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

It depends what methodology is used to measure “impact on attainment”. Whilst “Insight” provides a benchmarking tool which will be of use to schools and local authorities in analysing attainment data, its tariff scale does not afford the “parity of esteem” argued for in Wood. Many vocational courses are ungraded and based on an accumulation of units. A graded exam based course such as a Higher at the same SCQF level as an ungraded vocational course attracts more tariff points on the Insight scale. It is very important that this issue is fully understood by all stakeholders, including those who have a vested interest in attainment statistics e.g. politicians, Education Scotland (HMIE). There is a danger that if this is not fully understood, then a default delivery to traditional academic subjects will be the result.

If however, the measure of attainment is its impact on individual learners then the Wood report has the potential to benefit every pupil in Scotland. As a minimum, the proposed introduction of a new standard to Work Experience which is to feature on “Insight” should impact on every pupil by encouraging more meaningful and relevant experiences that meet a minimum standard. A broad range of vocational courses across the Senior Phase should offer a more appropriate pathway for many pupils who are not being well served by the current curriculum. For high attaining pupils aiming towards university study there is potential that a vocational course in their chosen area could enhance their future learning.

For lower attaining pupils the opportunity to participate in a range of vocational courses would enhance their employability skills and provide contexts for learning that are real and relevant.

It will be important that there are checks and balance in the system to ensure these opportunities are truly open to all.

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.

As highlighted in 1 above, Wood has the potential to provide advantage to all learners. However, a system which resulted in “separate streams” has the potential to narrow choice and close down pathways. Young people should have the opportunity to choose a traditional academic route, a focussed vocational route, or a blend of the two.
Implementation of Wood should create advantage for Scotland’s youngsters and seek to ensure that there are no unintended disadvantages created by ill thought out approaches. For example, if a young person achieves an NC in Engineering but not a recognised qualification in say, Maths, then future job opportunities could be limited.

Employers and business will need to be consulted and informed at all stages of implementation. As the report’s main purpose is to “develop the workforce” the enhancing of vocational provision must be based on a rigorous evaluation of the most appropriate qualifications for the work-place balanced with an enjoyable flexible and meaningful curriculum. Young people do change their minds and the curriculum on offer must be sufficiently flexible to meet their needs as well as those of employers.

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.”**

There needs to be more guidance for schools and local authorities on what qualifications have “strong currency in the labour market”. This information needs to come directly from employers and employer bodies and not only those with a vested interest, e.g. qualification bodies.

Anecdotally, employers report little or no knowledge of “Skills for Work” courses despite the claim that employers have been consulted in their content and frameworks. Funding will need to be available to education departments and schools to properly resource the facilities, qualified staff and examination fees for such qualifications. Parents will need to be informed about vocational qualifications and be persuaded that, for their child, there is a clear advantage to following a vocational pathway. Employers have a clear role to play in supporting schools with those communications.

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.**

Local authorities and their schools working with pupils living in areas of multiple deprivation are well aware of the disadvantage faced by many of these youngsters. By definition, they are more likely to be living in areas with fewer employers, and will sometimes have no working role model at home. Barriers for these youngsters can be complex. Decisions about post school destinations for youngsters can be influenced by the potential impact on a family’s income, particularly where the family is reliant on benefits. Low rates of pay for 16 and 17 year olds can deter young people from taking up employment opportunities. Initial costs of entering employment e.g. a PVG check or purchasing of work clothes, can prove prohibitive to a family living on benefits. The “vicious cycle” continues.
By contrast, those living in more affluent areas are likely to have greater exposure to employers and employed role models. When the economy grows, they and their families and peers benefit.

Steps to ease the transition into employment for more disadvantaged youngsters could include:

- extended transitional support beyond school along the lines of a “guidance/pastoral” teacher with specific employability training;
- a pot of money to support early workplace costs;
- a period of free/heavily subsidised travel;
- employers encouraged to pay more than the legal minimum wage for the younger age groups;
- a transition period where families on benefits are able to have a youngster in employment in the household whose income is not included in household calculations.

The report does make a recommendation (13) about those requiring “more choices, more chances” but it is clear already that at this early stage, it is not those youngsters who are being targeted in pilot models of activity.

5. **Whether there would have to be significant reorganisation in schools to accommodate all the proposed changes (for example, to enable more links with colleagues to have a greater focus on work placements).**

Schools have already come a long way on this. Creativity and flexibility around timetabling is the single most organisational factor in facilitating the changes recommended in the report. There are already examples of good practice in schools. There needs to be caution around the demands being placed on pupils. For example, models are emerging where there is an expectation that a pupil will undertake a qualification at college over the same time period as a full-time student. However the pupil is expected to be back at school on non-college days with a full or nearly full timetable of other study. There may be some merit in this “stretching” of pupils but there needs to be a clear rationale for models such as this.

There is widespread recognition & agreement that the current model of Work Experience is outdated and in need of revision. However, there are potential workload & resourcing issues in moving to a more flexible model. Most work experience coordinators in schools are willing volunteers who take on a heavy workload for a few weeks in the school year. There are implications for risk assessment, travel arrangements and year-long responsibilities for the coordinator if pupils are participating in more personalised arrangements.

Building the Curriculum 4 (Skills for Learning, Life and Work) already articulates much of the philosophy of Wood. Schools which have developed aspects of BTC4 into their curriculum will be well on the road to meeting many of the report’s recommendations.
In our haste to implement the commendable recommendations in Wood, reorganisation in schools must not be done at the expense of our highly academic pupils. Scotland’s workforce will still require doctors, dentists, lawyers, accountants, academics and so on. We need to meet the needs of all our pupils.

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”)

A robust programme of CPD (which could be designed at national level along the lines of the Schools Enterprise Programme) is required. It would be essential that the CPD is not designed by educationalists alone and that industry and employers contribute. Many teachers will not have worked outside of education and there will be gaps in their knowledge about employability and work place skills.

However, we should not underestimate the expertise and knowledge that already exists in schools. Schools could be given a resource to carry out a robust audit of their own workforce and teachers encouraged to share their expertise. This extra work would have to be acknowledged in some way and not be added onto already demanding workload.

At the earliest possible opportunity, Initial Teacher Training Institutions need to incorporate a module on employability and related issues into all programmes.

7. **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”).**

This is a further area where there are already good practice examples across the country. A previous drive to increase employer engagement as part of “Determined to Succeed” resulted in some links being made to reach targets – the measure being the number of partnerships and not the quality.

Our present model in North Ayrshire goes some way to ensuring that business/employment engagement in schools is purposeful. Ayrshire Chamber of Commerce effectively acts as a broker, matching school request with a suitable employer. This results in all parties being clear about what the “ask” is, and inputs are far more effective as a result. Similarly, business engagement offers are starting to flow as a result of Community Benefit Clauses – the key is to make the right match.

There is a danger of inequity of access across the country – areas with buoyant local economies are likely to have employers seeking new employees and will immediately see the potential benefit in engaging with schools. Less affluent areas are more likely to have employers whose primary focus is on running their own
business, less likely to be recruiting more staff and therefore less likely to understand the potential benefits to their business.

The recommendation that all schools should have one long-term business partnership could be limiting. This could result in input in a school being driven by one business sector with a narrow view of the range of opportunities to young people.

The key to the success of this recommendation will be absolute clarity on the purpose of these links.