Education and Culture Committee

Post-16 Education (Scotland) Bill

The Prince’s Trust Scotland

Key Messages:

The Prince’s Trust Scotland supports the Scottish Government’s efforts to review and reform post-16 education provision and is happy to share knowledge to assist effective strategic implementation.

The reform agenda must be aligned to improving outcomes for Scotland’s hardest-to-reach young people, in particular those not in education, employment or training.

That means that new regional structures for college governance must retain a focus on effective local delivery of services.

Regional college structures must be underpinned by input from partners in the third sector and business communities and appropriate outcome agreements that deliver locally-targeted interventions.

Further consideration should be given to requirements over the composition of regional college boards so that the views of partners in the third sector and business communities are reflected in regional strategies.

We welcome the Scottish Government’s proposals on data-sharing provided they succeed in improving the tracking of young peoples’ progress and outcomes.

The Prince’s Trust Scotland’s post-16 offering

The Prince’s Trust Scotland supports disadvantaged young people aged 16-25 at every stage of their journey towards education, training, employment and self-employment. In 2011/12 we supported over 5,000 disadvantaged young people in Scotland and 76% of these went on to positive destinations.

From early engagement programmes and personal development opportunities to vocational training courses and business start-up support, we offer a comprehensive and flexible development journey for young people. By focusing our activity on three key areas – Outreach, Assessment & Outcomes; Education & Training and Employment & Enterprise – our core programmes are strategically linked with each of the four stages of the strategic skills pipeline. This ensures that we can help young people to find the right support at the right time, and make positive journeys toward sustainable outcomes.

Our core programmes provide employability support to unemployed young people and have an additional focus on improving soft skills, such as confidence, self-awareness,
self-esteem and communication, to ensure young people are fully equipped to achieve and sustain positive outcomes.

We are focused on a collaborative approach to youth unemployment that harnesses the strengths of partnerships with the public sector (including FE colleges), the private sector, third sector colleagues and volunteers in supporting young people in turning their lives around.

**Collaboration with the FE Sector**

Further Education Colleges provide some of the personal development and vocational training content of our core programmes. We also encourage young people to continue their vocational training there, since the Colleges provide them with the chance to gain the nationally recognised qualification and accreditations that are valued by employers.

Our most effective current collaborations with the FE sector include ‘Team’, a 12-week, community-based programme of personal development and employability training run in partnership with FE colleges, designed to motivate young people and help them to think about their futures and ‘Get Into’, a 5/6 week, demand-led vocational training programmes run in partnership with colleges and local employers.

By uniting with The Prince’s Scottish Youth Business Trust, the newly named Youth Business Scotland programme has allowed The Prince’s Trust Scotland to significantly enhance its enterprise offering in Scotland. We have ambitions to grow our partnership working with the FE sector to encourage more of Scotland’s hardest to reach young people to consider self-employment as a viable route out of unemployment.

**The experience of Scotland’s hardest-to-reach young people**

The Scottish Parliament’s Finance Committee report into its inquiry on Improving Employability highlighted the challenges that Scotland faces in engaging with young people not in education, employment or training (NEET)\(^1\). The committee noted that Scotland’s proportion of NEETs is amongst the highest in the OECD and that figure has remained static since 1996. Meanwhile, the cost of educational underachievement to the Scottish economy is in the region of £1 billion each year\(^2\).

To tackle these problems effectively it is crucial that we offer targeted support to those young people who are the hardest to reach in society. The Prince’s Trust Scotland’s experience has demonstrated that the young people who are furthest from the labour market are those with multiple presenting social and economic needs such as long-term job-seekers, young parents, care leavers and ex-offenders. In addition, there is a significant cohort of young people who are ‘job ready’, but lack vocational skills.

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\(^{1}\) Scottish Parliament Finance Committee, (Dec 2012), *8th Report, 2012 (Session 4): Improving employability*

\(^{2}\) The Prince’s Trust, (Jan 2013), *The Prince’s Trust Youth Index*
In a recent survey of 16-25 year-olds across the UK, The Prince’s Trust Youth Index revealed that 33 per cent of young people in Scotland report feeling down or depressed “always” or “often” but that the proportion among young NEETs is significantly higher.[2] These figures underline our experience that NEETs have the tendency to fall into negative spirals of low self-esteem that make it increasingly more difficult for them to break patterns of long term unemployment and take advantage of employment and training opportunities on offer.

Because of their chaotic lifestyles, multiple support needs and social exclusion, these young people struggle to engage in more structured programmes and require longer term, intensive engagement that is tailored to their specific needs. They also require support to break down fundamental barriers before they can move forward with their lives and into positive destinations.

**Local needs & strategic intervention**

In recent years The Prince’s Trust Scotland has acknowledged the importance of tailoring the support we deliver to schools and colleges throughout Scotland to underpin effective learning transitions, particularly from secondary to further education, as part of Senior Phase models under the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE). That process has been assisted by a significant restructuring of our operations throughout Scotland to put young people – and their individual journey within the current pipeline of CfE activity – at the heart of what we do.

In our view, the post-16 education reform agenda will only succeed if the underlying structures put in place by legislation succeed in accommodating new structures that take into account differing abilities, learning styles and life circumstances of young people. Our experience suggests that in addition to providing formal learning and training, it is often necessary for education providers to adopt an informal approach, tailored to personal needs and which provides young people with the space and attention they need to develop confidence as well as a sense of ownership over their work and own development.

The Trust’s xl programme provides evidence of this. The xl programme is designed to help Scotland’s hardest-to-reach young people re-engage with education and make transitions into more positive destinations. The intervention, which targets young people who are underachieving at school, at risk of exclusion, are truanting or are already outside the education system, is now available to participants aged 13-19.

This gives schools and non-mainstream education centres a number of options when delivering the Senior Phase of the CfE and the success of the xl approach is evidenced in strong outcomes for participants when they reach further education. The results of the most recently published School Leavers Destination Report showed that, on average, 92% of those who completed an xl programme moved into a positive destination. (School Leavers Destination Report, Skills Development Scotland, December 2010).
4.5. Of those, 84% went into education or training, 13% into employment/self-employment and 5% went on to do voluntary work. Overall, 88% felt that the xl programme had improved their chances of getting a job; 88% felt more positive about their future; and 82% are more likely to consider further education or training.

Our recommendation therefore is that the root and branch reform of post-16 education provision must go hand-in-hand with consideration of initiatives like the xl programme that improve post-16 outcomes by engaging effectively with the hardest-to-reach young people in Scotland.

**College Reform: Planning regionally, delivering locally**

The Prince’s Trust Scotland acknowledges the significant role in improving services that strategic planning at a regional level can deliver.

However, we would stress that proposals under the government’s post-16 reform legislation must be focussed on effective local delivery if they are to sustain and improve outcomes for children and young people.

We know that in Scotland today, educational attainment is all-too-often determined and therefore limited by young people’s background. Our experience demonstrates the need to target interventions and resources carefully so that the most marginalised young people can make positive and sustainable progress. Those interventions must focus on the journeys of individual learners and on ensuring that the educational resources targeted toward them are not wasted.

Currently, The Prince’s Trust Scotland’s focus on localism involves aligning to the needs of young people in some of Scotland’s most deprived areas, by developing close working links with Community Planning Partnerships, while aligning our activities to local employability action plans and local employability partnerships. Our provision of courses also maps to each stage of the national strategic skills pipeline and local employability pipelines.

That provision must be outcomes-focused. We work closely with local authorities and other service providers across Scotland to ensure that the interventions we provide are aligned to the priorities detailed in Single Outcome Agreements.

We appreciate that in order to continue offering effective interventions across each of the 13 college regions proposed by government, we must adapt working practices appropriately. We are currently in the process of developing regional territory plans to ensure that the Prince’s Trust Scotland’s curriculum and portfolio of courses is mapped to wider college provision in each of the proposed regions.
Focus on outcomes

We welcome efforts to ensure a focus on outcomes for young people within the legislation. We recognise the need to be responsive to the needs of employers in developing and delivering our programmes so that young people are, where possible, developing skills and experience that are suitable for the labour market as it stands today in their communities. The commitment and direct involvement of local employers is central to the success of our programmes and the achievement of outcomes for our young people.

Role for the Third Sector

We would therefore recommend that the legislation must ensure that the establishment of strategic bodies for colleges in multi-college regions must ensure that local needs are met. The primary tool for this will be the drafting on regional outcome agreements, designed to ensure that all partners gear service delivery to pre-agreed outcomes.

However, those agreements must be refined by agreement with all partners – including those in the third sector and the business community – and tailored to local needs, together with the differing abilities, learning styles and life circumstances of young people.

For that reason, we would suggest that further consideration with is given to the means by which regional strategic boards are required to listen to the views of key partners, particularly in the third sector and business communities. We would recommend that this issue could be addressed by adjustment of the legislation to ensure that the national strategic forum and regional boards include members from the third sector and business communities, where possible.

Data-sharing

The Prince’s Trust Scotland welcomes provisions contained within the bill to improve data-sharing between agencies.

It is essential that where possible, we track the progress of young people to ensure that he programmes and courses are outcomes-focussed and can be targeted at those who need them most.

The Prince’s Trust already participates in data-sharing arrangements with partner agencies in Scotland and will be happy to work with the Scottish Government to consult on expanded arrangements that are workable for SDS and third sector bodies alike.