



# West of Scotland Colleges' Partnership



## Consultation on the Future "EU 2020" Strategy

### Response submitted on behalf of the West of Scotland Colleges' Partnership

#### Introduction

The West of Scotland Colleges' Partnership (WoSCoP), based in Glasgow, is a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee whose partners are 17 colleges of further and higher education serving the south-west Scotland region (NUTS code UKM3). All of the institutions represented by WoSCoP 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. 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. Whilst WoSCoP's membership comprises only 17 institutions in the professional higher education sector, it is mandated by *Scotland's Colleges* - the national policy and development agency for the Scottish college sector – to represent all of the nation's colleges 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 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).

#### Comments on the EU 2020 Strategy

WoSCoP agrees that the EU is in the midst of a period of deep transformation 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. At an operational level, WoSCoP believes that smarter, more strategically-focused use of the EU's existing instruments and funds is essential, not only for the "EU 2020 Strategy" but also to inform the



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development of the post-2013 generation of programmes and their associated priorities. The Strategy's clearly articulated aspiration to create a competitive, connected and greener economy is both welcome and worthy. However, WoSCoP feels that it fails to take due cognisance of a key lesson from the financial crisis: that is, the lack of a prevailing climate of corporate social and ethical responsibility has not only failed to put a brake on individual self-interest, personal enrichment and corporate greed but has also disempowered individual citizens who, as a consequence of public subsidies to corporate Europe, are now paying the price for a crisis created by a sizeable minority of bankers and financiers. Therefore, **WoSCoP argues that there is a need for the 2020 Strategy to ensure that any competitive, connected and greener economy that it seeks to create is also fairer and more ethical than that which laid the foundations for the financial crisis.**

As an influential player in the domain of education, WoSCoP welcomes the importance placed on this in the Strategy's thematic driver of "creating value by basing growth on knowledge". However, we offer the following observations and suggestions. Firstly, the EU's current Lifelong learning Programme and its predecessors like SOCRATES, HORIZON, YOUTHSTART, etc. must, surely, have generated an abundance of interesting practice in the fields of premature school leaving, equality and social exclusion. However, our experience in most of these programmes, leads us to conclude that insufficient effort is invested in harvesting such practice and experience to inform the development of future programmes. Furthermore, **the fact that the 2020 Strategy restricts itself to considering only the Erasmus, Leonardo Da Vinci and Erasmus Mundus programmes suggests to us that useful learning from the Comenius, Lingua (now LLP Key Activity 2) , Grundtvig, Minerva (now LLP Key Activity 3), European Social Fund and EQUAL programmes may, once again, be overlooked.** Our second observation is that 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 research, WoSCoP is duty-bound to note that, **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.** Therefore, it is our firm belief that restricting focus on 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 who are far removed from the range of stakeholders with whom most universities would seek to engage. WoSCoP recognises the economic imperative for the EU's leading universities to impact globally, particularly in research and in attracting the brightest postgraduate students.

All of WoSCoP's member colleges collaborate with a range of local stakeholders, including local and regional government, to build community capacity in the areas that they serve. Consequently, it is pleasing to note that the Strategy embraces a theme of "empowering people in inclusive societies". Whilst attaining 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 may empower many who are currently disenfranchised from full participation in education, employment and civic society. These outcomes, alone, are insufficient to address the signature symbol of the financial crisis – disproportionate rewards and impunity from failure for a privileged and educated minority at a cost borne by a majority powerless to prevent the self-serving, risky and, at times illegal practices of the aforementioned minority. In an effort to address this **WoSCoP urges the Commission to include corporate social and ethical responsibility within this thematic driver.** In more concrete terms, WoSCoP proposes that this topic is included as a priority in EU funding programmes; from 2010 to 2020 and that funding is made available, from existing resources, to develop training programmes to educate and mobilise the silent majority of corporate shareholders to develop the competence and confidence to hold company directors and senior executives accountable for the fairness and ethicality of their business decisions and practice. In fact, WoSCoP



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originally proposed to the Managing Authority in Scotland that Corporate Social Responsibility should be introduced as a horizontal theme for the EU's Structural Funds Programme for 2007 to 2013.

WoSCoP colleges are frontline 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 to help those subjected to unemployment retrain for new and different jobs. However, we feel 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.** It is indisputable that having a job is probably the best safeguard 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. WoSCoP's experience 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 and that seeking the cheapest possible solutions rarely, if ever works. Therefore, WoSCoP asks **the Commission and Member States to note this and to resist any temptation to reduce investment in educating and helping such individuals and communities simply because they are the least likely to protest.** More radically, WoSCoP suggests that those responsible for compiling the final version of the *EU's 2020 Strategy* explore the scope and appetite in Member States for requiring those corporations which are enjoying the highest levels of public support in recovering from the (self-inflicted) blows of the financial recession to demonstrate a concrete commitment to empowering people in inclusive societies through setting aside a small proportion of their profits to support community development and lifelong learning for those that are furthest away from education and employment. Whilst many such organisations will, no doubt, contend that the taxation system is the route through which they make such contributions, it is self-evident that the benefits that they accrue from the education system in the form of skilled employees, vastly outweighs their existing fiscal responsibilities.

As has been mentioned above, WoSCoP 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. A final point in the context of this theme is a restatement of our opening point that the competitive, connected and greener economy must also be more ethical and fairer than era of egotism that it replaces.

Submitted on 22/12/2009 by

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