

081
78

West Lothian College

Response to the Scottish Executive Consultation
on the Merger Bill

The Board of Management of West Lothian College has now had an opportunity to discuss the implications of the merger of the two Funding Councils on the college and the sector. This discussion was further informed by the views of staff and students at the Scottish Executive consultation event held on 11th November 2004.

The college would like 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.

It would be our wish to see the Bill having for its focus the benefits which will accrue from the merger to students in Scotland's colleges and universities.

The college has concerns with the intention to designate institutions as ATEES. 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 of the quality of provision.

It would be a competitive enough scenario at present where they are competing against the private sector for work. Creating a situation where the public sector is the competition for scarce funding will not further the current learning and social inclusion agenda.

Finally 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.

- * 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 CCF and the lukewarm support for progression and articulation routes between colleges and HEIs.

Equality of provision for colleges brought about by any levelling up of funding would be welcome but only if additional resources are made

... will continue to support excellence and diversity in HEFCOs and
... will be strengthened through by colleges low in quality 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.

The college is concerned that the merger of the two Councils if not
carefully managed might damage the relationships and collaborative
work which already exist between colleges and universities.

If the college board were to be welcomed as appropriate to sit with the
board of the Funding Council, the extension of the powers of the
funding body to call meetings of an autonomous board and subsequently
to make decisions on institutional governance would not be welcome; and
the college would in the most extreme circumstances of failure in public
accountability.

Yours faithfully,

The college will continue to contribute to the debate on the merger bill.

In 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 has discussed the ASC's preform statement on the merger.

Alan Chapman, College of
Education