

Dumfries and Galloway Employability Workshop

Note of discussion

On Friday 28 September 2012, the Finance Committee held three workshops across Scotland with key employability stakeholders. The key themes from the workshop in Dumfries, Dumfries & Galloway, which was attended by John Mason MSP, Deputy Convener and Elaine Murray MSP, are summarised below.

Session one (local employment partnership)

- The LEP highlighted the efforts made in pulling the work of the various partners together. One of the key challenge within the area was finding placements within small number of suitable SME's
- There was a view that the LEP agencies needed to tailor their work to meet the needs of local people. The key sectors within the area were hospitality, tourism, leisure, catering and that is where funding should be directed
- There was a perception, which needs to be tackled, that hospitality etc. was sometimes regarded as "basic and entry level" employment which wouldn't offer opportunity for progression up a career path
- The importance of good broadband coverage and connectivity in developing and supporting an entrepreneurial spirit was highlighted as this could then open up opportunity for SMEs and creating employment opportunities
- The point was made that one to one support was successful but was costly
- There were concerns over the application of national employment schemes, which could be too 'urban centric' in a rural setting such as Dumfries & Galloway
- A view was expressed that success shouldn't always be measured as just getting a person into employment but also recognise the importance of getting an individual on to a course which could develop their communication, social etc. skills and confidence and which could then increase their chances of getting into full time employment
- A number of ideas were put forward for action by the Scottish Government and others:
 - ❖ Incentivise employers to take on more placements through rates relief, financial support with NI contributions
 - ❖ The area needs to be more skilled at tapping in to EU funding
 - ❖ There was confusion over the number, type, purpose of the various employment and training schemes out there and the crossover (duplication?) which exists as a result – too many funding schemes from too many sources – "There is a funding industry out there!"
 - ❖ As a result of this, how are schools meant to make sense of all of this?
 - ❖ Not enough dialogue with young people as to what they actually need
 - ❖ Better use could be made of the LEP and the local intelligence it has
 - ❖ Make sure that all training etc. schemes are sustainable in the long term – funding is too short term
 - ❖ This is not about getting more money but about getting more out of the funding which is available

Session two (businesses)

- In discussion about SMEs, the question was asked as to whether businesses were making enough time available to provide mentoring and training for work placements
- Are businesses sending people on the right training or are they doing so because that is where the funding for training was
- Concern expressed at the lack of private sector involvement in the LEP
- There is a need to train management at the top so that they understand the need for, and importance of, the right training at the bottom of the organisation
- There was a lack of proper training facilities to assist with catering industry which was an issue given the areas reliance on the hospitality and tourism sector. It was critical that proper training eg a centre of catering excellence was established which could allow for degree courses to be offered
- Attempt was being made to get in to schools to highlight career options for other business areas but this was proving difficult with the college sector. There needs to be a cultural shift to identify other sectors which could be available to school leavers
- There is a need for employers to identify the skills which their employees have
- The various schemes eg Get Ready For Work are 'knocking on the doors of employers' which is causing confusion
- Why are public sector orgs being given money to train, recruit, employ individuals.
- Training can be a luxury when squeezing margins. Plea was made for public sector contracts to include 'a bit of fat' which would allow for proper training
- Some employers needed to employ people who could "hit the ground running within 5 minutes of entering the building" as training could be an expensive 'luxury' - the persons attitude to work was vital
- There was an assumption that when new money becomes available then public sector will retain that money to then deliver the service itself and not look to get private sector involved
- Good communication and improving ability of people to communicate and develop interpersonal skills was vital
- There could be more support for SMEs with 'core' training support around, for example, HR, health and safety. In addition, some of the Ayrshire local enterprise companies had pooled funding to provide communications skills training
- Schools have failed in ability to think of first principles and of the needs of business
- Real scenario of generations of families who have never worked and the challenge that brings with attitude towards working and getting a job, poor communication skills, difficulty in wider social settings or work environment
- Scenario exists of pupils leaving school, then going to university, then becoming teachers and never having worked outwith the education field (and the local area) thereby lacking wider views or perspective
- Importance and benefits of buddying between young person entering employment and older person to guide and mentor
- It needs to be made worthwhile for employees to actually take a person on say a 6 month placement

- There needs to be a cultural shift with people leaving university who expect to get a job
- When the economy does improve, are we going to have people with the proper skills to meet that challenge
- There are too many initiatives. The landscape is very complex and is dominated by national programmes

Session three (third sector)

- It was found to be difficult to get third, private and public sector around the table at the same time. Do talk about working together but is difficult on the ground
- A challenge is keeping young people involved and in to work placements or training particularly since they can earn more by staying on income support or other allowance. A similar point was made about travel costs which could make it too expensive for the person to take up the offer of employment
- With the various training etc schemes available there is unnecessary duplication of effort. Too many funding streams and too many evaluation processes, very complex landscape
- Wasn't clear who made up this employability pipeline everyone was talking about
- Very low referrals from Skills Dev. Scotland. Did SDS know about these 'problem youngsters' or were they not engaging with SDS? Point is they are falling through the cracks
- If SDS is not able to do the chasing and the referrals then give the money to the third sector and they will do the chasing
- Many of the referrals have poor communication etc skills which the third sector bodies are having to work on, within very short timescales, to get them for work. Getting 16-18 years old into work when they have simply not engaged at school, and lack core skills, is extremely difficult
- Scenario of public sector employees taking early retirement but then going back into the job market thereby 'taking' a job that could have been taken up by someone else particularly when it is a job for which that person was well suited
- Need to expand the thinking of young people geographically and take them to a different area to broaden horizons
- Can be criticism of third sector bodies when they take a person to an employer who is then critical about the quality of the person. Point made that the person is much better skilled and work ready than when 'they got that person' from school
- Need for more investment earlier on eg at school rather than spending money of programmes later on. Even with good qualifications some people are not ready for the workplace and have not been prepared properly while at school
- Third sector having to chase funding which is also too short term
- Don't place the burden of educating young people on employers they are there to train

Session four (job seekers, in training)

- General problems around travel to and from interviews or when successful at getting a job – more support needed here (due to high travel costs it was sometimes not worth taking the job)
- Lack of speciality training in catering, hospitality sector – surprising given importance to local economy

- Jobs were out there but it was becoming even more difficult for people to get in to them
- Problem of being on a recognised course e.g. Work Programme which then 'cuts' off other opportunities (i.e. funding). Example given of being on Work Programme which meant they could not run a course on a purely voluntary basis and for which they were trained and qualified as they would lose entitlements
- Lack of informed and useful guidance coming out of the schools
- Government should make much more use of social media to get information 'out there'
- General view was that Job Centre wasn't particularly helpful/useful
- Child-minding a real difficulty with lack of financial support which limits opportunity to take up or remain in employment

John Mason MSP
Elaine Murray MSP