

# CROSS PARTY GROUP ON SKILLS

Wednesday 9 October 2019, 1300-1400 hours  
Committee Room 9, Scottish Parliament

## Minutes

### Present

- Jamie Halcro Johnston MSP
- Beatrice Wishart MSP
- Colin Robertson, Scottish Government
- Jennifer Watson, Scottish Government
- Jon Gray, Scottish Government
- Joanne Buchan, Colleges Scotland
- Andy Witty, Colleges Scotland
- Jeni Adamson, Lantra Scotland
- Beatrice Morrice, Scottish Whisky Association
- Kenny Stewart, The Open University in Scotland
- Marie Hendry, The Open University in Scotland
- Robert Bruce, Semta
- Simon Williams, NHS Education for Scotland
- Izzy Gaughan, Weber Shandwick
- Chic Brodie, Caledonian Strategy (Scotland) Ltd
- Kerry Bamber, City & Guilds
- Aileen Ponton, SCQF Partnership
- Donnie Wood, SCQF Partnership
- Kirsty Conlon, Universities Scotland
- Barbara Adams, Servelec
- Sara Collier, Skills Development Scotland
- Robert Girvan, CITB
- Stephen Young, Civil Engineering Contractors Association (Scotland)
- Drew McGowan, West College Scotland

### Apologies

- Gillian Martin MSP
- Johann Lamont MSP
- Ross Greer MSP
- Anne Galbraith, SECTT
- Kevin Patrick, Lantra Scotland
- Geoff Campbell, Nithcree Training
- Stuart McKenna, Scottish Training Federation
- George Brown, SQA
- Svea Miesch, ScotlandIS
- Cara Hilton, CECA Scotland
- Fiona Stewart, Skills Development Scotland
- Moira Houston, Scottish Banker Institute
- Valerie Bauckham, Scottish Banker Institute
- Wendy Burton, Scottish Union Learning

### 1. Welcome and Apologies

Jamie Halcro Johnston MSP opened the meeting and noted apologies from members of the group. Colleges Scotland was thanked for sponsoring the lunch.

Beatrice Wishart MSP was welcomed as the new MSP member of the group, replacing Tavish Scott.

### 2. Approval of Minutes from the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the Wednesday 12 June 2019 meeting were ratified.

### 3. Presentation and Discussion

Colin Robertson, Head of Skills Development Unit at the Scottish Government, gave a presentation on the Future Skills Action Plan, accompanied by Scottish Government colleagues Jon Gray and Jennifer Watson. Colin stated that the 2018 Programme for Government made a commitment to publish the Future Skills Action Plan to ensure that Scotland can respond to challenges such as

digitisation, growing technologies, and sustainable economic growth. The plan is in line with the Enterprise and Skills Strategic Board's, utilising its recommendations as themes to develop change and ties in with the Learner Journey Review. In the Future Skills Action Plan, the government sets out its vision which includes the importance of skills delivery and its importance in fulfilling the potential of businesses and individuals, and it recognises that there is a process of change happening.

Colin stated that Scotland has a strong OECD position on skills but that there are still some persistent challenges to overcome such as skills gaps, the ageing population, Brexit, digitisation, rural economy, quality of work, and low skills; he stated that 11% of those aged 16-64 had low or no skills in 2018. He said that these challenges shouldn't be addressed in isolation and that the system needs to be able to navigate through uncertainty with agility and responsiveness.

Key proposals from the plan include working with Skills Development Scotland and the Scottish Qualifications Authority around meta-skills, working with CBI around the upskilling and retraining agenda, and delivering a Climate Emergency Skills Action Plan.

Colin noted that the plan has two phases, the first to publish the plan and demonstrate the range of activity, and the second to create a framework around how the recommendations are being delivered. He said that the Scottish Government don't see the plan as a definitive view but an ongoing process to be updated on a regular basis to reflect the changing environment and requirements.

A question and answer session followed and began with a question about whether the plan will integrate with City Deals. The Scottish Government said that a lot of activity underway through City and Growth Deals were consistent with the plan and that the plan creates a framework for looking at the funding on a city and regional basis.

Concerns around Brexit were discussed, and the Scottish Government said that it recognises the challenges and that there has been substantial work around what it means on a regional basis. The Scottish Government has been preparing for an immediate response and through agency work in the skills system and it was noted that agility is needed. The Scottish Government said it recognises that there will be a longer-term impact on the economy due to Brexit.

There was a question regarding the road haulage industry, the underlying infrastructure and the need to look at the whole system together. The Scottish Government stated that the level of investment was weighted to young people through Foundation Apprenticeships and noted that the Future Skills Action Plan is looking at a wider range of people, including older people and that the number of over 24 year olds taking college courses and apprenticeship programmes has increased.

CITB asked about whether the Scottish Government was looking into the area of digital leadership and the Scottish Government replied to say that they are looking into a correlation between how we improve the skills system and fit into the wider enterprise and skills strategy, and stated that companies of all sizes should anticipate and have an understanding of the skills needed.

The SCQF Partnership asked about the relationship between the plan and the Learner Journey recommendations, noting that the SCQF is being used as an underpinning and guide for the range of pathways and this should be picked up in the Future Skills Action Plan, and also asked if there is a timeline for the plan. The Scottish Government stated that that it was being picked up as part of the work and encouraged the SCQF partnership to get involved, and that in relation to the timescale, noted the need to take it forward as quickly as possible.

The Open University stated that it is keen for the plan to include lifelong learning and making the system more accessible as most of its students are already in work and a lot earning less than £25k. The Scottish Government agreed and noted that there is a need to create a culture of shared investment.

A question was asked around how to build on the success of Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) and the need for a much less cluttered landscape. The Scottish Government said it recognises the importance of DYW and stated that support for young people was an intrinsic part of the Future Skills Actions Plan, and stated that they would be engaging with Ministers, the Enterprise and Skills Strategic Board and agencies to ensure that there is cohesion across the skills system. It was noted that deeper consultation is needed to take forward phase two of the plan.

#### **4. Dates for Future Meetings**

It was noted that the next meeting was scheduled for Wednesday 4 December 2019 and that the meeting would also include the Annual General Meeting of the group.

#### **5. Close**

With no further business to conduct, the meeting was closed.