Education and Culture Committee

Post-16 Education (Scotland) Bill

Falkirk Council

Introduction

Falkirk Council in responding to the consultation is in general terms broadly supportive of the proposed Post 16 Education Bill as introduced to the Scottish Parliament on 27 November 2012 and are is pleased that much of our response to the consultation on the pre legislative paper published in September 2011, “Putting Learners at the Centre,” is reflected the Bill and the wider post 16 reform programme.

We welcome the opportunity to comment further as we are keen to ensure that the aim of making post 16 education more responsive to the needs of learners and employers remains on track and makes a positive contribution to economic recovery. We are encouraged by the focus on ensuring more positive outcomes for learners to improve their life chances, widening access to enhance employability of those most distant from the labour market and help them move closer to a job.

Falkirk Council encourages Scottish Government through the Bill and the reform programme to continue to support better alignment of post 16 learning and employability services by recognising the pivotal and enabling role of local authorities in supporting the Governments Economic Strategy. We welcome the opportunity to improve outcomes, increase transparency, reduce bureaucracy and generate increased value for money and provide some specific responses to the six elements provided for within the Bill.

Detailed Response

University Governance - to allow Ministers, when providing funding to the SFC to impose conditions relating to the need for higher education institutions to adhere to good practice in governance.

Falkirk Council welcomes good practice in governance and funding and supports the recommendation that the, “Scottish Funding Council should draft a Code of Good Governance for Higher Education Institutions.” We note that approximately 21% of Higher Education takes place within Colleges and therefore have further comments on good governance within our response to college regionalisation.

Widening Access - to allow Ministers, when providing funding to the SFC, to impose conditions relating to the need for higher education institutions to adhere to good practice in governance.
Falkirk Council supports the aim of improving participation in higher education for under-represented socio-economic groups and welcomes the inclusion of widening access targets within University Outcome Agreements.

Falkirk Council acknowledges the need for additional activities to raise aspiration and mobility such as the provision of summer schools, more targeted career information, advice and guidance. We also recognise the need to promote University as a positive route to employment and skills development within the under-represented groups.

Falkirk Council would wish to highlight to Scottish Government that some geographical areas such as Falkirk need to explore and establish more innovative and multi articulation agreements with colleges and universities on subject specific basis as diversity, mobility and aspiration may be limited if the appropriate higher education programmes and provision is delivered in Edinburgh, Glasgow or beyond.

We would encourage Scottish Government to ensure full consideration of learning styles and methodology is included in establishing targets and plans to widen access as many traineeship including the new higher level apprenticeships facilitate participation in Higher Education and support more diverse and non-traditional learner journeys.

Falkirk Council welcomes the changes to HE student support, increasing the minimum student income for the poorest students, should remove/lessen the perceived barriers many of our young people face and go some way to addressing the statistic which show that “only 11% of students attending university in 2010-11 came from the 20% most deprived areas.” We also highlight the impending consequences of Welfare Reform which may impact on the options and choices available to some students.

**Tuition fees cap** - to allow Ministers to set an upper limit on the level of higher education tuition fees which post-16 education bodies can charge UK students and certain others who are not entitled to be charged tuition fees at the level set by the Scottish Government; and When providing funding to the SFC, to impose conditions with a view to ensuring that post16 education bodies adhere to such an upper limit

Falkirk Council is generally supportive of the proposals to cap tuition fees

**College regionalisation** -To provide for two types of incorporated colleges with different duties, composition and appointment provisions, depending on whether they are in single-college regions; to establish new regional strategic bodies for colleges in multi-college regions to support a regional approach to the planning and funding of college provision and to introduce Ministerial powers to remove chairs and other members of incorporated colleges and regional board for reasons of failure (in addition to mismanagement).

Falkirk Council concludes that good governance for Regional Colleges is aligned with the connectivity with the Local Authority and Community Planning Partnership. We would therefore encourage Scottish Government in the confirming the general duties
and functions of Regional colleges to make specific provision for the inclusion of a Local Authority appointment on the Board of Management.

Falkirk Council would request that the Regional College Agreement outcomes related to the Community Planning Partnership and Strategic Community Plan for the Local Authority area are represented within the revised Single Outcome Agreements. The shared Statement of Ambition makes clear the commitment of the Scottish Government, COSLA and representatives of Community Planning Partnerships to retain and develop Community Planning and SOAs as the heart of an outcomes-based approach to public services in Scotland.

Review of fundable further and higher education - to allow the SFC to review the provision of fundable further and higher education with a view to ensuring that such education is being provided by post-16 education bodies in a coherent manner.

Falkirk Council would wish to see the review of fundable further and higher education as part of the Strategic Skills Pipeline mapping process which is being utilised to support a seamless and progressive learner journey to facilitating a better alignment of public sector resources and improved outcomes. This process also enables the identification of gaps and avoids duplication. In meeting the aim of making post 16 Education more responsive to the needs of learners and employers contributing to economic recovery. It would seem appropriate to forge closer links with the Local Employability Framework/Youth Employment Action Plans to have a clearer picture at various levels on evidence of need, demands and outcomes.

Data sharing - to allow Ministers to make secondary legislation to impose a legal duty on relevant bodies to share data with SDS on all young people between the ages of 16 and 24 moving through the learning system to identify those who have disengaged with, or may be at risk of, disengaging with, learning or training.

Falkirk Council supports legislative measures framed in the bill which support the expectation that “all those providing learning and training to 16 -24 year olds must participate in data sharing” should improve/increase the data available for schools to review and evaluate the support provided for young people prior to transition from school to the post-16 learning system.

Falkirk Council would encourage appropriate resourcing of data collection, management and reporting to support robust tracking and monitoring systems. We would ask Scottish Government to explore the value in extending the legal duty to include Local Authorities to avoid duplication of effort, especially as the Local Authority may be entering a range of local agreements with learning providers as well as providing other interventions to vulnerable groups.

Falkirk Council notes that welfare reform and the potential consequences for those who have disengaged or at risk of disengaging will make the identification and work with the
most vulnerable learners increasingly important and the role of the availability of this information will become critical.

**Conclusion**

Falkirk Council is happy to discuss further any of the observations and comments submitted as part of this consultation response as we are keen to ensure our post 16 learning system that enables our young people to attain, sustain and progress in quality well paid employment and make an effective contribution the economy and our local community.