

# CROSS PARTY GROUP ON SKILLS

Tuesday 8 December 2020, 1100-1200 hours  
Virtual Meeting

## Minutes

### Present

- Jamie Halcro Johnston MSP
- Beatrice Wishart MSP
- Joanne Buchan, Colleges Scotland
- Andy Witty, Colleges Scotland
- Tom Hall, Colleges Scotland
- Stuart McKenna, Scottish Training Federation
- Jennifer Adamson, Lantra Scotland
- Simon Hewitt, Dundee and Angus College
- Marie Donnelly, Skills Development Scotland
- Sara Collier, Skills Development Scotland
- Derek Young, Institute of Physics
- Robert Girvan, CITB
- Moira Houston, Chartered Banker Institute
- George Brown, SQA Accreditation
- Ian McCulloch, ITC Academy
- Aoife Keenan, Universities Scotland
- Fiona Hodgson, SNIPEF
- Robert Bruce, Enginuity
- Barbara Adams, Servelec
- Shona Matthews, Chartered Banker Institute
- Donnie Wood, SCQF Partnership
- Simon Williams, NHS Education for Scotland

### Apologies

- Gillian Martin MSP
- Johann Lamont MSP
- Clare Adamson MSP
- Ross Greer MSP
- Olivia Carson, CIPD
- Wendy Burton, STUC
- Cara Hilton, CECA Scotland
- Fiona Harper, SELECT
- Kirsty Summers, Scottish Whisky Association
- Geoff Campbell, Nithcree Training and Scottish Road Haulage Group
- Rachel Le Noan, SCVO
- Anne Meikle, EDAS
- Ishabel Bremner, Argyll and Bute Council
- Aileen Ponton, SCQF Partnership
- Chic Brodie, Caledonian Strategy (Scotland) Ltd
- Anne Galbraith, SECTT

### 1. Welcome and Apologies

Jamie Halcro Johnston MSP opened the meeting and noted apologies.

### 2. Annual General Meeting

Jamie Halcro Johnston MSP was re-elected as Convener of the Cross Party Group on Skills and Beatrice Wishart MSP was re-elected as the Deputy Convener. Colleges Scotland will continue to provide the secretariat function. The annual return form was approved.

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

The minutes of the Wednesday 3 June 2020 meeting were ratified.

### 4. Presentations and Discussion

The topic for this meeting was the opportunities and challenges for the skills sector from the COVID-19 pandemic and presentations were heard from: Jennifer Adamson, Policy and Partnerships Co-ordinator at Lantra Scotland; Stuart McKenna, Chief Executive of the Scottish Training Federation; Simon Hewitt, Principal and Chief Executive of Dundee and Angus College; and Marie Donnelly, National Operations Manager, Skills Development Scotland.

Jennifer Adamson explained that the pandemic has changed the skills needs in the land based and aquaculture sectors, for example, in terms of food production, animal welfare etc. She highlighted that Lantra Scotland has set up a skills matching service in response whereby individuals register and are then matched with businesses needing skilled workers. She also noted that Lantra's events

programme had moved online to increase flexibility at this time and that they held an online careers event which attracted three times more attendees and

Simon Hewitt stated that colleges have been working collectively with stakeholders including the Scottish Government, Scottish Funding Council, Skills Development Scotland, SQA, and others, throughout the pandemic. He also said that the college sector has been working on a proactive solutions-based approach to address target groups affected by the pandemic and assist economic recovery. A 'propositions for growth' paper has been produced with various solutions, some of which are already being taken forward in various forms such as the Young Person's Guarantee and the National Transition Fund. The paper is being refreshed as the landscape becomes clearer.

Stuart McKenna gave an update from the perspective of training providers, noting that there had been 10 months of uncertainty and change and that now new projects and initiatives were being introduced such as the National Transition Training Fund. He stated that the relief grants had helped training providers to stay in business and that the expansion of the Flexible Workforce Development Fund was welcome as was the Adopt an Apprentice grant being increased to £5,000 for employers. Stuart said that the pandemic had made engaging with stakeholders easier and that there was now more opportunities with online delivery.

Marie Donnelly provided an update on Pathway Apprenticeships which have been introduced in direct response to the pandemic and are focused on key growth sectors which have strong future job opportunities. Marie stated that Pathway Apprenticeship were for those leaving school who would normally move into a Modern Apprenticeship or straight into a job. The Pathway Apprenticeship is an opportunity to gain an industry recognised qualification at SCQF level 6 whilst receiving an allowance of £100 per week. She noted that they take up to 26 weeks to complete, 36 weeks for engineering, and that the first apprentices are due to start in January 2021.

A question-and-answer discussion followed. Halcro Johnston MSP asked if the role of colleges was recognised and whether the support was there. Simon Hewitt said that it had been a historical problem but that was changing because of the vital role that colleges play in economic recovery. He also said that social recovery will be important and that colleges would play a role in this as well. He noted the challenges of lots of different post of funding and the amount of reporting required to draw down the different funds.

Halcro Johnston MSP asked whether there were opportunities for young people in agriculture. Jennifer Adamson said that Lantra Scotland was looking at STEM opportunities and STEM ambassadors to promote opportunities. She noted that it wasn't all about mud and wellies, and that technological advances meant that there will be skills requirements in the technology side in the future.

There was a question on how social distancing is affecting learning. Jennifer Adamson said that it was inevitable that there are capacity issues because of social distancing but it has brought new opportunities for online and blended learning to reach more people. Simon Hewitt said that colleges were still in crisis management mode but they are keen to take a more proactive approach and that digital investment is required, particularly around digital poverty and the wider issue of connectivity across Scotland.

## **5. Dates for Future Meetings**

It was noted that the next meeting would be scheduled in due course and in line COVID-19 guidance.

## **6. Close**

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