

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

13.00-14.00 on 9 May 2013, Committee Room 2, Scottish Parliament

Note of Meeting

Present:

Ms Elizabeth Smith MSP	Convener of the CPG on Scotland's Universities and Colleges
Mr Hugh Henry MSP	Scottish Parliament
Mr Neil Findlay MSP	Scottish Parliament
Mr Liam McArthur MSP	Scottish Parliament
Prof Alan Gilloran	Queen Margaret University Edinburgh
Prof George Stonehouse	Edinburgh Napier University
Mr Graeme Kirkpatrick	NUS Scotland
Mr Peter Aitchison	University of Glasgow
Mr Tony Axon	UCU Scotland
Ms Una Bartley	Open University in Scotland
Mr David Belsey	EIS Scotland
Dr Pete Cannell	Open University in Scotland
Ms Gail Gibson	Skills Development Scotland
Ms Moira Gibson	University of Edinburgh
Ms Linda Greig	Carnegie College
Ms Susannah Lane	Universities Scotland
Dr Judith McClure	SCEN
Mr Finlay MacCorquodale	Edinburgh Napier University
Prof Matthew MacIver	University of the Highlands and Islands
Mr James Moohan	Edinburgh College
Ms Jennifer Ross	Scottish Parliament
Ms Jane Scott	Queen Margaret University Edinburgh
Mr Alastair Sim	Universities Scotland
Ms Heather Sloan	Universities Scotland
Ms Fiona Stewart	Skills Development Scotland
Mr Colin Taylor	Scottish Parliament
Mr Gordon Watson	UCU Scotland
Mr James Wilson	Universities Scotland

Apologies:

Mr David Bass	Lead Scotland
Mr Terry Brotherstone	UCU Scotland
Ms Mandy Exley	Edinburgh College
Mr John Henderson	Colleges Scotland
Mr Brian McLeish	Scottish Enterprise
Mr Robin Parker	NUS Scotland
Mr Rob Wallen	Aberdeen College

1. Welcome and introduction from the Convenor

Before official business began, the Convenor drew Group members' attention to a new Universities Scotland report, Taking Pride in the Job: University action on graduate employability, published on 6 May. The report can be read here: www.universities-scotland.ac.uk/uploads/TakingPrideintheJobApril13.pdf.

The Convenor welcomed everyone to the twelfth meeting of the Cross Party Group on the topic of workplace learning and workforce development. Thanks were given to Finlay MacCorquodale and Edinburgh Napier University for sponsoring the lunch for the meeting.

2. Apologies

Apologies were noted.

3. Co-Convenor proposal from George Adam MSP

The Convenor noted that Mr Adam was not in attendance to speak to this agenda item. This was despite confirming in writing prior to the meeting that he did want the matter of a co-convenor discussed.

The Convenor checked that no apologies had been received from Mr Adam before seeking the views of the meeting as to how members wished to proceed.

Hugh Henry MSP moved that the group discuss the item in Mr Adam's absence. Mr Henry said that he could not see any strong reason as to why it was necessary to change how the group was working given that all parties were represented on the group and that it was common practice for different arrangements to exist for co-convenors and deputy convenors across the Parliament's large number of cross party groups (CPGs). Dr McClure (SCEN) agreed with Mr Henry's sentiments. She did not feel it was clear on what basis the proposal to change the structure of the group was being made. Professor MacIver (UHI) noted that the group had worked well, especially in terms of bringing together people from the FE and HE sectors with no vested interests. Mr McArthur shared Mr Henry's view and added that all CPGs have different ways of working and he had not detected any problems within the group.

In the interests of a balanced discussion, the Convenor offered members who felt otherwise to express a view. None was forthcoming however, and so it was the unanimous opinion amongst the members present that the current structures should remain.

There has been no correspondence from Mr Adam.

4. Introduction to the topic of workplace learning and workforce development and presentations

The Convenor introduced the four speakers on the topic of workplace learning and workforce development and explained that each would present for around eight minutes followed by questions at the end of all four presentations.

Mr Jim Brown, Director, Energy Skills Partnership (Colleges Scotland)

Mr Brown explained that the Energy Skills Partnership (ESP) is a collaboration of most of Scotland's colleges established in 2011. Priorities for the ESP are demand-led provision, working with industry and companies and responding to need. Mr Brown noted that it was a challenging time for colleges in terms of funding but the ESP has been grateful to receive pots of money. Mr Brown emphasised the importance of ESP engaging with schools and Education Scotland as well as a joint partnership with the universities' Energy Technology Partnership to help ease transition for students from further education into higher education. Mr Brown talked about a real 'Team Scotland' approach with the Scottish Government and government agencies on work in three clusters, namely Power (including on/offshore wind, tidal/wave); Oil and Gas (including carbon capture and storage); and energy efficiency in the home. Group members were told that ESP has an industry-led approach which involves close liaison with companies, sector skills councils, industry representative bodies and others, and that ESP and colleges are involved in a number of industry-led initiatives. Mr Brown concluded his presentation by highlighting some key activities; firstly, the Transition Training Network, a pilot programme with Scottish Renewables which is industry-driven. Industry has advised of its geographic priorities and the programme is about reskilling people already in the industry as well as providing continuing professional development. Secondly, involvement as one of the partners in the establishment of Energy Skills Scotland. Mr Brown said this is an excellent collaboration model, which could be replicated in other sectors, and has given a focus for colleges and a strategic approach about how to deal with industry.

Mr Graeme Kirkpatrick, Depute President, NUS Scotland

Mr Kirkpatrick said that the best way to acquire employability skills is through being and work-based learning and placements gives students that experience. Robert Gordon University (RGU) leads with the lowest levels of graduate unemployment which can be attributed to the fact that every course includes a year's work placement in the third year. Mr Kirkpatrick suggested that other universities should follow RGU's lead. Mr Kirkpatrick said that work placements need to have quality controls to ensure they give value to students and pointed to the Modern Apprenticeship Programme as a good model with qualifications that employers and students respect. Mr Kirkpatrick then talked about the need to find parity of esteem between degrees and vocational qualifications, noting that this aspiration is not a pipe-dream as it has been achieved in Germany. Mr Kirkpatrick suggested this leads to a stronger economy in Germany. Mr Kirkpatrick said that the college sector in Scotland lacks a central and coordinated applications system, unlike in the university sector which has a central, transparent and easily accessible system in UCAS. Mr Kirkpatrick suggested that the Skills Development Scotland (SDS) website, My World of Work, is not yet a central place to look at all options, with a lack of university involvement in the site, and NUS feel that it is too early to judge whether the website is a good resource.

Professor Alan Gilloran, Deputy Principal, Queen Margaret University Edinburgh

Professor Gilloran talked about the East Lothian Hospitality and Tourism Academy, a collaboration between Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh College, East Lothian Council and employers.

Professor Gilloran explained that the Academy has been piloted in 2012-13 with three schools from three areas of most disadvantage and starts in S5 and through S6. The schools are Musselburgh Grammar School, Preston Lodge High School & Ross High School. For S5 pupils, the Academy is extracurricular with learning taking place on Tuesday evenings and Friday afternoons, so the young people are committing over and above their standard timetable. In S6, the Academy is one column (five hours of committed teaching) and this is agreed with head teachers. The Academy is designed to smooth the transition between school, college and university and is all about the flexibility of where students study. Another advantage of the Academy is that it deals with duplication at SCQF Level 7. In terms of widening participation, the Academy is about raising ambitions: it tells pupils that you start here and the end point is demonstrated; pupils learn at college and university and gain the confidence that they could become students at college or university. Professor Gilloran explained to the Group that the Academy is a demand-led initiative in growth areas of priority for the Scottish Government and other countries' governments. The Academy signed up big, recognisable employers such as MacDonald Hotels and Resorts, Marriott, Jurys Inn and Novotel Hotels so that pupils and parents could see credibility behind the project. Professor Gilloran said that the curriculum has been shaped by employers. The Academy helps to make the hospitality an employment destination for young people – a positive choice – with guidance on the career progression opportunities that are available, rather than just an industry that young people end up in. This benefits industry too as it gains motivated employees and better retention rates. The Academy will help to fill skills gaps within the regional economy although one of the messages given to Academy students is that the skills set they will acquire will equip them to find work both nationally and internationally. In concluding, Professor Gilloran told explained to Group members that there is a plan to roll out the academy geographically further into the Lothians and Borders as well as to establish other academies in areas of potential growth for the Scottish economy.

Professor George Stonehouse, Dean of the Business School and Professor of International Strategic Management, Edinburgh Napier University

Professor Stonehouse agreed with earlier speakers and said that perpetuation of the academic/vocational divide between universities and colleges is both false and unhelpful divide. Speaking from Edinburgh Napier University there is no division between the university and its college partners as it takes pride in being an access university Edinburgh Napier University is in the top ten in the UK for graduate employability and is second in Scotland. The University tries to provide a range of employability experiences for its students and its focus is on lifelong learning which goes beyond workplace learning. Employability initiatives at the University include internships, underpinned by research showing that students are more employable when they do these; Bright Red Triangle, a new student-led consultancy company for SMEs; and the Moffat Centre in Craiglockhart and Merchiston for students to start up their own businesses (more than 200 new businesses have started in last eight years, 150 of which are still going strong, and this is important for economic growth). He commented that the university is keen for more work placement and internship opportunities from employers but recognised that these were difficult times for employers. Professor Stonehouse commended the Practice-Based Learning (PBL) model whereby learning is through exposure to new ideas and experiences and then by using that learning in a supportive environment. Professor Stonehouse said that the University worked in partnership with companies in order to benefit companies and students. Benefits of PBL include producing reflective learners; allowing students to work on projects and give value to and take value from those projects.

It is actually possible to measure the added value to the business which is really important. In PBL models students work with learning coaches, a practitioner and academic team. It is still important to ensure academic rigour but there are different forms of teaching and assessment so it is no longer all about three-hour exams.

4. Discussion

Role of schools in academic/vocational divide

The Convenor asked if there is anything more that can be done to end the perception of a strict divide between vocational and academic education particularly in schools where this notion first takes hold in the minds of pupils and parents. Professor Gilloran said that it was a false dichotomy and we have to remind people in learning institutions why they are doing things – creating opportunities for young people rather than denying them. Professor Gilloran told the Group that we need to convince young people about career progression and that there is an onus on employers to think about the career progression they can offer and why they should invest in the people they attract people to their business.

Skills Development Scotland (SDS) initiatives

The success and value of the new college learning programme, as implemented by SDS, was questioned. Mr Kirkpatrick of NUS offered the view that any issues were most likely a result of the compressed timescale in which SDS has had to deliver the project. He was hopeful that the problems identified so far were symptoms of this. He emphasised he would want to see tighter quality controls over elements of the learning programme. Ms Stewart said that Skills Development Scotland have been developing a web channel to provide more content on potential career options to young people and for their parents' information. Ms Stewart said the inclusion of videos and case studies would help young people make a decision about where they want to work in the future. Ms Stewart also highlighted Scottish Apprenticeship Week beginning on 20 May 2013 with an event in the Scottish Parliament on 23 May.

Professor Stonehouse highlighted a degree programme at Edinburgh Napier University that allowed Modern Apprenticeship students to top up to degree level, giving recognition to the fact that learning is not just for young people and tailoring learning for mature learners. Professor Stonehouse pointed out that you cannot always expect an older person to study part-time for six years.

Collaboration

At the beginning of the discussion, Dr McClure praised the speakers' invigorating presentations and said that we need models of change and collaboration. She asked about the challenges involved in collaboration which inevitably requires close working with local authorities where this involves schools. It was noted that some local authorities are more receptive to new models of partnership working than others. Professor MacIver spoke about his own institution, the University of the Highlands and Islands, which is a partnership model making collaboration vital. He noted that it is not always easy whether between internal or external partners but there is always the need to press for success.

6. Date of next meeting

The Convenor thanked all speakers and attendees. The Convenor noted that the next meeting would take place after the summer recess as rooms in Parliament were extremely busy in June. The Convenor said Universities Scotland would liaise with her office to set a date for as soon as possible after summer recess and that this date would be circulated to the Group in due course.

Meeting closed.