

SUBMISSION FROM SCOTTISH TRAINING FEDERATION

Youth employment

The Scottish Training Federation (STF) welcomes the opportunity to discuss youth employability in connection with the Committee's Inquiry into Scotland's Educational and Cultural Future, and in particular to comment on:

- Whether the interaction between current UK and Scottish youth employability initiatives could be improved; and
- The extent to which youth employment could be boosted by: (a) a constitutional right to the opportunity of education, training or employment; and (b) the bringing together of job matching, employability training and career guidance.

The Youth employment challenge

As labour market statistics show, young people have suffered the most during the recent economic crisis, with many leaving the education system without the most basic employability skills, or any experience of the workplace. However, it is not all bad news:

- The economy is recovering (albeit slowly) – according to ONS figures, Scotland is outperforming other parts of the UK on employment, unemployment and inactivity rates
- Vacancies are increasing (back to pre-recession levels)
- Employers are training (two thirds of employers funded or arranged training for their staff in the last 12 months)
- Cross party commitment to Modern Apprenticeships and vocational training

The UKCES Employer Skills Survey published in January 2014 found young people in Scotland are the best prepared for work in the UK:

- The majority of employers who had recruited someone directly from a Scottish school, college or university thought that they were well prepared or very well prepared for work
- 46% of Scottish establishments had recruited a young person under the age of 25 in the last two to three years, an increase on the last survey and the highest level in the UK
- 70% of Scottish establishments provided training for their staff in the 12 months prior to the survey, the highest in the UK
- 65% of Scottish employees received training from their employer, the highest level in the UK.

STF represents over 100 organisations working in the training industry engaged in the delivery of Modern Apprenticeships and Employability programmes.

The current members are drawn from a wide cross-section of providers and include:

- private training providers
- group training associations
- FE colleges
- Local authority training departments
- Training organisations in the not-for-profit sector
- Sector Skills Councils

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- Awarding Bodies

Whether the interaction between current UK and Scottish youth employability initiatives could be improved.

The general consensus of training providers in Scotland is that there is room for improvement in this area. There are a number of agencies involved in the provision and funding of skills and employability training in Scotland, including Skills Development Scotland, Skills Funding Council, Department of Work and Pensions, Local Authorities, employers – and training providers.

Some confusion often arises as a result of the cluttered landscape surrounding youth employability initiatives. This can lead to duplication of provision with different agencies making different offers to the same target group. There is also anecdotal evidence that the Department for Work and Pensions is not always familiar with the differences that exist in the education and training landscape in Scotland – for example the work being undertaken in schools in respect of the Curriculum for Excellence and the initiatives being undertaken by Skills Development Scotland. Training providers have experienced a lack of understanding by JobcentrePlus of the Employability Fund and opportunities for 18-24 year old clients.

It would help both training providers and employers if there was a single point of entry providing comprehensive information on the opportunities that exist for current and future employees.

The diverging policies relating to, for example, the Modern Apprenticeship programme in the different nations in the UK will simply add to the confusion, with the distinct possibility of qualifications not being recognised throughout the whole of the UK. A number of potential cross-border issues are beginning to emerge. As a result, apprentices may require to renew qualifications in a different part of the UK, leading to a requirement for additional funding and training resources.

Extent to which youth employment could be boosted by

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

Members believe that aspects of this already exist through Opportunities for All.

The prospect of a Youth Guarantee as a constitutional right would be welcomed. A guarantee of 6 months of employment, such as Future Jobs Fund/Community Jobs Scotland, would also be beneficial, as work experience is often the greatest barrier to young people seeking full-time employment.

As the economic situation begins to improve we want to help more employers capitalise on the enormous potential young people have to offer.

b) The bringing together of job matching, employability training and career guidance.

This is a proposal that STF has advocated for some time. The current system is currently disjointed with 16-17-year olds going to SDS Careers and 18+ going to JCP. There are currently inconsistent systems and measurements in place and the targets set by the different bodies often get in the way of progress.

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There is currently little incentive for a joined up approach with providers being required to focus on achievement of the goals set in their specific contracts.

There needs to be greater partnership working between schools, colleges/training providers and employers if we are to improve the transition from school to work. High quality and impartial careers advice and guidance is critical. Greater employer involvement across all phases of education will also help to raise awareness of jobs and careers in a range of sectors and industries, particularly those which are key to the industrial strategy for Scotland.

We would like to see greater recognition of the role training providers' play in developing young people in Scotland. Training providers have a strong track record working with employers to deliver the skills businesses and the economy needs.