FDM Group, Glasgow
21 April 2017

In attendance:

- Bill Bowman MSP
- John Mason MSP
- Gil Paterson MSP
- Jane Gotts, Adviser to the Committee
- Jennifer Holmes – Head of Getting Back to Business
- Dan Scully – Glasgow Head of Sales
- Norman Yarwood – Business Operations Manager Ex Forces
- Lynn McPhee – Glasgow Academy Manager
- Julie Angus – Getting Back to Business Recruiter

FDM Group is a professional services provider with a focus on IT and the UK’s leading IT graduate employer. FDM runs a variety of careers programmes targeting graduates, ex-Forces personnel and returners. Graduates of their Academy progress to represent FDM on client sites as FDM Consultants for a minimum of two years.

- Training through the Academy is free
- FDM have had nearly 200 successful Academy leavers in Scotland to date.

FDM have over 180 clients worldwide and supply consultants in various sectors, including financial services, media, retail, insurance and the public sector.

- In Scotland, clients include SKY, HSBC, RBS and Hewlett Packard to name but a few.

The Glasgow office was established in 2014 to engage with Scottish graduates. It was felt a Glasgow office would keep continuity for the graduates, and allow FDM to fill client demand.

FDM have a gender balance of above the sector average. This has been achieved in the Glasgow Academy by drawing on lessons learned in London and Leeds Academies, and a strong desire to have more women working in IT. They acknowledge it is a male dominated environment, but that it is changing.

FDM do not require STEM degrees as background for applicants. This is one of their successes in attracting women into their programme, although they suggest that they have had to convince women that they can work in the IT field without an IT background. They have chosen to “forget the STEM pipeline” and rather look at retraining individuals with a minimum 2.2 degree and transferrable skills.

- This is in contrast with other organisations who have a very strict recruitment policy (ie STEM university degree with a First), and
therefore have a very small pool of candidates from which to recruit.

- Applicants spend up to 16 weeks in the Academy during which they are assessed and, in dialogue with trainers, identified for streams of development
  - those in the Academy “often feel they’ve taken the wrong degrees” first time around and find it refreshing when they are able engage in the process of choosing their career stream.

- FDM is keen to establish “diversity as the norm”. They look at diversity at all stages of the recruitment process, and use a strengths-based recruitment approach that allows them to look at the potential of applicants.
  - This is partly driven by clients, who are increasingly demanding a more diverse pool of talent from which to choose. One major client demands a gender balanced (50:50) pool from which to sift.

- FDM identified blocks to women entering the IT field:
  - The language used is “vital”, with a feeling that woman are particularly sensitive to the language around both IT and recruitment.
  - Mothers – want their daughters to choose career paths similar to their own, and many struggle to keep up with current opportunities in IT which didn’t exist 30 years ago
  - Careers advisory staff in schools who are also out of date with current IT opportunities
    - however, FDM find that the women who come in are excited by what they see and then get actively involved

- The “training pipeline” begins at school, but there is a need to retain qualified and experienced women in IT by encouraging them to return to the workplace following a career break (child care, caring, relocation).

**Returners Programme**

- The programme was launched in Hong Kong and was client driven. The appetite to run a similar scheme in the UK was recognised and a pilot programme was launched in 2016 in London.
  - The first programme was very successful but lessons were learned from the second which went for volume of applicants and not the same standards. FDM has learned that getting the right people into the programme is the key to success.
  - Clients are often looking for those who have been business analysts or project managers

- The programme takes on men and women, and is keen not to portray that this is about “mums going back to work” – it’s about professional
women (and men) who are returning after a career break – it aims to “legitimise the career break”.

- “100% of returners [male or female] have lost confidence”, so a key part of the programme is a Pro Skills Week which is focused on building confidence.
  - the loss of confidence is both personal and professional

- The Getting Back to Business returners programme (which is open to both men and women) has seen “massive loyalty” from those who complete it.

- FDM liaises with companies to determine what they want, and while several are very interested in the programme, some are unsure about committing to taking on returners as they are an “unknown quantity”.
  - senior managers are often on board, but there are often stumbling blocks at HR/recruitment level
    - HR departments will often automatically cull applicants with a gap of 2+ years on their CV
    - the Pro Skills Week works to “legitimise” the career break – but need companies to do the same.
  - need incentives to make companies take on returners
    - targets around sifts and recruitment panels may be needed