Post 16 Education (Scotland) Bill

Skills Development Scotland: supplementary evidence

Skills Development Scotland (SDS) previously provided information to the Education and Culture Committee following our evidence session on the Post 16 Education (Scotland) Bill on 19 February 2013. We said we would provide further information on developmental costs of the Data Hub (‘the hub’) and the number of individuals’ records held in the hub.

We would also like to provide you with information to address a number of questions raised in the Committee’s Stage 1 report on the Bill which was published 20 March 2013, which have been referred to SDS from Scottish Government as an operational matter.

We apologise to the Committee for not supplying this information in advance of the Stage 1 debate.

Developmental Costs

221. The Committee asked for information on the full costs to date of developing the data hub. SDS stated that it would provide further detail in due course.

The Financial Memorandum of the Bill outlined a figure of £52,000 for one-off costs to provide for small Information Technology (IT) modifications to partners’ systems in order to enhance their ability to share data through the hub. Technical modifications have been necessary, as although all partners already own and maintain substantial customer data recording systems, some use incompatible systems from each other.

Our submission to the Scottish Parliament Finance Committee\(^1\) 16 January 2013 advised that the majority of the technical work to enable multi-partner data sharing through the data hub was already in place.

In financial year 2012/13 SDS spent approximately £6,000 of the £52,000 on developing and refining technical solutions to partner systems in order to enable data sharing with local authority partners. SDS has allocated the remaining anticipated spend against financial years 2013/14 and 2014/15 to take into account the expected timescales for incorporating additional partner organisations within the data sharing community and in line with the schedule for legislation coming into force.

Costs involved in SDS initially developing the hub and maintaining it have been included within SDS’s existing core budgetary provision (ie. staff resource and technological improvements). The developmental costs of the hub were part of SDS’s core budgetary provision for FY 2012-13 aimed at supporting our delivery of our core services to young people. As of 31 March 2013 £40,154 had been spent on hardware and software and £122,734 on systems development.

Most of the preparatory work to date has related to developments in SDS’s own systems for the design, development, hosting and management of the hub facility.

The investment that SDS has made directly in the development of the hub reflects the importance we place on effective data-sharing with partners to inform our - and partners’ - service support for young people. Since SDS came into being in 2008, one of our main aims has been to work with partners, and in particular with Local Authority Education Boards, to target and assist those who are at risk of not progressing to a positive destination. The hub, and the associated data-sharing agreements which underpin its use, provide the capability to

share information with partners on a more regular and frequent basis. The information held is more up-to-date and thus of greater value and quality. It is therefore a more useful resource for staff to draw on to inform the service support we - and partners - provide directly to clients.

Number of individuals’ records in the hub

226. The Committee wrote to SDS seeking clarity on the number of young people on the database, noting that there are around 625,000 people aged between 16 and 24 in Scotland.

Specific questions asked in the Committee’s email of 20 February 2013:

- ‘60,000 records are to be added to the database each year, with approximately 7,000 of these records likely to be classified as ‘active’. SDS made reference to 600,000 young people being on the database “over a 10 year period”—
- ‘How many people are currently on the database? (The Committee understand that there are around 625,000 people aged between 16 and 24 in Scotland, while the database was described as being a record of every pupil in Scotland).
- ‘The Committee understands that there were around 74,000 unemployed individuals aged 16-24 between October and December 2012. Are these people currently on the database?
- ‘What is the significance of the 10 year period referred to?

SDS Response

In explaining how many records for young people are held it is important to make a distinction between the hub facility and SDS’s own internal customer records system, the Customer Support System.

Records are not permanently held in the hub but are passed through it into SDS’s Customer Support System. This holds a wide range of data that is used operationally to enable SDS staff to track the statuses of individuals in order to identify what support is most appropriate for individual customers/clients.

Our records indicate that there are 135,000 young people across years 4, 5 and 6 in our schools. There are approximately 60,000 young people in each year cohort. Approximately 55,000 pupils leave school every year and there are a further 5,000 young people in the same cohort who are not in school, such as care leavers, travellers etc. Around 60,000 individuals’ records will pass through the hub each year, to be held in SDS’s Customer Support System. SDS holds data across the 15-24 year old cohort (so covering 10 cohorts of individual client records). Based on the circa 60,000 records added for school leavers each year this gives the total mentioned of 600,000 records.

It is worth noting that, of those 600,000, not all records are “live” as many individuals will have moved into positive destinations and will not require, or want, SDS intervention or follow up. Some records are therefore in archive but can be imported into the system at any time. Those who have received support due to having Additional Support Needs will however be “live” in SDS’s Customer Support System even after a considerable amount of time so that they can be actively monitored.

Not all of the 74,000 unemployed individuals aged between 16 and 24 will pass through the data hub and be held on SDS’s Customer Support System. As previously advised, SDS is now receiving data into the hub from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP). DWP records from those aged 18 to 19 will be passed through the hub and held on SDS’s Customer Support System. This covers circa 17,000 records.
Those aged under 18 are in SDS’s target group for case management. However for those aged 19-24 who are seeking employment, DWP is the primary case manager. Through the hub we can work with partners using a complete set of information on an individual to decide on the best support for a young person.

How does SDS intend to proactively support young people who may be at risk of disengaging with learning or training?

215. The Committee would welcome a detailed explanation from SDS before stage 2 of how it intends to pro-actively support young people who may be at risk of disengaging with learning or training.

SDS Response

Further information on how SDS intends to proactively support young people at risk of disengaging from learning or training is given below, and includes particular reference to how data obtained via the hub directly and actively supports this process.

As part of its services to provide careers advice and guidance and employability support for young people SDS makes use of a risk matrix to assess the likelihood, based on a number of factors or indicators, of young people being at risk of disengaging from learning or training. Information on the risk matrix has previously been provided to the Committee. Essentially, through the risk matrix approach SDS staff can look at information held on an individual young person’s record, which may include a number of data indicators about the likelihood of that young person being or becoming disengaged with learning, training or employment. This data informs an assessment about the level and intensity of support that young person is likely to require to achieve or sustain an opportunity or positive destination.

Approximately 3,000 young people aged 16-19 leave school each year either without an identified opportunity, or having been assessed while in school (based on multiple indicators) as potentially being at risk of disengaging in the first 6 months if an opportunity is identified for them. These young people are allocated an SDS Work Coach in the 3 month period prior to leaving school. They will have had a Career Coach in school (who will arrange a meeting for the young person with a Work Coach to ensure they do not have a gap in support).

A number of young people leave school without an opportunity by choice: they do so for a variety of reasons, not necessarily negative e.g. they may wish to take a break before making a decision; to take a gap year; or to do voluntary work. These young people are case managed by an SDS Personal Adviser, who keeps in regular touch and ensures advisory and guidance support is accessible when they need it.

Around 4,000 of those young people “at risk” who do obtain an opportunity after leaving school will generally leave that opportunity within 6 months of starting. An SDS Career Coach (who initially will have helped place them obtain that opportunity) will case manage these young people until they have remained in their opportunity for 6 months; if the Career Coach identifies problems preventing the young person from engaging with their opportunity, they will ensure they are allocated a Work Coach for more intensive support.

Many young people will start a college course and complete their course, but may not have an identified opportunity on leaving. Making use of updated partner data (from colleges, in this case) received through the hub and passed through into - and held on - SDS’s Customer Support System, SDS staff will identify such young people (flagged through a number of data indicators) as being at risk of disengaging with learning or training. These young people will
be actively contacted by a Career Coach to offer support in identifying a fresh opportunity and then tracked to ensure that they remain in that opportunity.

In the university sector, university careers services, through AGCAS, support their own early leavers for a year after leaving, but may be referred to SDS if the university is outwith their home area. However SDS will itself be made aware that young people have dropped out of university through the information received through the hub from SAAS.

**How does the data hub support this process?**

In order to meet the needs of every young person in Scotland, regardless of geography, it is essential that data sharing is both robust and that information is shared consistently amongst partners. In the absence of legislation, the basis for data sharing between partners has been through voluntary data sharing agreements; where partners have been able to opt out of or give reduced priority to data sharing.

SDS therefore welcomes the data sharing provisions in Section 15 of the Post 16 Reform Bill as regardless of economic conditions, there will be a mandatory requirement on partners to share data with SDS and all partners will have a mutual understanding of the legal position in relation to data sharing. Legislative underpinning will improve data quality and thus help ensure holistic support for young people requiring careers and employability support.

The hub complements ongoing work that partners are undertaking to enable multi-partner data sharing for the benefit of young people. The concept of the creation of a national Data Hub to bring together relevant partner information to ensure all partners had more complete and comprehensive information on individuals, was identified by the Scottish Government in 2008. The purpose of the hub was to ensure that data sharing would provide all partners with better quality client and customer records, as a basis for them to work together to deliver appropriately targeted customer support to achieve more positive outcomes for individuals.

The hub provides a facility that allows a variety of data from a variety of partner sources to be captured, sorted and uploaded into SDS’s Customer Support System. This provides a richer, more comprehensive and higher quality client record for individual young people, that can be used by SDS and (through the hub) SDS’s partner agencies to understand what support is required by individuals and allocate services accordingly.

In 2011, a National Reference Group was established to provide oversight for data governance and coordinate the work around the hub. The Group is chaired by the Scottish Government: the Group’s membership includes SDS, Local Authority 16+ Co-ordinators and Local Authority Education Department representation. The remit of the group is to develop a partnership hub, housed and hosted by SDS but collectively owned by all the partners, which will allow for comprehensive sharing of data on young people.

The main benefit of having a more comprehensive and up-to-date set of information for young people was to give all delivery partners access to the information to determine the service support needs of the young people concerned and thus to provide, collaboratively, the most appropriate support to help each young person achieve an opportunity in education, employment or training on leaving school.

The first phase of activity (2011 to date) has included information sharing between Local Authority Education Departments (who collate data from their schools), and SDS. The Group has agreed what information these partners will input to the hub, and, importantly, their reporting requirements from the hub.

Before the hub existed, the customer tracking system which SDS had in place received only annual data downloads from Local Authority Education Departments on all young people as
they entered year 3 of secondary education. The SDS system held basic information on schools attended, gender, ethnicity, health and additional support for learning for individual young people. Careers Advisers used this information to identify those requiring targeted support. SDS did not share the information held on its system with education authorities on inputs and outcomes of SDS interventions with individuals. With the introduction of the hub, SDS and the education authority can regularly share data to deliver a better service to individuals at risk of disengaging with learning or training.

When young people leave school (approximately 55 - 60,000 per year, as indicated above), SDS records their destination and completes a School Leaver Destination Return (SLDR) within a 4 week period in October each year to show an individuals’ actual destination, followed by a second SLDR in March to check sustainability of the destination.

The second phase of importing data through the hub involves the collation of information from colleges, universities and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). These partners have been invited sit on the National Reference Group, where reports required by each partner will be agreed.

The establishment of the hub has significantly improved the way data can be shared between partners. Improvements made are both technical, related to IT systems, and practical/procedural. Data sharing agreements are in place with all Local Authority Education Departments in order to ensure that data sharing is a two way process, with information on SDS interventions being passed through the hub and therefore visible to Local Authority Education Departments. This information is shared on a monthly basis.

The key advantages of the hub are that the reports generated on a regular basis enable a more comprehensive and current record of individuals’ statuses to be maintained than was previously possible. This helps staff responsible for supporting those individuals most at risk of disengaging (or already disengaged) in making better decisions about the most appropriate support for those individuals to achieve a positive outcome.

Capture of data relating to part time college and university students

227. The Committee would also welcome confirmation from SDS that it captures fully data relating to part time college and university students. This was a specific issue raised in the Open University's written evidence.

This information is not presently captured or shared through the hub; it is not provided by colleges (or universities) through the hub. The primary purpose of the hub is to ensure all partners can successfully engage with those young people aged 16-24 who do not have an opportunity in education, employment or training (who are in a ‘negative destination’). A by-product is that the hub receives - and SDS (in CSS) captures and holds - extensive information on those who are in education, employment or training (a ‘positive destination’). Part time learning may be undertaken by those already in an opportunity/positive destination (eg. in full or part-time employment), where college study would not be considered as their primary ‘destination’.

Skills Development Scotland
April 2013