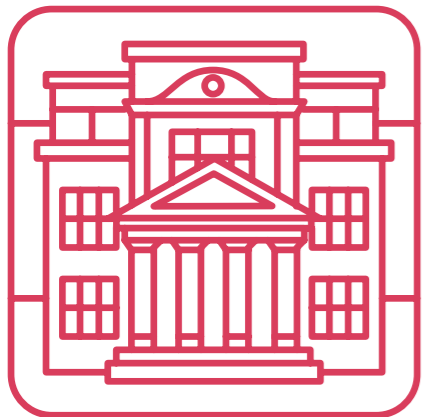
Provision is tailored to suit employer needs, with the department structured in a way that supports close partnership working and assisting in the recruitment of potential apprentices for many employers. Coleg Cambria IoT is one of the 'training leaders' in the UK in this sector and supports 500 apprentices from various engineering sectors from L2 up to delivery of 'applied' engineering degree apprenticeship (L6), which are in partnership with, and endorsed by, Swansea University. The IoT operates to support manufacturing behaviours, with apprentices clocking in and out and having daily 'start of shift meetings.' The centres also act as a catalyst to support STEM activities, with over 300 school learners attending the sites each week.

The Cambria IoT is also at the early stages of forging a partnership with Bangor University and the Advanced Manufacturing Research Centre (AMRC/Cymru) to support the development of a 'Skills Factory' concept that will support industry within North Wales and the North West through modular applied skills delivery (L4 – L6). The aim is to create a regional skills ecosystem that brings together all skills support for industry, working with partners such as universities and sector groups.

"We couldn't be happier with the service and support we have received from Cambria. The team have made it easy for all our employees to have fun and an interesting experience."

Dave Evans, Training and Development Officer, Magellan Aerospace.

Sustainable funding,
governance and
accountability based on
nurturing relationships
that drives the change needed in every community



Mission-driven funding, governance and accountability

Recommendation 8

Stable funding and accountability frameworks for colleges.

Ensuring that colleges can take a long-term strategic focus and reinforcing strategic investment in colleges, the sector must be funded on the basis of three-year, block grant funding settlements, reflecting a trust-based strategic partnership between colleges and governments. This should be based on high-level strategic outcome agreements focused on strategic impacts, aligned to the agreed local network strategies.

Recommendation 9

A strategic relationship with governments and simplified processes.

Oversight systems across the four nations must be simplified, driving efficiency, engendering greater trust and enabling better strategic coordination to deliver for systems outcomes across people, productivity and place. This must include developing a single post-16 education oversight and funding body within each nation (or in the case of NI, a coordinated approach within government) – crucial to ensuring a coherent lifelong education service, and to addressing nugatory competition between colleges and with other education providers.

Colleges must be given the authority and be held accountable for strategic delivery across people, productivity and place

Colleges must be given the authority and be held accountable for strategic delivery across people, productivity and place. This must be reflected in an approach to funding, governance and accountability which enables and demands colleges to be focusing on long-term systems outcomes, and working together and with wider partners in support of that agenda.

Funding

- Colleges/college networks should be funded on the basis of three-year block grant funding agreements – offering the stability and surety that ensures a longer-term systems focus, and ensures continuity and confidence for partners.
- Funding should in this way be based on long-term, outcomes-oriented strategic agreement with the relevant funder/regulator – agreeing the role that the college/college network will play for people, productivity and place.

Regulation and accountability

- Accountability structures must reinforce the long-term, collaborative systems orientation, and be based on strategic dialogue centred around long-term outcome agreements.
- College network strategies will be developed in collaboration with other key partners – including employers, employer representatives, universities and schools, the NHS, trade and student unions and other key community partners. Oversight should include evaluating the way in which the college system aligns with their strategic priorities and the needs of the groups they represent.
- Clarity of roles in strategic oversight is critical, and across the four nations there is important work to take forward in simplifying and streamlining the regulatory landscape. The goal in each nation should be to have one post-16 education and skills funder and regulator, with clear oversight across the integrated tertiary system.
- The recommendations that we set out in this report would deliver very significant improvements in the service that people, employers and communities receive – ensuring a universally high-quality service, which is context appropriate to meet local priorities and needs.



Governance

- Governance crucially needs to reflect the systemic approach we advocate for college networks. Delivering this means that college governors should have a dual mandate towards both institutional and systems good. What this looks like will be notably different within the four nations, and might be applied in different ways in particular regional/local contexts.
- As well as the structure of governance, college governing bodies need to ensure that they appropriately reflect the wider community within which they sit. Serious work needs to be undertaken across the four nations to ensure that governing bodies are diverse and inclusive, as well as having clarity on the particular expertise that governors respectively contribute to the board.
- This must include effective staff and student voice represented at the governing body level, who must be supported to undertake this role – including with fully funded sabbatical positions for elected student union representatives, and ensuring that staff representatives have sufficient time outside of contractual duties to undertake their additional responsibilities.
- Development of the student voice function is crucially both in ensuring that the college reflects and responds to student priorities, but also crucially as a key element of enrichment and in developing diverse future leaders.
- Governing bodies must also involve representation from appropriate regional stakeholders (including employers, local government, and other education providers).
- The robust, professional relationship between governors and executive leadership will be strengthened through ensuring that governors serve a maximum of two terms, and ensuring that governors are supported with high-quality training and support delivered through relevant agencies.

Development and investment in a professional workforce and place-based leaders

Leading the way

Recommendation 10

An ambitious future college workforce strategy.

Colleges need the best people who are fully empowered to deliver on this vision. Ensuring this must see colleges working with governments across the four nations to develop ambitious college workforce strategies, based on a comprehensive review within each of the four nations. A new social partnership between colleges, unions, employers and governments within each nation would oversee key strategic priorities, including:

- Ensuring and recognising the professional status of the college teaching workforce and the ongoing evolution of the profession - with a focus on continuous personal development, an expansion in secondment opportunities and a focus on developing diverse routes into the sector with a much more porous relationship with industry.
- Recognising and responding to changing aspirations and expectations of people, employers and communities, and the implications of this across both pedagogy and delivery – including with a focus on staff development opportunities and wellbeing.
- A proliferation in support functions including across careers advice, business support and student representation.
- Significant investment in the digital skills of the college workforce.

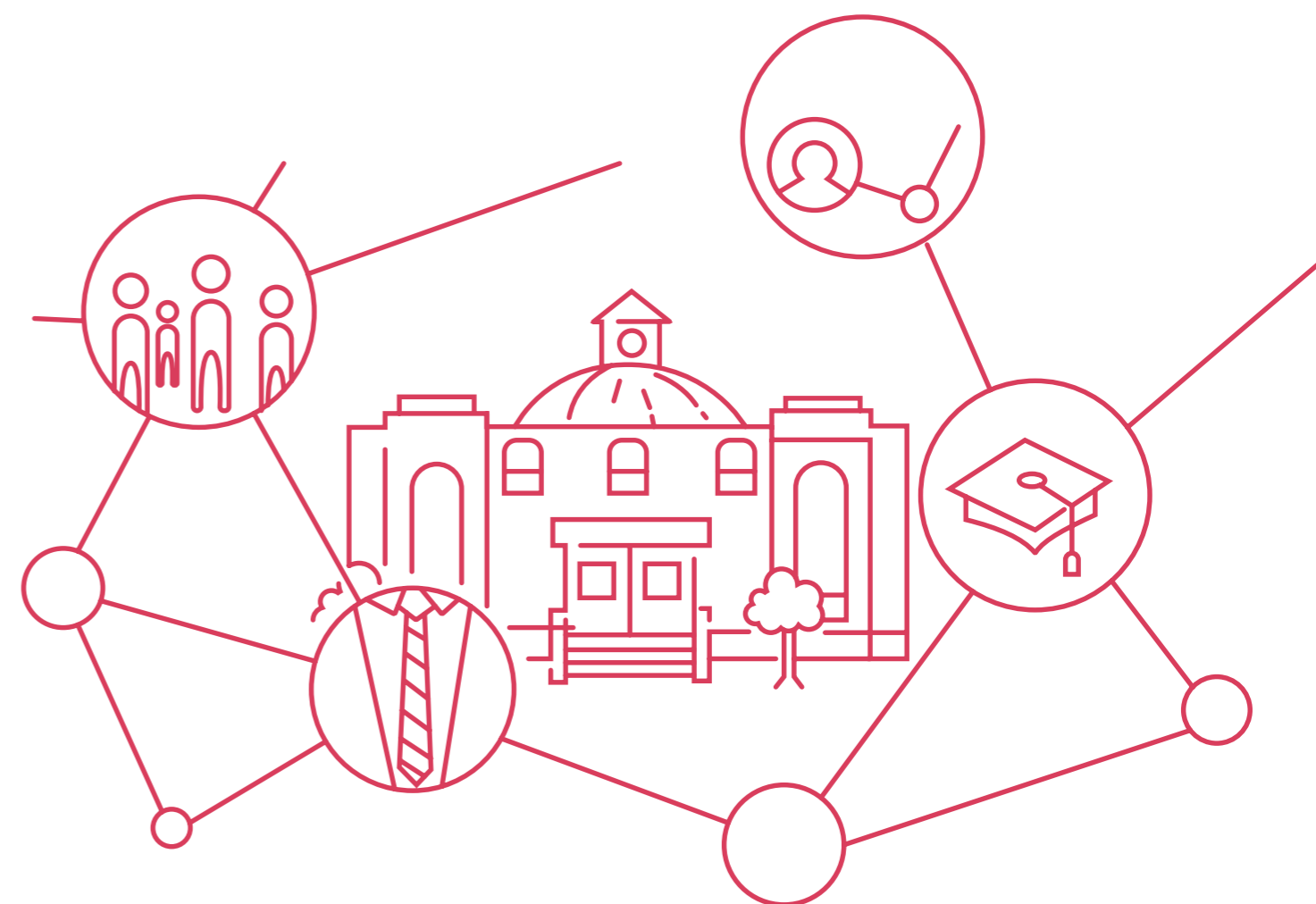
The status of the college workforce should be further developed and extended through the establishment of a new UK-wide teaching network.

Recommendation 11

Diverse and representative systems leaders.

Colleges must be led by systems' leaders who reflect the communities within which they are based and the students they serve. College representative organisations must review representation in leadership structures - with a focus on systematic, mandatory data collection on college leaders and governors by protected characteristics, including across race, gender, sexuality and disability. This data must be used to identify gaps in diversity, to develop targeted recruitment and development programmes in under-represented groups.

The Four Nations College Alliance should work with partner organisations across the UK to champion systems leadership capacities and competences across the four nations, including through development of the ongoing peer development programme.



The workforce must be a central focus of the ongoing renewal of college systems

Workforce development

The workforce must be a central focus of the ongoing renewal of college systems across the four nations. Changes in the world of work, technological developments and changes in individual aspirations and expectations will mean significant changes – with the expansion into more flexible learning opportunities outside of tradition working hours and online, and ongoing significant changes and developments in pedagogy too.

Colleges have changed so much in recent years and the recent COVID-19 period has brought with it even more and rapid change in pedagogy and working practices for the college workforce. A more flexible and diverse range of approaches to teaching, learning and training will, together with a focus on the health, wellbeing and mental health of staff, highlights the need for an ambitious future workforce strategy within each nation - based on a social partnership between governments, trade unions, colleges and employers within each nation. This will ensure that colleges continue to deliver for learners, communities and employers, whilst always supporting and developing staff to harness their professionalism and commitment to the sector.

The shift towards more networked systems with specialisation across networks offers significant opportunities to develop new strategic leadership positions in teaching, research and employer engagement – and significant emphasis must be given to this across the four nations.

- The college teaching workforce must hold, and be recognised to hold, professional status. This will look different in different subject areas, but across all subject specialisms teaching staff must be recognised for their expertise both in teaching and in their subject specialism (McGoughlin, 2013). We need to continue to develop diverse pathways into the college workforce, as well as progression routes within the sector.
- This must see college networks ensuring that where relevant, teaching staff have regular exposure to current industry practice through placement/exchange and upskilling opportunities development, including through the delivery of a CPD programme to ensure the regular updating of specialist skills and teaching and learning competence (Greatbatch and Tate, 2018).
- In order to be able to develop the esteem of the college sector, pay levels need to be competitive with similar roles in other parts of the education and skills system/other specialisms where relevant for support functions.



Routes into the college teaching workforce

Teachers enter the college teaching workforce in different ways:

- Directly from a PGCE
- With a PGCE but having worked in a school
- Directly from industry to train on the job
- Starting as teaching assistants/technicians and moving into a teaching role
- Starting on 'FE only' teaching but moving on to mixed or HE teaching roles

This is a real strength of the sector – and it is important to strengthen diverse pathways into the college workforce, including a far closer relationship with relevant industries.

The shift towards more networked systems with specialisation across networks offers significant opportunities

- There is a longstanding challenge in attracting teaching staff for key sectors where they are much better paid in industry, and this should be a matter of strategic consideration from colleges, trade unions, employers and governments within the four nations.
- Coordination of specialisations across hubs allows for the recruitment of highly specialist roles, who can play a lead role in teaching and learning, workforce development and employer engagement across a wider network.
- College networks are also likely to develop employer placement programmes to ensure staff remain fully up-to-date with current skill requirements and business practices.
- There is an immediate priority around the development and ongoing updating of digital skills of the college workforce. This requires investment from national governments and should be coordinated to ensure that this is delivered in an efficient manner, ensuring consistent skills across the college system.
- The workforce would benefit from the reestablishment of a UK-wide teaching network, with an emphasis on learning and research in pedagogy.
- Employer hubs will allow for the development of a range of strategic leadership positions in curriculum development, pedagogy and research, which would be attractive to staff from other parts of the education and skills system and industry, presenting the college sector as an attractive career for a diverse workforce.
- An increasingly networked tertiary system across relevant economic geographies also presents an opportunity for the development of a wide range of non-teaching specialist roles – including in lifetime careers and skills advice and guidance, pastoral support and student voice functions, all of which must be developed in order that colleges can deliver across their full remit.

CASE STUDY**College leader's ambition for excellence through collaboration**

The recently launched WorldSkills UK Centre of Excellence, the first of its kind to be launched across the UK, will draw on WorldSkills UK's unique insights into global skills development to mainstream excellence in training standards with a new college network. The initiative has been designed in response to overwhelming demand from college leaders throughout the UK to help create a new cadre of world-class educators, supporting their professional development in delivering higher standards in training so more young people and their employers succeed. The aim is also to put higher standards at the heart of boosting productivity, placing colleges at the heart of local economic development. The WorldSkills UK Centre of Excellence will convene this collaborative leadership network and provide support, resources and opportunities to mainstream excellence in technical education throughout the UK, and with a focus on raising aspirations and standards in areas of the UK that have high levels of social deprivation. It will initially run as a three-year pilot programme, in partnership with NCFE and colleges across the four nations.



“We are committed to delivering excellent teaching programmes and developing world-class skills at Coleg Gwent. [...] Being part of the WorldSkills UK Centre of Excellence is a fantastic opportunity to further enhance our skills training by sharing best practice and providing learners the opportunity to learn from the very best.”

Guy Lacey, Principal, Coleg Gwent

“Vocational skills and training are key to our success here in the South of Scotland and so we understand how important they are, how to help promote them, and how they help prepare our students for their careers after they leave us.”

Joanna Campbell, Principal, Dumfries and Galloway College

Diversity and inclusion

- Across both executive and non-executive leadership in colleges across the UK, there is a serious issue of equality and diversity, with leadership teams and governing bodies disproportionately male and white, and failing to reflect the diverse student population that colleges serve.
- Concerted work is needed to address these failings, including through the setting of targets for leadership, and through a focus on developing new pathways into working in the college system and progression routes within the system.
- There is a particular challenge too in the lack of data collected on representation across executive and non-executive leaderships across the four nations, and we recommend that this gap is addressed as a matter of priority.
- This therefore requires work led by the relevant college representative bodies, together with government, to develop systematic, mandatory data collection of college leadership and governors by protected characteristic, and for governors, of the expertise/skill they contribute to the board.
- This data must be used to identify gaps in diversity (both by protected characteristics and in terms of expertise) to develop targeted recruitment programmes for governors and training for managers in under-represented groups in leadership within the sector, to ensure leadership and governance reflects the community the college serves and is highly skilled to provide system leadership.

SUMMARY**Developing the digital skills of the college workforce**

A joint Jisc and AoC research project, *Shaping the Digital Future of FE and Skills* conducted over the summer of 2020, highlights a range of responses about the shift to online learning during the pandemic and the requirement for upskilling staff. 66 per cent of respondents thought the digital shift had a positive impact on their team and 55 per cent pointed to an increase in their levels of productivity. Others struggled, however, with nearly half of staff (49 per cent) saying they were concerned they would not be able to deliver the quality of teaching they expected of themselves.

Additionally, findings from Jisc's *learner digital experience insights 2020 report* published in September 2020 collated responses from more than 19,000 FE learners. When asked what one thing organisations could do to improve the quality of digital teaching and learning, among the top answers learners gave was “help teaching staff to develop digital skills”.

Leadership

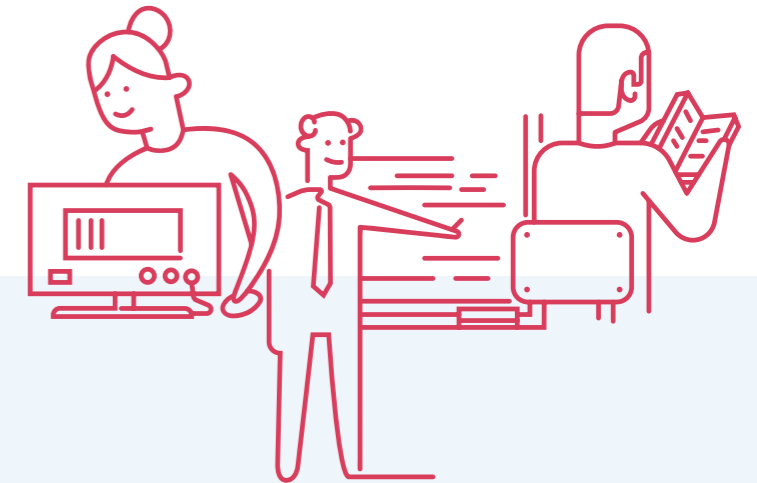
- Leaders must be empowered and held accountable for driving strategic outcomes on the wider system engendering a well-networked approach, alongside effective institutional management. This will require significant work across the four nations to build on systems leadership where it exists and develop it where it does not.
- There is tremendous productive learning from across the four nations of the UK, and that there is a key role for the Four Nations College Alliance to work relevant organisations across the four nations to support future leadership development.

SUMMARY

Four Nations College Alliance

The Four Nations College Alliance was established in 2017, and brings together college leaders, college representative bodies and senior civil servants from across the four nations of the UK – to seek to learn from the different policy contexts and institutional practices that exist and to champion systems leadership across the sector.

The alliance has received support from the Gastby Foundation, Edge Foundation and the Education Training Foundation.



DEFINITION

Systems leadership

“Systems leadership is a set of skills and capacities that any individual or organization can use to catalyze, enable and support the process of systems-level change. It combines collaborative leadership, coalition-building and systems insight to mobilize innovation and action across a large, decentralized network.”

(Dreier et al, 2019)

The key elements of systems leadership



GRAPHIC: HARVARD KENNEDY INSTITUTE

Chapter four

NEXT STEPS FOR TAKING THIS FORWARD

Colleges and governments can't deliver this vision alone



Achieving this vision requires not just system renewal within each of the four nations, but also requires significant cultural change within and outside of the college sector

Achieving this vision requires not just system renewal within each of the four nations, but also requires significant cultural change within and outside of the college sector. And it requires many other partners to step into new relationships with colleges.

The Four Nations College Alliance will be taking forward this work, in close partnership with colleges and college representative bodies across the four nations. This will include:

- Working with policy makers, college leaders and college representative bodies to support the implementation of our recommendations.
- Working with college leaders and college representative bodies to champion systems leadership development, amplifying good practices from inside and outside of the sector.
- Working to continue to build engagement with other sectors, building consensus for change and better-connected local education and skills ecosystems. This will include taking forward work across the four nations with the NHS and with sector councils.

Recommendations for the four nations

The four nations of the UK are at markedly different stages of their reform programmes and operate within notably different contexts. We have drawn very significantly from important policy reforms and outstanding institutional practices across the four nations.

And yet across all four systems, there are common challenges and changes (as set out in chapter one), there is a common strategic remit for colleges to realise (as set out in chapter two), and there are key strategic components which will allow colleges to deliver on this (as set out in chapter three).

We have set out eleven overarching common recommendations for governments across the four nations. We will set out further specific recommendations for each of the four nations in a series of nations-specific reports to be published this autumn.

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