



Scottish Funding Council  
Comhairle Maoineachaidh na h-Alba

## **Review of Regional Strategic Bodies – Glasgow Colleges' Regional Board**

**SFC Publication**

Issue Date: 20 October 2020

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## Review of Regional Strategic Bodies – Glasgow Colleges’ Regional Board

### Introduction

1. The Regional Strategic Body for Glasgow Region, known as the Glasgow Colleges' Regional Board was established by the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 2005 (as amended by the Post-16 Education (Scotland) Act 2013). From August 2014 Glasgow Colleges’ Regional Board (GCRB) assumed overarching responsibility for the planning and delivery of coherent, high quality further and higher education in the region via its three colleges. At the same time the three colleges in Glasgow (City of Glasgow College, Glasgow Clyde College and Glasgow Kelvin College) were designated assigned colleges. GCRB became one of three RSBs in multi-college regions across Scotland<sup>1</sup>.
2. SFC has a statutory duty to assess and enhance the performance of RSBs and from 2014 worked closely with GCRB in its initial phase of development<sup>2</sup>.
3. Recent Audit Scotland reports have highlighted the progress of each of the RSBs on meeting accountabilities and developing partnership arrangements in their respective regions. Specifically, the Audit Scotland report ‘Scotland’s Colleges 2018’<sup>3</sup> noted that GCRB “is making progress in coordinating collaborative regional activity, but needs to do more work with its assigned colleges, to deliver all of the intended benefits of regionalisation.” The report went on to recommend that the Scottish Government and the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) should assess and publicly report on the extent to which RSBs are meeting the aims of regionalisation.
4. SFC initiated a review process for the three RSBs in 2019. This report is the summation of SFC’s assessment of the effectiveness of GCRB, the Glasgow RSB, in meeting its core statutory duties and wider aims of regionalisation. It also considers the extent to which governance structures and lines of accountability are clear and facilitate good working practices. Broadly, our assessment is based around the key responsibilities and themes outlined in the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 2005. These four themes were central in the self-evaluation exercise, the written consultation with stakeholders and during discussions on the day SFC met with the GCRB Board and key stakeholders:
  - Planning provision within the region.
  - Funding and performance monitoring.
  - Efficiency of the RSB, and its colleges.

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<sup>1</sup> The other Regional Strategic Bodies are the Lanarkshire Board and the University of the Highlands and Islands.

<sup>2</sup> S.13A of the Further & Higher Education (Scotland) Act 2005

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/report/scotlands-colleges-2018>

- Consultation & collaboration.

## Methodology

5. GCRB was asked to complete a self-evaluation of its performance in meeting its legislative duties and responsibilities. SFC provided a template to ensure consistency across the three reviews being undertaken. SFC asked that the full Board consider the self-evaluation prior to submission and that the final document should be copied to its assigned colleges. This self-evaluation has now been published and can be found on the GCRB website<sup>4</sup>.
6. At the same time SFC also contacted a range of stakeholders who were identified as central to the colleges' delivery of provision in Glasgow Region and asked them to respond on a range of questions to inform the review.
7. SFC considered the judgements and views presented in the self-evaluations alongside the initial responses from stakeholders. SFC also drew on the current knowledge and evidence it has from working alongside the GCRB in recent years as the fundable body in Glasgow Region. A key source of evidence was the Glasgow Regional Outcome Agreement which GCRB has been responsible for delivering since 2014. SFC also drew on a range of planning and reporting documents issued by GCRB.
8. SFC then arranged evidence sessions with GCRB and its key internal and external stakeholders, to discuss their self-evaluation and seek further evidence of the Board's performance in delivering on regional aims and achievement to date and the impact of decisions taken. These sessions were held at the City of Glasgow College, where GCRB has its offices, on 4 October 2019.
9. SFC also took account of any additional feedback submitted in the weeks following the evidence sessions up until the end of November.
10. Appendix A lists the stakeholders who submitted evidence to the review of the GCRB.
11. Appendix B lists those who attended the evidence sessions.
12. Appendix C lists additional documents which were used in the review.
13. In undertaking and reporting on the review SFC acknowledges that the sector is operating in an environment that is complex, changing, and difficult to predict. In particular, there is uncertainty in the wider context of the COVID-19 pandemic, public finances and the UK's exit from the European Union,

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gcrb.ac.uk/sites/default/files/GCRBSelf-EvaluationReportRegionalEffectivenessFINAL.pdf>

alongside financial pressures from pay and pension contributions, demographic and migration changes, and increasing competition for students.

### **General background to RSBs**

14. To operate fully, RSBs in multi-college regions had to first meet the SFC's requirements to become 'fundable bodies'. The creation of multi-college RSBs has led to a change in the financial and accountability relationships between the SFC and the assigned colleges in these regions.
15. The RSBs are bound by a Financial Memorandum with SFC, which sets out the relationships and accountabilities between SFC and the institutions it funds. Assigned colleges are funded by the RSBs and in turn are bound by a Financial Memorandum with the RSB which funds them. In both cases compliance with the Financial Memorandum is a condition of grant funding. SFC provides funding to the RSB for the delivery of the region's Outcome Agreement; it is then for the RSB to decide on how those funds should be allocated among the colleges.
16. Each RSB monitors its assigned colleges' financial performance and progress towards delivery of activity targets. SFC monitors the RSBs' performance through the Regional Outcome Agreement (ROA). The ROA sets out what the region will deliver in return for SFC core funding, and the RSB is accountable for that delivery. SFC regularly monitors RSBs' progress against the activity targets and measures in the ROA.
17. There are a few areas where assigned colleges continue to report jointly to SFC and their RSB, because of practical considerations. An example of this is colleges' submission of monthly cash flow returns which inform payment of SFC grant, where time pressures are a constraint. Another example where SFC continues to liaise directly with assigned colleges is around activity data collection and the integrity of that data; this approach is more efficient than SFC engaging with RSBs.
18. RSBs also provide a central point of contact for employers and other stakeholders (e.g. Community Planning Partnerships, Local Authorities, Skills Development Scotland and third sector partners) to engage at a regional level, rather than with individual colleges, thereby ensuring a coherent offering via a regionally responsive curriculum.
19. SFC recognises that to some extent geographic challenges will limit the curriculum efficiencies that can be realised in some regions. This is particularly true in Lanarkshire and the Highlands & Islands, but also to a lesser extent in Glasgow. There may be scope for regions to concentrate some specialised provision on a single campus, or at one college, but it is important that further

education provision is available locally within regions (this also applies to multi-campus colleges where those campuses are geographically dispersed).

## **Specific background context to the Glasgow Region**

### ***Establishing GCRB***

20. Unlike the other two RSBs, the Lanarkshire Board and UHI, GCRB was set up as a completely new and separate entity for the purpose of governing college provision in Glasgow region. The Glasgow college region encompasses all or some of the local authority areas of Glasgow City, East Renfrewshire and East Dunbartonshire. The Board's first Chair was appointed in May 2014 with responsibility for establishing the governance structures and processes necessary to support the new body and for initiating new ways of working across the Glasgow colleges.
21. In August 2014 GCRB assumed all of the responsibilities of the RSB for the region but without the authority to act as the funding body for the three colleges. The legislation would have allowed SFC immediately to transfer funding responsibility for the whole region to the GCRB. However the Scottish Government advised that this should not happen until the appropriate point when SFC was satisfied that GCRB as a new funding entity had in place robust systems of governance and accountability. Only at this point would the Glasgow funding allocation be passed to GCRB, rather than directly to the assigned colleges. So, at the outset SFC continued to pay core funding to the three assigned colleges on the instruction of GCRB.

### ***Unique challenges***

22. In 2009 Glasgow had nine colleges and by the end of 2013, following the move to regionalisation, there were three remaining colleges in Glasgow region. In August 2014 the three colleges which became assigned colleges to the newly formed regional board - GCRB - were still relatively new entities, the result of fairly recent mergers, two of these happening in academic year 2013-14.
23. Glasgow Clyde College was created following the merger of Anniesland College, Cardonald College and Langside College in August 2013 and Glasgow Kelvin College was created following the merger of John Wheatley College, North Glasgow College and Stow College in October 2013. Slightly earlier than this, in 2010 Glasgow Metropolitan College, Central College of Commerce and Glasgow Nautical College had merged to form the City of Glasgow College.
24. Forming strong strategic relationships across the three colleges and with other key stakeholders was critical during the early period of the operation of GCRB to ensure the future development and success of regional arrangements in Glasgow. The shift from newly formed, independent institutions of fairly

significant scale, to assigned colleges was not inconsequential for the Principals and Chairs. Added to this the approach taken by GCRB at the outset was not successful in bringing the colleges, their Principals and their Chairs together around a shared ambition for the region.

25. During its first year of development there was little progress in the function and direction of GCRB. Serious concerns about delivery led to the Audit Scotland Section 22 report, '2014/15 Audit of Glasgow Colleges' Regional Board' which identified weaknesses in governance arrangements. SFC worked with the Scottish Government to support GCRB to get back on track. Interim arrangements were put in place for leadership at Board and executive level. SFC continued to offer support and challenge to GCRB during 2015-16 as it worked to put in place the necessary operational and management arrangements required of a fundable body.
26. By August 2016 GCRB had experienced significant transformation, with a change of Chair, members and executive. Effective progress had also been made on governance structures and processes, and by March 2017 SFC's Board confirmed it was content to move GCRB to fully fundable body status. Early in her role at GCRB the current Chair acknowledged that greater stability was needed to make GCRB more effective than it had been while recognising the more recent progress that had been made to achieve fundable body status.

### ***Regional strategic planning***

27. Prior to GCRB, from 2012, the Glasgow colleges had shared responsibility for submitting a Regional Outcome Agreement (ROA) to SFC which was agreed jointly across nine colleges. This was a planning challenge but from the outset the Glasgow ROA was held up as an example of a well-developed and well-informed Outcome Agreement and with challenging targets and measures.
28. In late 2014 all three colleges and the newly established GCRB signed up to complete a curriculum and estates review. The focus of the review was to ensure that across the region the right college provision was being offered in the right place and the best possible use was being made of the resources and facilities across the three assigned colleges to deliver for Glasgow. The review also took account of the imminent changes resulting from the redeveloped and new build estate across the whole city to ensure best value from the investment in public funds.
29. The review was undertaken jointly by the colleges, GCRB and SFC and led by an independent chair. The output was the Glasgow Colleges Curriculum and Estates Plan 2015-2020. Implementation of this plan led to changes in the number and content of courses offered across the region, the closure of a

campus that was no longer fit for purpose and a transfer of credits across the three colleges in Glasgow.

30. In October 2017 GCRB launched the first regional strategic plan *Glasgow Region Strategic Plan for College Education 2017-22*. The strategy set out the regional priorities for 2017-22 and made commitments to develop a range of regional initiatives including:
- Coordinating curriculum hubs that jointly plan the courses colleges provide, to match economic and employer needs. This approach gives learners a better chance of getting a job when they leave.
  - Coordinating the way school pupils move into further education across the region and developing ways for students to articulate from the colleges to Glasgow University.
  - Supporting Glasgow's colleges to develop individual college and regional science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) strategies.
  - Establishing regional leads for curriculum planning, organisational development, student experience, developing the young workforce (DYW) and student data systems. Individual colleges offer their senior staff, on average, for one day a week.
  - Distributing capital funding to colleges against an agreed set of criteria, linked to regional priorities.
  - Monitoring and scrutinising colleges' finances and performance on an ongoing basis.
31. In 2019 GCRB launched its 2019-20 Regional Programme of Action which complemented the ROA<sup>5</sup>.

### **Summary of main conclusions**

32. SFC confirms that operating within the current regional structure, GCRB is meeting its core statutory requirements and has made good progress in delivering additional benefits expected through regionalisation. After a challenging start, nearly three years to achieve fundable body status, and changes in its leadership, it is adding value to the delivery of college provision in the Glasgow College Region and beyond. This success is due in no small part to the current Chair's leadership of the GCRB Board and collegiate approach, which draws on the contribution and experience of senior staff across all three

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.gcrb.ac.uk/content/regional-programme-action-2019-20>



assigned colleges underpinned by the expertise that resides within the small executive of GCRB.

33. Since 2016 GCRB has made significant progress in developing the governance, structures, capacity and expertise, and relationships needed to deliver a joined-up college system that offers coherent provision to meet the needs of learners and stakeholders across Glasgow Region and wider. Working closely with its three assigned colleges it has developed a strategic and responsive 'one-door' approach to its many stakeholders.
34. The self-evaluation submitted by GCRB was a comprehensive document; insightful and evidenced-based providing responses on all the key areas requested by SFC. It was reflective and critical, acknowledging both achievements to-date and development actions. The self-evaluation was supported by a range of additional strategic documents, most recent of which is the 2019-20 Programme of Action which sits alongside the AY2019-20 Outcome Agreement for Glasgow Region.
35. This was supplemented by written evidence submitted from a range of key stakeholders including Skills Development Scotland (SDS), local authority education departments, key partner agencies, university partners, staff, trade unions, and students.
  - A Regional Outcome Agreement (ROA) has been submitted by GCRB and agreed with SFC from AY 2015-16 onwards. The consecutive ROAs have consistently evidenced a robust approach to assessing the demand for skills and education provision and adjusting local provision to meet demand. The ROA commits GCRB and the colleges to deliver on key priorities including STEM provision, the regional childcare expansion strategy, Foundation Apprenticeships as part of the Senior Phase offer, Flexible Workforce Development in direct response to employers, and work placements as part of the vocational learning offer. In addition to submission of the ROA, GCRB plays a significant, central role in the ongoing evaluation, monitoring and reporting on delivery across Glasgow Region.
  - GCRB has been effective in ensuring the right provision is in the right place across the three colleges to meet the needs of learners, employers and other stakeholders in the region. Delivering the 2015-2020 Curriculum and Estates Plan was a significant early achievement. This skills focus is continuing through the skills alignment work, which will underpin a revised curriculum plan for Glasgow Region for the future, and work on the Glasgow City Region, Regional Skills Investment Plan.
  - GCRB has agreed the allocation of resources to the three colleges to deliver on their respective ROA commitments since 2015. Fully fundable body

status was achieved in 2017 following full consideration by the SFC Board. However, evidence suggests that agreeing the funding allocation to the assigned colleges each year remains challenging for GCRB which is operating within tight timescales following SFC funding allocation decisions. The colleges suggested that where GCRB has made decisions to move credits or align funding with regional strategic priorities this has contributed to uncertainty and tensions. SFC and GCRB should continue to work closely in future around the timing of communications related to funding announcements. GCRB, its committees and its assigned colleges should continue to liaise regularly around funding decisions. .

- Through its collaborative approach GCRB is making a significant contribution to addressing the college attainment and progression aspirations in Glasgow. It has built on the college sector quality framework to make the link between individual college quality plans and the regional aspirations and to bring curriculum leads together across the region to plan appropriately. It has focused particularly on the school to college and college to university pathways but is also looking to grow the college to college route. Students now have more opportunities to progress on to university with advanced standing. GCRB should look to continue to prioritise attainment, progression/articulation and widening access in Glasgow.
- GCRB is acutely aware of the ongoing scrutiny of the return on public investment in the Glasgow College Region and this is a constant and urgent priority in relation to both running costs budget and programme budget. From what we heard on the day and the evidence presented (including a recent externally-validated self-evaluation and the Annual Report of the External Auditor in 2019) we are content that appropriate reassurances are in place.
- The evidence presented confirmed that by collaborating across existing effective regional executive structures GCRB is able to agree both wider strategic priorities and also the targets for the ROA which deliver on regional and national ambitions. These collaborations are productive and are based on a true collegial approach across senior staff of the three colleges and GCRB.
- It was SFC's view from the evidence presented that there is greater understanding and awareness across staff at all levels of the role that GCRB has in Glasgow Region. GCRB prioritises this activity and it will be important to keep up this level of commitment and communication moving forward.

- Despite differences of opinion in the past, the four Boards in Glasgow Region and their senior managers have committed to seek to address any conflicts constructively and share responsibility for seeking solutions for Glasgow and its communities, recognising that everyone is working within the parameters of the original legislation to create RSBs.
36. Having taken account of all the evidence presented, it is SFC's view that GCRB's governance arrangements have bedded in and have been able to deliver regional benefits and added value for students and other stakeholders, including employers. GCRB has delivered consistently, and well, to respond to needs in Glasgow Region. That said, there are still mixed views within the assigned bodies themselves about the additional value being added by the RSB and the cumbersome nature of the four-Board arrangement (i.e. the boards of the assigned colleges – Kelvin, Clyde and City of Glasgow – alongside the regional board). All agree on the need for collaboration, but disagree about the cost and region-level processes of GCRB, although at £445,000 in 2019-20 GCRB's costs are less than originally envisaged in 2014. Agreeing the funding allocations across the three colleges remains challenging for GCRB, despite an efficient approach. Operating within tight timescales following SFC funding allocation decisions and negotiating agreement on key issues between four Boards and senior managers has been time-consuming and difficult at times.
37. We propose that now is an appropriate stage in its development for GCRB to begin conversations about further reformation of the structures in Glasgow that will facilitate the continued effective and efficient delivery of education and skills for the region. We recommend GCRB and the colleges explore other organisational options that build on and secure pan-regional planning, further efficiency gains, the financial viability of the constituent colleges, and a Glasgow front door for students, employers and other stakeholders. This should include options that may lead to reformation of the regional structure and further consolidation that will fulfil regional and policy objectives.

## Detailed assessment

38. As part of the self-evaluation SFC set out a series of questions consistent with the relevant sections of the Act which were designed to capture detail of activity but also to identify the structures and processes underpinning progress and the extent to which these are supporting RSBs to fulfil their statutory responsibilities.

### ***Planning provision within the region (right provision in the right place)***

39. The evidence presented in the self-evaluation, and also evident in the AY 2019-20 Glasgow Region Outcome Agreement (ROA), confirms that GCRB, working closely with the three colleges, undertakes a comprehensive analysis of labour market intelligence to ensure that they plan effectively and the provision on offer meets national, regional and local employer needs. The mechanisms in place are rigorous and wide-ranging. This includes a combination of reports and plans outlining relevant skills needs and labour market intelligence; and regular interaction with key stakeholders including partner agencies, employers, staff and students to gain more immediate local and regional intelligence.
40. The main reports accessed are the Regional Skills Assessments (RSAs), Skills Investment Plans (SIPs) relating to specific industries, local authority and city region economic development strategies, and national employment policy briefings. This is reconciled with locally generated employer information from each of the colleges. GCRB also has regular engagement with key partner agencies such as SDS, local authority Education Services and the Glasgow City Region Skills Investment Group. The GCRB executive also sits round the table with economic and skills planning bodies in Glasgow such as the Glasgow City Region Skills and Employment Partnerships and it engages directly with employers, representative bodies and the Chamber of Commerce. The evidence confirmed that the level of activity around stakeholder interactions and regional and national work of the GCRB is significant and impactful.
41. This intelligence is shared and discussed throughout the year by senior managers and curriculum staff from each college as part of the curriculum planning process. In 2019 the outcome of this process was reflected in both The Regional Programme of Action and the ROA, which set out how the learning opportunities provided by the Glasgow colleges in 2019-20 are designed to meet employers' needs and provide the right learning opportunities for students, offered in the right place. These strategic documents were seen to drive regional activity and projects which benefit students and all stakeholders, and in some cases attracts additional leverage or funding.

42. The evidence presented in the self-evaluation and also in the Glasgow Region ROA confirms that GCRB has a wide range of mechanisms in place for establishing the needs of students and employers. The Region also has a strong history in responding to the needs of students in Glasgow and beyond and ensuring a smooth learner journey.
43. The scope and impact of curriculum planning in Glasgow region has been evident from the very first ROA for AY2012-13. The curriculum shifts outlined in the AY2015-16 ROA were underpinned by the recommendations and proposals in the first Glasgow Region Curriculum and Estates Plan 2015-2020.
44. The focus was on delivering a regional curriculum which met national, regional and local learner needs, as well as employers and stakeholder. This led to increased opportunities for those learners furthest away from education, employment and training and an increased volume of FE levels for those with little or no qualifications. The commitment across the three colleges, with distinct missions, to work together and in partnership with GCRB to implement the plan, to address the skills and education needs in Glasgow, was a significant pivot point.
45. The self-evaluation confirms that this plan has provided a coherent framework for regional curriculum changes over the last five years. An annual curriculum development cycle, aligned to the ROA development activity, was established as a way to underpin and endorse its delivery.
46. The AY2019-20 ROA groups the curriculum into economic sectors and joint Curriculum Hubs, corresponding to each of the sectors, leading to ongoing review activity across the three colleges to ensure the regional curriculum and learning opportunities on offer meet employers' demands, supports economic growth, and provides learners with the qualifications and skills they need to enter the job market and build successful careers.
47. The ROA includes key performance measures and references the parts of the skills system GCRB is actively addressing. For example, in AY2019-20 the Glasgow colleges committed to increase childcare training and volume of credits for STEM related training. The region also committed to deliver an expanded Flexible Workforce Development programme, broaden the joint delivery of Foundation Apprenticeships to Senior Phase pupils, develop and deliver more articulation routes, and maximise opportunities for quality work experience and work-based learning across vocational courses. This was also clearly outlined in the self-evaluation.
48. The ROA also sets out the Region's commitment to widening access and equalities. All three colleges have engagement with learners from the most deprived communities and have ambitions to grow this further. All colleges have in place the required supporting strategies for AY2019-20, including

Access and Inclusion, Equalities, Mental Health and Wellbeing, Developing the Young Workforce and a Gender Action Plan.

- **SFC conclusion: A Regional Outcome Agreement (ROA) has been submitted by GCRB and agreed with SFC from AY 2015-16 onwards. The consecutive ROAs have consistently evidenced a robust approach to assessing the demand for skills and education provision and adjusting local provision to meet demand. The ROA commits GCRB and the colleges to deliver on key priorities including STEM provision, the regional childcare expansion strategy, Foundation Apprenticeships as part of the Senior Phase offer, Flexible Workforce Development in direct response to employers, and work placements as part of the vocational learning offer. In addition to submission of the ROA, GCRB plays a significant, central role in the ongoing evaluation, monitoring and reporting on delivery across Glasgow Region.**
49. In 2019 GCRB committed to collaborating with SDS and SFC on a pilot to develop a combined curriculum planning model for Glasgow to ensure greater alignment and collaborative working across all partners. This worked through the '5-step skills planning and provision model' in the Glasgow context.
50. More recently GCRB has played a key role, along with SDS and SFC, in bringing together the six colleges across the wider Glasgow City-Region, formed of eight local authority council areas (set up to secure one of the largest City Deals in the UK) around a shared skills agenda for the future. GCRB has also supported the development of a Skills Investment Plan for the City-Region.
51. "GCRB have been instrumental in the development of the Glasgow City Region Regional skills Investment Plan and have also contributed to the review of the Regional Economic Strategy, and production of revised draft actions, and have helped to facilitate communications across three college regions." (Senior Portfolio Development Officer [People] Glasgow City Region: GCRB, Self-evaluation report on regional effectiveness p7)
- **SFC conclusion: GCRB has been effective in ensuring the right provision is in the right place across the three colleges to meet the needs of learners, employers and other stakeholders in the region. Delivering the 2015-2020 Curriculum and Estates Plan was a significant early achievement. This skills focus is continuing through the skills alignment work, which will underpin a revised curriculum plan for Glasgow Region for the future, and work on the Glasgow City Region, Regional Skills Investment Plan.**

### ***Funding allocations***

52. Since 2017 SFC has provided funding to GCRB, as the RSB, for the delivery of the priorities outlined in the Glasgow Regional Outcome Agreement; it is then for GCRB to decide on how those funds should be allocated across the three colleges and to make the payments to the colleges. The colleges work together with GCRB to plan and deliver provision for the region. The GCRB Board monitors the performance of all three colleges in meeting regional needs, and the Board and its committees receive and consider reports from both colleges.
53. The evidence SFC heard from stakeholders on the day of the review visit suggests that GCRB is effectively responding to local needs of the hardest to reach.
54. GCRB aims to ensure that the funding decisions it makes are fair, transparent and underpinned by sound and consistently applied principals.
55. For 2019-20, GCRB proposed that the allocation within Glasgow followed the simplified approach adopted nationally. On this basis:
  - £89,884,297 was allocated to the three colleges to deliver their institutional responsibilities within the 2019-20 Regional Programme of Action/ROA. Included within this total figure was additional funding to meet the cost of national bargaining.
  - £345,000 was allocated to deliver collaborative projects set out within the 2019- 20 Regional Programme of Action.
  - £442,000 was set aside to meet the running costs of GCRB (the actual figure for 2019-20 being £445,000).
  - **SFC Conclusion: GCRB has agreed the allocation of resources to the three colleges to deliver on their respective ROA commitments since 2015. Fully fundable body status was achieved in 2017 following full consideration by the SFC Board. However, evidence suggests that agreeing the funding allocation to the assigned colleges each year remains challenging for GCRB which is operating within tight timescales following SFC funding allocation decisions. The colleges suggested that where GCRB has made decisions to move credits or align funding with regional strategic priorities this has contributed to uncertainty and tensions. SFC and GCRB should continue to work closely in future around the timing of communications related to funding announcements. GCRB, its committees and its assigned colleges should continue to liaise regularly around funding decisions**

## ***Performance monitoring***

### *Quality of teaching and outcomes*

56. Raising levels of attainment and successful progression into employment or further study are core strategic priorities for GCRB. The region has consistently set stretching targets in the ROA for increasing levels of student success.
57. In seeking to improve performance GCRB has approached this in two ways. First of all GCRB has worked in close partnership with Education Scotland, the SFC and the three Glasgow colleges in response to the 'How good is our college?' quality arrangements for Scotland's colleges. In 2018 each of the three colleges submitted Evaluation Reports and Enhancement Plans (EREPs) for formal consideration. The outcome of this exercise provided assurance that the three colleges are performing well and have in place appropriate individual enhancement plans. Secondly, following this exercise a focused schedule of regional quality improvement was put in place, led by GCRB, which seeks to marry the individual college plans with the regional improvement plan. In addition GCRB established a new Regional Student Funding Forum to support consistent approaches to Learning Support Services across the Region. This Group includes student representation.
58. The regional collaboration to improve retention and achievement is highlighted in the GCRB self-evaluation (p44) and was also referenced by staff on the day of the SFC review visit. It was initiated at GCRB committee level. This brought the quality leads from across the three colleges together to consider how collectively they could work to evaluate performance and put in place improvements across the region. The success of this initiative was clearly demonstrated via the key outcomes and improvement actions. Feedback to SFC noted that this was a good example of how strategic level discussions at the GCRB Board influence change at an operational level. GCRB was in a unique position to understand both the SFC and the colleges' perspectives on quality improvement.

### *Performance on widening access and inclusion*

59. From its inception GCRB has had widening access and inclusion at the top of its list and it remains a key priority in the 2017-2022 Glasgow Region Strategic Plan for Education and in the 2019-20 ROA. The three colleges are aware that there are significant social, educational, and economic challenges that must be addressed in Glasgow, not least that 1 in 10 of the region's residents has no qualifications. SFC has clear evidence of this commitment to address widening access by actions that the GCRB Board has taken over the period 2015 to 2020.



60. In implementing the 2015-2020 Curriculum and Estates Plan, GCRB and the colleges agreed that opportunities for foundation level provision must remain at local and community level and they increased the proportion of FE provision made across the region. GCRB also recognised the specific expertise of two of its colleges who had historically prioritised widening access in Glasgow. The GCRB Board followed this by targeting an increase in teaching activity delivered to learners residing in Scotland's 10% poorest neighbourhoods, and to learners with little or no qualifications.
61. The three Glasgow colleges historically prioritised pathways (learner journeys) from school to college and from college to university, promoting articulation with advanced standing wherever possible. This was evidenced in 2015 with an enhanced relationship with Glasgow Caledonian University allocating its additional articulation places to the three colleges. The recent implementation of an innovative new articulation programme which will offer Glasgow college learners from widening access group to progress with advanced standing to the University of Glasgow is a significant achievement for the Region. Students will complete their HNC at college alongside undertaking access-oriented Year 1 studies on the University campus. This was able to progress as a result of strong relationships between the GCRB executive, the college curriculum leads and the University widening access team.
62. "The formation of GCRB has made working across the region easier in terms of having one focal point to take ideas and issues for discussion and resolution. It has streamlined the process of working with the three large colleges within Glasgow region. This coincided well with University of Glasgow taking a fresh look at articulation from HNC to year 2 in light of the CoWA recommendations. Working with GCRB allowed us to more easily take a regional approach and formulate a strategy by which we could work in partnership with the colleges to set up bespoke courses, which would sufficiently prepare students for articulation directly into year 2." (Head of Widening Participation, University of Glasgow)
- **SFC conclusion: Through its collaborative approach GCRB is making a significant contribution to addressing the college attainment and progression aspirations in Glasgow. It has built on the college sector quality framework to make the link between individual college quality plans and the regional aspirations and to bring curriculum leads together across the region to plan appropriately. It has focused particularly on the school to college and college to university pathways but is also looking to grow the college to college route. Students now have more opportunities to progress on to university with advanced standing. GCRB should look to continue to prioritise attainment, progression/articulation and widening access in Glasgow.**

## ***Efficiency of the RSB, and its colleges (maximising efficiencies)***

### *Supporting efficient services through regional collaboration*

63. On the day of the review, and also in the self-evaluation, SFC heard examples and evidence of how regional planning and delivery in Glasgow contributes to efficient services. For example, regional curriculum planning avoids unnecessary competition between colleges and supports improved viability of cohort sizes. Particular successes referred to include the expansion of childcare provision and its organisation across the three colleges to ensure learner choice, and the regional Foundation Apprenticeship programme which has a regional co-ordinator in place. Regional collaboration also helps deliver more for the public funding investment. A regional approach to procurement across the Glasgow colleges has delivered savings of over £1.5 million.

### *Delivering value for money*

64. **Running Costs:** The Scottish Government anticipated that as the only RSB which had to establish completely new governance structures there would be additional annual costs involved for GCRB. GCRB's operating costs have been consistently less than the indicative costs (£540,000) set out by the Scottish Government in 2014. It has been able to deliver on average at 35% less than the Scottish Government estimate as a result of the support of the three colleges in provision of functions to meet estates and ICT needs, Finance, HR, payroll services and marketing services.
65. "GCRB's operating costs are significantly less than the indicative budget set by the Scottish Govt when the GCRB was formed in 2014" (2017-18 Group Annual Audit Report to the Board and the Auditor General for Scotland, Scott-Moncrieff, January 2019)
66. GCRB operates with only a small number of direct staff (amounting to 3.8 FTE). This would not be sufficient to deliver the regional ambition without the contribution of senior college staff who come together as regional leads to complement the regional executive. GCRB benefits from the Glasgow Colleges Group, established earlier in response to the regionalisation agenda which has four operational groups including the Principals' Group and the Learning and Teaching Group. GCRB executive membership of these groups provides a link to the GCRB board.
67. GCRB also seeks to reduce the need for external advisors and uses APUC shared procurement services when contracting services.
68. **Programme funds:** GCRB's programme fund budget is around £120 million per year (including Capital and Student Support Funding). GCRB is the funding body for Glasgow Region and the Outcome Agreement process clearly aligns

the expected outcomes in return for public funding. The GCRB Board is responsible for endorsing the funding methodologies in place and they review Institutional Efficiency returns on an annual basis.

69. The financial memoranda (FM) in place require the assigned colleges to achieve value for money (VfM), and be economical, efficient and effective in their use of public funding. GCRB also requires the assigned colleges to have a strategy for reviewing management arrangements for securing VfM, and seek from audit processes a comprehensive appraisal of management's arrangements for achieving VfM (p27 GCRB Self-evaluation Report on Regional Effectiveness). These were key considerations at the point when SFC was assessing GCRB's readiness for fully operational fundable body status.
70. **Governance:** The Board undertakes detailed evaluation of its performance and effectiveness on an annual basis and takes account of emerging recommendations. In 2017-18 GCRB undertook an externally-validated self-evaluation. The final report was positive and there were no major areas of concern identified. In May 2019, the Internal Auditor reported an overall level of assurance of "Good" with no weaknesses identified during the review. The GCRB Board considers its Risk Register at each meeting and to support discussion, ensuring that all risks will be reviewed in depth at least once a year.
  - **SFC conclusion: GCRB is acutely aware of the ongoing scrutiny of the return on public investment in the Glasgow College Region and this is a constant and urgent priority in relation to both running costs budget and programme budget. From what we heard on the day and the evidence presented (including a recent externally-validated self-evaluation and the Annual Report of the External Auditor in 2019) we are content that appropriate reassurances are in place.**

### ***Consultation and collaboration***

71. In its 2018 Report Audit Scotland recommended that GCRB and its assigned colleges should "address concerns among senior staff and college board members about its role to further improve collaborative working across the region." (Summary, page 7). As part of the review SFC looked specifically for evidence of the effectiveness of relationships across the region with key stakeholders and with the staff, students and unions across the three assigned colleges. SFC also looked for confirmation of cross-College Board collaboration on shared governance issues.

### ***Effective relationships within the region***

72. GCRB places a strong emphasis on utilising existing regional operational working groups to support joint planning across the region and ensure positive

relationships. The self-evaluation report refers particularly to the Glasgow Principals' Group, the Learning and Teaching Group and the Sustainable Institutions' Group. SFC heard a strong message on the day and in written evidence that these groups are central to the successful delivery of regional strategic goals.

73. The Learning and Teaching Group is the forum where the colleges discuss how they collectively respond to and meet the needs of their learners and ensure that they delivering the skills and education required by employers and stakeholders. The three Vice-Principals along with the GCRB Executive Director are the core members. They work effectively to plan their individual college's contribution to ensure that collectively they are able to deliver the agreed commitments outlined in the Regional Outcome Agreement. This Group also collectively engages with key regional stakeholders including SFC, SDS and local authority partners. It is a good example of regional collaboration. In addition, this Group facilitates the coming together of regional curriculum hubs that take a more forensic analysis of labour market information and intelligence gathered through their engagement with employers to ensure appropriate subject focus and volume of curriculum for Glasgow Region and wider. Successful developments that have been possible as a result of this way of working across the Glasgow Region include in STEM, Early Learning and Childcare and Financial Services. The recent collaboration on a pilot with SDS and SFC on Skills Alignment in Glasgow was possible as a result of this robust collaborative approach to curriculum planning.
74. Another example of a successful cross-college group brought together with a specific purpose was the regional collaboration to improve retention and achievement, formed of quality leads from across the three colleges. Taking a student journey approach, and using SFC's published retention data, this group piloted a new methodology with Sport and Leisure practitioners delivering full-time FE programmes. This involved bringing together members of the curriculum hub to share good practice and devise new approaches (see page 44 of the GCRB Self Evaluation Report on Regional Effectiveness).
- **SFC Conclusion: The evidence presented confirmed that by collaborating across existing effective regional executive structures GCRB is able to agree both wider strategic priorities and also the targets for the ROA which deliver on regional and national ambitions. These collaborations are productive and are based on a true collegial approach across senior staff of the three colleges and GCRB.**
75. GCRB also engages effectively with the Students' Associations of all three colleges through regular meetings of the Glasgow College Region Student Executive, which coordinates regional activity across all three Students' Associations.

76. “Working together as a region allows us to have a stronger collective voice . . . we were also able to receive support from the GCRB and share our views on topics that could affect our students.” (Milea Leone, Chair of Glasgow College Region Student Executive (GCRSE) Group, p40 GCRB self-evaluation)
77. GCRB has established a regular regional engagement forum with representatives across all trades unions to promote greater understanding of the regional approach to service delivery in Glasgow. Alongside this GCRB issues a regular regional newsletter for Glasgow’s college staff.
- **SFC conclusion: It was SFC’s view from the evidence presented that there is greater understanding and awareness across staff at all levels of the role that GCRB has in Glasgow Region. GCRB prioritises this activity and it will be important to keep up this level of commitment and communication moving forward.**

#### *Relationships with key stakeholders*

78. SFC heard overwhelmingly positive evidence on the day of the review, and in the written evidence submitted, that GCRB has developed and successfully operates a “one door” approach to engagement with external stakeholders seeking to engage with the three colleges/college provision in Glasgow. We heard clear supportive messages from three local authorities and their schools, key partner agencies including SDS, employers and other post-16 education providers that this approach worked for them.
79. The reasons given for this success included:
- GCRB and the Glasgow College executive together provide a staff resource and a structure that acts as an entry point to high level strategic engagement with the three colleges.
  - They have the ability to talk the same language and understand what stakeholders are looking for from college provision in Glasgow Region and then to make things happen.
80. The specific examples that we heard most positive messaging about included, the senior phase/DYW offer for schools, delivery of the Foundation Apprenticeship offer across the colleges via the Foundation Apprenticeship Forum, engagement in skills alignment, work to engage with students who had experience of care, the provision of ESOL, and STEM provision.

### *Board collaboration across the region*

81. To strengthen partnership working and to counteract any existing concerns about lack of communication and collaboration at board level, a Memorandum of Understanding was agreed to underpin and drive effective partnership working across the four Glasgow College Region boards (GCRB and the three assigned colleges) and the senior executive. The MOU contains commitments to enhance open and proactive communication, collaboration and consultation and joint development and networking. The MOU was established to agree constructive ways of reducing and managing conflict that had continued to occur between the Board of GCRB and the boards of the assigned colleges across a range of sensitive issues, but mostly related to decisions around the allocation of funding, which is a key function of GCRB for the Glasgow Region colleges.
  82. Despite the MOU now being in place it was evident on the day of the review meeting that there were still sensitivities, particularly around the value for money of GCRB and frustration with the legislation that created RSBs. However, there was also recognition from the chairs of the assigned colleges that progress has been made that benefits learners and stakeholders and enhances the reputation of the Glasgow colleges. In particular GCRB is facilitating collaboration across a range of regional groups coming together in Glasgow, led by GCRB and the colleges.
  83. The introduction of Regional Conversation events has been a positive outcome from this commitment to more collaborative working at board and senior executive level. The first event in September 2018 focused on diversity and considered ways the four boards could collaborate on initiatives to improve their diversity. Twenty-six board members and 15 members of staff attended. A second 'regional conversation' was held in February 2019 focusing on approaches to supporting good student and staff mental health and wellbeing. This was widened to include external stakeholders as well as GCRB and assigned college staff. One of the outcomes was a mapping of current services and gaps across the three colleges which led to improvements across the region, access to the Big White Wall, an online mental health and well-being service for students and staff across three colleges (see page 37 of the GCRB Self Evaluation Report on Regional Effectiveness).
- **SFC Conclusion: Despite differences of opinion in the past, the four Boards in Glasgow Region and their senior managers have committed to seek to address any conflicts constructively and share responsibility for seeking solutions for Glasgow and its communities, recognising that everyone is working within the parameters of the original legislation to create RSBs.**

## **Recommendations**

- 84. In concluding this report SFC considers what actions might be required, and appropriate, for GCRB to ensure it addresses issues and challenges identified during the review and continues to develop in line with statutory requirements and deliver on its mission and ambition for Glasgow region and beyond.
- 85. The review provided clear evidence that GCRB is successfully and consistently delivering on regional outcomes and the expected benefits of regionalisation. However SFC identified the following key challenge points for GCRB and its assigned colleges moving forward.

### **1. Maintaining effective relationships**

- 86. On the day of the review meeting it was clear that strong feelings persist at Board and senior manager level about the appropriateness of the legislative and regulatory framework that designated the three colleges in Glasgow assigned colleges to the RSB in Glasgow (GCRB). These underlying views have impacted on relationships across the four Boards in the past. It was for this reason that the Memorandum of Understanding was developed jointly across GCRB and the three colleges in 2017 to ensure closer and effective working relationships between the collective college and regional boards and executive teams and to strengthen regional partnership working. While it is not in itself legally binding, the Memorandum of Understanding is a public statement by the four boards of their understanding of the imperative to, and their firm intention to, work effectively in partnership.
- 87. At the same time SFC was presented with evidence to indicate that a key element of what makes the Glasgow Region successful is the effective cross-college working that is in place through the Glasgow Colleges Group. The four groups, all of which include GCRB, are fundamental to regional partnership working and delivery of regional outcomes. In addition we heard very positive feedback from the senior representatives of the three colleges on the day who shared the benefits they had experienced from regional working, including step changes in progression pathways, employer and wider stakeholder engagement, Foundation Apprenticeship delivery and greater engagement in a wider city region dialogue on skills investment.
- 88. Consistent with GCRB's own development actions in its self-evaluation document, GCRB and the boards and senior executive of the colleges should continue to seek opportunities for open and pro-active communication, collaboration and joint-working, joint development and networking and constructive conflict resolution should this be required. This will be particularly

important moving forward as SFC recognises that the challenges for the college sector post-COVID19 is likely to put pressure on regional relationships.

## **2. Further develop and ensure that the region's running/operating costs are appropriate and efficient**

- 89. This report has highlighted the benefits of regionalisation that have been delivered over recent years for learners and stakeholders in Glasgow via the joint efforts of GCRB and its partners colleges. However, the running costs required for GCRB are not insignificant, even although they remain less than what Scottish Government initially recommended in terms of expected operational costs for the Glasgow RSB.
- 90. The cost of GCRB's operation is broadly appropriate. It is crucial that the GCRB continues to ensure its running costs remain efficient and appropriate whilst continuing to bring added value to the region.
- 91. The current commitment from the colleges to the regional leads approach, in the form of senior college staff, supporting effective and efficient working, will be required on an ongoing basis to ensure GCRB staffing costs remain at a reasonable level.
- 92. In addition SFC recognises that it will be difficult to find additional regional efficiencies in the current context of the collective COVID-19 response.

## **3. Explore other organisational options**

- 93. Having taken account of all the evidence presented, it is SFC's view that GCRB's governance arrangements have bedded in and have been able to deliver regional benefits and added value for students and other stakeholders, including employers. GCRB has delivered consistently, and well, to respond to needs in Glasgow Region. That said, there are mixed views within the assigned bodies themselves about the additional value being added by the RSB and the cumbersome nature of the four-Board arrangement. All agree on the need for collaboration, but disagree about the cost and region-level processes of GCRB, although at £445,000 in 2019-20 GCRB's costs are less than originally envisaged in 2014. Agreeing the funding allocations across the three colleges remains challenging for GCRB, despite an efficient approach. Operating within tight timescales following SFC funding allocation decisions and negotiating agreement on key issues between four Boards and senior managers has been time-consuming and difficult at times.
- 94. We propose that now is an appropriate stage in development for GCRB to begin conversations to consider further reformation of the structures in Glasgow that will facilitate the continued effective and efficient delivery of education and skills for the Region. We therefore recommend GCRB and the



colleges explore other organisational options that build on and secure pan-regional planning, further efficiency gains, the financial viability of the constituent colleges, and a Glasgow front door for students, employers and other stakeholders. This should include options that may lead to reformation of the regional structure and further consolidation that will fulfil regional and policy objectives.

### **Next steps**

95. SFC wants to be assured that GCRB is responding appropriately to the outcomes of the review. SFC will seek further dialogue with the Chair and GCRB senior executive on next steps once GCRB has had an opportunity to consider the conclusions and recommendations reached. SFC will also continue to support the operation of GCRB as the fundable body in Glasgow and offer appropriate guidance in future.

## **Appendix A - List of consultees responding to the questionnaire**

- Action for Children.
- East Dunbartonshire Council.
- East Renfrewshire Council.
- EIS.
- Glasgow City Region.
- Glasgow Clyde College Students' Association.
- University of Glasgow.

## **Appendix B - List of stakeholders represented at evidence sessions**

### **External stakeholder organisations**

- Action for Children.
- Glasgow City Council Education Services.
- Glasgow City Region.
- Skills Development Scotland.
- The University of Glasgow.

### **Senior Managers of the colleges**

- Douglas Dickson, Performance and Improvement Director, CoGC.
- Alastair McGhee, Director of Business Development, GKC.
- Gillian Plunkett, Director of Student Experience, CoGC.
- John Rafferty, Assistant Director, GCC.
- Mairead Wood, Regional Data Protection Officer, HEFESTIS Ltd.

### **GCRB**

- Janie McCusker, GCRB Chair.
- Robin Ashton, previous GCRB Executive Director (now Vice-Principal GKC).
- Alasdair Barron MBE, Chair, CoGC.
- Paul Buchanan, GCRB Chair of Audit Committee.
- Michael Cullen, GCRB Board Member
- Jim Godfrey, GCRB Interim Executive Director.
- Clare Ireland, GCRB Staff Board Member.
- Caroline MacDonald, GCRB Chair of Performance and Resources Committee.
- Ed McGrachan, GCRB Board Member.
- David Newall, Chair, GCC.
- Ian Patrick, Chair, GKC.
- Derek Smeall, Principal, GKC.
- Stuart Thomson, Vice-Principal Finance and HR, CoGC.
- Jon Vincent, Principal, GCC.

### **Scottish Funding Council**

- Martin Fairbairn, Chief Operating Officer.
- Wilma MacDonald, Financial Analyst.
- Linda McLeod, Assistant Director.
- Caroline Stuart.
- Paul Travers, Senior Policy Officer.

## **Appendix C – Documents referenced in the review**

Glasgow Region Strategic Plan for College Education 2017-2022.

Regional Programme of Action 2019-20.

Glasgow Region Outcome Agreement AY2018-19 and AY2019-20.

Audit Scotland Report 2018.