

Note of visits and engagement undertaken in Stirling on 30/31 August 2016

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Meeting with teachers, parents, pupils and stakeholders Stirling, 30 August 2016

Members present

- James Dornan MSP
- Johann Lamont MSP
- Jenny Gilruth MSP
- Colin Beattie MSP
- Fulton MacGregor MSP
- Gillian Martin MSP
- Ross Thomson MSP
- Daniel Johnson MSP
- Ross Greer MSP
- Tavish Scott MSP

Discussion group: Early years

Building relationships with the whole family

- The attendees agreed that being family-centred is very important to delivering early years care as supporting and engaging with parents and/or carers is key to supporting the child. Attendees also agreed that valuing the relationship with the family is part of the culture in early years.
- One of the issues identified was that some families do not take up the free nursery provision. The attendees agreed that it is important to link with key-workers and family-workers to help identify those families who may require support to enrol their children into nursery and taking up the available free provision. This requires working sensitively and dealing with a number of issues. It was noted that the more parents have confidence in the work of the nursery, the more their children will attend.

Childminding

- There was recognition of the distinct role that childminding has to play in delivering child care and early years provision. It was noted, however, that parents cannot use their entitlement for free early years provision at a childminder, which means that parents are financially incentivised to move their children to a nursery once they become eligible for free hours and this can cause disruption.
- Childminders can have weaker links to other support services for young children and their families and sometimes the only contact with those services is at drop off/pick at the child's school or nursery.
- Attendees argued that childminders should be more valued within early years policy.

Flexibility

- The attendees agreed that the most important thing about early years policy is that it should be flexible so that the providers are able to tailor their service to meet the needs of the children and their families.
- Particularly, the attendees argued that there should be greater flexibility in the transition to primary, perhaps with a move to having two intakes to Primary 1. It was argued that while this is often to do with the age of the child, it is not always the case. However, there was no support for a suggestion that nursery staff should have any decision-making powers in this regard.

Additional support needs

- There was some concern about the support available for children with additional support needs. Particularly there were concerns about the funding available and how funding is allocated. Access to funding support could be bureaucratic and potentially off-putting to parents who, for example, may not want to engage with social services or for their children to receive a diagnosis.
- One organisation that specialised in services for families with children with special needs organised play groups for those children. Some of the benefits of these groups were that they created opportunities for play and socialising; gave parents respite; and signposted families to other support services.
- Some argued that there was a lack of childcare provision for children with special needs and especially flexible wrap-around care. It was noted in this context that childminders are not always able to support children with additional support needs (although some do), they do not attract additional government funding nor do they have access to the wider support (e.g. educational psychologists) that would be available to a local authority nursery.

Discussion group: primary school aged children

The benefits of the Raploch community campus

The campus includes three primary schools, one of which is a special education facility for those with complex additional support needs, a nursery school, Forth Valley College beauty therapy and catering courses and council and community services. Attendees noted that this co-location of services allows for an integrated approach to be taken. For example, the schools and nursery share expressive arts, sports and outside play and learning facilities. The pupils eat together - food is prepared by Forth Valley College catering students; they also play together in the playground under supervision from by staff across the different schools.

Attendees suggested that the inclusive model, which encourages interaction between able bodied and disabled children, not only encourages pupils to establish or maintain relationships with their peers, but should have beneficial long-term benefits, with a more widespread understanding and appreciation of the needs of and respect for disabled people.

Co-location in one campus has allowed teachers to develop their knowledge of groups working in the voluntary sector, so that they can signpost parents where to go for assistance and support. It also enables different communities to link up with the schools. An example is the intergenerational gardening group.

Attendees suggested that co-location supports the development of education and encourages lifelong learning in an area that has suffered from lower education outcomes and lower than average employment.

Work to improve outcomes

A number of examples were cited that demonstrate how schools on the Raploch campus are grappling with the impact and consequences of modern-day living.

A major issue identified was the lack of pupils' focus and attention. A number of approaches were being taken to deal with the problem:

- breakfast clubs, where children from different backgrounds are able to mix, have the added benefit of allowing the pupils to settle down before the learning day begins, leading to improved behaviour
- poor sleeping patterns was a growing issue, with pupils turning up to school too tired to learn. An element of that appeared to be the increasing use and - presumably – the overuse of electronic devices. One school was carrying out work with families on bed-time routines. Another example was the establishment of a sleep clinic to help the learning process
- work with a speech and language therapist to help teach children how to listen effectively
- educational psychologists are providing support, and techniques such as mindfulness are being deployed, as well as a focus on wellbeing

Separately, there were examples of social norms classes to look at gender stereotyping. An element of that work was the language being used by, for example, boys to describe girls.

Emerging themes expressed by attendees

The need to tackle, first and foremost, social disadvantage; without addressing that, then closing the attainment gap - improving numeracy and literacy levels – will not be possible.

The further extension of teachers' role into the social sphere. Teachers are having to adapt to and deal with modern problems, and time is being dedicated to instructing on life and social skills that were previously considered to be the preserve of parents.

A teacher's role is not simply about teaching, but ensuring that they prepare the pupils so that they are ready and able to learn.

Attendees suggested that schools can play their part, but tackling attainment issues will only be achieved with the involvement of and collaboration with local communities and voluntary sectors. Furthermore, meeting that objective will require a refocusing of efforts and a culture change, as well as giving schools greater flexibility and freedom to act and react to the individual circumstances of their pupils.

Teachers expressed a strong belief in their ability to impact positively on their pupils at any stage. The earlier that happens, the better. It was suggested that, by the time some pupils moved from the early years to primary, they were already 18 months behind in their learning. Work was on-going with early years' colleagues to improve the situation, the main gains would be through increasing the focus on the early years.

It was argued that the need to tackle the underlying problems is key, rather than addressing the problems as and when presented, with a community-based approach to improving education and improving life chances. To achieve that outcome there is a need to know how to co-ordinate the different players, as well as how to share and learn about best practice. It was suggested that that work should include better support for parents and helping to equip them with the right parenting skills, particularly for those who had not been parented themselves.

It was suggested that here is no quick solution to the issues, and long-term financial and non-financial investment would be required.

There was strong support for GIRFEC.

High workload was identified as an issue. Some staff were prepared to provide additional support above and beyond and be involved with extra-curricular activity; others were not.

The need to provide extended learning support for those with additional support needs was discussed. The presumption of mainstreaming disabled children, given their different needs, was questioned by some.

The poor information technology structure was highlighted, and concerns that that limits the ability of different bodies to interact with each other.

It was suggested that there can be too much bureaucracy and paperwork and that can get in the way of the priority: teaching children.

Discussion group: secondary school age

Value of volunteering/extra curricular activity

The value of a volunteer in mentoring young people was discussed. Attendees suggested that young people need a trusting relationship with an adult, who can be a teacher, project worker or volunteer. It was noted the role of volunteers is different to professional staff, and is very valuable; however it can be difficult to get sustainable funding for volunteering projects, or projects that might be considered 'extra curricular' despite them showing their worth in developing young peoples' confidence and trust.

This was evidenced in the role of teachers in the Big Noise projects. Pupils built up a trust with them that generally is not possible with class teachers. The Big Noise project can develop young people's confidence and their willingness to try – and stick at - new things. This was suggested to have 'spillover' effects to school work and the impact of Big Noise can be on the wider family as well as the pupil.

Developing the Young Workforce

Attendees noted that it is important to link school and school activities with local employers in order to help develop employability skills. Scottish Government

policies such as 'Developing the Young Workforce' were considered valuable, but the approach to funding was queried. While DYW is a long term strategy, funding had been allocated for 2 years.

Within a broad framework, it was argued that schools should be given discretion to develop the employability projects that best reflect their local situation.

Education Reforms: GIRFEC, CfE, governance

There were some comments in favour of greater autonomy for schools. Views were expressed that autonomy should perhaps not be imposed on all schools and a tandem issue of importance was developing genuine partnerships.

Views were expressed that the recent guidance on CfE had not simplified matters as yet, and some considered that previous efforts to tackle bureaucracy had not been particularly successful.

Some had a view that the Standard Grade had enabled nearly all pupils to sit an exam. The perceived prestige of sitting an external exam was noted.

Attendees identified that the pace of change in school education has been rapid and argued that this has impacted on teacher workload. For example, guidance teachers now work with GIRFEC which means the variety of issues they deal with has increased.

It was argued that the amount of work teachers are required to do in relation to SQA qualifications has increased. For example, National 4s are marked and assessed by teachers.

Visit to University of Stirling, MacRobert arts centre

31 August 2016

Members present

- Johann Lamont MSP
- Jenny Gilruth MSP
- Ross Thomson MSP

Background

The arts centre, based at the University of Stirling's campus, is a cultural hub for Stirling, Forth Valley and beyond. It states that it makes

“active connections with people communities and ideas, for entertainment, wellbeing and understanding”,

whose focus includes access, audience development, participation and outreach work.

At the time of our visit, students from Wallace high school's school of dance were working with a professional dancer/choreographer to create their own short piece based on “5 Soldiers”. The pupils were highly motivated and engaged, and it was clear how much they were benefiting not only from the professional instruction, but from the centre's facilities. Within a short time, they demonstrated their aptitude and ability to bring their own creative flair to their piece. The pupils' enthusiasm was infectious and, most important, they were all enjoying themselves.

The second element of the visit was to participate in a widening access workshop session. Pupils from the high school, under the guidance of mentors, discussed various degree subjects, including media and journalism, politics and psychology. The objective was for the pupils to spend time considering the subjects and what such a qualification might lead to, aided by someone with experience in the respective fields who could answer their queries, share their experiences and provide practical advice. In part, the session was to demonstrate the options and opportunities available to the pupils; it also aimed to encourage pupils to consider university as an alternative to going straight to work after school. Another element of the workshop was to help to tackle the gender imbalance in careers and to challenge the view that, for example, nursing and care roles are for females and science and technology careers are for men.

It was highlighted that the type of pupils sent by the schools differed widely, with some appearing to be more inclusive than others. The centre was keen to emphasise the importance of potential and the role that it could play to harness that potential.

The third and main element of the visit was a session on diversity in provision, creativity in widening access and working in partnership to deliver for students with a

range of University of Stirling, Open University and Forth Valley College staff and students.

Emerging themes

- The importance of taking into account individual's needs and circumstances. For example, ensuring that entry requirements are flexible to help those with aspirations to participate in education, while not forgetting the high performing students and offering them appropriate opportunities, too
- Work experience is often far more relevant than educational qualifications that may have been gained decades previously
- Getting out the message that ability and potential are more important than a person's background
- The value of student ambassadors who act as mentors and promote learner engagement and enhance the educational experience for students by improving the links to further study
- How to open up barriers to education, and how education institutions and councils can best work together to achieve that through partnership working
- The value in the work of the focus on college and university study west of Scotland (FOCUS West), which is part of the national schools for higher education programme (SHEP) in widening access to and increasing the number of pupils into higher education. (FOCUS West provides activities for targeted pupils from secondary 3 to 6, and is delivered by staff and students from colleges and universities on site.)
- The importance of a flexible approach to where learning takes place, in order to meet students' needs. That may mean taking the learning to the student
- The need to make clear the transformative power of education on lives
- Pockets of best practice, with a need to pull it all together and share how successful outcomes have been achieved across the country
- The tension between rigid funding streams, which may stifle creativity and innovative solutions to fit the individual
- Work has focused on S4 upwards, but a recognition of the need to get in earlier, so more activities are being built in for younger pupils. In addition, there is a need to focus support at the transition stages
- Need to ensure networks get the latest information on access and funded places
- The focus on STEM subjects has seen the development of valuable and successful programmes, but it may have led to arts being pushed out and tended to be an additional rather than a core part of schools work
- Improving and sustaining the dialogue between all the learning institutions is required to meet the needs of business
- Learning institutions must take account of modern life and the fact that people may be juggling their home, work and learning lives. The interaction between those three spheres is getting more complex, and institutions need to tackle the stress points, which may mean offering counselling and adopting a personal rather than a one-size-fits-all approach

- Institutions can be braver, more agile and quicker to reshape its programmes to meet the needs of learners. However, innovation can be hard to progress if the ideas are outwith rigid funding streams, so funding needs to be more flexible in order that different cohorts can be supported. Furthermore, funding needs to follow the successes
- Students' interest in courses should be the main driver in the provision of education rather than a top-down request to meet targets

Additional information

The University of Stirling provides targeted information, advice and guidance to schools in Stirling, Falkirk and Clackmannanshire with below average progression. This has led to a collaborative project, supported by the Impact to Access initiative, to tackle longstanding issues that have resulted in those low progression rates. The university also has its own access programme and works closely with the Scottish wider access programme (SWAP) to support adult returners.

On 5 September, a SFC conference - Impacting on Access 2016 - on widening access and equality, delivered in partnership with the University of Stirling will be held. It will be an the opportunity to share best practice and discuss the challenges set for the sector from the Commission on Widening Access and SFC gender action plan. The university received funding for the impact for access scheme and it will report the project's findings at the conference, with the aim of helping to shape future activity around addressing gender imbalances in higher education and the jobs market.

The college and the universities are working together in order to supply the students required by the life sciences sector. Through this collaboration, they are forming a joint curriculum, with bespoke programmes, and their offer is beyond what the universities could offer by themselves

[University of Stirling lift off project](#). A personal development programme to provide students with the confidence and tools to move from university to work.

[FOCUS West](#) (detailed above).

Macrobert arts centre focuses on the hard to reach groups – children and working families who might not otherwise find the centre by themselves and who face geographic, social and economic barriers to doing so. The centre plays an important role given that decreased funding means that pupils might be less likely to have access to the arts.

Specific action by the university on science includes a “science girl” forum, with a dedicated web page, and science fairs with a range of interactive activities aimed at enthusing young children about science

A STEM club has been established, and school-aged pupils participate in [STEM Plus](#), which runs workshops, competitions and awards relevant to the curriculum.

The University of Stirling's retention rates of 93.8% were among the best in Scotland, including the retention rate for students from the most deprived quintile (92.1%) and those with protected characteristics.

Visit to Stirling Community Enterprise on 31 August 2016

Context and visit programme

1. The Committee undertook a business planning day in Stirling on 30 and 31 August 2016. The Committee took the opportunity to engage with stakeholders and users of services across the Committee's remit. On 31 August 2016, Daniel Johnson MSP and Fulton MacGregor MSP visited Stirling Community Enterprise (SCE).
2. SCE offer a variety of supported training opportunities for people aged 16 – 64 years from across the Stirling Council area that are experiencing unemployment. The majority of its users are under 25 and the most popular courses are on construction and landscaping. SCE focus on helping individuals farthest from the jobs market or education. For example SCE offer courses to young people in the final term of schooling who are unlikely to leave with many qualifications, long-term unemployed and people leaving prison.
3. Along with vocational courses, SCE offer a personalised service to encourage soft skills required to get and keep employment. This included timekeeping, behaviours appropriate in workplaces, writing CVs and cover letters, and financial planning. SCE supports trainees in IT and to pass the Construction Skills Certification Scheme.
4. SCE signposts trainees to jobs, benefits and other public services. Indeed SCE is co-located with an addiction counselling service.
5. SCE welcomed the members and provided a short tour of the facilities in Raploch. Members then had the opportunity to talk to staff, volunteers and trainees about the work of SCE, the benefits of its services and the challenges it faces.

Themes from the discussion

Trainees/Service Users

6. The trainees were all very positive about the services that SCE provides. Many contrasted their negative experiences at school, which may have been chaotic and difficult, to the positive experiences at SCE. They felt that they were treated with respect and importantly that their confidence had increased through the programmes at SCE. It was clear that attendance at SCE provided the young men with much more than qualifications, it gave life structure. Without this alcohol abuse, crime and imprisonment were mentioned as likely ways in which life chances would be reduced.
7. The trainees appeared to enjoy the fact that they are able to work at their own pace and learn practical skills. The trainees had a clear understanding that the work at SCE could lead to employment or further education at the local college. One volunteer had previously undertaken construction courses at SCE, which

led to construction management courses at college and now he had started a degree course at Glasgow University in community development.

Staff

8. Some of the trainers employed at SCE had previously been service users. The staff were keen to point out that they provided a personalised service to the trainees. Trainees are referred to the SCE from a number of agencies, e.g. DWP, SDS, schools and prisons.
9. One of the main issues faced in the management of the SCE is the short term and precarious nature of funding, which in turn makes long term planning difficult to achieve.
10. The SCE is able to measure some outcomes for trainees. The SCE tracks positive destinations for up to 6 months after the completion of courses; measuring attendance; and, through surveys, increased confidence. Other outcomes are harder to measure; for example, increasing socialisation and reduced risk of alcohol abuse and crime.

Meetings with Children's Services stakeholders

Stirling 31 August 2016

Care experienced children and young people

1. Gillian Martin MSP met with young people with experience of being in care. The [biographies of the young people](#) and a [document from Who Cares Scotland on Outcomes for care experienced children and young people](#) highlights the issues covered during the discussion.

Kinship carers

2. The Convener had a discussion with three kinship carers from Midlothian Kinship Carers. This included individuals who are acting as primary carers for grandchildren and in one case for a great grandchild.

Emotional literacy session

3. The Convener and Gillian Martin MSP then had a session with children from Cowdenbeath Primary School using a "kitbag". The kitbag is one of an increasing number of initiatives being used in schools, often supported by charities or local authorities, to encourage emotional literacy. The kitbag's use in schools is promoted by Children 1st. Details from the creators of the kitbag can be viewed [here](#). A video on the kitbag including a demonstration can be found here: <https://vimeo.com/178624012>