

## **Outcome of the targeted review into School College Partnership response to COVID-19 for Curriculum and Assessment Board (CAB)**

### **Purpose**

1. To ask the members of the Curriculum and Assessment Board to note the outcome of the targeted review on School College partnerships and to support a continuation of the study with a more in depth analysis with recommendations on the impact of Covid-19 on young learners.

### **Background**

2. On the 9th September 2020 a paper updating CAB (CAB-12(01)) on the re-opening of schools drew attention to reported tensions and the potential for quality issues where a young person is attending different establishments.
3. As a consequence of the points raised, a meeting was agreed to understand the position of the school/college responses to COVID-19, to be clear of the issues being raised and to build an evidence base to provide solution focused outcomes. In the meeting were representatives from the Colleges Principals Group, the CEO College Development Network (CDN) and senior representatives from Scottish Government and Education Scotland.
4. Quite early on, it was unclear to those attending what specifically was meant by the general reference to “tensions” in relation to school/ college partnership delivery post COVID-19 in the curriculum paper though discussion at CAB had suggested that any such tensions might be more regionally focused.
5. As discussion developed, consensus emerged that there did not appear to be one uniform tension or problem with regard to impact of COVID 19 on collaboration between schools and colleges across the country at the operational level. However there did appear to be some regional variance in terms of confidence and certainty in applying the recently published guidance on returning to schools, specifically about what to offer and how in a context where young people may not be able to move as freely. It was recognised there was the need for a better awareness and understanding as to the breadth of experiences across the country of school/college partnerships.
6. As an outcome, a short life working group (SLWG) was convened by the College Principals Group (CPG) to engage with colleges, schools and LAs and included the Colleges Scotland Vice Principals Group on Curriculum, the School/College Partnership Network (CLASS), Scottish Funding Council (SFC), Skills Development Scotland (SDS) and DYW practitioners to identify and suggest actions to address any potential issues but also to examine and report best practise and identify actions for improved awareness and communication. The Association of Directors of Education Scotland (ADES) and Education Scotland would be part of the engagement to consider the school perspective. The scoping document and agreed questions can be seen in Appendix 1. Finally, it was agreed an update report would be presented to CAB and CPG by Christmas and

an update presented to CAB at their meeting on 8<sup>th</sup> December.

### Key considerations from the targeted review

7. Over the last two months, the SLWG has combined qualitative analysis from 15 local authorities, 9 regional colleges, feedback from CLASS representatives with quantitative data to 2018/19 from SFC and SDS.
8. In 2018/19 there were 72,799 school college enrolments across the 13 Regional Colleges and 3,445 Foundation Apprenticeships (FA's). This was a 19% increase on enrolments from 2017/18 (61,144) and a 15.6% increase on the year before (52,904). The data has not been finalised for enrolments in 19/20 but it's estimated this will be around 90,000 enrolments including FA's.
9. The review identified there were indeed tensions with the school college partnerships which arose as a consequence of the circumstances and pressures created by having to respond quickly to COVID-19. This was well articulated by one respondent:

*“No fault of partnership, strong working relationships in most cases, but tensions unavoidable.”*

10. Further analysis clarified the tensions and difficulties for school/college partnership as being caused by the following:
  - General early frustrations from both parties during the COVID-19 pandemic response. In the main these were attributed to:
    - The need for better systematic, joined up and timely planning and communication, recognising this was made difficult by the different timing of guideline announcements and the fact guidelines were also different between sectors. This included H&S in areas such as social distancing, numbers in classrooms, practical delivery and placements. It was recognised that the need for long term planning was not a luxury any partner had.
    - Access and security issues on different learning portals and the need for better preparation for online learning. It was recognised that for all sectors, the move to online delivery was an emergency response with a few exceptions where virtual learning had been already well established prior to the pandemic, such as the Highland Virtual School. College learners are currently working from home on virtual platforms. In schools, most students are utilising school and personal equipment in the schools and space to study has been problematic as well as the need for supervision.
11. School College Partnerships are recognised by all parties as being a key component of the Senior Phase representing an average of 22% of College

activity in session 2018/19 and over 72,000 enrolments. The opportunity provided by Foundation Apprenticeships has been seized with a doubling of numbers across the last two years and potential for growth through established DYW networks of employers, schools and colleges.

12. In the main, School College Partnerships are well established with strong management support and groups are working towards future planning for 2021/22. The opportunities for the use of high quality on-line delivery, support for appropriate digital pedagogy and access to the right equipment in the right place should be further examined.
13. Travel issues were not seen as problematical from respondents being managed at the local level by both schools and colleges.
14. In the responses, there were a number of references to Education Scotland's recent collaborative publication on [Learner Pathways: A key to successful curriculum design](#). This is a collaborative report on what schools, communities and Government could do to support curriculum design around each learner and can be used to inform and shape the future options for school/college partnerships going forward particularly in relation to the increase in digital capacity.
15. However, some respondents recognised there were a few instances where the relationship between the schools, local authorities and the regional college were not strong particularly in timeous communication on both programme development and changes to delivery modes.
16. There was not a single example of a regional college working directly with Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs).
17. Many respondents commented that the DYW funding for DYW Coordinators was not in place noting concern for the sustainability of the historical work that had been undertaken by the DYW teams.
18. In the wake of the recent experiences of the 2020 exams and most recently with the advent of the COVID-19 local protection levels, concern was noted for the need for an equitable approach to learners from the SQA with clear guidelines to all schools and colleges, recognising the considerable volume of school-college activity.

### **Looking forward**

19. The analysis from the respondents has shown that for session 20/21, the numbers from the school/college partnerships are either stable or increasing in what continues to be a difficult year. It is extremely important, therefore to ensure any remaining tensions are resolved for a substantial cohort of young people.
20. The impact on School College Partnership success for learners as a consequence of COVID-19 measures was not part of this work however it should be a key component of a Phase 2 study using the excellent data collated as part of this review. This Phase 2 study should focus on analysis of the data for learners in attainment, achievement, progression, best value, positive destination, improved

awareness, sharing of best practise in pedagogy and infrastructure arrangements. Securing successful outcomes for young people undertaking courses in 20/21 is the most pressing concern for school college partnerships.

21. The review highlighted a number of areas for where CAB members could support continued improvement in school-college partnerships:

- As the School College Partnership is seen as a core and interdependent component of the Senior Phase which has real and tangible enrichment for young learners, there is a need for a strategic overview and reporting mechanism for a young person's achievement and attainment to be recorded to ensure the totality of the Senior Phase is measured.
- The role of the regional college in the RICs should be explored because of the strategic impact on learners.
- Improved awareness raising of successful regional models as part of a regional educational ecosystem potentially underpinned by development of the Learner Pathways project.
- Sustaining the excellent networking capacity of DYW with employers, enhancing pathways, subject choice and careers guidance.
- Review of SFC decision to focus on credit activity for the Senior Phase. This has been to the detriment of some excellent projects in the BGE phase and in Primary Schools, including STEM in Primary projects, linked to learner pathways and subject choice.

#### **Points for discussion**

- To note the outputs from this targeted review on the impact of COVID-19 on School College Partnerships and the positive feedback from partners.
- To agree the need for further work through a Phase 2 analysis of data to identify the impact of COVID-19 on school college partnership learners leading to one final report. Colleges Scotland could lead on this work and report to CAB in the future. Importantly though, the work should provide a "heads up" on the in-year position for young learners.
- Notwithstanding a Phase 2 analysis, what actions can be taken forward now, for example in the implementation of Learner Pathways (para 14), addressing the bullet points in paras 10 and 21 and in seeking an equitable approach to learner qualification (para 18).

**Appendix 1**

The College Short Life Working Group identified the following points for consideration:

- What impact has the COVID restrictions had on scoping the school college offer for the next academic year across each region?
- What is the college feedback on new awarding bodies' guidance on assessment strategies for this academic year?
- Where DYW co-ordinators have been established, what benefits are seen as emerging in the short (COVID) term and longer (business as usual) term?
- Is there involvement with the Regional Improvement Collaborative(s) for your area with School College partnerships in relation to the response to COVID-19?
- What is the role of your DYW employer group(s) during the COVID-19 crisis?
- At operational level, describe what you see that could be described as tensions between colleges and schools following the introduction of COVID-19 restrictions and how could they have been mitigated?
- What is the line of communication and engagement between regional colleges, school managers and curriculum leads?
- Where are school college partnerships working well in particular to the solutions in place for the digital offer and why? Include here responsive DYW collaborations have been in the different regions)
- With information from SFC and with a comparison for the last three years for each college region, what are the number of learners involved, percentage of school-college activity by region, by SCQF level and subject areas.?
- With information from SDS and comparison with previous years what has been the uptake of Foundation Apprenticeships for each college region?
- Are regional colleges actively promoting post-school progression opportunities to school pupils for further, higher and work-based learning options, including access to university via a college-university articulation route? What are the approaches taken?
- How is the movement of young people being managed, both getting to the college and within college?