

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

13.00-14.00 on 20 December 2012, Committee Room 1, Scottish Parliament

### Note of Meeting

#### Present:

Elizabeth Smith MSP	Convener of the CPG on Scotland's Universities and Colleges
Tony Axon	UCU Scotland
Una Bartley	Open University in Scotland
David Bass	Lead Scotland
Mark Batho	Scottish Funding Council
Emma Beeby	Scotland's Colleges
Dr Pete Cannell	Open University in Scotland
Dr Roger Collins	University of Edinburgh (Honorary Fellow)
John Henderson	Colleges Scotland
Graeme Kirkpatrick	NUS Scotland
Susannah Lane	Universities Scotland
Claire MacEachen	University of Abertay Dundee
Matthew MacIver	University of the Highlands and Islands
Dr Judith McClure	Scotland China Education Network (SCEN)
Margaret McCulloch MSP	Scottish Parliament
Stewart Maxwell MSP	Scottish Parliament
Chantelle Robson	Albyn School
Jennifer Ross	Scottish Parliament
Alastair Sim	Universities Scotland
Heather Sloan	Universities Scotland
Colin Taylor	Scottish Parliament
Joan Thomson	Open University in Scotland
Gordon Watson	UCU Scotland
James Wilson	Universities Scotland

#### Apologies:

Mr Paul Little	City of Glasgow College
Ms Moira Gibson	University of Edinburgh
Mr Finlay MacCorquodale	Edinburgh Napier University
Liam McArthur MSP	Scottish Parliament
Dr Richard Simpson MSP	Scottish Parliament
Mr David Belsey	EIS Scotland
Mr Ken Wimbor	EIS Scotland

## **1. Welcome and introduction from the Convener**

Ms Smith MSP, Convener, welcomed everyone to the Cross Party Group meeting. Ms Smith thanked Dr Jim Miller and the Open University in Scotland for providing the lunch for today's meetings. Ms Smith noted that Scotland's Colleges has had a change of name to become two separate groups: Colleges Scotland and College Development Network. Ms Smith introduced the topic of the meeting, articulation from college to university, saying it is one that has drawn considerable interest and hoped that today's meeting would help the Group understand the process and how important it is.

## **2. Apologies**

Apologies were noted.

## **3. Presentations**

### **Ms Chantelle Robson, Albyn School (speaking on behalf of NUS Scotland)**

Ms Robson gave an account of her personal experience as a former student who articulated from college into university. Ms Robson explained that she now works for Albyn School, an independent school in Aberdeen, as Assistant to Director of Admissions, Marketing and Development. Ms Robson explained that she was brought up by a single mother and attended a low progression school. However, Ms Robson suffered bullying at school, did not enjoy it as a result, and failed all of her Highers. Ms Robson looked at Aberdeen College instead of a sixth year at school and took up an Introduction to Media Studies course.. For Ms Robson it was important that the course led to an HND course and, following the HN, a 2+2 arrangement with Robert Gordon University. Ms Robson said she would not be where she is today without articulation to university. Ms Robson explained that the induction process at the university was good and she felt she was not at a disadvantage to those studying the full four-year course at university. Ms Robson explained that she found out about the 2+2 articulation model whilst at Aberdeen College, but there had been a lack of information for pupils at her school. Ms Robson said she believes that all universities should take HN students as she feels some people may be missing out on the opportunity at the moment. She would also like to see broader choice in the range of articulation routes open to learners including the number of universities participating in articulation.

### **Mr Mark Batho, Chief Executive, Scottish Funding Council**

Mr Batho explained that the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) has been supporting articulation (HN to university) since 2003 and from 2008 there been a move towards a model of articulation hubs. Mr Batho said that 12,500 students had articulated by academic year 2012/13. Mr Batho used the analogy of snakes and ladders to describe the "learner journey" and said people should have the opportunity to keep progressing on this journey without worrying that they might hit a snake which returns them to a lower level of learning. Mr Batho told the Group that reasons previously raised as obstacles to greater levels of articulation, such as different learning styles or different curricula between college and university are not insurmountable. Mr Batho praised the work that has been done by Robert Gordon University (RGU) and Aberdeen College, saying these institutions have thought through what is needed, pointing out that Chantelle could have articulated into two or three different university courses at RGU from her college course. Mr Batho reminded the Group

that the environment in which universities have been operating these schemes is one of capped student numbers which meant limited availability of places. Mr Batho explained that a good model for universities involved in articulation, is to give colleges' HN students the status of "associate students" from day one – allowing them to access the library and other facilities. Mr Batho went on to discuss how there is patchy provision across the articulation hubs as some are doing more than others at present. Mr Batho said that student choice is the important issue when talking about articulation: a joint up approach requires negotiation between colleges and universities and these negotiations should be greater than between just one college and one university. On SFC incentive schemes announced the previous day, Mr Batho said the SFC is offering 1,200 extra places for 2013/14 for universities in order to improve articulation. The university will receive the money for these extra places, but for the years the student spends in college, a minimum of 75% of this money will be paid to the college. Mr Batho said there had been significant demand from universities for these extra places to expand articulation activity. Mr Batho said that information about articulation is critical and hopes that in schools information about all the different paths available to pupils is being given to them and explained to them. On admissions, Mr Batho said that Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) would start to break down the traditional requirements for access to university courses, including five Highers in one sitting, and said that this represents a great opportunity for wider access going forward.

**Mr John Henderson, Chief Executive, Colleges Scotland**

Mr Henderson said that colleges transform lives and articulation is key to that. 50,000 students study at HN level, according to Mr Henderson, and he said the part-time route is key to giving people a 'ladder', continuing on Mr Batho's analogy. Mr Henderson made the point that not all HN students will want to articulate. Mr Henderson said that HN students are also valuable to Scotland's economy. Mr Henderson said that the college sector is an efficient sector which will become more efficient under regionalisation. Mr Henderson explained that students who go to college often have lower grades due to a bad school experience whilst they can also join college at 18, 19 or 20 years of age because some people know what they want to do a little later in life than others. This is the open access policy of colleges that is key. Mr Henderson welcomed the 1,200 additional articulation places announced by the SFC and he welcomed the work of Robert Gordon University, University of Aberdeen, University of Abertay Dundee and the University of Glasgow on articulation though warned that this was not universal. Mr Henderson pointed out that Colleges are successful in recruiting students from disadvantaged backgrounds and the option of later articulation into university is a great opportunity as an alternative route into university for those learners. Looking at challenges going forward, Mr Henderson said that public money for post-16 education going to be tight so we have to ask questions about how do we best spend the total tertiary education budget.. Mr Henderson said that both carrots and sticks are important as drivers of more articulation, but more often it comes down to the will and motivation of staff in colleges and universities to make it happen. The college regionalisation agenda might be an opportunity in this regard as it could make the necessary dialogues easier.

**Dr Pete Cannell, Depute Director, Open University in Scotland**

Dr Cannell told the Group that the Open University has 900 new entrants every year that start with some previous college experience (either HNC/D). Further, most students at the OU (more than

70%) are in work and most students come from college after a gap from all forms of education and the work experience is an important dimension to their studies. Dr Cannell explained that for part-time students that join the OU, the concept of a year-based system of learning, on which the articulation model is based, doesn't really work. For them, it's about the credits they have accumulated, not the number of years of prior study. Credits can map onto years of study but the system should not be reducible solely to years of study if it is to be sufficiently flexible. Dr Cannell went on to talk about the learning opportunities available at the OU. Dr Cannell said that the OU's formal relationships with colleges is important and, with a focus on articulation hubs, partnerships are all about being there to support students make the college to university transition. Dr Cannell said each OU-college partnership is active, with an annual review to see what more can be done. Students often said they were not aware that they could get credit for prior study, so now progression routes are clearly available online on both the OU and colleges' websites. Dr Cannell explained that the partnership works both ways, with some OU access courses delivered on college campuses as students like the flexibility of online learning but are attracted to the fact that they can retain a physical connection to the college. Dr Cannell talked about a pilot at Reid Kerr College where HN students did a 30 credit OU course to top up the number of credits in their HN to that of a first year university course. The majority of students who took part in the pilot went on to university whereas in the past there had been limited success with this. Dr Cannell pointed out that for some people the traditional articulation route does not always work – perhaps because the university is too far away or they cannot cope with the university mode of study – so for them the OU environment is better as students still remain at college (community) but are studying an OU course. This is the new campus-based model that has been developed and piloted at Adam Smith College and the results have been very positive.

#### **4. Discussion**

##### Questions from the Convenor

Ms Smith began the discussion by asking Ms Robson at what stage in her school career would she liked to have had more information about future learning opportunities. Ms Robson said that more information in third year, when making course choices, and then again at the end of fourth and fifth year.

- Ms Smith then asked Mr Batho whether geographical proximity of colleges and universities involved in articulation made establishing routes and encouraging take-up easier. Mr Batho responded by saying that ties to areas are important for people and regional partnerships reflected demand.

##### Teaching at college and university

Dr Judith McClure questioned Ms Robson on whether she had noticed a significant change in the learning styles between college and university and whether she found the transition difficult. In answering, Ms Robson said that there had been differences; at university there was more emphasis on research. As she reached the end of her HN there were structures in place to help learners adapt to the university approach. As part of the transition, existing university students arranged for articulation students to come and meet those who had been at the university for two years already and by the third year all students had mixed and were doing projects together so there was no difference.

#### Information available at school

Mr Matthew MacIver, of the University of the Highlands and Islands, said he was very concerned about the apparent lack of information schools hold on alternative routes into university. He questioned whether this was due to a lack of careers officers in schools or because teachers come from a traditional route through learning and therefore seem to know little about the credit-based system.

Ms Margaret McCulloch MSP (Central Region) asked Ms Robson if her school had taken her class on a visit to a college or university. Ms Robson said that her class had never been taken to a college for experience, but there was the option for some pupils to go to university open days. Ms McCulloch then asked if Ms Robson thought it was better to offer information on university and college options in the third year of school. In response, Ms Robson said that in her case she did not know what she wanted to do until doing an Intermediate 2 course in her fifth year so information provided to her in S3 would not have shaped her decisions.

Mr Graeme Kilpatrick made the point that qualifications need equal treatment, but that this will not happen until they are funded equally. Mr Kilpatrick went on to say that Ms Robson received lots of support to help from Aberdeen College to help her to articulate and the danger is that if you cut college budgets you cut support that people like Ms Robson received. Whilst he welcomed the additional articulation places he did not understand how this was consistent with cuts to the college budget.

#### **5. Proposal to create a subgroup to prepare a written evidence submission to inform the Scottish Government's upcoming Post-16 Education (Scotland) Bill.**

Ms Smith explained that the CPG cannot provide formal evidence to the Education and Culture Committee's call for written evidence, but a subgroup could. Ms Smith went on to explain that MSPs cannot give evidence given that they will be involved in scrutinising the legislation going forward.

It was decided that due to tight timescales with a deadline of 18 January for evidence submissions, that on this occasion the Group would not look to form a subgroup to consider making a submission.

#### **6. Date of next meeting and Notice of Annual General Meeting: WEDNESDAY 6 MARCH 2013**

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 Wednesday 6 March 2013, 12.30 – 2.00 pm.

The meeting of 6 March will have a dual purpose: firstly, as an Annual General Meeting to re-elect office bearers; secondly, as a meeting to discuss a topical issue.

The second meeting of the CPG in 2013 will be held on Thursday 9 May from 12.30 – 2.00 pm in Committee Room 2.

Suggestions welcome on topics of the future meetings. Suggestions welcome as to who might be invited to make presentations or formal contributions at the next meeting.

Ms Smith wished Group members a Merry Christmas.

Meeting closed.