

Dundee 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 Dundee, which was attended by Gavin Brown MSP, are summarised below.

Meeting with employability partnership

There was recognition that there was a need to consider the demand side of the economy (not just the supply). In particular, there was a need to create job opportunities through regeneration;

The local employability partnership has developed an information management system to better track individual client's progression through the employability pipeline;

When the employability partnership was formed in 2008 there was a conscious decision to co-locate services such as Jobcentre Plus, More Choices, More Chances, housing association etc. This facilitates quicker referrals. Skills Development Scotland is now in the same centre;

The partnership does not pool resources but did align resources. Pooling of resources was also complicated by the different times at which funding came in;

There was a disconnect between Community Jobs and Lottery-funded projects and local initiatives which needed to be addressed;

Building relationships with employers was considered to be a significant hurdle and one that took time to develop. There was recognition by the employability partnership that it was in the early stages of developing this kind of partnership;

There was recognition that there was a need to look at public sector employment opportunities; NHS Tayside and Dundee City Council are the biggest employers in the area;

There was a feeling that legislation still focuses funding on crisis interventions rather than on early intervention. There was recognition that there needs to be a shift in funding to facilitate early intervention.

Meeting with the business sector

Businesses wanted to take on staff but needed the right people. There was a suggestion that skills learnt in colleges were not always suitable for the specific job on offer and, as a consequence, businesses sought more direct engagement with colleges;

There was a need for greater focus and better understanding of the needs of individual employers. Likewise, employers would welcome more information about

the needs of individuals to whom they were asked to provide employment opportunities;

A key problem for SMEs was navigating and understanding the complex employment/employability landscape. It could be hugely time-consuming and it was not always clear to whom to speak. Often there was one person in the SME performing a whole range of jobs as well as an HR role;

There was a need for more flexible funding solutions that are local orientated;

There were mixed views among the business sector on contact with public sector agencies. One participant reported two different branches of Skills Development Scotland providing different advice and different funding arrangements;

The key issue for employers was attitude; a person could be trained up for the specific skills required for the job;

There was a feeling that some sectors, such as hospitality, were not seen as an attractive career route;

By focussing on reaching a “positive destination” it was possible for individuals to fall through the gaps. For example, obtaining a place at college was a “positive destination” even if the course was not then completed;

A key issue was a lack of confidence, but participants emphasised that such skills could be learned through appropriate training in communication, confidence and respect. More funding for confidence-building training was required;

Small businesses would welcome further support, such as handbook on employment legislation;

Sometimes businesses reported that they were not receiving in-work support that had been promised;

Businesses suggested that sometimes it was easier for businesses to take on young people, such as those on the Get Ready for Work scheme, because it was easier to train them up;

Small businesses cannot access credit so, in some cases, their growth plan is put on the backburner;

There was a view that there was too much focus on numbers and purely achieving targets.

Meeting with third sector organisations

Third sector organisations reported that sustaining programmes in the economic current climate is proving hard;

A key issue is the multiplicity of schemes and funding mechanisms. There is a very complex employment support landscape. In some cases, third sector organisations could only offer services in connection with certain government programmes;

A further key issue is annual funding. Organisations suggested that two year funding would be an improvement but that, ideally, they would seek three-year funding;

Participants commented on the amount of administration required as a condition of receipt of funding. The European Social Fund was identified as being particularly burdensome requiring 100% traceability of all funding (ie. collection of receipts, tickets etc). It was pointed out that the objective of support programmes was to encourage people to self-manage but instead they ended up being managed because the system was so complex;

There needed to be greater focus on social skills rather than job-seeking skills;

Participants suggested that the optimum length of time to work with individuals furthest from the labour market is 6 to 12 months and that continuity of contact was extremely important;

Participants emphasised that small group working is preferable, as peer support is very important. Although there was always a case for individual support in some cases;

Third sector organisations suggested that public sector bodies should also be looking to hire vulnerable people;

It was pointed out that less than 10% of jobs are obtained through traditional job routes and therefore developing relationships with local employers was extremely important and needed to be developed over time;

There was a difficulty in cases where individuals were mandated to attend a course or take up an employment opportunity irrespective of their interests and skills;

It was suggested that modern apprenticeships were often not appropriate for this client group as they cannot compete with the other applicants.

Meeting with service users

The key message was how much difference even a short course (5 to 6 weeks) with one of the third sector organisations providing employability support could make. Such courses provided core skills such as interview technique, application form filling, IT help, energy efficiency, quick meals. A key message was that such courses improved confidence and self-esteem;

Participants often then went into volunteer work, building up their confidence in the work place with the aim of obtaining a job;

The focus of such programmes was getting individuals into sustainable jobs;

Such courses were provided in a group setting and this was considered a real benefit by participants; it acted as both a support mechanism and also assisted with communication skills and building confidence;

Participants indicated that they had wished that they had been offered such courses earlier. One participant had spent years on income support and had only been provided information about the course and was able to access it once they were on job seekers allowance;

There was a real risk of vulnerable people moving from one training programme to another without any incentive;

A number of participants suggested that compliance/application paperwork needs rethinking;

It was suggested that there was insufficient flexibility in the provision of support once in the workplace; for example, childcare support might not be available during the evenings or at weekends or once a programme had been completed.

Gavin Brown MSP