Education and Culture Committee investigation into the educational attainment gap

ENABLE Scotland submission for Evidence Session 1 - Implications of the Commission for Developing Scotland's Young Workforce

February 2015

About ENABLE:

ENABLE Scotland is the largest voluntary organisation in Scotland of and for children and adults who have learning disabilities and their families. We have a strong voluntary network with around 5000 members in 44 local branches and via individual membership.

Around a third of our members have a learning disability. ENABLE Scotland campaigns to improve the lives of people who have learning disabilities and their families and carers. ENABLE Scotland provides social care services to more than 2,000 people across Scotland who have learning disabilities or mental health problems.

ENABLE also delivers a range of programmes in schools and colleges across Scotland to support young people with additional support needs to make a successful post-school transition to a positive destination, for example our Stepping Up programme which is highlighted in the Wood report as an example of best practice.

ENABLE Scotland would warmly welcome the implementation of recommendations in the Wood report, particularly those relating to young disabled people, for example:

- Rec 33 – Tailoring career advice and work experience for young disabled people who are still at school to help them realise their potential and achieve their career aspirations.
- Rec 34 - Funding levels to colleges and Modern Apprenticeship training providers should reflect the cost of providing additional support to young disabled people, and age restrictions should be relaxed for those whose transition may take longer.
- Rec 35 – numbers of young disabled people in Modern Apprenticeships should be increased.
• Rec 36 - Employers should be supported and encouraged to employ young disabled people.

Questions:

1. **If the Wood report were fully implemented, what would be the likely impact on attainment in schools and which pupils would benefit most?**

   Attainment in school is currently focussed on discrete academic qualifications that allow pupils to access Higher Education. For young people who have a learning disability, qualifications, whilst important, do not reflect the full breadth of achievement in terms of the range of skills developed in school or readiness to progress beyond school.

   Implementation of the Wood Report would see the definition of attainment in school fundamentally challenged, broadening it to encompass vocational skills and readiness to progress into industry.

   ENABLE Scotland welcomes the increased focus on advancing equalities for all young people, particularly young people who have disabilities who are not asked 'what do you want do be when you leave school?'.

   ENABLE Scotland believe Recommendation 33 of the Wood Report would significantly enhance working aspirations in a generation of young disabled people, their parents, carers and teachers. Combined with support for vocational attainment, this will allow many more young people who have disabilities to make a positive transition from school into work.

2. **The report aims to significantly enhance vocational content “without splitting young people off into separate streams at school age”. What would be the disadvantages of such an approach and how could they be avoided?**

   Early ‘streaming’ of pupils deemed to be progressing towards Higher Education and those progressing towards vocational qualifications may have unintended consequences on inclusivity in schools – particularly for disabled children.

   Young people who have learning disabilities should be able to access employability and vocational training at school, and it is the responsibility of the Scottish Government to ensure that the curriculum is accessible for all learners, whether it be academic or vocational.

   ENABLE Scotland believe that when children take the lead, the pace of education is appropriate to the child and schools have the right resources and training, an inclusive and successful learning environment can be achieved.
We would hope that, as part of a school’s inspection and review, these elements would be in place and pupils who have learning disabilities could be included with equal degrees of success.

3. **Does the report – which includes a section on improving equalities – place enough emphasis on pupils’ socio-economic inequalities and how these could be overcome?**

The most recent official learning disability statistics tell us that the majority of adults with learning disabilities for whom deprivation is known live in the 40% most deprived areas in Scotland.¹

The Scottish Government have reported that the proportion of individuals in relative poverty (before housing costs) was higher in families containing a disabled adult than in families with no disabled adults and that the proportion of low paid employees (earning less than £7/hour) with a disability was higher than that for employees without a disability.²

We believe that implementation of the Wood Report will indirectly address socio-economic inequalities by focussing on improving attainment for the vulnerable groups targeted.

Alignment of reporting across education, skills and a devolved employability portfolio will allow the Scottish Government the opportunity to directly measure this impact against National Performance Framework. Specifically, indicator number 35 to reduce the proportion of individuals living in poverty in Scotland.

4. **Whether any measures other than those advocated in the report are needed to ensure more young people leave school with “high level vocational qualifications which have strong currency in the labour market”?**

Skills Development Scotland’s recent emphasis on accredited work placement through the Certificate of Work Readiness and Introduction to Workplace Skills qualifications highlight the values put by employers on 'soft skills'.

Recent research led by McDonalds UK, with support from the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) and Confederation of British Industry (CBI), highlighted the £88 billion contribution that 'soft skills' make to the UK


We know that these skills (including communication, initiative, customer confidence and team working) are best developed through real work experience, particularly for young people who have learning disabilities.

ENABLE Scotland believe that whilst 'high level vocational qualifications' are necessary for the development of Scotland's young workforce, an equal emphasis should be given to practical workplace experience that gives all learners an equal chance at gaining employment after school.

5. **Whether there would have to be significant reorganisation in schools to accommodate all the proposed changes (for example, to enable more links with colleges/ to have a greater focus on work placements);**

ENABLE Scotland have, since 2009, developed significant partnerships with over 80 schools and 18 FE Colleges across Scotland, supporting hundreds of young people who have learning disabilities to make a successful transition from education into work.

We believe that strong consideration should be given to the resources that schools and colleges allocate to providing meaningful work experience and individual support for transition for young people with additional support needs. Whilst this type of practical support is sometimes given in school and colleges, it often not given the same priority as teaching and classroom administration.

Opportunities for work experience can be limited to a shortlist of 'friendly businesses' or within the school/college itself, rather than experiences aligned to the young person's skills and interests. Requirements necessary of school/college to ensure workplace safety can be limited by the availability of workplace inspectors, further limiting partnerships with business. Similarly, class sizes dictate the number of young people that can undertake supported work experience off site at any one time, due to restrictions on staff availability. Teaching staff often have limited availability to communicate with partners and ensure quality transition from education for young people leaving school or college.

Dedicated resources to plan, arrange and support work experience as well as partner with employers, agencies and colleges during transition would significantly enhance positive destinations for young people who have additional support needs.

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6. **What action and resources would be required to deliver the specific recommendations aimed at schools and teachers:**

Specifically for staff supporting young people who have learning disabilities, ENABLE Scotland would advocate for:

- Parental involvement and consultation at the earliest point of the vocational curriculum, developing ambition and support at home.
- Local peer mentoring or ‘role model’ programmes that involve former pupils/students who have learning disabilities and made a transition into work with existing pupils/students and their parents.
- Dedicated training and resources for staff to be able to plan, negotiate and deliver supported work experience and coordinate positive destinations.
- Senior staff representation in community planning partnerships and transitions forums to ensure positive destinations.
- Opportunities for All statistics to specifically show positive destinations for vulnerable groups in each local authority, so progress can be measured.

ENABLE Scotland also believes that all student and qualified teachers should receive training on positive behaviour support, learning disability/autism awareness and communication skills, as well as a good understanding of inclusion and equalities. This reflects Rec 26 of the Wood report, which says that Scotland should embed equality education across Curriculum for Excellence. This would enable staff to create an inclusive, supportive learning environment for children with learning disabilities which would benefit the whole school. It would also maximise the opportunity for each child to reach their educational potential.

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4 ENABLE Scotland (2011), Bridging the Training Gap.