UCU Scotland submission to the Education and Culture Committee on the Education (Scotland) Bill

The University and College Union is the largest trade union in the Post-16 education sector in the UK, representing 120,000 academic and related members across the UK, and is the largest union in the higher education sector in Scotland.

We are happy for this submission to be made publically available and shared in the usual ways.

Introduction

UCU organises in the higher education sector in Scotland. While this bill is predominately occupied with changes to school education we thought it might be helpful simply to note that one of the areas the committee is seeking views on around achievement and attainment has a bearing later in the education of individuals when they are considering whether to apply to study in a higher education institution (HEI) and how their application for study is then considered.

We note that the Scottish Government has recently set up the Commission on Widening Access which is very much in the early days of its work. We note also that one of the successful ways in which widening access at the higher education level is being encouraged, albeit slowly, is by the use of contextual admissions policies by HEIs and universities. Contextual admissions may be of interest to the Committee in your deliberation around young people’s attainment.

This model would seem to be a real and practical example of how we can reduce inequalities of outcome. While higher education may not be the right choice for everyone it can be transformative for many, many students and has the triple benefits of being both transformative for the individual, having societal benefits and also acting as a driver for economic growth and wellbeing.

It may be that there is a role for education authorities and the proposed Chief Education Officers to have a duty to work with HEIs and colleges in their geographic area and the Scottish Funding Council to promote contextual admissions and other strategies and ensure they are working for pupils who have experienced inequalities of educational outcome as a result of disadvantage.
Given the nascent stage of the Commission it may be too early for this bill, but we would also encourage the Committee to consider how they can benefit from the expertise gathered together in the Commission on Widening Access. The evidence gathered in the Committee’s work on the bill will also surely be of interest to the Commission. Given the cross over both between inequality at school and the desire and ability to secure a place at university and also the Committee’s consideration of the Bill around attainment and the work of the Commission it would seem a lost opportunity if there was not cross over too in the work being undertaken by both bodies.

For further information please contact:

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