Dear Committee Members

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT GAP – DEVELOPING SCOTLAND’S YOUNG WORKFORCE

1. I am writing to offer some views from East Lothian Council officers in connection with the Committee’s work on the educational attainment gap, in particular to the questions it had on the implementation of the Wood Commission report on Developing Scotland’s Young Workforce.

2. East Lothian Council is committed to the best possible outcomes for our children and young people. Our recently-refreshed Council Plan focuses on four priorities:

   2.1. Reducing unemployment, particularly youth unemployment and improving positive outcomes for school leavers, principally through the initiatives developed and supported by East Lothian Works [East Lothian's multi-agency employability service];

   2.2. Raising attainment in schools, particularly for pupils from more economically ‘deprived’ areas, and providing a broader work based education experience through working with Edinburgh College, Queen Margaret University and Napier University on initiatives such as the Academies;

   2.3. Reducing inequalities and ensuring the most disadvantaged groups and communities, have access to services that maximise opportunities to break the cycle of poverty or mitigate the impact of deprivation; e.g. Children’s early years initiatives and improving health and wellbeing for all age groups;

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1 http://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/info/231/business_advice/1493/east_lothian_works
2.4. Supporting the capacity of communities and voluntary organisations to show community resilience and maximise social capital from community and social networks.

3. We appreciate that while the input of teachers is crucial, we know we have to harness other elements of the community to give our children and young people a rounded and effective learning experience. We recognise and value our inter-dependency with families, professional groups, the health service, business people, the third sector and police and fire and rescue colleagues in helping young people learn to make their way in the world.

4. We also put effort into listening to the voices of young people themselves, through for example Pupil Councils and the Student Educational Experience survey.

5. Examples of innovation in the county over the past few years have included:

5.1. Academies in partnership with further and higher education institutions.

- **The Creative Industries Academy**
  Academy students can opt to study for the HNC Media & Communication or the HNC Acting & Performance. Subjects studied include performing arts, media, film, photography, copywriting and public relations. Successful students can then gain access to Year 2 to relevant HND or BA courses in creative subjects at Queen Margaret University or Edinburgh College.

- **The Food Science and Nutrition Academy**
  Two-year course leading to HNC Applied Science. Includes:
  - the study of Chemistry, Biochemistry and Microbiology;
  - practical laboratory experience;
  - data handling skills;
  - work experience in a food and drink company.
  Successful students can apply for direct entry into Year 2 of relevant BSc or HND courses, or alternatively qualify to apply for level 3 Modern Apprentice in Life Science.

- **The Health & Social Care Academy.**
  There are two qualifications offered:
  - National 5 in Care.
  - Skills for Work Higher in Health & Social Care.
  There is also a “Careers Pathways in Health and Social Care” course offered for students thinking of going directly into employment after school.
• **Hospitality and Tourism Academy**

The HNC Hospitality covers a mix of theory and practical subjects, taught throughout S5 and S6, studying subjects including Management theory, Supervision, Finance and with practical classes preparing and serving meals in the College restaurant.

Most of the teaching is done through Edinburgh College, at Granton and Milton campuses. Onward destinations include:

- Employment / Modern Apprentice
- Year 2 of an HND Hospitality Management
- Advanced entry to Level 2 of the International Hospitality and Tourism Management degree at Queen Margaret University

• **Engineering Academy – HNC Engineering Systems with Renewables**

The HNC in Engineering Systems with Renewables at The Engineering Academy aims to develop abilities to apply analysis and synthesis skills to the solution of engineering problems.

5.2. The Tots and Teens programme at Knox Academy in Haddington, has helped school students find excellent motivation and training through the care of young children, with the necessary support and safeguards in place.

5.3. “Paired reading” in secondary schools with volunteers, helps relevant youngsters improve their literacy and thus gain better access to the curriculum being offered.

5.4. “Support from the Start” project\(^2\) helps parents and families give children the very best start in life.

5.5. “Learn to Succeed” initiative at Dunbar Grammar is a tailor-made course, including Rural Skills, Employability, Confidence-building and coping with stress, aimed at helping students complete mainstream education and move on to a positive destination.

6. Head teacher colleagues have noted that the creation of East Lothian Works (see para 2.1 above) has given a much clearer focus to employability issues in schools. As Curriculum for Excellence develops and our senior school structure evolves, we are able to include more opportunities for vocational links, and foster equity of value placed on academic and vocational learning for all pupils.

\(^2\) [http://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/info/200433/support_from_the_start/1580/early_years_getting_it_right](http://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/info/200433/support_from_the_start/1580/early_years_getting_it_right)
7. We consider our biggest challenges and opportunities are around the following:

7.1. The Doran report highlighted that we collectively are not doing enough to ensure that young people with additional support needs – including severe and complex needs - are being fully supported into a positive destination. The statistics for this cohort are very poor, and reflect an opportunity gap and equalities issue. It would be helpful if the Committee would give particular attention to this aspect of its work.

7.2. We need to enable all teaching staff in secondary schools to accept responsibility for employability (in the same way that they now do for literacy skills, whatever the subject they teach). We need teachers to be able to talk naturally in class about the kinds of jobs their subject can lead to, not to leave it to careers guidance sessions.

7.3. “Walking the talk” in our educational system – as vocational subjects increase in schools, there is a requirement to shift the mindset of existing staff and look towards the type of colleague who will best serve our young people in the delivery/engagement of the subject matter: this could go beyond GTC registered staff.

7.4. We need to help parents understand that vocational subjects are not a “second-best” option, both in terms of achievement of qualifications and post-school options, e.g. modern apprenticeships.

7.5. The lack of a further education college campus within East Lothian, coupled with a lack of public transport options, can be a real barrier to some young people. Even where available, public transport can be costly (especially for young people who are not earning), time-consuming and not always reliable. However the planned creation of a construction academy in East Lothian may offer opportunities for further thinking about a college campus presence.

7.6. School attendance can be a particular challenge; in East Lothian our relevant place-based community planning bodies recognise the importance of working together to tackle this. Being able to offer learning that appears more relevant to the student (thinking here of vocational learning) may help to help to raise attendance, engagement and attainment.

7.7. It would be beneficial to foster better partnerships through appropriate community benefits clauses in supplier contracts.

7.8. We need to find the resource to help schools to take up the opportunities that may be offered by employers and link with the wider community. Perhaps a senior manager in each school could take a strategic role and gain practical support from specific colleagues to co-ordinate opportunities. This may also in time help to build a sustainable throughput of opportunities rather than in the current fledgling model which, while always welcomed, still have a
tendency to be ad-hoc and short notice, and sometimes can be missed outright because there is no nominated co-ordinator within a school.

7.9. Primary schools also have a role to play. Certainly in East Lothian they take part in initiatives that can be seen as vocational (e.g. cooking with professionals) and enterprising (events management, fundraising), but there is room for more systematic involvement and an opportunity for secondary schools to work with their “cluster” primary schools.

8. I hope the Committee find this helpful. Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to its work.

Yours sincerely

ANGELA LEITCH
Chief Executive