

## **CONSULTATION ON THE FUTURE “EU 2020” STRATEGY RESPONSE SUBMITTED ON BEHALF OF THE SCOTLAND’S COLLEGES.**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

This response is submitted by *Scotland’s Colleges*, the body created and developed by Scotland’s 43 Colleges of further (non-advanced) and higher education to support their work, represent their interests and inform others about the work of the Colleges. This response has been developed with reference to that submitted by the West of Scotland Colleges Partnership (representing 17 of Scotland’s Colleges members) and is therefore confined to making key high level points. Scotland’s Colleges would be delighted to provide further information on any of the points made here through the contacts set out at the end of this document.

In order remain well informed about and participate in EU developments with its area of remit, Scotland’s Colleges mandate the West of Scotland Colleges’ Partnership (WoSCoP) to be its representative on the following national forums:

- (a) The Scottish Government's Stakeholders' group for the Bologna Process
- (b) The Scottish Advisory Group for the National Agencies for the EU's LLP
- (c) The Scottish Interreg IV Forum
- (d) The European and International Group of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership
- (e) The Programme Monitoring Committee for INTERREG IVA Programme for Northern Ireland, the Border Region of Ireland and Western Scotland
- (f) The Project Management Group and the Project Advisory Group of the Scottish Government’s Scoping Study into support mechanisms for refugees and migrant workers

In addition, the Chairman of WoSCoP (who is member of Scotland’s Colleges Principals’ Convention) serves as a member of the Programme Monitoring Committee for the European Structural Funds Programmes for Lowlands and Uplands Scotland for 2007 to 2013 and a member of WoSCoP staff serves on the General Council of The European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE).

All of Scotland’s Colleges’ member Colleges have a statutory duty to develop and deliver a vast range of initial and continuing vocational education and training and retraining programmes up to EQF level 5. (approximately ¼ of Scotland’s higher education is delivered by Colleges.

In addition, all member colleges fulfil their remits as institutes of professional higher education by collaborating with a range of stakeholders in the public, private and voluntary sectors and social partners to engage in activities to support social inclusion, digital literacy, workforce and skills development,

knowledge transfer and sustainable local and regional economic development.

All 43 of Scotland's colleges of further and higher education have been a key tool in the Scottish Government's response to the economic crisis, particularly in providing timely education and training interventions to support those who have been confronted by redundancy and extended periods of unemployment.

## 2. COMMENTS ON THE EU 2020 STRATEGY

### **A: Creating Value by Basing Growth on Knowledge**

Like WosCoP, *Scotland's Colleges* agrees that the EU is in the midst of a period of deep period of transition and that better and more coherent collaboration between the EU and member States in policy development and implementation offers the most effective route to creating a partnership for growth and job creation. The existing resources of the EU's current instruments and funds provide a strong base which can be used more strategically and effectively for this purpose. This is not only for the "*EU 2020 Strategy*" but also to inform the development of the post-2013 generation of programmes and their associated priorities.

*Scotland's Colleges* agrees that the Strategy's clearly articulated aspiration to create a competitive, connected and greener economy is both welcome and worthy, providing that economy is also increasingly fairer and more ethical.

Each year, approximately 1 on 10 of Scotland's people will increase their skills and knowledge through one of Scotland's 43 Colleges of Further and Higher Education. Almost all of the learning opportunities provided by Colleges are work related. Colleges work across all economic sectors and with employers of all sizes (from micro to large businesses). The average age of students in our Colleges is now over 30, despite the fact that significant numbers of those of school age also attend College either full or part time. This average age is therefore a strong indicator of how important Colleges are to Scotland's economy.

*Scotland's Colleges'* welcome for the Strategy's thematic driver, "**creating value by basing growth on knowledge**", *is therefore based on this highly significant contribution and experience.* *Scotland's Colleges* would, however, observe:

The Strategy seems to suggest that European universities are uniquely placed to foster employability in young people and to make adequate arrangements for increased learner mobility and the acquisition of new knowledge and languages. Without seeking to diminish the significance of universities, particularly in the field of new knowledge and technologies generation through research, in many Member States, colleges of further and higher education, technical and vocational schools and institutes of professional higher education have been considerably more successful than

universities in widening access to learning, developing education-industry partnerships and work-based learning, developing education for digital and creative industries, promoting transnational mobility and structured work placements. Restricting the focus of this theme to universities presents a risk of missing the opportunity to build upon and learn from existing structures, policies and practice that are closer to the majority of learners, workers and businesses.

*Scotland's Colleges* recognises the economic imperative for the EU's leading universities to impact globally, particularly in research. However, much would be gained in ensuring that the new knowledge and technologies generated through this research is exploited with the EU for the benefit of all, if Colleges and their equivalents were more strongly empowered to act as a bridge particularly to the small and micro-enterprises, which currently find it difficult to interact with universities. This bridge should also allow businesses of all sizes to pose problems for solution and seek knowledge from researchers and experts in colleges and universities, creating true knowledge exchange.

It is therefore crucial that whatever systems and funding models are created to support the strategy act to enhance this and promote progression between different types of learning opportunities, whilst minimising the necessity of duplication of learning by individuals. The European Qualification Framework and national credit and qualification frameworks are essential mechanisms to ensure this.

### **B: Empowering People in Inclusive Societies:**

All of *Scotland's Colleges'* member colleges work with a range of local stakeholders, including local and regional government, to build community capacity in the areas that they serve. Consequently, *Scotland's Colleges* welcomes the identification in the Strategy of the theme, “**empowering people in inclusive societies**” and strongly supports the aim for 2020 of more jobs, better jobs, higher rates of employment amongst the working age population and a real chance for everyone to enter the labour market. This is because developments in this area would empower many who are currently disenfranchised from full participation in education, employment and civic society. This theme should also promote the expansion of the concept of “community benefit” within all public sector works.

### **C. Developing Skills at all Levels and Lifelong Learning for All.**

The Colleges of Scotland are the major champions of the Skills Agenda in Scotland and work in partnership with all relevant stakeholders to ensure that their curricular offerings match current, emerging and future labour market needs and help those subjected to unemployment retrain for new and different jobs.

It is from this basis of expertise and experience that *Scotland's Colleges* very strongly recommends that the Strategy and the policies which flow from it should place greater emphasis on the fact that linear learning and career

pathways no longer exist and that the provision of adequate investment and support for lifelong and lifewide learning should be regarded as one of the most liberating tools at the disposal of national governments.

Having a job is one of the best safeguards against poverty and exclusion but in all Member States there are individuals and communities who have been marginalised by previous recessions and globalisation. The first step (back) into the labour market for people within this category is often so huge that it is too frightening for them to contemplate. The experience of *Scotland's Colleges*, including WoSCoP's members, is that significant investment in financial and pastoral support and extremely flexible learning pathways is a pre-requisite to engaging with them and helping them to progress, commonly through more than one attempt. The groups which require More Choices and More Chances than others must remain one of the highest priorities for investment, because of the benefit their successful inclusion brings to society as a whole and those individuals.

Although this varies across the EU, many member nations have shortages of the intermediate level skills that categorise “associate professional, skilled technical and middle management jobs. These are essential for the European Union economies to flourish in the Global context and the Strategy must recognise this, through the appropriate development of the EU's vocational education area and other mechanisms.

#### **D: Creating a Competitive, Connected and Greener Economy.**

*Scotland's Colleges* fully endorses the thematic imperative of “**creating a competitive, connected and greener economy**”. Whilst the transition to a low-carbon economy will be challenging, WoSCoP colleges are, already establishing partnerships and knowledge exchange arrangements with other educational institutions, national and local government and transnational partners to develop less carbon-intensive methods of delivering learning across wider areas and identifying emerging “green collar” jobs and appropriate training and certification for them.

#### **E: Harvesting Existing Resources to Support the Strategy and its implementation.**

*Scotland's Colleges* would also, like WoSCoP, commend the learning and experience in the EU's current Lifelong Learning Programme and its predecessors as a resource for the development of the Strategy and its implementation and recommends investment in harvesting this.

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