



Memorandum of Comments by EIS-FELA on Colleges Scotland, 'Statement of Ambition'

The EIS is the largest education union in Scotland with around 55,000 members including over five thousand members in Further Education Colleges and around fifteen hundred members as academics and academic related staff within Higher Education Institutions in Scotland.

The EIS FE members form a Self-Governing Association called the 'Educational Institute of Scotland Further Education Lecturers' Association' with its own Executive to determine EIS FE policy. It is the sole recognised union for representing lecturing staff within the FE sector.

The EIS-FELA welcomes the publication of Colleges Scotland's 'Statement of Ambition' for the college sector and the opportunity to provide comment on the vision, mission and value statements outlined in the document.

It is hoped that the following comments will be of assistance in reviewing the draft:

Mission Statement

The EIS-FELA believes that colleges are central to widening access to education for all, with the delivery of high-quality learning and teaching enriching the lives of those attending and ensuring that society benefits from a workforce which is appropriately skilled and trained to meet the challenges of modern life.

The mission statement acknowledges the importance of equity and excellence in the educational provision for the learner. The EIS-FELA welcomes this statement as the prime focus of the mission statement but would suggest that the intrinsic value of education in its own right, without consideration of the consequential economic impact of the provision, should also be acknowledged. The statement could be adjusted to reflect this additional value more clearly.

Ambitions to Deliver

It might be helpful in this section if the ambitions which Colleges Scotland has for those people involved in the sector are more clearly specified. As currently drafted, this overview section does not provide a clear outline of the ambition in terms of the people involved. Given that the students, staff and partners are at the heart of the college sector, EIS-FELA believes that the order of the ambitions should be adjusted to reflect this.

Prosperous Economy

The first bullet point in this section provides that the college sector will contribute to Scotland's 'inclusive sustainable economic growth agenda' and outlines how this will be delivered. EIS-FELA would suggest that reference should be included here to the delivery of educational needs, in addition to training and skills development.

Bullet point two then provides that the college sector will 'deliver sector benefits from innovative funding models and commercial opportunities'. Whilst commercial opportunities may provide a source of funding, it must be acknowledged that this may be limited and that the majority of funding emanates from the Scottish Government. EIS-FELA believes that continued public investment in the sector is

essential as a means of widening access to education and reducing poverty and inequality in society more generally. Such investment is key to delivering equity for FE learners in comparison to students in schools and universities. EIS-FELA would suggest that this is reflected in the drafting of this section.

The Communities We Serve and Students

These sections make reference to the key role which colleges play in widening access to education and make a welcome commitment to placing the learner's experience at the heart of everything the sector does.

Whilst EIS-FELA endorses this position, it would suggest that these sections could be developed further to emphasise that Further Education is about lifelong learning and education for social inclusion as well as for capacity building and employment in the communities served by the colleges. Given the reduction in part time student places in recent years and the consequential impact of this on mature, female students, such a commitment to lifelong learning would strengthen both sections of the document.

It should also be recognised that those 'furthest away from the labour market' will also require investment in learner support services to sustain their studies and are often the learners who are in most need of part time, community based/outreach provision, which has diminished significantly in some regions. If the ambition outlined in these sections is to be realised, then reference to this investment and the framework for the delivery of the outcome should be included also.

Perhaps one of the most vulnerable groups of learners supported by the provision of Further Education are those serving custodial sentences in our prisons. The delivery of high quality prison education by trained lecturers is key to the rehabilitation process and provides an exemplar of education being tailored to meet the needs of learners as is outlined in this document. Reference to this group in the 'Student' section might assist in clarifying how this ambition could be realised.

One of the ambitions for 'Students' rightly refers to the improving the learner's journey and experience. In recent years, the focus on full time, 15-24 learners has made the journey more difficult for non-traditional and adult returners, who may lack the guidance they need in the first instance. EIS-FELA would recommend that the ambition is extended to focus on ensuring appropriate provision and support is available for these learners to remove such barriers to learning.

The document makes a commitment to transforming learning through the benefits of digitalisation. This statement is narrowly drafted and does not reflect that students learn in many different ways. Digitalisation may provide one medium through which learning may be transformed but it is not the only one. EIS-FELA would recommend that this section is re-drafted to acknowledge this and reflect that learning can be transformed in many different ways, provided a focus is placed on meeting learners' needs.

Staff and Partners

EIS-FELA welcomes the commitment given in these sections of the document to collaborative work and positive engagement with trade unions to deliver positive outcomes. It may be helpful to further develop this section to reflect this approach by including reference to support at college level for staff professional development.

In addition, reference to the joint work of the NJNC could also be incorporated and the following statement included: "The College sector is fortunate to have a successful and proven national collective bargaining machinery (NJNC) and will use it as a means of delivering progressive outcomes for college staff in partnership with the recognised staff trade unions."

The first bullet point in the section under 'Partners' refers to building and maintaining collaborative partnerships with key stakeholders. EIS-FELA notes that no reference is made to building the partnership to ensure the delivery of high quality teaching and learning and would recommend that this is incorporated into this section.