

Education and Culture Committee

Post-16 Education (Scotland) Bill

Asset Skills

Many thanks for the opportunity to submit written evidence to the Education and Culture Committee's considerations of the Post-16 Education (Scotland) Bill.

Asset Skills is the Sector Skills Council for facilities management, housing, property, cleaning and support services and parking. Our role is to support employers within the sector to be more productive by facilitating access to relevant training and qualifications that support their business needs.

This submission of written evidence is concerned solely with the effective involvement of employers in the decision-making processes relating to the provision of post-16 education.

The Bill is very clear in its objectives that post-16 education must be more responsive to the needs of employers and better aligned to labour market demand, but it is not clear from the Bill's provisions how it is intended that this will be achieved in practice. It is not clear how employers will influence decision-making within the Scottish Funding Council nor the newly formed regional strategic bodies and regional colleges themselves.

In terms of both regional colleges and regional strategic bodies, the Bill requires consultation 'where it considers it appropriate to do so', with, sixth in the list of bodies to be consulted, 'any representative of employers in the locality'.

Asset Skills considers that these proposals will not deliver the Bill's intentions to provide education that is more responsive to the needs of employers.

Employers should be demonstrably at the heart of decision-making related to post-16 education at all levels, the Funding Council, regional strategic bodies and regional colleges themselves. They should be listed first and statutorily on the list of bodies to be consulted.

Nor is effective employer consultation conducted with 'any representative of employers'. Asset Skills, and its sister SSC's for other sectors, are employer-led bodies with well-developed employer links throughout Scotland. SSC's would be the appropriate body that colleges and similar bodies should have to consult with in relation to the planning of future 16-plus education provision. Asset Skills, in common with other SSC's, has extensive Labour Market Information resources that would inform, underpin and support the decision-making of education bodies. It is a missed opportunity to ignore those resources that already exist and are on offer in this regard.

We are also concerned that the Bill provides no statutory requirement for the representation of the employer voice on the boards of regional colleges or strategic bodies, this being reserved for the college staff and student populations. This is despite the quotation in the Bill's Policy Memorandum from the Scottish Government's own

Putting Learners at the Centre (February 2012), 'key considerations included the need for student representation on boards,...the need to ensure employer representation and creating rigorous accountability'.

Finally, whilst this Bill avows to 'make post-16 education more responsive to the needs of learners and employers' (Policy Memorandum), it is silent on the issue of Modern Apprenticeship funding which is allocated by Skills Development Scotland. MA funding is extremely important to Scotland's employers, within Asset Skills' sector as elsewhere, much of which is channelled through the college system. How MA funding decisions are made is less than fully transparent. Employers' involvement in these essential decisions is unclear. Whilst seeking to create a post-16 education system more responsive to the needs of the employer and the labour market, this Bill as currently presented represents a missed opportunity not to strengthen the employer voice in MA funding decisions also.

Asset Skills welcomes the intent of the Post-16 Education (Scotland) Bill. In order to be effective, we believe that the employer voice must be given far more prominence and robustness in its provisions.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss these opinions in more detail with the members of the Education and Culture Committee.

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