

**Submission by
The Open University in Scotland**

**Education Children and
Young People Committee
Inquiry into College
Regionalisation**

April 2022

Education, Children and Young People Committee – Inquiry into College Regionalisation

In February 2012, Scottish Ministers announced changes to the college landscape as part of wider reforms introduced by the Post-16 Education (Scotland) Act. This led to the formation of 13 college regions. During this time, college mergers reduced the number of colleges down from 41 in 2011 to 26 currently. The majority of these colleges sit within the 13 regions.

[Recent reviews by the Scottish Funding Council](#) have recommended more changes to the way multi-regional colleges are run and [closer collaboration between colleges and universities](#).

The Committee wants to look at what has been learned from this over the past decade and how this might inform future change within sector.

We want your views on college regionalisation regarding:

1. What has worked well in the college sector in the years following regionalisation?

New regional structures have been embedded and the new institutions which have emerged seem to have moved beyond the legacy of the pre-merger institutions and made progress towards the goal of more coherent regional curriculum and outcomes for their learners. As a national HE provider we have sought to engage with all colleges outside of the UHI network in areas such as articulation and progression, and the efficiencies created by dealing with a smaller number of larger institutions has been beneficial in this work.

With Ayrshire, City of Glasgow, and Fife Colleges we have collaborated on campus-based delivery providing students with the opportunity to transition to an OU degree within the familiar environment of their local college. Dundee and Angus College have successfully integrated OU Access modules into their wider access programme, OU Options, at the college.

Likewise, in pursuing deeper and more complex partnership opportunities, such as development of collaborative provision, the greater scale and breadth of provision offered by larger institutions is beneficial, however funding mechanisms continue to constrain potential for more progress in this area.

Our routes for college students to enter into advanced level of OU study are available nationwide, unrestricted by the geographical location of the student or their college. Advanced entry onto The Open University's unique Open Degree is available to all HN students, regardless of the subject they studied at college. This allows the student to gain credit for previous study, whilst building a degree programme tailored to their own development needs or to the needs of their employer. Accessible, clear and simple pathways for learners are becoming increasingly even more important as demand for different opportunities gets stronger. We note higher completion rates amongst those OU students articulating from college.

2. How might the sector further improve in the years ahead?

Further progress on collaborative and integrated working with the University sector could make a significant contribution to meeting the needs of learners on a regional basis and to the fair access agenda nationally. As highlighted in the SFC's report *Coherence and Sustainability: Review of Tertiary Education and Research*, funding body support in the form of incentives for collaboration between colleges and universities would be a welcome and significant enabler, and this would likely

be particularly effective in supporting more integrated academic pathways between college and university qualifications. Likewise, opportunities for the college sector arising from Knowledge exchange and innovation funding could be enhanced through collaboration with the university sector, leveraging experience of universities in this area alongside the local and regional experience of colleges.

3. How might colleges adapt in light of current challenges such as those resulting from COVID-19?

The response of the college sector to the Covid 19 pandemic, and the support they have provided to their learners throughout, is to be commended. In meeting the societal and financial challenges arising from the pandemic partnerships should be at the centre of efforts to adapt, working collaboratively on a regional and national basis with the HE sector and other stakeholders to ensure efficient and coherent curriculum offerings that meet the needs of learners and employers in a regional and national context.

The coronavirus pandemic has seen a strengthening and deepening of our relationships with colleges at what has been a challenging time for everyone. The OU in Scotland supported colleges ambitions to pivot quickly to online delivery models, but providing access to our free online learning resources designed for education providers, providing dedicated advice from OU experts on online pedagogy and course development and through Scot Govt funding, provided fully funded places for 14 colleges across Scotland on our suite of Microcredentials designed to help educators take their teaching online.

4. What should be the priorities of the college sector in the years ahead?

Priorities for the college sector should continue to be aligned to Scottish Government and Scottish Funding Council Priorities, be outcome focussed, and centred on working collectively and collaboratively with partners. Colleges have a unique position in being strongly rooted in local and regional economies, and so have a key role in focusing national priorities through a local and regional lens, engaging with, galvanising and influencing wider educational sector activity and provision in the region to ensure regional needs are met coherently and efficiently, and that regional needs are understood and fed back into national policy planning.

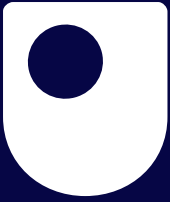
ABOUT THE OPEN UNIVERSITY

The Open University (OU) in Scotland is the country's leading provider of part-time higher and flexible education – with 73% of our students combining work and study (2020/21). Social justice is at our core and we are committed to ensuring high quality education is accessible to all, regardless of age, income, qualifications or geography.

Our [open admissions policy](#) means no formal entry requirements are needed for most undergraduate qualifications or modules, and many of our new undergraduates join us without standard university entrance level qualifications.

Working with our partners, from employers and trade unions, to schools, colleges and voluntary sector groups, we are at the forefront of using innovative distance education to deliver supported open learning to a wide range of people, at every stage of their lives and regardless of their background. Students can choose to study for a degree, diploma or certificate, or take a stand-alone module, short course or microcredential.

Over 7,500 young people across Scotland have participated in the OU's innovative [Young Applicants in Schools Scheme](#). Scotland's national bridging programme offers accredited courses to S6 pupils that introduces them to university level study alongside their normal classroom study. Schools in all 32 Scottish education areas take part.



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