

Delivering Scotland's Circular Economy: A Consultation on Proposals for a Circular Economy Bill – Colleges Scotland Comments – August 2022

Introduction

Colleges Scotland is the collective voice for the college sector in Scotland, representing its interests and ensuring that colleges are at the heart of a world class education sector that is recognised, valued and available to all. Colleges Scotland, as the membership body, represents all 26 colleges in Scotland, which deliver both further education and around 24% of the provision of all higher education in Scotland.

The college sector [Statement of Ambition](#) commits the sector to being 'a key partner in delivering Scotland's inclusive and environmentally sustainable economic growth', with colleges across Scotland having also signed up to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Since the launch of the Climate Commission for UK Higher and Further Education, Colleges Scotland has represented the college sector in Scotland in discussions and been involved in the development of an action plan by College Development Network in response to the climate emergency. Colleges across Scotland have also been involved in the development and delivery of the Skills Development Scotland [Climate Emergency Skills Action Plan 2020-2025](#).

Separate to this work, ESP, the college sector agency for energy, engineering and construction, which is a collaboration of Scotland's colleges and industry partners, is acting as a key strategic body in increasing Scotland's capability and capacity to deliver the right skills for the construction, energy, engineering and STEM sectors to meet industry demand against emerging skills priorities stemming from the Climate Emergency, Just Transition and move to Net-Zero.

On behalf of the college sector in Scotland we welcome the opportunity to provide our views regarding the Scottish Government's proposals for legislation to develop Scotland's circular economy and transition Scotland to a reuse society.

Key Points

We are supportive in principle of the overarching concepts and objectives underpinning the proposed legislation in relation to the definition of a circular economy and the opportunities this could provide to Scotland in the form of new market opportunities, improving productivity strengthening communities by providing local employment opportunities.

At this stage, given the vital role colleges play in skilling up the workforce required to support the economy and increased productivity, we would welcome college sector engagement and presence with and on the proposed circular economy public body.

This would have real benefit to the Scottish Government by enabling the best practice of colleges to be communicated and shared with wider stakeholders, at a time when colleges are making significant strides in enhancing and managing their own resource management plans in response to their public sector requirements to reach Net-Zero status.

More fundamentally, having the involvement of colleges as part of a wider educational presence would be a key element in embedding the benefits and practices associated with a circular

economy into the curriculum, as well as using the linkages of colleges with both schools and with employers in encouraging innovation. Colleges can offer both focused, subject specific skills as well as broader awareness raising climate education to the wider student community, with the ability to influence climate aware behaviours for the 213,000 learners across the sector.

As the Scottish Government takes forward plans in relation to the circular economy bill, and on how best to achieve the delivery of a circular economy in practice, we would wish to highlight the following key themes regarding the role of colleges in supporting the circular economy as part of a wider-drive to reaching Net-Zero and supporting the Just Transition agenda.

Colleges as Green Civic Anchors

Scotland's economy and learners have already been significantly impacted because of Covid-19 and colleges, in their role as local civic anchors across the country, will be pivotal in driving economic recovery with their agility and ability to upskill and retrain people, providing them with the employability skills employers need.

Colleges are ideally placed to support organisations across Scotland to rebuild businesses and their confidence and to do this with the Net-Zero targets in mind, whilst creating opportunities to develop resource efficient, inclusive and sustainable economic approaches, which help address inequality and poverty, in line with the goals of the Commission.

Given the college sector's extensive networks and unique reach to SMEs, colleges have a key role to play in supporting Net-Zero related innovation activity in these businesses, whilst driving regional economic developments and recoveries focused around moving towards a Net-Zero economy and simultaneously maximising the opportunities for workers to develop their skills as part of these changes.

By acting as green civic anchors across Scotland, colleges are in a unique position in being role model organisations, by demonstrating to their communities, students and employers how sustainable buildings and supporting infrastructure can be used to achieve Net-Zero. Some colleges for example are openly considering acting as 'living labs' of sustainable practice so everyone engaged with the college experiences the best sustainable practices. ESP are also already supporting industry partners in the transport and energy sectors to make progress towards their sustainability objectives.

Role of Colleges in Supporting Just Transition and Net-Zero

Going forward colleges across Scotland will continue to help Scottish workers, and Scottish apprentices, to keep pace with technological, environmental and labour market changes and to increase workforce and business resilience to future disruption as the economy both recovers from the impact of Covid-19 and transitions to a Net-Zero, low-carbon inclusive format in response to the Climate Emergency.

For example, in relation to skills, the biggest impact on reducing carbon emissions in housing will be through retrofitting. Colleges are the leaders in providing construction skills and with investment from the Scottish Government will be in a prime position to support the construction sector to adopt new practices, whilst at the same time supporting a disproportionate amount of learners from lower Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation Quintiles, as colleges have historically done and will continue to do so.

Conclusion

As the Scottish Government receives responses with which to inform legislation to develop a circular economy for Scotland, we would ask that the knowledge and thinking of the college sector, a sector

which is increasingly supporting the development of an inclusive, cohesive and resilient economy across Scotland, is taken into consideration in the next stages of the work. This would especially be around planning, investing and implementing a transition to environmentally and socially sustainable jobs, sectors and economies, and in building on Scotland's economic and workforce strengths and potential.

On this basis, we would welcome the opportunity to consult with the Scottish Government, building on previous engagement with the Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity, given the crucial role that colleges will play in supporting the transition to a circular economy in communities across Scotland in their role as civic anchors, and in ensuring that this transition to a circular economy is a successful one.

Our requests at this stage, which we would like to take forward with the Scottish Government, are as follows:

1. For colleges to be strongly involved in the implementation of the legislation to develop Scotland's circular economy and transition Scotland to a reuse society and the co-creation and implementation of associated initiatives.
2. To engage with the Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity to identify how to progress the role of the college sector in delivering the Circular Economy Bill once enacted into law.

Colleges Scotland
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