Glasgow City Council
Response to call for evidence from Education and Culture Committee

Consultation 1: Implications for Schools, Teachers and pupil of the Commission for Developing Scotland’s Young Workface (Wood report)

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

This is dependent on the definition of attainment being applied. Currently attainment is defined in terms of national qualifications, for example, three or more awards at SCQF level 4. Many of the courses on offer in partnership with colleges would not count in this framework as they are often made up of coherent groupings of units. Attainment is also measured in average tariff points and the units will count in this calculation. However, the tariff score scale puts more weighting onto courses than units, therefore it is possible that the gap between the average tariff score of pupils doing college/school programmes and those doing more traditional school-based courses will widen.

Schools and local authorities need to get better at telling the ‘story’ of young people’s achievements and not be overly influenced by these national statistics. Conversely, it is incumbent upon awarding bodies such as SQA, working alongside Education Scotland, the Scottish Government and Local Authorities to ensure a greater ‘objective equivalence’ is achieved in apportioning value and recording success in young people’s learning. This work must be developed to create a currency of recognisable achievement which is as credible for business as it is in supporting progression into FE or HE institutions.

Successful implementation of the recommendations will increase the range of learner pathways for young people. There is not one single group of young people who will benefit from this.

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;

Glasgow currently has very well-developed school/college partnerships which are long-standing. We have been working more recently on creating more innovative and bespoke pathways which better meet the increasing numbers of young people returning to school for fifth and sixth year. These pathways allow young people to remain in school receiving strong support from pastoral care staff and achieve qualifications both in school and in college. Young people have responded well to these as they also have a work placement element which enriches their learning further.

We need to have a clearer shared understanding of vocational courses and not imagine that vocational courses are in any way worth less than an academic course. Medicine is a vocational course. This relates directly to the point made in the response to the previous question. The challenges raised through the implementation of the Wood report are far more around how we articulate successful learner journeys and how these relate to the capacities, knowledge and potential of individual young people in a way which is recognisable and credible to them, their parents, business and HE and FE establishments.
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”;**

Local authorities and schools need to engage actively with employers to ensure that the pathways being developed lead to strong employment opportunities. In some cases, this will mean a focus on developing young people’s employability skills through more traditional school-based courses, such as Highers and Nationals, along with a range of broader experiences, such as Sports Leadership, school prefect, Duke of Edinburgh, Student Council, charity work, etc. In other cases, this will mean a bespoke programme designed in partnership with employers and colleges, such as our engineering scholarship programme. We have also been working with NHS GGC who are major employers to design bespoke programmes which lead to careers in health care.

This takes time and involves working with a range of partners. There are also practical challenges around timetabling when working across schools and colleges.

It should be recognised that unlike many other countries in Western Europe, the UK has far less of a tradition of collaborative development between the education and industrial sectors at school level. The critical element in the success of the Wood recommendations is the greater adoption of its principles across the Scottish business community. Schools and Local Authorities have the ability to develop strong partnerships with business to create coherent pathways into employment. However, the Scottish Government must work with business to create either financial benefits or legislative requirements to underpin them. Without these safeguards in place, any partnerships developed between schools and businesses are likely to be transient based on the economic health of the business and the country as a whole. This is a key area in which the Government must take the lead.

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;**

The Wood report has the potential to improve the employment opportunities for all young people regardless of their socio-economic background. However, reducing inequalities is a challenging area and we must be mindful not to lower expectations for young people because of their background. This must be about raising standards and giving young people the best possible chance to succeed.

In the last few years, we have worked very hard to raise expectations for all young people regardless of their background. We have challenged the poverty of aspiration which has stubbornly existed in many communities. We are now seeing much improved outcomes, such as 32.8% of school leavers going to higher education when ten years ago it was 18.2%.

As stated earlier, vocational courses should not be seen as a less valuable option for young people. We must also be careful not to narrow down young people’s choices at too early a stage in their development. A strength of Scottish education has been its breadth and this must not be lost. Young people need to be provided with the opportunity to achieve qualifications which afford them more choices not less.

We must also recognise – a point not given due prominence either in the Wood report or in the Government’s Youth Employment Strategy - the fundamental role that social networks play in supporting young people’s aspirations and facilitating their
achievements and progressions. Across agencies we must focus more on the importance of role modelling, mentoring and expanding life experiences for groups of young people whose economic or social circumstances make them more likely to disengage from education and move either into low paid employment or unemployment. Regardless of attainment levels, all too often young people from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, or from minority / under-represented groups, do less well in making successful progressions into well-paid careers or highly valued academic programmes. Again, this is often due to a lack of ‘social capital’ and young people self-selecting out of particular career or learner pathways because of a lack of recognisable peer / role model group. Business has a major role to play here and one which – as described above – must be stimulated and directed to an extent by Scottish Government.

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);

We don’t believe there is a need to make significant changes. However, it will need careful planning and it is complex when timetabling across schools and colleges in the city.

There is also the issue of staffing in schools when young people are learning in colleges. Staffing levels in schools could be adjusted to take account of the fact that young people are not spending 27.5 hours learning in school. Moreover, where learning is split across various establishments, it may be the case that the make-up of school and college staffing evolves to support a more multi-disciplinary workforce. There is a question to be asked about the best use of public money paying for teachers in schools and lecturers in college.

6 What action and resources would be required to deliver the specific recommendations aimed at schools and teachers, for example:

i. teachers’ skills and knowledge may need to develop in certain areas (for example, “to better understand employability and modern work skills”);

ii. 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”).

There are a number of areas in which developments are required to deliver the recommendations for schools and teachers. The main principles underpinning all are centred on the importance of partnerships, effecting sustainable development and ensuring a shared vision and sense of purpose in supporting the development of Scotland’s young people across schools, HE, FE and industry.

There are currently enough skilled staff employed across schools, other educational establishments, SDS and business etc. to support the developments recommended through the Wood report. We do not consider the provision of additional training for teachers to provide bespoke careers advice, for example, as a key driver for the success of the new youth employment strategy. Of far more importance, is the development of a truly collaborative approach across sectors in mapping out flexible learner journeys which support the needs of industry but more importantly recognise the needs, circumstances and particular aptitudes of individual young people. This means that we need to affect change across teaching and business roles to create more time for collaborative approaches in curricular design, to establish new learning environments (e.g. greater focus and value on work based learning) and to recognise
a broader range of successes and achievement which are underpinned by a unifying and equitably valued set of recognition criteria.

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