

## CROSS PARTY GROUP (CPG) ON SCOTLAND'S UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES

13.00-14.00 on 15 December 2011, Committee Room 3, Scottish Parliament

### Note of Meeting

#### Present:

Claire Baker MSP	Acting Convener CPG
Angus Allan	South Lanarkshire College
Tony Axon	UCU Scotland
Emma Beeby	Scotland's Colleges
Val Belton	University of Strathclyde
Marco Biagi MSP	University of Strathclyde
Jenny Bloomfield	UCU Scotland
Terry Brotherstone	Universities Scotland
Kirsty Conlon	Scottish Wider Access Programme East (SWAP East)
Kate Davidson	Glasgow Caledonian University
Kenneth Fleming	University of Strathclyde
Colin Grant	University of Strathclyde
Wendy Groome-Vine	Jewel & Esk College
Moira Gibson	University of Edinburgh
Russell Gunson	NUS Scotland
John Henderson	Scotland's Colleges
Grant Jarvie	University of Stirling
Charlie Jeffrey	University of Edinburgh
Simon Jennings	Universities Scotland
Maggie Kinloch	Royal Conservatoire of Scotland
Susannah Lane	Universities Scotland
Ged Lerpiniere	Lothians Equal Access Programme for Schools (LEAPS)
Paul Little	City of Glasgow College
Malcolm MacLeod	University of St Andrews
Steven Magee	University of St Andrews
Anne McGillivray	University of West of Scotland
Matt McPherson	Edinburgh University Students Association (EUSA)
James Miller	OU in Scotland
Robin Parker	NUS Scotland
Jennifer Ross	Scottish Parliament
Jane Scott	Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh
Alastair Sim	Universities Scotland
Charandeep Singh	University of Strathclyde Students' Association (USSA)
Heather Sloan	Universities Scotland
Colin Taylor	Scottish Parliament
Philip Whyte	NUS Scotland
James Wilson	Universities Scotland
Grahame Wright	University of Abertay, Dundee

#### Apologies:

Elizabeth Smith MSP	Convener of the CPG, Scottish Parliament
Una Bartley	OU in Scotland
David Belsey	EIS
Anne Campbell	James Watt College
Mandy Exley	Jewel & Esk College

Geoff Fenlon	Carnegie College
Hugh Henry MSP	
Hanzala Malik MSP	
Matthew MacIver	University of the Highlands & Islands
Liam McArthur MSP	
Stewart Maxwell MSP	
Judith McClure	Scotland-China Education Network (SCEN)
Peter Pringle	Reid Kerr College
Keith Robson	Association of Teachers and Lecturers
Richard Simpson MSP	
Drew Smith MSP	
Susan Stewart	University of Glasgow
Rob Wallen	Aberdeen College
Petra Wend	Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh

## 1. Welcome and Introduction from the Convener

Ms Baker, Acting Convener, welcomed everyone to the third meeting of the CPG on Scotland's universities and colleges, and thanked NUS Scotland for sponsoring the lunch. She informed the group that the topic for discussion was widening access, student support and retention and introduced the three speakers who would give brief presentations:-

- Dr Anne McGillivray, Dean of Students at the University of the West of Scotland to discuss initiatives to widen access
- Angus Allan, Depute Principal of South Lanarkshire College – also on the subject of widening access
- Robin Parker, President of NUS Scotland on student support in the college and university sectors

## 2. Apologies

Apologies were noted

## 3. Presentations

### **Dr Anne McGillivray, Dean of Students, University of the West of Scotland (UWS)**

- Dr McGillivray talked about the outcome agreement that UWS has with the Scottish Funding Council which covers access and employability. She discussed the mix of students at UWS (40 per cent part time and many using Independent Learning Accounts to support their education) and the diverse routes of entry and exit available.
- Articulation agreements were also an important part of UWS activity and UWS has strong partnerships with the network of local colleges through the Scottish Wider Access Programme (SWAP): 30 per cent of UWS's full-time undergraduate students are HN students articulating into second or third year, an increase of 100 per cent in recent years. However, she identified higher attrition rates amongst articulating students as a problem and said that it was an aim of UWS to increase the number of students successfully completing programmes.
- The flexibility of access that UWS offers is an important dimension to the university but so too is the delivery of relevant research and internationalisation.
- In her view support and guidance and information on the various routes into higher education were essential for widening access students although this then benefitted all students.

- However, she cautioned that targets on access cannot be reliably measured and assessed in a year as there can be a long time lag between action taken and impact seen.
- She advised that it was a challenging environment and the proposals for college reorganisation on a regional basis would be likely to bring significant implications for UWS as the university currently has 18 college partners through SWAP.

#### **Angus Allan, Depute Principal of South Lanarkshire College**

- Mr Allan discussed the risks the college sector is currently facing in regards to the funding environment and commented on the need to ensure that no group of students disadvantaged. He noted the focus on 16-19 year olds but urged caution that other age groups should not be overlooked; noting that the average age of a college student is 28+ years of age.
- He commented on the strong links and partnership approach between UWS and South Lanarkshire College and with SWAP and the fact that local delivery was important. He also thought that flexibility was very important to non-traditional students many of whom juggle part-time jobs and families.
- He advised that much of the work done by SWAP, to provide access routes through college into university for people who have been out of formal education for many years, is highly successful.
- He finished by stating that students from different backgrounds who have progressed through non-traditional routes are often very high achievers.

#### **Robin Parker, President of NUS Scotland**

- Mr Parker commented that the sector should be united in tackling the issue of widening access (WA) and that the issues of WA, retention and student support are all interlinked.
- Student hardship is a major factor in drop-out rates which makes student support crucial in terms of having the financial means to get into education. NUS Scotland is pleased to be working with the Scottish Government in moving towards a £7,000 guaranteed minimum income.
- Studies by NUS Scotland have revealed that for students, having money in their pockets whilst studying was more of a priority than accumulating debt which is why the minimum income is important. However, loans should be a top-up on existing grants; not a replacement for them.
- NUS Scotland also wants to see an equalisation of support available to young and independent students.
- Within the college sector, NUS Scotland wants to see a move from discretion to entitlement, so student support is not a barrier to entry and they want to see consistency in student support across the FE sector.
- NUS Scotland is also working with the Scottish Parliament to end the current anomaly whereby an HN student articulating into a degree programme is required to pay council tax over the summer months but a 'typical' undergraduate student is not.
- Mr Parker questioned universities' record on widening access relative to the college sector and argued that student associations should have a greater role in widening access in their institutions.

## **4. Discussion**

The discussion following the presentations centred on the following issues:

- **The SCQF framework**  
There was some discussion of the role of the SCQF framework as a vehicle to encourage more entry with advanced standing from college into university. Charandeep Singh of USSA questioned whether it was being used enough. Simon Jennings of Universities Scotland clarified that all

university provision is mapped to SCQF levels and the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) has a role in ensuring this is the case. However, it was noted that SCQF is supposed to be a framework and not a set of rules. Rigid adherence to SCQF levels could actually reduce flexibility and disadvantage learners. Anne McGillivray commented that many HN students want to change direction or lack confidence and they should have the option of starting at SCQF level 8 at university, rather than be forced into study at SCQF level 9.

- **System design within tertiary education**

John Henderson of Scotland's Colleges questioned whether the current system was designed to incentivise delivery of four-year degrees over other models. This view was supported by Paul Little of Glasgow City College who argued for the need to examine the whole tertiary education sector. He expressed the view that it did not serve learners to have different organisations working in 'silos'. Colin Grant of the University of Strathclyde and others pointed out the university funding model did not offer a preferential incentive to recruit 'traditional' four-year students; universities received the same funding per student per year regardless of whether the student started in year 1 or made a transition from school or college into a later year of a degree programme.

- **Engaging learners from non-traditional backgrounds at schools level**

It was noted that in terms of university engagement with schools to widen access, it was important to couple raising aspirations with guidance to students and parents. Ged Lerpiniere of LEAPS stated that it was his view that funding for widening access should have a strong guidance element to it and that contextualised admissions did help students from non-traditional backgrounds but that it was important that parents and prospective students are supported through the admissions stage. This was supported by Anne McGillivray who felt that pre-entry guidance is a crucial time for students.

- **Diversity in mission – diversity in approach**

Claire Baker MSP questioned whether all universities were equally engaged in the widening access agenda and posed the question, for discussion, whether it was necessary or desirable for them to be. This was echoed by Paul Little who suggested that universities in different mission groups took a different approach to engagement with colleges. Kate Davidson of SWAPEast advised that at a national level, every Scottish university engages with the programme and all offer great support for the SWAP access programmes irrespective of 'type' of institution. Matt McPherson of EUSA advised that the University of Edinburgh was part of a partnership agenda of colleges and universities across the city. Grant Jarvie of the University of Stirling advised that it would be inappropriate to set overly prescriptive or narrow routes for universities to follow in regards to widening access – it is not a case of one-size-fits-all. Robin Parker of NUS Scotland agreed that a one-size-fits-all approach may be counterproductive but that NUS Scotland wanted to see progress from all universities and at present there was very little in place to ensure minimum standards on widening access.

- **Postgraduate level study**

Matt McPherson of EUSA expressed concern that postgraduate students had largely been overlooked in the debate on widening access. He advocated the abolition of upfront fees for postgraduate study and an extension of the current system of post-graduate loan system so that Scotland is able to say that it is opposed to upfront fees for any university course.

## 5. Future meetings – dates and themes for discussion

- Members were informed that meeting dates for 2012 would be identified in consultation with the Convener would be circulated by Universities Scotland early in the New Year. It was agreed that now that the CPG was up and running with some momentum, meetings should revert to the same frequency as most other CPG meetings of once every six to eight weeks.
- Future dates for meetings will be scheduled to avoid the CPG on Skills as that group is particularly pertinent to both the college and university sector and some members may wish to attend both group meetings – Meetings of the CPG on Skills will be held on Thursday 9 February and Thursday 10 May 2012.
- Ms Baker advised that the Convener was keen to see internationalisation as a topic for the next meeting and it would be appropriate to return to the subject of governance when the reviews of the college and university sector have been made public.
- It was noted that the CPG might wish to return to the topic of widening access at a future meeting given the breadth of the topic and the fact that having college, university and student representatives together in one room represented a real opportunity.
- Mrs Baker closed the meeting with thanks to all for their attendance and contribution and best wishes for very happy Christmas and New Year.