

25th June 2004

Merger of the Funding Councils Team
Enterprise Transport and Lifelong Learning Dept
2nd Floor, Europa Building
450 Argyle Street
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Andrew

Dear Sir

Response to the Scottish Executive Consultation on the Merger Bill

Jewel and Esk Valley College wishes to make the following observations:

- The College is broadly supportive of the decision to merge the two Councils and welcomes this as a positive move forward in pursuit of the Lifelong Learning agenda in Scotland.
- There is a general concern as to how one body can span human endeavour from global leading edge primary research to the education of adults with complex learning difficulties.
- The College notes with concern the intention to designate institutions as STEPS. This is not only unwelcome terminology, but the lack of clarity in designation might lead to a number of current private sector competitors gaining entry to the publicly funded market in Scotland causing a dilution in quality of provision.
- Colleges face a competitive enough scenario at present where they are competing against the private sector for work and encouraging participation and social inclusion. Creating a situation where there might also be competition for scarce funding will not further the Lifelong Learning and Social Inclusion agenda.

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- The College wishes to express its concern at the proposed new powers for ministers to specifically earmark funds for particular public services such as health or care. This may run across carefully constructed local plans to support local economic development.
- The College finds disturbing the proposition that the Bill might be more directive on the subject of mergers between institutions.
- The College is also concerned on the more general point of overlap between the powers proposed for the new merged body and those currently exercised by Audit Scotland.
- The College is also disappointed by the lack of prominence given to the SCQF and the lukewarm support for progression and articulation routes between colleges and the HEIs.
- Parity of esteem for colleges, brought about by any levelling up of funding would be welcome; but only if additional resources are made available to continue to support excellence and diversity in FECs and HEIs. The real parity sought by Colleges lies in equality of regard.
- The College is mindful of the need to take account of the number of Scottish Executive consultations currently underway and their likely impact on each other - in particular the school/college review and student finance.
- The College is concerned that the merger of the two Councils if not properly handled, might damage the relationships and collaborative partnerships which already exist between colleges and universities.
- Whilst the college board welcomes appropriate meetings with the Executive Funding Council, the extension of the powers of the funding body to call meetings of an autonomous board and subsequently interfere with institutional governance would not be welcome; and necessary only in the most extreme circumstances of failure in public accountability.

On the question of the naming of the new body, the college suggests it be called the Scottish Funding Council. The word tertiary is not well understood by the public and does not adequately describe the scope of activity which will be funded by the new body.

The college also supports the ASC's platform statement on the merger.

This response is made in collaboration with the other colleges within the Edinburgh and Lothians area.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Howard McKenzie". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Howard McKenzie
Principal & Chief Executive