



Consultation on the Merger of the Scottish Further Education Funding Council and the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council.

Stow College welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this Scottish Executive consultation on the merger of the funding councils. In general terms, the college welcomes the proposals set out in the consultation paper and views these proposals as a worthwhile attempt to both simplify and clarify the existing arrangements and relationships. However, there are a number of areas covered by the consultation paper, which we feel need to be addressed and/or further clarified and these are set out below with specific reference made to the appropriate section of the consultation paper.

Section 34

There is a requirement to establish a fair and transparent funding model which is based on the level and nature of learning provision delivered rather than the two models currently in use which are based on type of institution.

Sections 51 & 52

While welcoming the intention to move towards greater parity of esteem between the sectors, the use of the term 'tertiary education' is not supported. This is terminology which is outmoded and out of step with the principles of lifelong learning, widening access and social inclusion. The term is meaningless except for those working in the college and university sectors. The use of the term 'further education' is also unhelpful and potentially misleading given the scale of higher education provision delivered by Scotland's colleges. In this respect, for clarity, it may be better to use terms such as 'the college sector' and 'the university sector'.

Section 54

SCQF should be given greater profile notwithstanding its lack of maturity. Its importance would be considerably enhanced by using it as the framework for differing levels of provision.

Section 55

As noted above, the use of the term 'tertiary education' is archaic. To designate colleges and HEIs as STEPs is not supported. Neither is the proposal that in future Scottish Ministers will be able to specify other providers for the purposes of funding provision of lifelong learning. In a period when colleges are unable to meet demand for learning because of funding constraints, it is inconceivable to consider adding to the number of providers. A more realistic option would be to allow growth to meet demand through increased funding.

Section 65

The emphasis on autonomy is welcome. This must be maintained if colleges and HEIs are to continue to respond to meeting local needs.

Section 81

Colleges are already responsive to the needs of learners and employers and work effectively with a range of groups at local, regional and national levels. As noted above, the major drawback to meeting demand is the current level of funding, not the willingness or desire of colleges to provide learning opportunities.

Sections 98 & 99

The college supports the view that mergers are most likely to succeed when entered into by willing players. While noting the points made regarding strategic role and best value, we cannot see how giving Scottish Ministers the power to request that unwilling organisations investigate the feasibility of merger will be anything other than wasteful of public monies.

Sections 107-112

We are opposed to the proposal that the new funding body be assigned a single aggregate of funds to divide up between the main funding streams. This has the potential to allow the new funding body to allocate resources as it sees fit between providers and across sectors.

Finally, in respect of a name for the new body, we do not welcome the term used in the draft Bill, Scottish Tertiary Education Funding Council. Perhaps a term such as 'Scottish Lifelong Learning Funding Council' or 'Scottish Funding Council for Lifelong Learning' would be more appropriate.