GCRB | Glasgow Colleges' Regional Board

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Friday 4 September 2020

Ian Patrick
Chair of the Board of Management
Glasgow Kelvin College

Sent via email

Dear Ian

Your letter of Tuesday, September 1 refers to the additional capital fund for digital provision, and raises questions regarding its allocation. In reaching the decision for the allocation of funding to the Glasgow Region Assigned Colleges, the Glasgow Colleges' Regional Board (GCRB) took into account the national approach and methodology for allocating funds, GCRB's legislative and governance responsibilities in exercising due diligence, and the current challenging environment impacting our students across the entire Glasgow region.

On 9 July 2020 the Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science announced that the Scottish Government was investing an additional £5million to help bridge the digital divide for students. The aim of these funds is to support approximately 13,000 learners, providing them with the necessary equipment to engage in remote online learning.

On August 14, 2020, Scottish Funding Council confirmed this additional tranche of funding for Scotland's tertiary education sector, entitled *Additional capital funding to support digital provision in AY 2020-2021.* The Scottish Government split this funding across both college and university sectors, Community Learning and Development (CLD), and Jisc, with Scotland's colleges gaining access to £1,660,000 of additional funding for FE learners and £670,000 for HE learners in college.

The Scottish Government, Student Awards Agency Scotland (SAAS), and SFC agreed on a mixed methodology to ensure that the funds were distributed equitably across both FE and HE sectors. They further agreed the distribution of funding to institutions across Scotland as part of their response to the unprecedented circumstances created by the Covid-19 crisis.

For FE students, funding was distributed to colleges in proportion to SFC's Student Support funding allocations published in SFC's College Outcome Agreement Funding allocations announcement for AY 2020-21. For HE students at college and university, funding was distributed using data from SAAS and distributed funding in proportion to SAAS Discretionary Fund institutional allocations. SAAS used this allocation methodology for its distribution of COVID-19 ring-fenced funds and other funding brought forward to support students during the pandemic.

Glasgow Colleges' Regional Board, in processing these funds, recognised the desire for a national approach to a national crisis and maintained the distribution model developed nationally to ensure a consistent approach across the tertiary system. Therefore, the national approach for the allocation of funding was recommended to the GCRB Performance and Resources Committee for consideration.

The GCRB Performance and Resources Committee convened an additional meeting at short notice which was held on Wednesday, August 26, 2020. This meeting heard from the three Principals of the Glasgow Region Assigned Colleges who each presented their comments on the paper presented to the Committee. Subsequently, the Committee fully and carefully considered the proposal for the allocation of funds as outlined in the paper and unanimously agreed with both the national approach and methodology for the allocation of funding and the allocation for the Assigned Colleges. This was then presented to the full GCRB to ensure due diligence and, following some dialogue, was again approved with no dissent. You cite the comments of one board member, which demonstrates the robustness of the debate that the GCRB exercises in taking these challenging decisions. In that regard and following feedback from the GCRB Executive to questions raised, said board member agreed to the proposal.

During its deliberations, it was the view of the Committee and the Board that while not meeting the entire needs for the region in terms of digital poverty, there was reasonable evidence to suggest that the methodology used benefited Glasgow, and therefore its colleges, as a whole. Indeed, GCRB received almost 25% of available funding while delivering 22% of credits. Therefore, it was to Glasgow Kelvin College's advantage to be provided with an additional unplanned £77,713 FE Digital Support Funding and £28,500 HE Digital Support Funding, equating to £106,213 new money dedicated to supporting the college's students. Moreover, Colleges have the discretion to use these funds flexibly between FE and HE to effectively meet the needs of students identified on a college-by-college basis. This flexibility enables Glasgow Kelvin College to prioritise the needs of students and ensure the best use of the funds available with the requirement to account for spend separately for FE and HE when reporting back to GCRB and SFC.

The GCRB has legislative and governance responsibility to operate in the best interests of the region, its students, and its colleges in a clear, transparent and fair manner. It is within that framework that this, and all decisions, are taken by the Board with a view to maintaining an independent and objective stance which places the region at its core. In a situation such as this one, in which more than one college was seeking a larger proportion of the finite resource, it is not possible to meet all demand, and it is reasonable within GCRB's legislative powers to adhere to a national policy designed to address a national need.

The GCRB Executive, Committee and Board take careful consideration of all feedback regarding methodology, but are cognisant at all times of seeking to strike a balance which does not lead to on-going bartering over methodologies which will inevitably advantage or disadvantage one college over another. In considering the approach on this occasion, the GCRB Executive, Committee and Board also fully considered the need to ensure that this new additional funding be processed in a timely manner to allow colleges to make use of it at the key point of need as the new session gets underway.

To that end, GCRB will continue to work with its member colleges and other stakeholders to consider how best to build an evidence-based understanding of need. There was discussion and recognition of the fact that SIMD statistics may have shifted considerably over recent months as the pandemic impacts communities right across the city, as well as a recognition that there needs to be greater evidential link to allow us to draw any conclusions around where 'digital poverty' resides, and whether this can be accurately mapped to other societal measures. Ultimately, that identification of need would require to be one which works effectively across the full region, and would require to be based on evidence, objectivity and impartiality without favour to any constituent college. GCRB always retains the right to follow national policy, while considering alternative courses of action where they are deemed appropriate and as informed by GCRB strategic regional priorities in support of Scotland's ambitions and policies.

The wider agenda for the nation, and for the region, is that we continue to operate in unprecedented circumstances to navigate our way through health, financial and social crises. To that end, GCRB undertakes to continue to process any and all additional funds in a clear, objective and timely manner to allow our colleges to continue to meet our mission and have the earliest possible impact on the lives, and life chances, of our citizens. We carefully and fully consider all inputs prior to progression through our governance structure in line with our legislative responsibility and will continue to do so as, together with the Assigned Colleges, we move through these unprecedented times to ensure the best outcomes for our students. GCRB also undertakes to work with constituent colleges, Colleges Scotland, SFC and Scottish Government to avail of any funding opportunities which are emerging from government to safeguard college education in the region for our citizens and our communities in the future.

For Glasgow Kelvin College's part, GCRB anticipates that this additional funding of £106,213 will be utilised to have a significant and positive impact on the college's students, and look forward to hearing more about the application of the funding via the reporting mechanisms and procedures set out in the awarding documentation and in line with our Financial Memorandum.

We will collectively endeavour to ensure the best possible outcomes for our students, colleges, and for Glasgow. These are unprecedented times and it is inevitable that we will continue to face financial challenges across the region. I am aware of the financial position of your college and I, together with the GCRB Executive, look forward to working with Glasgow Kelvin College and its Board with a key focus on the short- and longer-term planning to ensure sustainability and viability as mandated in the Financial Memorandum.

The FFR estimate over the course of the projection period requires to be addressed. In terms of next steps, GCRB, Scottish Funding Council and Glasgow Kelvin College meet on Friday, September 11 to agree potential future options. From that meeting, GCRB will require Glasgow Kelvin College to present the first-year plan, and will then work closely with Glasgow Kelvin College to develop and monitor a longer-term sustainability and viability plan. I will write to you further on the requirements for this following our meeting of September 11.

Yours sincerely

Janie McCusker
GCRB Chair

CC

David Linden MP
Bob Doris MSP
All member of the Glasgow Kelvin College Board of Management