

Education and Culture Committee

Scotland's Educational and Cultural Future

Glasgow Clyde College

Glasgow Clyde College wishes to thank the Education and Culture Committee for the opportunity to respond to the inquiry into Scotland's potential educational and cultural future.

The College wishes to submit the following comments in relation to Further and Higher Education

THE IMPACT OF CURRENT UK IMMIGRATION POLICIES

The current UK government immigration policy in relation to student visas has had a major impact upon the ability to attract international student visitors to the UK. The restrictions on post-study work opportunities made the UK a less attractive prospect in the international student recruitment market. The impact this policy change had was immediate. Much of the recruitment practices overseas are undertaken by education agents and intermediaries and the informal feedback from professionals working in this market is that the UK is considered to be "closed" as far as international student recruitment is concerned. Competitor destination countries such as Canada offer far more attractive study opportunities with the prospects of post-study work opportunities as well.

The practical implementation of the policies has also created significant difficulties for colleges. Visa applications have been refused in the past for very minor applicant errors such as the unintentional and insignificant erroneous transcription of a digit or spelling error on the visa application. These visa refusals impact upon whether or not the sponsoring college retains its sponsors licence.

The UKBA response to colleges and universities who do lose their sponsor's licence is to remove all visa-sponsored students currently studying with the institution. This is unfair on the existing bona-fide international students who have already passed through a stringent visa application process and are on courses studying and living in full compliance requirements of the UKBA. This practice makes the UK and Scotland an unattractive option for any further bona-fide international applicants.

The College recognises the need for the government to regulate and control immigration practices, especially in relation to the early abuses of the student immigration system in the UK which seen a proliferation of "bogus-colleges" set up simply to act as a conduit for would-be economic migrants into the UK economy. Some changes the UK government has introduced to the student visa policy have been necessary to reduce abuse of the system and unfair treatment of the people who are genuinely trying to access high quality education in the UK. An example of this was the change to ensuring that all sponsors are subject to educational oversight and review, such as the role played by Education Scotland's Her Majesty's Inspectorate in Scotland.

If Scotland became an independent country, then it would be necessary to ensure that our readiness to support international students to come to Scotland was also tempered with strict but fair regulations to control any potential abuse through the re-emergence of “bogus-colleges” in Scotland. One way of protecting the country from this would be to legislate to ensure that the term college in Scotland was a designation legally recognised as only those public bodies representing the Scottish further education college sector and other institutions identified by the Scottish Government.

THE SOCIAL CULTURAL AND FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTION MADE BY INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

International students bring an opportunity to enhance the experience of indigenous students through creating a multi-cultural environment where mutual understanding and respect can be developed. Friendships are formed which can be long-lasting and can only benefit Scotland’s future international links. The international student population also boosts the Scottish economy. It should be noted that the colleges of Scotland contribute significantly to Scotland’s educational offering to the international student market. Colleges provide affordable opportunities in smaller more supportive class groups with multiple exit opportunities and progression to final years of university courses which maximises the international student’s likelihood of a successful learning journey whilst in Scotland.

THE PROPOSALS IN SCOTLAND’S FUTURE TO CHANGE VISA POLICY FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

The proposal in Scotland’s Future regarding international student visa policy changing to offer post-study work opportunities would immediately increase the attractiveness of Scotland as a study destination. However, it should be noted that this must be supported with continued investment in the further education sector in Scotland. Many international students came to Scotland for the duality of being able to undertake Higher National courses in a supportive environment coupled with advanced entry to university to complete a degree. The university sector in Scotland recognises the valuable contribution that colleges can make to ensuring international students are well-prepared and progress to successfully complete degrees in our universities. This is a very important stream for international student recruitment which should not be ignored. International students will not be attracted to a sector which is impoverished through the future prospect of heavy funding cuts. In an independent Scotland, the government must ensure the colleges are supported and recognised as a very important element for international student recruitment.

Scotland’s Future rightly identifies the world-class reputation of Scottish universities. However, the importance of the contribution that the further education sector makes to the Scottish economy from the international vocational education and training trade should not be overlooked. This includes the exportation of our vocational training expertise to many countries around the world which are now just beginning to realise the need for a vocational education and training sector. Scotland’s colleges are already exporting their expertise, which enjoys a very high level of international respect and should be recognised, supported and exploited by the Scottish Government.

REST OF UK (RUK) TUITION FEES

The current practice of Scottish universities charging RUK students' tuition fees at rates comparable to those in the home countries appears to be an unfortunate but necessary position to hold resulting from the unilateral decision of the Scottish Government not to charge tuition fees to Scottish domiciled undergraduate students, whilst also seeking to protect the availability of sufficient places for Scottish students.

The Scottish Government should consider prescribing the RUK fee rate limits for the further education sector's higher national courses.

In the event of Scotland becoming an independent country then the legalities of the charging policy would be dependent on whether Scotland was a member of the European Union and also whether the rest of the UK remained part of the European Union.

The College wishes to submit the following comments in relation to Youth Employability.

WHETHER THE INTERACTION BETWEEN CURRENT UK AND SCOTTISH YOUTH EMPLOYABILITY INITIATIVES COULD BE IMPROVED?

The UK Youth Contract aims to get every unemployed young person earning or learning again. The Scottish Government's proposal of a Youth Guarantee of education, training or employment within 4 months of becoming unemployed mirrors the aims of the Youth contract. It seems that the Scottish Government intends to replace the Work Programme with an extended Youth Guarantee. Thus it is difficult to state if the interaction between current UK and Scottish initiatives could be improved as the intention is to replace a UK system with a Scottish one.

The suggestion that there be an integration of SDS and DWP would make for a more coherent framework to increase skills and employability as there would be a sharing of data that should improve job search activities.

THE EXTENT TO WHICH YOUTH EMPLOYMENT COULD BE BOOSTED

a) By a constitutional right to the opportunity of education, training or employment

It is unclear from the document how this would be achieved. It is unclear what the responsibility of the youth of the country would be if offered this right. The UK government has made it clear that in creating a youth contract that the youth of the country have a responsibility to engage and that claiming benefits is not an option. It is unclear whether this is what is envisioned in an independent Scotland.

It is also unclear from the document how the Scottish Government can ensure that there are adequate opportunities for education, training or employment. Whilst some industries are mentioned such as renewables there is little mention of the geographical limitations of some of the opportunities for employment. Questions that would need to be considered are: how mobile is the Scottish youth workforce? How flexible is the provision of education and/or training? What investment would there have to be in education and training to ensure that the constitutional right was able to be met? Do young people have a right to be educated and/or trained in vocational areas where there are few jobs? What would be the mechanism for planning for workforce development in an independent Scotland? How do you ensure that education is funded to meet the needs of a developing workforce? To ensure the constitutional right what support will be in place for young people with additional support for learning needs and for refugees who have language barriers?

b) Bringing together job matching, employability, training and career guidance

Youth Employability could be boosted by the integration of services. A one-stop shop for Youth would benefit not only the young people of Scotland but also parents, carers and employers. There would be clarity about where a young person should go when leaving school if he/she needs help. However, it is unclear how the Scottish Government would bring the agencies together that are currently responsible for these aspects of employment. It is also unclear from the document what part further education colleges would play in this integration of services. Colleges offer a unique service and there is no detail in the document as to the role that colleges will play in the integrated service.

The College wishes to submit the following comments in relation to Childcare.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS TO CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND THE WIDER ECONOMY OF INVESTING IN CHILDCARE?

The benefits of investing in childcare (also proposed in the 2009 NEF/Action for Children report) include:

- allows parents to take advantage of employment opportunities;
- improves outcomes and short-circuits the cycle of deprivation for the most vulnerable children;
- builds the foundations for a more equal and well-functioning society over the medium and longer term;
- significantly reduces the cost to the UK economy of continuing to address current levels of social problems including crime, mental ill health, family breakdown, drug abuse and obesity; and
- improves children's psychological and social well-being.

NEF/Action for Children suggest that the forecasted cost to the UK economy of addressing current levels of social problems will amount to almost £4 trillion over a 20 year period. Investing in targeted interventions, universal childcare and paid parental leave could help address as much as £1.5 trillion worth of the cost of these social problems. This would leave the UK in a similar position to European nations such as Finland, Sweden and Denmark which have the best social outcomes.

WHAT PLANNING, TRAINING AND INVESTMENT WOULD BE REQUIRED TO BRING ABOUT A TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE IN CHILDCARE PROVISION?

High quality early education and childcare is essential to guarantee each child the best start. Life chances will be greatly enhanced by an early years' workforce with the ability to advance each child's care, learning and development. The Play Strategy for Scotland which places requirements to support the provision of play for all children suggests that 'Every child needs to play freely in order to grow into a healthy, happy, creative and confident adult.

We would suggest this transformational change will occur only with significant investment in the early years' workforce, both in the initial training of potential staff and with existing staff, through continual professional development. Investment must also take into account an improvement in pay scales and employment conditions to match qualifications and experience.

The status of the early education and childcare profession also needs to be raised in order to attract suitable applicants with the capability and capacity to become that more highly skilled workforce. This means continuing financial support for degree equivalent courses and qualifications as well as the BA in Childhood Practice.

Early education and childcare needs to have a multi-skilled approach – a combination of staff working directly with the children who have a range of qualifications from SCQF level 5 to degree level. At present, early years staff are normally considered qualified having attained a two year programme of study (NC plus HNC or SVQ 2 plus SVQ 3). However, local authorities vary in what they deem to be minimum training periods (some requiring 1 year and some requiring 2). It is also the case that some local authorities do not support posts below the level of Child Development Officer (which requires an HNC) and this prevents the development of staff on the job who could proceed through an alternative SVQ route, were there to be Local Authority trainee posts at support worker level. This has created a disparity of practice between public and private sector provision and both needs to be brought to the same high standard if all of Scotland's children are to benefit. In order to attract larger numbers into childcare a variety of training models and a variety of levels of post is needed in both the public and private sectors to allow different childcare workers to advance in a way that suits them.

Populating the early years' workforce with practitioners able to achieve the highest standards and outcomes for children will realise the transformational change desired. The Government's support of colleges in the pursuit of excellence is vital in ensuring the best applicants are attracted and retained.

Colleges can be instrumental in ensuring the workforce is consistently populated with those whose initial training is excellent and they can play an on-going role in providing excellent CPD for the employed workforce.

Colleges can prepare for this transformation to occur through:

- liaison with SQA and the SSSC to ensure revised qualifications are fit for purpose;
- contributing to the debate regarding the Scottish Pedagogue Model;
- seeing potential in the applicants they recruit;
- devising and delivering CPD courses for existing staff to upgrade knowledge, skills and understanding; and
- collaborating with partners to support high quality placements.

The Government can prepare for this transformation to occur through:

- recognising that breadth of activities that fall under the childcare banner – including local authority nurseries, private sector childcare providers, wrap around care providers, play centres and other community projects;
- raising the profile of Childcare and Playwork as professions;
- supporting college provided alternatives to university study, such as the PDA Childhood Practice (SCQF Level 9) or SVQ Level 4;
- ensuring that Local Authorities offer a variety of level of posts which attract a broad range of applicants to the profession who may prefer a choice in training model, such as through Modern Apprenticeships, SVQs or traditional full-time college courses; and

- ensuring that the SFC properly resource Childcare training in colleges by ensuring that properly supported placements are SUMs funded.

Whilst the question posed mentions 'childcare' and not *early learning* or *early education*, it would be remiss and potentially damaging not to include early learning/education. The Government should be encouraged to appreciate that this transformational change can only occur via the integrated approach of childcare and education. The proposed extension to nursery hours may well extend learning and care opportunities for vulnerable two year olds and for three and four year olds. Extension in provision does not necessarily equate to quality. This extension in provision must be supported by staff who are able to provide excellence in care and learning. It is therefore necessary that policy makers ensure that this is realised via appropriate qualifications that help to create practitioners who can support children in their earliest years.

References

- BBC News Education and Family (18.02.14) *Professor Iram Siraj to lead Scottish Childcare Review*. Available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education>
- Children in Scotland, (2008) *Explaining a Scottish Pedagogy*. Available at www.childreninscotland.org/uk
- Children in Scotland, (2011) *Early Childhood Education and Care: Developing a Fully Integrated Early Years System*. Available at www.childreninscotland.org/uk
- Pascal, C., Bertram, T., Delaney, S. and Nelson, C. (2013) *A Comparison of International Childcare Systems Research Report*, London: CREC. Available at <http://www.education.gov.uk/researchandstatistics/research>
- PF4.2: Quality of Childcare and Early Education Services*. Accessed on 21/02/14. Available at www.oecd.org/els/social/family/database
- Scottish Government, (2013) *Scotland's Future: Your Guide to and Independent Scotland*, Edinburgh: Scottish Government
- Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I. and Taggart, B. (2010) *Early Childhood Matters - Evidence from the Effective Pre-school and Primary Education Project*, Oxon: Routledge