Scottish Chambers of Commerce (SCC) comprises some 26 local Chambers of Commerce across the length and breadth of Scotland, with a combined membership of around 11,000 businesses, of all sizes and from all sectors. With a local presence in every part of Scotland, Scottish Chambers of Commerce is the nation’s largest, most engaged and representative business network.

SCC welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Education and Culture Committee’s inquiry into the educational attainment gap, focusing on the role of third and private sectors.

1.0 Chamber Engagement

1.1 The chamber network has been actively working alongside schools, colleges and local authorities, bringing forward a voice for business in their local communities. There is a clear requirement for a widespread overhaul of the linkages between the education system and business. 2014’s report by the Commission for Developing Scotland’s Young Workforce is a starting point for this.

1.2 A step-change is required in terms of attitude and culture to move towards a more flexible and innovative system; one which works in collaboration with businesses to build and develop our workers of the future.

1.3 SCC believes there is a need for improvement in the delivery mechanism, and that the chamber network is best placed to take a lead in the regional Invest in Youth Groups which were outlined in the 2014 report by the Commission for Developing Scotland’s Young Workforce, giving businesses both responsibility and accountability.

1.4 SCC is pleased with the establishment of the first two Regional Invest in Youth Groups led by Aberdeen and Grampian Chamber of Commerce, and Glasgow Chamber of Commerce.

2.0 Success of Private Sector Involvement

2.1 Within the chamber network there are various examples of strong programmes developing and proving to provide successful linkages within the Youth Employment and Skills Agenda topics. Some examples of which have been detailed below:
2.2 **West Lothian Chamber of Commerce** and Mitsubishi Electric have been working in partnership to bring closer together industry and schools with the aim of supporting young people in developing skills beneficial to their future development.

The ‘**Pump It Up**’ Heat Pump Design Challenge grew from Armadale Academy’s forward thinking approach to investing in their pupils, and their community, which has now been rolled out to all 11 high schools in West Lothian. This partnership enabled:

- Students get to work on a project related to environment and renewables.
- Students develop a better understanding of Science and Technology involved in “Green” Energy
- Students having an exposure to industry.
- Recognition of the brand Mitsubishi Electric
- Community visibility of Mitsubishi Electric supporting their schools and school children’s education
- Support in local community by using local marketing suppliers

2.3 **Glasgow Chamber of Commerce** facilitated the development of the Youth Employment Action Group (YEAG), which set out 13 recommendations to support an increase in the number of young people (age 16-24) accessing and sustaining employment, while improving the efficiency and competitiveness of the city’s business sector.

The blueprint was created by key representatives of the Glasgow Employer Board and included individuals from some of the city’s most well-known businesses and organisations, with Network Rail, Microsoft, The Weir Group, Boots, City of Glasgow College, GTG, NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, LPL Telecom, Scottish Water, Marriott, Scottish Power, Two Fat Ladies, Laing O’Rouke, Gorbals Healthy Living Initiative and Murray Recruitment all taking party.

Divided into five main themes, the report made recommendations to combat the issues around youth unemployment. The city’s main stakeholders (Glasgow City Council, Jobs and Business Glasgow, Skills Development Scotland and Glasgow Chamber) were invited to make a response to the employers’ findings within six weeks, followed by a debate at the Glasgow Employer Board. The YEAG was formally acknowledged in the Commission for Developing Scotland’s Young Workforce final report as an exemplar.

2.4 **Ayrshire Chamber of Commerce** were successful in setting up the Chamber Youth Academy (CYA), which provides support to 16 to 19 year olds who have faced barriers in the past to develop work-based skills and attitude. A key element of CYA is that local employers play a
leading role in the delivery of the programme elements and are able to impart young people their knowledge, giving them the skills and attitude employers are looking for.

During the two weeks the young people are exposed to various activities themed around team building, confidence, communications, goal setting, and customer services and through hands on ‘Apprentice’ style experiences entrepreneurial & real business challenges.

After completing the two weeks they are allocated a mentor for six months who will ensure the ‘wish’ list compiled over the two weeks is being progressed and therefore has a better chance of being achieved. At the closing celebration event the young people give a presentation on their experience and the ‘winning’ team presented with their awards.

Business challenges range from having stands at B2B exhibition selling products they have ‘pitched’ for to in store product promotions where sales are monitored.

Several companies have offered guaranteed interviews to young people who have completed CYA and we post their profiles on Chamber website for potential employers to view.

2.5 Renfrewshire Chamber of Commerce piloted the programme HireMe which adopted a Canadian Model designed to build the confidence that young people have about their ability to gain employment. The programme gave young people a better understanding of the core competencies identified by employers.

HireMe not only helped learners build a quality CV, but also aided their understanding of the often complex nature and demands of the interview process. Additionally, it aimed to develop a better understanding of the role social media plays within the recruitment process today.

3.0 Increased Private Sector Involvement- Work Experience

3.1 Work experience speaks volumes to employers. The optimum model sees students undertake work placements, relevant to their skills and accredited as part of their course, that also help the host business.

3.2 A new model of work experience should be adopted which offers a structured work experience programme, developed by both industry and education, in which the businesses offering work experience are given the opportunity to grade a pupils progress. This will give employers responsibility and accountability.

3.3 This model should include a modern standard which outlines the requirements which must be met to ensure high quality work experience placements. While many directly vocational courses have an ‘in industry’ element to them, this is not the case for other subjects; SCC is keen to work with the education sector to support expansion of this, whereby businesses
work alongside schools and universities to make young people more employable. Scotland’s businesses need the skills, whilst integration of work experience into the education system is essential for employers, young people and education providers.

3.4 The inclusion of an in-industry or business work experience programme starting from S1, which forms part of the pupil’s curriculum, and is recognised with an accreditation that has been created in collaboration with both business and education must be introduced. This would provide pupils with a qualification when leaving school which shows that pupils are work ready, and have had quality work experience.

4.0 Increased Private Sector Involvement- Vocational Education

4.1 As over 50% of Scottish school leavers do not go to university, it is essential that our education system is designed to support those young people who wish to pursue vocational training or education.

4.2 The recommendations by the Commission for Developing Scotland’s Young Workforce highlight the need for schools and colleges to embrace a true partnership with business in order to ensure effective forward planning in terms of demand for skills that will deliver for both young people in terms of employment and businesses in terms of growth. This approach has the full support of the Scottish Chambers of Commerce.

4.3 SCC believes that in order to help close the educational attainment gap, the private sector must place a significant role in the development of vocational education which includes:

- A key focus being placed on ensuring that all levels of apprenticeships are promoted amongst young people, with an emphasis placed on skills shortages and economic need.
- Implementation of a Modern Apprenticeship incentive package, as recommended by the Commission for Developing Scotland’s Young Workforce to reduce the cost of employing apprentices for smaller and micro businesses.

5.0 Private Sector Involvement- Careers advice

5.1 Despite a huge focus recently from both public sector policy makers and the business community, we still see some industries reporting recruitment difficulties due to skills shortages – notably ICT, energy, engineering and tourism. This indicates that we are not, in Scotland, doing enough to encourage young people into studying for qualifications in these disciplines – qualifications that would result in jobs with good career progression prospects.
5.2 We acknowledge the efforts being made by Skills Development Scotland on this agenda, but believe that more needs to be done to ensure that Scotland’s careers services fulfil the needs of young people and of business.

5.3 SCC believes that a reformed Careers Service in which business and Skills Development Scotland work closely to achieve effective forward planning that ensures skills shortages in STEM subjects are clearly understood and met. By working together, businesses and Scotland’s career service can help Scotland’s young people make informed career decisions. This reform should include:

- Increased number of business led class talks throughout the academic year.
- All teachers should complete an enterprise workshop delivered by business.

Scottish Chambers of Commerce
Economic Development Intelligence Unit
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