



Scottish FE College Governance Review

The UNISON Scotland Submission

November 2013

Introduction

UNISON is Scotland's largest public sector trade union representing over 160,000 people delivering services across Scotland. UNISON members deliver a wide range of services in the public, community and private sector. In education UNISON members deliver essential services including cleaning, advice, administration, libraries, technical and research support, IT, finance, learning and student support services, security, porter services and management. These employees are often the face of Further Education in Scotland and contribute a great deal on the overall student experience, providing the foundations for high quality learning for all. Many UNISON members are also current and past users of further education. UNISON Scotland is able to collate and analyse member's experience to provide evidence to inform the policy process we therefore welcome the opportunity to respond to this consultation.

CONSULTATION PAPER QUESTIONS

Q1. We should welcome comments on Ministers' plans to designate the following incorporated colleges as regional colleges.

UNISON has raised concerns about governance in Scotland colleges and about the Post-16 Education Bill from which this consultation now flows. The Bill has now passed and UNISON accepts that the regional bodies will now go ahead.

The current governance structures in FE are weak in terms of links to local communities and accountability for the public money they spend. The new regional boards need to be made up from a wide range of people to reflect the communities which they serve. There also needs to be the appropriate range of skills to ensure that the governance bodies are able to hold managers reporting to the boards to account. Until the guidance is produced on board appointments it is impossible to comment on how effective these new structure will be.

Guidance at a minimum should lay out an open and transparent board appointment process independent of the senior managers of the respective institution. This should include a process for holding governors to account and their individual and collective de-selection. The process should ensure board members are appointed from a range of constituencies reflecting the region's wide range of stakeholders, to include trade union representatives and democratic representatives from the communities in which they operate. FE colleges should be at the heart of their communities. Boards should also reflect the diversity of the communities that colleges serve.

It is the experience of our members in colleges that management have too much influence in the decisions of governing bodies. Board members need to have access to all necessary management information held within FE colleges. They also need to be provided with appropriate training in respect of being independent, and methods of accountability. Governors require access to appropriate professional support and advice, including finance and audit. It is our experience that HR expertise is often lacking. Boards should ensure that some members bring these skills with them in the first place.

Our members feel they have little or no contact with board members leaving them feeling the boards have little understanding of the day to day running of colleges and the implications of the decisions they make at board level. Communication with staff is currently only via line management. It is often one

way i.e. management tell but don't listen. If board members had more contact with staff they would be better informed, more able to challenge management information at board level and therefore to improve the running of colleges. This would also support management to improve their communication with staff and students.

UNISON is disappointed that there will be no direct trades union representation on the new regional boards. There were union representatives on the shadow board during the merger process to create the new Kelvin College in Glasgow. This enhanced the transition process. It is a real loss that this will end now that the new boards will come into place. The new staff reps need to have equal status with other members of the boards. Currently they are excluded from some parts of meetings where for example staffing issues are discussed. There needs to be a clearly laid out process as to how the staff representatives will be elected, how they will inform, consult and feedback to staff. Staff reps must also have appropriate time off to attend both meetings and for the workload involved to participate fully in the meetings and to meet with staff. There will also need to be guidance on how staff reps workload will be covered. While the promised guidance will set out how and why other board members can be removed, this must include a means where staff can remove their rep if they are not happy with their performance.

It is essential that there are appropriate staff governance standards in place. UNISON believes that the voluntary staff governance standard agreed between Scotland Colleges and the STUC provides a basis on which governance could be improved. This is a strategic framework of minimum standards, continuous improvement and ongoing consultation and negotiation between boards, management, staff and recognised trade unions.

The regions must have a broad range of up-to-date staffing policies. These should be negotiated with all recognised trade unions within the region and should reflect current good practice. Representatives of the Governing Body should be required to meet on a regular basis with trade union and student representatives of the respective college to discuss strategic issues.

UNISON remains concerned about the impact of college mergers on local delivery of college courses and services. This is not just where courses are delivered but about access to libraries, welfare support, bursary administration and careers advice. Travel from Banff and Buchan to Aberdeen to sort out finance or childcare problems takes at best an hour and a half each way. Travel across cities is often no easier or quicker. Services to students as well as courses need to be available in all college locations not just a central hub. It is essential that the new regional colleges deliver all their services in all the communities they serve.

Q2. Should the colleges in Table 1 be designated as regional colleges in March 2014?

UNISON accepts that colleges will now be designated as new regional colleges. There is a range of staffing issues which need to be negotiated with the appropriate trade unions. In the past college mergers consultation with staff has been minimal and the key staffing issues have been unresolved long after mergers have been pushed through. Staffing issues have to be resolved as part of this change so the new bodies can focus properly on delivery. The people who

deliver services cannot be an afterthought it is they not structures that deliver improvement and increased efficiency.

Q3. We should welcome comments on whether the matters covered in questions 1 and 2 raise any equalities issues that require to be addressed with respect to age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation

UNISON is concerned that equalities impact of many of the changes taking place in further education has not been fully investigated . UNISON believes a much fuller Equalities Impact Assessment is required. The focus on full time courses, centralisation of courses and services and the focus on young people in particular impact on women, people with disabilities and those over 19. For example:

Centralisation of courses and services means longer travel times which increase the costs of childcare and make it harder to combine study with caring responsibilities and paid work. This makes it harder for women who are more often responsible for a range of unpaid care work to combine study with their other responsibilities. Travel and childcare costs are also key barriers to those on low incomes accessing and completing courses. Travelling long distances also adds to childcare costs as children have to be looked after longer. As this burden usually falls on women then there is a gender impact from moving courses out of communities and reducing the opportunity to study part-time.

Cuts in part-time provision will have an impact of a range of groups including people living with disabilities who cannot study full-time, those who wish to combine work with study which tends to be those on low incomes or with caring responsibilities. The cuts on so called hobby courses may also have an impact on the many retired people who have in the past accessed further education as a means to enhance their health and wellbeing through both learning new skills and interacting with other members of their community. There are also many people across Scotland for whom an “evening class” was the first step to returning to learn or breaking out from mental health issues or even escaping domestic violence. Closing down these opportunities will impact on many who are already marginalised.

Board membership must reflect the diversity of the communities that the regional boards serve. Guidance for appointments to boards must ensure that this is the case. Regional Boards must take their Public Sector Equality Duties seriously and ensure that Equality Impact Assessments are core to decision making in colleges

Conclusion

UNISON members in education deliver essential services including cleaning, advice, administration, libraries, technical and research support, IT, finance, learning and student support services, security, porter services and management. These employees are often the face of Further Education in Scotland and contribute a great deal on the overall student experience, providing the foundations for high quality learning for all. Many UNISON members are also current and past users of further education. UNISON Scotland is able to collate and analyse member’s experience to provide evidence to inform the policy process we therefore welcome the opportunity to respond to this consultation.

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