

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

13.00-14.00 on 8 November 2012, Committee Room 4, Scottish Parliament

Note of Meeting

Present:

Elizabeth Smith MSP	Convener of the CPG on Scotland's Universities and Colleges
Tony Axon	UCU Scotland
Laura Barjonas	Skills Development Scotland
Malcolm Barron	Skills Development Scotland
Una Bartley	Open University in Scotland
Emma Beeby	Scotland's Colleges
John Blicharski	University of Dundee
Amy Brown	Skills Development Scotland
Kirsty Conlon	Universities Scotland
Grant Jarvie	University of Edinburgh
Umbreen Khalid	Scottish Parliament
Graeme Kirkpatrick	NUS Scotland
Moira Gibson	University of Edinburgh
Finlay MacCorquodale	Edinburgh Napier University
Matthew MacIver	University of the Highlands and Islands
Margaret McCulloch MSP	Scottish Parliament
Hanzala Malik MSP	Scottish Parliament
Robin Parker	NUS Scotland
Bill Porterfield	Burn Stewart Distillers Ltd
Diane Rawlinson	Ayr College
Jane Scott	Queen Margaret University
Alastair Sim	Universities Scotland
Heather Sloan	Universities Scotland
Colin Taylor	Scottish Parliament
Gordon Watson	UCU Scotland
Mike Williamson	sparqs
James Wilson	Universities Scotland

Apologies:

Peter Aitchison	University of Glasgow
Terry Brotherstone	University of Aberdeen
Alan Dearle	University of St Andrews
Mandy Exley	Edinburgh College
Charlie Jeffery	University of Edinburgh
Simon Jennings	University of Strathclyde
Paul Little	City of Glasgow College

Judith McClure	SCEN
Jim Miller	Open University in Scotland
Sue Pinder	James Watt College
Jennifer Ross	Scottish Parliament
Richard Simpson MSP	Scottish Parliament
Drew Smith MSP	Scottish Parliament
Rob Wallen	Aberdeen College
Petra Wend	Queen Margaret University

1. Welcome and introduction from the Convener

Ms Smith MSP, Convener, welcomed everyone to the Cross Party Group meeting. Ms Smith thanked Scotland's Colleges for providing the lunch for today's meetings. Ms Smith introduced the topic of the meeting, careers advice in schools on post-16 options as a subject very close to all of our hearts. Ms Smith also pointed out that the issue is very topical, particularly given recent Scottish Government debates on the issue.

The Convener noted that the Group was coming to the end of its suggested topic areas and welcomed more suggestions from Group members in the next two or three weeks. Suggestions can be e-mailed to Ms Smith at Elizabeth.Smith.msp@scottish.parliament.uk.

2. Apologies

Apologies were noted.

3. Presentations

Mr Malcolm Barron, Lead Head of Regional Operations, Skills Development Scotland (SDS)

Mr Barron explained that while SDS has a statutory responsibility to deliver careers guidance in schools there was also an important contribution to be made by school staff and the community in which the school resides. This community can include a local college, university, local businesses and the third sector. Mr Barron explained that this shared responsibility is well developed.

Mr Barron told the Group that all 400 SDS careers advisers are professionally qualified with a postgraduate qualification in careers guidance. SDS has recently developed a new service delivery model. This model includes a universal offer to people of all ages delivered via the SDS web service My World of Work (www.myworldofwork.co.uk). This service is available 24/7 and includes a range of tools to support individuals to make career decisions and to research a range of career options. These tools have been devised to support individuals to understand the skills they require to successfully manage their career path. This service is supported by a customer contact centre which is able to provide support to customers on careers information and advice. Finally SDS provides face to face careers guidance service targeted at those individuals who require this support.

In school, SDS works with teaching staff to identify those pupils most at risk of not making a successful transition from school to the next stage in their career path. Once the pupils to be targeted have been agreed, SDS advisers adopt a coaching approach to support them to develop the career management skills they will now and in the future. These career management skills include four main themes, Self, Strengths, Horizons and Networks. These four themes aim to help young people: one) better understand what they want out of a career; two) understand their strengths; three) where do you want to get to in the future, and four, understand networks that will help you to achieve your aim. Mr Barron concluded by saying SDS provides a universal offer: access to its online facility with opportunities, video content and the like; a contact centre that can answer questions; and face-to-face time with a member of staff if further help is needed. He emphasised that this support will be provided to those pupils outwith the targeted group if they are still uncertain about a career path.

Mr Bill Porterfield, Human Resources Manager, Burn Stewart Distillers Ltd

Mr Porterfield said that in the discussion of being ready for the workplace the fundamental question that is missing is 'why?' as students at all levels do not get the time to ask this question. Mr Porterfield explained that employers want staff to add value straight away and that any potential employee must have a work ethic that adds value. Mr Porterfield said that there are three missing elements to new employees: understanding of the contract of employment; rules of employer relations; and individuals having ability to take instruction. Mr Porterfield stressed that students need to be taught how to take instruction and explained that adding value is about continuously setting and resetting goals. Mr Porterfield welcomed the development of a certificate of work readiness, saying it might be a good thing and employers might be keen to see this. Mr Porterfield said that employers must be involved in developing the certificate. Mr Barron confirmed that employers are involved and will be key to its development. Mr Porterfield used a series of allegories to make the point that employers are looking for new employees to be successful because their success means the employer is successful.

Mrs Diane Rawlinson, Principal, Ayr College

Ms Rawlinson said that college places are currently over-subscribed and scarce, so students need the best advice to get on the right course to give young people the best chance of success. From a college perspective, chance of success is understood to be as much about skills and aptitude as formal academic qualifications. The experience of colleges is often that schools careers advice focuses more on the stage of development of the young person and less on their suitability for a particular industry or career. Ms Rawlinson said that colleges are making efforts on pre-entry guidance having recognised a need to work with parents and schools. For example, a team from her college goes out and engages at school events as well as holding industry-focused open evenings at the college and inviting employers along to speak to young people at the college. Ms Rawlinson said that Skills for Work courses are important as these allow the opportunity for students to try different routes. On non-advanced Ayr College courses, essential core skills, including literacy and numeracy, IT, employability skills, citizenship and personal development skills make up one third of the course time whilst two thirds of the time is spent on developing technical skills. Ms Rawlinson said that Ayr College had success last year with 30% of leavers going onto higher education or further education (mostly higher education) and 35% going into paid employment. Ms Rawlinson said that college staff have been encouraged by SDS's My World of Work and Ayr College is working on a pilot with SDS to

build it into the HN curriculum. Ms Rawlinson said that colleges could see scope for further improvement of the My World of Work system through giving tutors in colleges administration rights that would enable them to track the level and scope of student use of the system and thereby tailor their support appropriately. This facility is missing from the system at the moment. Ms Rawlinson said that she is concerned by recurrent problems faced by colleges as many school leavers turn up for interviews for college courses misinformed about the nature of college courses. There is a regular assumption made that college courses are less demanding and less theoretical than they are in practice. There is also commonly an assumption made that access to college courses is not competitive. School leaver applicants were also frequently misinformed regarding the key attributes required for work in particular industries. Ms Rawlinson suggested that the lack of understanding of college provision amongst school teachers was understandable as very few teachers themselves had a college learning experience and so do not fully appreciate the value of colleges or arrangements such as the 2+2 model (which offered a more supportive route for the less confident or less mature school leaver), the rewards of a modern apprenticeship route into some highly technical roles, the benefits of close employer relationships enjoyed by many colleges and the value of HNC/D qualifications as direct routes to employment.

Dr John Blicharski, Access & Participation Manager and Senior Lecturer, University of Dundee

Dr Blicharski described the landscape from a university perspective. Nineteen per cent of applications to the University of Dundee were from the 40% most deprived, 16% entered the university. Dr Blicharski explained that fewer candidates apply to university from deprived communities than affluent ones. At the University of Dundee, 50% of those from deprived areas who are offered a place turn it down and Dr Blicharski said he believes this is because these young people have a fear of the unknown. Dr Blicharski explained that universities know what works – carefully targeted outreach, all the means of communication and all the diverse routes. In Dundee, the University is working at every level: with S2 pupils from low progression schools; planning to work with primary schools; and helping delivery of Advanced Highers on campus for pupils from multiple schools giving them the opportunity to study courses that would not have been viable at individual schools and the opportunity to see what a university is like. Dr Blicharski praised SFC-funded access projects REACH and ACES. REACH and ACES aim to widen access to a range of professional degrees by those from non-traditional backgrounds. Dr Blicharski explained that at the University of Dundee one of the criteria for applicants to Medicine is that they must have shadowed a medical post for one week. For someone from an affluent area this can be done easily such as by joining their parents at work but for someone from a less affluent area this can be more problematic. The University helped a GP surgery open for additional hours to enable more students the opportunity to gain shadowing experience. The University of Dundee's Access Summer School has proven to add value as 60% of the 2008 cohort who went to the University's Summer School and graduated in 2012 achieved a First or 2:1. Dr Blicharski said that we know the problems and the solutions but resourcing is the hard part. It is about doing things more fairly as reality is different from the assumption that everyone has the same school experience which is why contextualised admissions are being looked at. Dr Blicharski said that Professor Pete Downes, Principal of the University of Dundee and Convener of Universities Scotland is committed to universities offering opportunities to the brightest and best, regardless of background.

4. Discussion

Need to introduce student support earlier

Mr Gordon Watson, UCU Scotland, asked for the panel's thoughts on the idea of introducing student support earlier, perhaps in schools to those aged 14+. Dr Blicharski said that depends on what is meant by 'student support' and went on to highlight the difficulty of press coverage of what universities are about. The media suggest that university is about studying for a degree to get a particular job, but actually what employers want is transferable skills. Dr Blicharski pointed out that the flexibility of the Scottish four-year degree system allows for this to happen.

The Convener, Ms Smith picked up on Ms Rawlinson's concern that those giving careers advice in schools do not have college experience/knowledge and asked if she thinks teachers should give advice or if the system should be overhauled so that others come in to give advice to pupils. Ms Rawlinson said she wants to see a partnership approach where teachers and pupils come into colleges and work with college professionals. Ms Rawlinson gave the example of a west of Scotland partnership between Ayr College, the local authority and industry that sees school teachers being taught about engineering skills in order to understand what is required of students in a course at the college. Mr Barron pointed out that careers advice is given in a number of ways, including by SDS trained staff in every school all of whom have knowledge and understanding of colleges. Mr Barron explained that school guidance staff also give advice and have a pastoral role in schools and that pupils get advice from a number of sources, namely parents, teachers and peers.

Point of careers advice in schools

Mr Robin Parker, NUS Scotland, said that the point of careers advice in schools is to set out the different options for pupils. Mr Parker said his generation will not have a single career but instead one with different steps. Mr Parker said NUS Scotland is beginning a new research project with Higher Education Academy Scotland (HEA Scotland) funding looking at the university/college experience; how prepared students felt when they arrived at university; how they felt about the advice they received before applying; and also at articulation between college and university. Mr Parker went on to say that league tables are problematic because the information people can take from them can be misleading. Mr Parker said he believed a peer to peer approach to widening access, things such as inviting former pupils who have gone on to university back to inspire future students, should be taken further as they are really effective.

Mr Parker asked, given cuts to colleges' budget will likely put pressure on careers guidance in colleges, how we can ensure a standard approach to careers guidance, especially as it is delivered in different ways. Ms Rawlinson replied that you cannot guarantee equality of careers guidance. Ms Rawlinson conceded that it will help that there will be fewer colleges. Ms Rawlinson explained that college regions have been working to standardise provision to include careers information and development of employability skills in mainstream provision rather than as an unfunded add on. Dr Blicharski said that if learning is as flexible as it should be, you cannot have a false start in education, for example the University of Dundee Summer School allows students to sample the university experience before committing to it. Mr Porterfield suggested that you can do this in the workplace, too. Mr Mathew MacIver, University of the Highlands and Islands, and Ms Una Bartley, Open University in Scotland, pointed out that there are different post-16 models.

Targeting careers advice and support

Ms Jennifer Ross, researcher for Liam McArthur MSP, said all school pupils should have access to face to face support. Mr Barron explained the different elements of careers advice offered by SDS: online information as a first port of call as evidence suggests that this is where young people go for their information; then a contact centre that can answer simple questions of fact, such as where you can go to study particular subjects; and targeted support for those people who have used the first two tools but are still uncertain and this is available to all. Mr Parker said he is worried by the way the system works as there is a reliance on schools to make careers advice a priority – some will, some will not. Mr Barron said that SDS is working Education Scotland on a quality assurance framework to address exactly these issues.

5. Date of next meeting: Thursday 20 December 1.00 – 2.00 pm

Ms Smith thanked all speakers and attendees. The next meeting of the Cross Party Group on Scotland's Universities and Colleges will take place on the last business day of Parliament before Recess, Thursday 20 December.

The topic for the meeting on 20 December will be articulation.

Ms Smith welcomed suggestions of topics for future meetings to be e-mailed to her at Elizabeth.Smith.msp@scottish.parliament.uk.

Meeting closed.