



# **Scottish FE College Governance Review Part 2**

The UNISON Scotland Submission **January 2014**

## **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 to 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.

## **Response**

UNISON raised many concerns about the changes in the Post-16 Education Bill in particular college regionalisation. We are already seeing many of our concerns realised, for example overall student numbers are down 140,000 since 2007/8. Our general concerns about regional structures are covered in our response to part one of the consultation. While UNISON fully supports the decisions of colleges to remain independent rather than create single college regions in Glasgow, Lanarkshire and the Highlands we have concerns about how the multi-college regions will operate.

UNISON remains concerned about the impact of the changes 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. We were concerned in particular about the impact on women and the recent revelation that 80,000 less women are studying part-time courses than in 2007/8 bears this out. Travel across campuses for example 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.

UNISON accepts rather than welcomes the new structures. There remain a range of outstanding staffing issues which need to be negotiated with the appropriate trade unions. In 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 across regions have to be resolved 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 excellence.

Designating New College Lanarkshire as the Regional College runs a real risk of creating a situation where this college is seen as "in charge". The impact of the power imbalance and the issues which arise from that may lead in the long run to the colleges merging. Members feel that far from operating in partnership the institutions in the multi-college regions could end up operating competitively. The regional board must act and be seen to act in the best interests of the whole region and to fairly balance the needs of all colleges and the communities they serve particularly budget allocations and course availability. The complex of and differences between terms and conditions that staff work to across the regions and within colleges that has evolved following all the mergers that have taken

place can no longer be ignore. Resolving these issues will require negotiating with trade unions.

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. Their expertise in relation to HR issues would have been very useful in resolving the many outstanding staffing issues.

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.

Members suggest the following as ways to improve the links between boards and staff.

- The board should hold bi-annual staff meetings, allowing for open and frank discussion and to let staff meet the board.
- The board should hold surgeries where staff have access to individual board members.
- A member of the board should “drop-in” on departmental meetings. The staff would then be able to meet the people who employ them and allow the board member to have a better understanding of the college.
- Staff and student board members should have access to the full content of the board meeting
- Representatives from the boards of all colleges should meet on a regular basis to discuss common issues and raise these issues as a sector not as an individual college.
- Board and sub group minutes should be published on the college website.

### **Equalities**

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 more comprehensive 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. Recent figures from the Scottish Funding Council show that substantially less women are now studying in our colleges: 80,000 less on part-time courses alone. Part-time study is particularly important for women as they still bear the brunt of caring responsibilities.

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. 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 recovering 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 to 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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