Skills Development Scotland Submission

Skills Development Scotland (SDS) is Scotland’s national skills agency, and is focused on contributing to the delivery of the Scottish Government’s Economic Strategy and the Skills Strategy for Scotland. Our work is further shaped by the Scottish Government’s Career Information, Advice and Guidance Strategy and more recently, the Youth Employment Strategy. We set out our vision and future development and delivery plans in our Corporate Strategy (2012-15) and annual Operating Plan (2012-13)\(^1\). SDS’s Corporate Strategy clearly sets out three key aims that guide SDS’s activity:

- **Enable people to meet their potential** through the delivery of careers, skills and employability support to those who need it most, particularly young people;
- **Make skills work for employers**: listen to employers to understand their needs;
- **Working together to improve the skills and learning system**: working with local and national partners to improve, integrate and simplify services to employers and align provision of skills with employer needs.

SDS welcomes the opportunity input to the Local Government and Regeneration Committee inquiry on local government shared services. Our views, in relation to the questions posed by the committee, are embedded in our response and are limited to the questions which we feel are directly related to the key role we play in shaping Scotland’s skills and learning landscape.

Given that SDS is not a statutory Community Planning Partnership (CPP) member our views are taken from a national perspective. It should however be noted that SDS is represented at Board level in 21 Local Authorities (LAs) and involved in key employability CPP sub groups in all 32 LAs. In order to illustrate some of our key activities at a local level we have included practical examples of SDS links to the CPPs to demonstrate how they support delivery and prepare Scotland’s workforce to maximise opportunities in today’s dynamic world.

**Partnership Working**

As a national organisation it is vital for SDS to work closely with CPPs at a local level. We are working closely with local authorities and CPPs to develop a range of services and activity including:

- Local Youth Employment Action Plans;
- A blended Career Information, Advice and Guidance service that includes our web service My World of Work (MyWoW);
- Case managed face-to-face support for all unemployed 16-19-year-olds;
- The national 16+ Learning Choices Data Hub providing information on what young people are doing, whether or not they are positively engaged and if they need further support;

---

In partnership with the Scottish Qualifications Agency (SQA), employers and young people, we are developing a new national award ‘The Certificate of Work Readiness’ to help young people demonstrate their work-readiness to future employers;

16+ Learning Choices Data Hub

The development of innovative approaches to data sharing across partnerships provides an example of collaborative arrangements to tackle social problems. For example, many organisations at a local level have separate databases which hold information on clients. It is essential that young people, especially those at a disadvantage in terms of life chances, benefit from the best support they can get at transition points in their lives, such as leaving school and entering college. The Scottish Government and 16+ Learning Choices/More Choices More Chances (MCMC) delivery partners recognise the value that data sharing brings to successful delivery for young people and, to enable this, SDS is tasked by the Scottish Government as part of the Post 16 Education (Scotland) Bill, with developing and sustaining the 16+ Learning Choices data hub for the benefit of all involved partners. At this point the main data sharing partners are SDS, all LAs and colleges in Scotland, the Student Awards Agency for Scotland (SAAS) and Jobcentre Plus.

SDS approaches the 16+ Learning Choices data hub as a joint endeavour between data sharing partners and focuses on the key success factor of embedding data sharing in the robust legal, governance and technical framework which make up the 16+ Learning Choices data hub. The intended benefits from the data hub are:

- A more effective and personalised service for young people, leading to more young people in positive destinations;
- Removal of data gaps and duplication to provide more effective and easier working for front-line service delivery staff;
- More comprehensive and robust management information that supports well-informed strategy decisions;
- More accurate and complete reporting to Scottish Government, particularly in relation to Opportunities for All.

The aim of the 16+ Learning Choices data hub is to achieve these benefits and support young people from S3 onwards by providing the central mechanism in Scotland for bringing together and sharing the information available on young people and their learning choices. Effective, straightforward data sharing between partners will support 16+ Learning Choices and Opportunities for All by achieving a more complete and reliable data set for all partners, allowing them to quickly identify and engage with any young person dropping out or failing to complete their learning choice, with a view to re-engaging them in the system.

At the time of writing, the core legal, governance and technical frameworks are in place, and SDS current activity is centred on sustaining and enhancing the data hub so that it can progressively better meet the needs of all partners and respond to evolving service delivery and management of reporting needs.

SDS will provide evidence to the Education & Culture Committee 19/2/13 on the provisions in the Post 16 Education (Scotland) Bill which relate to data sharing.
Addressing Youth Employment

There have been significant changes in the way that SDS works with CPPs, bringing new approaches to service delivery, particularly in relation to employment and economic development. Given the current and prevailing economic challenges faced by Scottish businesses and individuals, especially with regard to increasing long-term youth unemployment, it is crucial that we maximise benefit from the public purse by simplifying the way pre-employment programmes are commissioned and delivered.

The new Employability Fund addresses this issue by pulling together funding for all National Training Programmes (NTPs), except Modern Apprenticeships. Building on the experience of working with CPPs to co-commission provision in each LA area we are working with CPP nominees to ensure that provision is appropriate for the local skills pipeline. Local employability partnerships (LEP) have been directly involved in providing information for potential bidders and a LEP nominee will be directly involved in the decision making process on the award of Employability Fund programme starts to bidders in an area.

There are challenges in ensuring that public funding, local or national, supports local employability initiatives with no duplication, and that the provision meets the needs of the local economy. Recent developments, including the production of local Youth Employment Activity Plans, are an important step in helping to target resources. With the range of organisations involved in providing support to all age groups this can be a complex activity including different organisations contracting with the same providers for delivery. There is the potential for all partners to consider approaches similar to the Local Employability Fund processes to help target funding and activity.

Helping Employers

It has been argued that the public sector support for employers can be confusing and complex. In response to this call for action, SDS has been working with CPP partners to support the introduction of and further development of Our Skillsforce (OSF), which is a new simple and easy to use web service which helps simplify the skills landscape and makes it easier for employers to access and navigate public sector employability services in Scotland. Launched on 2 November 2012, OSF is hub of skills information - with national, regional and local information on recruitment, training and workforce development, to help employers explore the range of programmes, financial support and resources available to help them plan for, recruit and develop a skilled workforce. It draws together skills services offers from SDS, DWP and Scotland’s 32 LAs, amongst other agencies and sources so employers can find all the information they need on skills and workforce development in one place.

IT

Sharing services and resources within the public sector allows for efficiency savings. Since 2011 SDS has provided a shared IS service to Scottish Enterprise, Scottish Development International, the Scottish Criminal Cases Review Commission and Highlands and Islands Enterprise. This is a managed service, which supports approximately 2,500 users across 90 sites in Scotland and worldwide. The contract provides for significant savings during its term.

Conclusion
Moving forward, SDS welcomes the development of the revised Single Outcome Agreement Guidance issued on 4th of December 2012 and we will be working closely with CPPs over the next few months to ensure that SDS activity reflects local priorities, and that our activities contribute to the key themes relating to the economy and employment.

Skills Development Scotland
January 2013