Clerk to the Education and Culture Committee

(via e-mail: ec.committee@scottish.parliament.uk)

Dear Sir

**Education Attainment Gap: Submission of Evidence**

**Session 1: Commission for Developing Scotland’s Young Workforce**

Please find below response from Renfrewshire Council in relation to the implications for schools, teachers and pupils of the Commission for Developing Scotland’s Young Workforce.

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

   If there is indeed 'parity of esteem' between vocational and academic pathways, a fully implemented Wood report would increase attainment, as all learners would be on a pathway most suitable to their desired post school destination. When learners are engaged and motivated they achieve their full potential.

   To ensure this is the case, all barriers to this 'parity of esteem' must be removed – by tackling perceptions of learners, parents and stakeholders of vocational pathways, by ensuring that opportunities to access industry recognised qualifications (IRQ) are available through the senior phase in each school, and by ensuring that Insight gives appropriate weighting to vocational awards.

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

   A senior phase that reflects the seven principles of curriculum design and also DYW will provide a range of opportunities that allow ALL young people to access vocational content that will better prepare them for their chosen post school destination, and more generally, the world of work. Pathways should be flexible so that learners can access an individualised programme of school, college and training opportunities.
Parity of esteem is again, crucial, in this regard. Learners should not be labelled or limited to being on one particular pathway over another as this would inevitably lead to pigeon-holing youngsters and closing doors to them at too early a stage in their life-long learning journey.

Vocational content should be given equal status and should feature heavily in the senior phase. Moreover, vocational content should appear in the BGE in both the primary and secondary sectors and every effort taken to emphasise the importance of skills for learning life and work in terms of future destinations.

3. 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”.

Companies that receive local and national government contracts should be legally compelled through their corporate social responsibility to employ a certain number of school leavers/apprentices.

New school buildings should have appropriate facilities, such as an industry standard kitchen/engineering works.

Thought given to workforce planning within secondary teaching; there is a commitment to maintain teacher numbers – there is an inherent difficulty in this regard when DYW advocates more vocational courses, IRQ, and learners working with college and training providers. Is this moving school age learners into the tertiary sector and out of schools, or is there a re-training issue for existing staff of ‘traditional’ academic subjects?

Awareness raising amongst parents, learners and other stakeholders around the value of IRQ – linked into local labour market information.

Current practices should be reviewed in light of DYW to look at where there are barriers to successful implementation and then these should be tackled, in, for example:

- Insight
- college funding to support a more appropriate school link programme
- SDS working practices so they can engage in career management with ALL learners, not just those in S4-6
- SQA costs – at the moment the ‘tolerance’ or cap on charges to local authorities does not include vocational subjects such as HNCs which are an additional charge. This is a disincentive to the full implementation of DYW.
- Education Scotland incorporating this agenda in HGIOS4 and supporting local authorities to in turn, support schools, in self-evaluating their approach to DYW
4. Whether the report – which includes a section on improving equalities – places enough emphasis on pupils’ socio-economic inequalities and how these could be overcome.

Again, this takes up back to the issue of parity of esteem. This must be tackled or this agenda will be interpreted as simply the provision of more stereotypical and poorly valued vocational type opportunities for ‘less able’ learners whilst ‘more able’ learners continue on a traditional academic pathway which is valued as high status and leads to university.

Renfrewshire Council is committed to the tackling poverty agenda and therefore sees DYW as a way of ensuring that ALL learners across ALL socio-economic backgrounds are able to access appropriate academic and vocational opportunities and are fully supported to achieve their potential in order to gain their desired post school destination.

Socio-economic difficulties can only be overcome by acknowledging them and committing to addressing them through intent and action. The implementation of DYW at local and national levels must take this into account, alongside all other vulnerable groups at risk of missing out.

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).

Renfrewshire Council currently has a working group reviewing the senior phase curriculum to ensure that it meets the needs of ALL learners. DYW underpins this review.

It is likely that structures will need to be reviewed so that our current synchronicity of S5/6 timetables alongside the local college is extended to afford S4 learners the opportunity of accessing college courses through the consortium that is currently in operation.

Moreover, the curriculum will need to be flexible to incorporate apprenticeship learning and HNC delivery, neither of which will fall neatly into existing column structures. We are attempting HNC delivery in Engineering and Hospitality next session.

Work experience week in S4 is also likely to be significantly reorganised as work placements should be more individualised and woven across their senior phase. We are at an early stage with this and offer this opportunity to small numbers of learners across the secondary schools.

It is worth noting that regional colleges who work in partnership with schools in more than one local authority face challenges in accommodating different school timetabling structures. This can have an adverse impact on the range of course provision made available.
6. What action and resources would be required to deliver the specific recommendations aimed at schools and teachers? For example:

- teachers’ skills and knowledge may need to develop in certain areas (for example, “to better understand employability and modern work skills”);
- closer links should be established between schools, colleges and employers (for example, “all 363 secondary schools in a long term partnership with employers within 3 years”).

We are already planning for DYW through our strategic employability group that has representation from education and a range of key partners.

With specific reference to the points made above, initial teacher training, professional standards and ongoing professional learning (PL) need to take DYW into account. In Renfrewshire we offer a range of PL activities, both at school and authority level, around employability, skills and how to raise the aspirations of our young people. Particular groups are targeted (guidance staff, SMT, employability project leaders) to ensure they have up to date knowledge and access to support on career management skills, labour market information and skills development. However, arguably skills for learning life and work, and in particular, employability, would benefit from being elevated to a ‘responsibility for all’.

All 63 Renfrewshire schools are full members of the Renfrewshire Chamber of Commerce with whom we have a very productive and close working relationship. The chief executive is on our strategic group, regularly meets with head teacher groups and key school staff, and is a tremendous support in linking schools to appropriate employers. This can be most obviously demonstrated through ‘Mission Discovery’ where the Chamber (as a key partner) is linking this NASA affiliated programme to industry leading STEM employers and ensuring a long term legacy for STEM and related careers in our secondary schools.

Overall Comment

The strategy paper on Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) has been well received within Renfrewshire schools. In order to fully implement it over the desired timescales, a number of considerations have to be taken into account:

- funding: increased staffing; professional learning for staff to increase capacity; provision of a wider more appropriate curriculum; focus on impact...
  For example the following initiatives are currently being delivered to enhance employability opportunities for our learners and are resource dependant:
  - Renfrewshire has 12 employability project leaders in secondary and ASN with a remit to implement DYW
  - graduate interns have also contributed to this
  - 450 primary colleagues have engaged in modern languages training with a view to delivering 1+2 in order that learners are fully equipped to compete in a global market;
  - STEM and Mission Discovery
  - a variety of Early Years activities

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GETS
- science ambassadors
- inter-authority research around literacy & numeracy development
- early leavers enrichment programmes
- college and university consortium arrangements in the senior phase
- aspire to success programme

- culture change – focus on developing parity of esteem between academic and vocational pathways with all stakeholder, in particular modern apprenticeships must have a higher profile and the equalities agenda 3-18 must be made more explicit

- strategic direction and guidance for practitioners – skills for success group’s 3 year strategic plan on DYW and recently created SLDP 4 group exploring best practice and implementation of DYW

- curriculum design: Senior Phase Curriculum Group currently reviewing the Senior Phase model to ensure a model which meets the needs of all learners in light of DYW

- increased partnership working – clarity of roles and responsibilities; planning with partners to deliver a more appropriate curriculum; currently Renfrewshire has an ongoing partnership agreement with the Renfrewshire Chamber of Commerce and a 3 year engagement plan with UWS

- school improvement – DYW featuring in the improvement agenda (SIPs, authority reviews, the inspection process) – the work of the SLDP4 will support this

- sustainability – all of the above must become embedded after the 7 year programme outlined in DYW concludes

I trust this is helpful to you.

Yours sincerely

Peter Macleod
Director of Children’s Services