Submission from The Scottish Council of Independent Schools (SCIS)

Educational attainment gap - Commission for Developing Scotland's Young Workforce - The Wood Commission

The Scottish Council of Independent Schools (SCIS) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Education and Culture Committee’s call for evidence regarding views on the Commission for Developing Scotland's Young Workforce (The Wood Commission). We have limited our response to the areas that we feel are most relevant to our member independent schools.

SCIS supports the emphasis on engaging employers with schools and young people. Scottish independent schools work hard to establish and maintain links with former pupils and the parents of current pupils and use these networks to encourage opportunities for work experience placements and for public speakers to visit the school and share their experience and knowledge with young people. SCIS believes this provides great benefit to, and increases the attainments of, young learners and would welcome this approach being expanded to all schools in Scotland.

SCIS also agrees with the opinion that careers advice has an extremely important role to play in enabling pupils to reach their full potential. SCIS therefore strongly supports the recommendation for careers services to be provided at an earlier stage within schools. Some independent schools have their own career development service offering advice from S1 whilst others use ISCO (the independent schools careers guidance service). The early involvement of careers services ensures young people are fully prepared for the world of employment and that young people understand how their subject choices for the senior phase will impact on future learning and employment opportunities.

Independent schools recognise the importance of these opportunities and a number of independent schools further ensure that they are available to young people more widely. Loretto School, Musselburgh, for example, organises a UCAS week at the end of summer that is open to all local schools which provides further education/careers guidance to young people. Support is also offered to local authority school pupils by schools such as Fettes College, Edinburgh; which organises careers and higher education fairs open to pupils from local schools and provides trial interviews for candidates; or Gordonstoun in Moray, which holds a Higher Education and Careers Fair for over 1,000 secondary pupils in Moray and Highland schools, to meet representatives from universities, colleges and the armed forces (Gordonstoun subsidises travel to this event so that no student is unable to attend). Work experience opportunities through visits from local secondary pupils considering a career in education and care may also be offered, for example, these opportunities are provided by the Compass School, Haddington. These selected examples highlight just some of the links between independent schools and local schools in sharing careers guidance and work experience opportunities.

SCIS recognises the importance of increasing the uptake of STEM subjects for the future success of Scotland, as was highlighted in a recent members’ debate in the Parliament¹ and

¹ http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/28862.aspx?r=9737#.VOsz5HysXeo
in evidence given to the Education and Culture Committee by the Learned Societies’ Group\textsuperscript{2}. Our schools promote these subjects through their significant provision within the school curriculum up to and including the Advanced Higher. The number of candidates who attended our member schools and took STEM subjects at Higher level in 2014 was 5438 which accounted for 37.3% of all candidates and the number of candidates taking STEM subjects at Advanced Higher level was 3629 or 51.4% of all candidates. These numbers demonstrate the commitment of independent schools to the provision and encouragement of STEM subjects. Our teachers also contribute to this area through their involvement in the design and verification of qualifications, such as the new Higher and the new Advanced Higher. Furthermore, a number of member schools act as sponsors for Arkwright Scholarships who provide funding for talented students to encourage and assist them in pursuing a career in engineering and technical design (and do so in partnership with businesses, universities and professional institutions).

Within independent schools a great deal of work is being undertaken in this area, much of which also involves the local community. For example approximately 2000 people attend the annual Science Festival held by St Mary’s School, Melrose, this event is open to all local schools and the general public, and Robert Gordon’s College, Aberdeen hosts the National Association for Science Education Conference which is open to educators across Scotland and beyond. Another way in which independent schools promote the advancement of STEM subjects is through the Association for Science Education holding an annual two day science conference at Morrison’s Academy, Crieff.

Independent schools acknowledge the central importance of individually tailored and up-to-date careers advice and an increased uptake of STEM subjects in raising the attainment of pupils within Scotland and would be happy to provide further evidence on these important issues to the Committee both as witnesses and on site in schools.

\textsuperscript{2}http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/28862.aspx?r=9757#VOs0fnysXeo