

Merger of Funding Councils
Consultation
Response – Reid Kerr College, Paisley

Reid Kerr College welcomes the opportunity to respond to the merger of SFEFC and SHEFC. The College supports the Scottish Executive's proposals on the role of the new body and we believe that the merger will help secure coherence, maintain quality standards and promote parity of esteem in the tertiary education sector.

The intention that the new body promotes future skills needs of employers is welcomed, as is the need to support effective collaboration and progression within the sector to benefit all learners.

With regard to the name for the new body, we believe that the title "Scottish Tertiary Education Funding Council" adequately reflects the scope and responsibilities of the new body.

In response to the funding issues outlined in para 37, the College supports the suggestion that we "need to think about less stratified ways about how, where and by whom provision is offered" and indeed funded.

The comments in para 113 relating to student finance are also worthy of support, in particular the reference to the new body having "powers to provide any form of financial student support to colleges and institutions including grants and loans".

The College has some concerns with regard to some of the proposals outlined in the document.

The recommendation that Scottish Ministers "will also be able to specify other providers as STEPs, and therefore make them eligible for funding" is a major cause for concern. Given the number of funded institutions in the tertiary education sector and the acknowledged contribution that they make to society and the economy in Scotland, it would seem inappropriate that additional bodies may have access to already limited funds. We believe that the sector is of sufficient size and scale to adequately meet the present and future needs of the population and is only limited by the resources available through grant funding and from other income generation activities.

We are particularly concerned at the lack of enthusiasm to use the SCQF as a basis for defining or indeed funding tertiary education. Whilst it may be considered that the model is "not mature enough" it should be noted that the resourcing, consultation and development of this framework have been welcomed and acclaimed by both the education and business communities. The framework is seen as a significant tool in understanding how qualifications relate to knowledge and skills requirements both at home and in the international community.

With regard to the new approaches to delivery of tertiary education in UHIMI and at the Crichton Campus, we would agree that the new body should have a focus in developing further new models for collaboration.

We are concerned that there are no additional powers for the new body to support the development of articulation (para 103). We believe that the existing arrangements are limited in the extent to which they can develop articulation arrangements to benefit vocational students in the FE sector and allow them to make progress in higher education. A new approach to funding and developing sound articulation and progression would be of considerable benefit to lifelong learners in Scotland.

The comments on the current school/college review paper in para 118 are also noted. The outcome of this review could have major resource implications for the further education sector and the new body must continue to consult widely with the sector, the local authorities and the Scottish Executive to ensure that the quality and coherence in the tertiary education sector is maintained.

In conclusion, we trust that the merger of the Councils will result in a reduction of the administrative burden on Colleges and a reduction of the costs associated with regulation of the sector.

If the merger helps establish parity of esteem in the treatment and funding of FE Colleges then we are sure that the benefits to our students will be considerable.