Educational Attainment Gap – Role of the Third and Private Sectors

Scouts Scotland

Scouts Scotland is the largest co-educational uniformed youth organisation in Scotland, with 44,373 members (2014) across all 32 Local Authority Areas. It is positioned as a key provider of non-formal education. Its Purpose is to actively engage and support young people in their personal development, empowering them to make a positive contribution to society.

Scouting originated in 1907 with an experimental camp involving a group of young people from quite different social and educational backgrounds. Since then Scouting has grown to become the world’s largest co-educational voluntary youth Movement, with over 31 million members in 216 Countries and Territories.

The programme for young people is delivered with the support of 7,614 adult volunteer members in Scotland and countless thousands more parents and supporters. The work of the volunteers is supported by a professional staff of 10 at Scottish Scout Headquarters.

As a leading third sector youth work organisation, Scouts Scotland is pleased to have the opportunity to respond to the call for Evidence from the Education and Culture Committee with respect to the Educational Attainment Gap – Role of the Third and Private Sectors.

Third Sector

In its Final Report ‘Education Working for All!’, the Commission for Developing Scotland’s Young Workforce set out a number of important recommendations for action to develop the skill base of young people in Scotland and address concerns over unemployment amongst the young workforce.

There is much to commend in the Report, which identifies a range of actions for Government, the education sector and employers in particular. Disappointingly, the only explicit reference to a role for the Third Sector appears at Recommendation 37, that being with respect to Care Leavers.

We believe it would be helpful to acknowledge the important contribution that third sector organisations make to the support and development of young people, and in
particular the role of the youth work sector in connection with developing the soft skills that employers rightly regard so highly.

The contribution in this regard from Scouting is clearly evidenced through independent research conducted by Public and Corporate Economic Consultants (PACEC) into the Impact of Scouting\(^1\) on young people, adults and communities. Key findings of the research included:

- 91 per cent of volunteers and 88 per cent of youth members stated that Scouting had helped them develop key skills;
- 97 per cent of volunteers and 92 per cent of youth members stated that Scouting had helped with relationship-building;
- 89 per cent of Scouts identified that Scouting had helped them to build ‘key skills’ including social, team working and leadership skills;
- External organisations surveyed said that many of the key Scouting attributes such as respect for others, friendships, teamwork, character building and personal development were very important attributes for their staff or volunteers to have in the workplace.
- 41 per cent of employers reported that a job applicant’s involvement in Scouting would be a positive influence on their decision to employ them.

A more recent report from Demos\(^2\) stated that

> The ethos and activities of the Scouts – particularly at the Explorer age of between 14 and 18 years old – underpin the acquisition of a broad range of soft skills. Our research suggests that the Scouts can assist the development of team-working, leadership, resilience and problem solving, as well as demonstrating commitment and resolve.

We suggest that the above are the very skills that employers seek. The development of such skills and attributes in young people is a particular strength of organisations such as Scouting and of the broader youth work sector.

There has been encouraging growth in engagement between youth work and schools in recent years. However, the sector’s capacity to engage with the formal education sector has been limited both by the nature of its own workforce (which

\(^1\) A Study of the Impact of Scouting on the UKs Young People, Adults and Communities, PACEC, 2011
\(^2\) Scouting for Skills, Jonathan Birdwell and Ian Wyborn, Demos 2014
includes large numbers of volunteers) and by the willingness or otherwise of schools to recognise the wider achievements of young people outside of the school setting.

**Reporting Attainment v Achievement**

Curriculum for Excellence has been welcomed by youth work organisations for its recognition of the importance of developing the whole person. It is not just about academic attainment but also about recognising the wider achievements of young people that largely happens through activity outside of the formal education sector.

Some of these wider achievements are recognised by the range of awards identified in the publication ‘Amazing Things’ - A guide to youth awards in Scotland. Young people in Scouting value the badges and awards they achieve through our progressive non-formal curriculum. Our top awards in each of our youth sections, and most particularly the Queens Scout Award, the highest youth award in Scouting, are highly prized by our youth members and their parents. As reported above, employers too value the skills that young people develop as they progress through our programme.

However, the currency of such awards is reported to vary considerably from school to school and Authority to Authority. Some awards can be achieved through school activities and these seem well received by the formal education sector, but there remains a challenge for schools to uniformly recognise the wider achievements of young people beyond the school gates. HMI inspections may help to focus minds. There has been some engagement with Scouting locally, e.g. in the context of schools inspections requiring a wider learning community focus. To date, however, this has been patchy, and too often it is inspection driven rather than reflecting a greater openness towards external engagement and recognition of wider achievement.

A tendency of some local authorities to limit recognition to levelled and accredited awards points to the easy option of recording attainment. It is more challenging to provide the space and opportunity for young people themselves to demonstrate their personal achievements by way of awards and experiences that do not lend themselves to a simple tick box approach. The CfE Senior Phase ‘Insight' benchmarking tool only records SCQF credit rated awards and thus fails to record achievement of e.g. The Queens Scout Award or the Duke of Edinburgh Award, both of which are generally highly regarded by employers.

It might be hoped that P7 and S3 profiling will provide an opportunity to capture wider achievement. There is a challenge here for award providers and the youth

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work sector in general to help young people to more clearly articulate such achievements and the skills developed as a consequence. By way of example, The Scout Association has provided a helpful resource for members aged 14 to 25 to develop their CV and identify relevant skills. ‘Get Ahead – Scouting and Employability. A guide for Explorers and Network members’ helps members to ‘map’ the skills and personal qualities developed and demonstrated through their Scouting experiences.

One of the important skillsets that young people have the opportunity to develop through Scouting is that of leadership. We are aware of a number of Explorer Scouts being presented by their schools for the SQA Leadership Award, building on the Young Leader training and experience available to them through Scouting. However, such instances remain rare and generally arise from an approach from local Scouting to a school rather than as a consequence of specific actions of a school to recognise and harness wider experiences and achievements of their pupils.

In general there remains a disconnect between schools and a youth work sector whose workforce is predominantly made up of trained and committed volunteers whose time is limited usually to out of school hours. To be serious about a commitment to recognising the wider achievements of young people more resources will have to be found to bridge the gap between formal and non-formal education provision, helping to ensure that achievements and skills acquired out of school are properly captured in themselves, but also, as with the SQA Leadership Award and the Explorer Scout Young Leader Scheme, channelled appropriately to secure recognised qualifications.

Age Ranges

Scouting’s youth programme is tailored across 5 age bands, from 6 to 25. Youth work in general is seen as aimed at young people aged 12+. However, there is growing recognition within the youth work sector of the importance of provision for 8 to 12s, spanning the critical years of transition from P7 to S1 education. Indeed the Smith Group Report whilst recognising that ‘the pre-school years represent perhaps the greatest opportunity in determining future destinations for young Scots’ also pointed to the ‘importance of the transition from primary to secondary school’.

Through its National Activity Centres, Scouts Scotland provides support to this transition cohort through a range of residential and non-residential outdoor learning experiences designed to support aspects of CfE, providing opportunities for young people to also develop important skills in teamwork, leadership and problem-solving.

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There is a need for wider recognition of the quality and impact of such provision, not just from Scouting but also from a number of third sector youth work organisations that seek to provide similar opportunities through their programmes. There is a large body of research evidencing the positive impact that residential outdoor learning experiences can have on young people, no matter their background and academic skills. Indeed the origins of Scouting, the outdoor focus of much of its programme and its growth into the world’s largest youth Movement, testify to the attraction and value of such experiences and approaches. The benefits are such that we believe all our young people should have the opportunity to participate in residential learning experiences at some point during their time in school.

Conclusion

The recently published CBI Scotland Report on Scottish schools makes the following opening remarks: ‘Business is clear – we need an education system which develops rigorous, rounded and grounded young people. This means a system which focuses as much on the development of key attitudes and attributes – such as confidence, resilience, enterprise, ambition – as on academic progression and attainment.’

There is little we can disagree with in this statement. Our schools, and employers, must not only focus on academic achievement but also promote and facilitate recognition of wider achievement. To that end, however, they must recognise that our ‘education system’ is not just schools and colleges, but embraces a wide array of non-formal learning provision, epitomised in particular by that provided by the youth work sector.

Youth work organisations such as Scouts Scotland make a significant, but often under-acknowledged contribution, to the development of the whole young person. With the support of business and government they could do so much more, reaching out and engaging with more young people, helping them secure life changing skills and opportunities.

Resourcing improved collaboration between schools and the youth work sector will reap dividends for young people, schools and employers, helping young people to better articulate their achievements; schools to fully record these alongside attainment; and employers to see a more rounded picture of their future workforce.

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6 Delivering Excellence - A New approach for Schools in Scotland, CBI Scotland, March 2015