Education and Culture Committee
Post-16 Education (Scotland) Bill
Scottish Youth Parliament

Introduction and Context of Evidence

The Scottish Youth Parliament welcomes the opportunity to comment on the proposed Post-16 Education Bill. As an organisation representing young people aged 14-25 from all parts of Scotland, these proposals are likely to have a substantial impact on the lives of our Members (MSYPs) and those of the young people they represent. We would welcome the opportunity to provide further information about any of our evidence listed below or consult further with our MSYPs during the course of the Committee’s consideration of the Bill.

Our evidence is drawn from extensive consultation with young people on areas contained within the Bill and other issues closely related to post-16 education over the last two years. These are drawn from our 2011-16 youth manifesto ‘Change the Picture’; extensive engagement with our membership to inform our response to the Scottish Government’s ‘Putting Learners at the Centre’ consultation and the outcomes of debates and votes at our National Sittings.

Statements from the ‘Change the Picture’ youth manifesto

SYP’s youth manifesto, ‘Change the Picture’ is based on 42,804 consultation responses from young people. The following relevant statements are contained in it, and attracted majority support from young people. More information can be found at http://www.syp.org.uk/our-manifesto-W21page-82.

“The success of Scotland’s students must not be compromised by financial worries. Immediate action needs to be taken to ensure students don’t face poverty and hardship in pursuit of their education.” 84% agreed, 6% disagreed, 10% were ‘not sure’.

“All young people should have the chance to participate in work experience.” 92% agreed, 4% disagreed, 4% were ‘not sure’.

“Tuition should remain free in further and higher education. Top-up fees are not an option for a society which puts ability to learn above ability to pay.” 85% agreed, 6% disagreed, 9% were ‘not sure’.
Debates at National Sittings

The SYP holds three National Sittings each year, where our full membership gathers to debate and vote on policy statements. The following recent motions were passed by our membership:

“Private further and higher education institutions should not have a place in Scotland.” October 2012

“Scottish universities which have drastically increased their tuition fees for students from the Rest of the United Kingdom to unprecedented levels should be criticised for their poor judgement.” March 2012

“SYP calls for the Scottish Government to invest in education and fund a £7,000 minimum income for the poorest HE students and create a new entitlement to student support for FE students.” October 2011

Recommendations from ‘Putting Learners at the Centre’ response

To inform our response to the consultation, SYP held a series of debates, votes and focus groups with our full membership at our October 2011 Sitting. Our full response can be found at: http://www.syp.org.uk/img/consultations/Putting%20Learners%20at%20the%20Centre_SYP%20Response.pdf, within which we made the following recommendations:

Creating a Learner Journey

Good quality careers advice should available to young people at every stage on their learner journey. Efforts should be undertaken to ensure consistency of provision in all parts of Scotland.

Increased promotion of Skills Development Scotland’s website and other careers advice resources.

The proposals for a post-qualification application system (PQA) as part of UCAS reform have the potential to add significant stress and disruption to young people at a critical point in their lives. A PQA should not be pursued.

Widening Access to Post-16 Learning

There should be an emphasis on the long-term development of young people as part of the labour market, emphasising the provision and availability of apprenticeships and placements which will equip young people with important skills and experience on which to build careers.
The Opportunities for All guarantee of a place in education and training appropriate to their needs and circumstances for all 16-19 year olds in Scotland has the potential to make a real difference for young people and should be welcomed.

Youth workers and careers services should be supported and resourced to actively track and focus promotion of Opportunities for All to 16-19 year olds most in need of support.

New approaches should be pursued to engage young people through formal and non-formal education routes. These might include summer school programmes leading to SQA qualifications, and working to tailor learning around young people’s interests.

There should be more choice in courses available pre-16 to inform choices post-16. This should include an increased provision of vocational courses to open to all learners, regardless of perceived academic ability.

The Opportunities for All guarantee should remain focussed on 16-19 year olds, as 20-24 year olds have distinct support needs.

Individual tailored packages of support should be available for 20-24 year olds who are not in education, employment and training to reflect their age and social circumstances.

Funding for youth projects and groups should be a priority for local authorities.

The Scottish Government should seek out and consider examples of good CLD and youth work practice, with a view to rolling these out across the country.

Learner-centred youth work has a vital role to play in the development of a Post-16 education strategy that delivers for all Scotland’s young people.

The Scottish Government should be required by law to make sure as many young people from poor backgrounds are able to go to university as those from well-off backgrounds.

Universities who do not meet Widening Access Outcome Agreements should face penalties, including fines.

A legal duty on universities to take into account the schools that applicants attend should be pursued.

**Skills and Jobs**

Learners should be encouraged to attend college for part of their studies, either to study courses not offered at their school alongside their Highers, or to learn practical skills by studying a vocational course, studying only core subjects at school.
The possibility of young people being allowed to study vocational courses or go to a trade apprenticeship from age 14, returning to school to take part in Maths and English courses only, should be given consideration.

The Scottish Government should work with colleges and universities to encourage them to provide courses which match demand for vocational skills locally.

The Post-16 education strategy should not be used as a substitute for jobs. The Scottish Government should take all action to ensure that appropriate jobs for young people are created to meet demand, working in conjunction with the UK Government where necessary.

Teaching job-specific skills is one of the biggest priorities of education, but not the only one. A balance must be struck between teaching vocational skills and allowing young people to develop and decide for themselves what opportunities they wish to pursue.

All young people should have the chance to participate in work experience.

A focus on work experience placements being of good quality and lasting longer than one week is very important for them to be of meaningful value to learners.

Examples of learners undertaking work experience placements in lieu of a subject for a school year should be considered for a wider roll-out.

The role of committed work experience co-ordinators in schools should be developed.

**Student Support and Funding**

Universities should be required to use some of the income received from fees from students from the rest of the UK to provide additional targeted bursary support to students from poorer backgrounds.

Further research should be undertaken into the basic financial support needs of learners, particularly FE students and post-16 school pupils, to inform an entitlement to support. In particular attention should be paid to travel costs and the viability of current travel expense schemes.

Learner support should remain means-tested, but research should be undertaken into the actual level of parental contributions to learner support, with appropriate adjustments made to the system based on the outcomes of this.

Consideration should be given to regulating EMA spending, with a view to reimbursing genuine living and travel costs incurred in the course of learning.
Formal partnership agreements between student unions and universities should be created, guaranteeing student representation and setting out what students and universities should expect for each other.

The Educational Maintenance Allowance or similar type of funding should be available to young people who engage in Community Learning and Development, subject to particular conditions.

These conditions could include specific agreed outcomes being met, including level of involvement and time committed to engaging with CLD programmes.

The funding should be focussed on learners from the poorest backgrounds, with means-testing or an appropriate equivalent system being used.

**Joined Up College and University Structure**

The Scottish Government considers carefully the impact of any move to a regional college structure of disruption to learning and increased travel times and costs incurred by learners.

All steps are taken that any regional structure does not reduce flexibility of learning by reducing the local options that are practical for learners to study at.

A regional college structure should not be seen simply as a cost-saving measure. Any money saved through mergers and regional working should be directly reinvested in education.

Moves towards a regional structure should be delayed until the legitimate concerns of learners, as outlined above have been satisfactorily addressed.

Proposals to encourage universities to work closer in partnership and in some cases merging are more appealing to learners than a regional college structure, although there are a number of drawbacks that make it less than ideal.

Encourage closer partnerships between colleges and universities have the potential to be more mutually beneficial to learners and institutions.

Examining formal partnership structures between colleges and universities in the same local area would be preferable than regional colleges or university mergers.