

CROSS PARTY GROUP ON SKILLS

Tuesday 16 March 2021, 1100-1200 hours
Virtual Meeting

Minutes (Draft)

Present

- Jamie Halcro Johnston MSP
- Beatrice Wishart MSP
- Clare Adamson MSP
- Joanne Buchan, Colleges Scotland
- Shona Struthers, Colleges Scotland
- Jen Johnston, Colleges Scotland
- Tom Hall, Colleges Scotland
- Chris Brodie, Skills Development Scotland
- Fiona Stewart, Skills Development Scotland
- Sara Collier, Skills Development Scotland
- Susan Hughes, Skills Development Scotland
- Paul Little, City of Glasgow College
- Will McLeish, City of Glasgow College
- Emma Link, CITB
- Lauren Pennycook, CITB
- Anne Galbraith, SECTT
- Alison McLure, Institute of Physics
- Moira Houston, Chartered Banker Institute
- Ian McCulloch, ITC Training Academy
- George Brown, SQA
- Fiona Harper, SELECT
- Kerri Haynes, The East of Scotland STEM Ambassador Hub
- Robert Bruce, Enginuity
- Jennifer Adamson, Lantra Scotland
- Simon Williams, NHS Education for Scotland
- Dale Thomson, SNIPEF
- Stuart McKenna, Scottish Training Federation
- Kirsty Summers, Scotch Whisky Association
- Drew McGowan, West College Scotland
- Gordon Nelson, Federation of Master Builders
- Chic Brodie, Caledonian Strategy (Scotland) Ltd
- Olivia Carson, CIPD
- Rachel Le Noan, SCVO
- Julie Cavanagh, SCQF Partnership
- Glenda Douglas, CECA Scotland
- Simon Williams, NHS Education for Scotland
- Derek Young, Institute of Physics

Apologies

- Gillian Martin MSP
- Johann Lamont MSP
- Ross Greer MSP
- Jim Metcalfe, College Development Network
- Fiona Hodgson, SNIPEF
- Stephen Young, Civil Engineering Contractors Association (Scotland)
- Aileen Ponton, SCQF Partnership
- Wendy Burton, STUC

1. Welcome and Apologies

Beatrice Wishart MSP opened the meeting and noted apologies.

2. Approval of Minutes from the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the Tuesday, 8 December 2021 meeting were ratified.

3. Presentations and Discussion

The meeting reflected on the last five years for the skills sector and shared hopes and aspirations for the skills landscape in the next parliament. Presentations were heard from: Chris Brodie, Head of Sector Development, Skills Development Scotland; Paul Little, Principal and Chief Executive, City of Glasgow College; and Emma Link, Industry Analyst, and Lauren Pennycook, Senior Policy and Government Relations Advisor (Scotland), CITB.

Chris Brodie highlighted the five trends that have shaped the debate on skills – Demographics, Brexit, Industry 4.0, Nature of Work, and Net Zero Carbon. He stated the need for re-training and in response to changing demographic and economic patterns. COVID-19 has also exacerbated and enhanced challenges, particularly in areas such as retail, hospitality, and oil & gas, and he noted that we have never seen so much disruption and demand for skills, and that this will intensify over the next 10 years.

Chris said that one of the biggest challenges ahead would be the climate emergency. He said that the Climate Emergency Skills Action Plan will be important and that transition to net zero will be a major disruptor and tremendous opportunity to create highly skilled jobs through apprenticeships, colleges and universities. There is an opportunity for Scotland to be a world-leader in this area. Chris highlighted that the factors of success would be creating a compelling economic vision for Scotland, empowering people to commit to upskilling and reskilling, investing in meta skills, greater skills alignment with industry needs, and creating a Virtual Scottish Workforce Academy.

Paul Little noted the profound social and economic challenges ahead which have been captured in the Cumberland-Little Report published last year. He said that the scale of public sector borrowing, and the long-term impact of COVID-19, means that more difficulties will lie ahead. Structural inequalities have widened, and industries will be in need of support over next decade.

Paul discussed the importance of protecting life chances for people, stating that learning 5.0 and technology has been thrust upon the wider education sector which has had to quickly adapt. He said that there are likely to be more expectations over the next decade, and a rapid upskilling of the workforce, as we pivot to changing opportunities such as COP26 and Net-Zero Transition.

Paul highlighted the Cumberland-Little Report, commissioned by the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, which looks at the economic Impact of colleges and recommends taking system-based approach and not a hierarchy approach to tertiary education. One tertiary system that is agile and collaborative across all providers. He said there needs to be targeted recovery to support key sectors, save livelihoods and help businesses thrive in the short, medium and long term. Paul also said that we can't afford to pay the price of a lost generation and lost upskilling and reskilling opportunities through system uncertainty and hesitancy.

Emma Link and Lauren Pennycook focused on the opportunities for skills in the construction industry. They highlighted new research undertaken by CITB which helps to understand the skills implications of the transition to the Net-Zero target by 2050. Around half of the UK's emissions can be influenced by the construction industry.

They said that the research included an online employer survey as well as a number of in-depth interviews across the industry. A forecasting model was also developed.

There was discussion on Scottish Employment Forecasts around requirements to adapt building and construction changes for the wider sector. They highlighted priority skills that industry requires to decarbonise buildings such as retrofit and heat installation and noted the deficit in specialist skills for traditional buildings. They said that the sector requires a much more planned approach to training requirements and increased engagement with key businesses to establish clear pathways.

A question-and-answer session followed. Robert Bruce noted the significant challenge in getting the workforce to upskill and reskill as research shows that workers are less likely to engage after the age of 30. Chris Brodie said that there needs to be a change in the mindset of employers, and Paul Little added that the skills sector needs to stay ahead of the curve – to be predictive and agile, not responsive. He highlighted the role of the Flexible Workforce Development Fund in supporting

employer engagement and facilitating upskilling and reskilling activity. He said it's about anticipating future need and ensuring support is targeted and prioritised for key sectors.

Clare Adamson MSP asked what we, as a nation, can do moving forward. Paul Little said that by working collectively, Scotland can build on international relationships. Chris Brodie noted that we needed clarity over future direction in terms of economic opportunities in Digital Economy and Net Zero, and that we should be taking into consideration new roles that will be needed as well as roles that will require change. He said that Scotland has a diverse economy to create jobs and wealth and that we already have strong industry engagement to understand skills needs and drive skills and innovation. Emma Link added that there needs to be a clear line of policy direction to facilitate activity and employer engagement to ensure that when demand is in place that training infrastructure and pathways are in place. Collaboration to meet challenges will be required.

A question was then asked on micro-credentials – how important these will be and how they can be delivered. Paul Little said that they will be needed more than ever, especially in sectors such as hospitality and retail. Micro-credentials can help people to upskill as well as retrain. He said that there will also likely be an increasing demand for personalisation because of the growing use of artificial intelligence, for example, through the use of digital badges. Paul finished by saying that we have to look towards a changed future.

4. Dates for Future Meetings

It was noted that future meetings would be scheduled following the election, once the group reforms.

5. Close

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