

Education and Skills Committee

Note of visit to Scottish Maritime Academy, Peterhead, 29 January 2018

The Education and Skills Committee visited the Scottish Maritime Academy (SMA) on 29 January 2018. Members present were Gillian Martin MSP, Ruth Maguire MSP, Ross Greer MSP and Richard Lochhead MSP.

The SMA is part of the North East Scotland College (NESCOL). The Committee held a number of meetings with staff and students from the SMA and NESCOL.

Programme for the visit:

10.30 Arrival, briefing with Principal of NESCOL, Liz McIntyre

11.00 Tour of Scottish Maritime Academy

11.30 Informal discussion

Two groups:

- one with staff and students at SMA;
- one with staff and EU27 students from NESCOL, Fraserburgh Campus (ESOL and Computing Course students).

Meeting with Liz McIntyre, Principal, Duncan Abernethy, Director of Business Development, and Linda Hope, Manager of SMA

MSPs present: Gillian Martin MSP, Ruth Maguire MSP, Ross Greer MSP and Richard Lochhead MSP

Ms McIntyre gave members a briefing on NESCOL and the challenges of the merger of Banff and Buchan College and Aberdeen College. Ms McIntyre identified some benefits of the merger as being achieving economies of scale and sharing access to capital investment. Ms McIntyre noted that NESCOL's approach is now that there be differentiation across different campuses within the single institution.

Ms McIntyre also identified some forthcoming priorities for NESCOL: Fraserburgh Campus to refocus on local and community need; Aberdeen City Campus requires capital investment; and a focus on mechanical engineering and construction courses, especially at Altens campus.

STEM

Ruth Maguire asked about the uptake in STEM subjects and the links to local schools.

Ms McIntyre and Mr Abernethy identified a number of initiatives which were supporting girls and young women into STEM subjects—

- Supporting Foundation Apprenticeships;
- [Girls into Energy](#) which has grown to a current cohort of over 120. It is a National 5 level course and delivered in either schools or colleges, depending on the location.
- S2 STEM Skills Challenge – a competition open to all S2 children in Aberdeenshire, with the purpose of influencing subject choice.

Mr Abernethy reported an increase in young women taking STEM courses, particularly applied science courses.

Ms McIntyre and Mr Abernethy discussed [Gateway2Medicine](#), a Widening Access to higher education programme focusing on people from SIMD20 areas or who are care experienced. Students who pass this course have guaranteed entry to a medicine course at the University of Aberdeen.

Changing course structures

Ross Greer asked about how NESCOL was supporting a transition away from oil and gas.

Ms McIntyre said that NESCOL has a focus on upskilling and reskilling and the college was moving its focus away from full-time programmes to better meet the needs of the community. This led to a broader discussion of the role and flexibility of the college in mediating between the skills required by the local economy and the learners' needs.

Ms McIntyre noted that a full time course is considered to be 18 hours per week. Part time courses are also changing with a move away from offering National Certificate courses where people attend two nights a week and becoming more flexible. Mr Abernethy noted a dip in uptake of distance learning courses after the move from Individual Learning Accounts to [Individual Training Accounts](#), although he expects uptake to return to normal levels once people become familiar with ITAs.

Brexit

NESCOL

Ms McIntyre identified a number of areas where the work of NESCOL may be impacted by Brexit.

- Impact on lives.
A high number of NESCOL students come from EU27 countries. Many of those individuals will have met residency criteria (i.e. lived in the UK for 3 years). If significant numbers of these individuals returned to the EU27, there may be sustainability issues for the work of the college.
- European Social Fund
The ESF funds around 4,500 college students across Scotland.
- Skills gaps.

NESCOL will need to respond to local economic need. Ms McIntyre suggested that workforce planning should take place earlier in schools, particularly in supporting entry into STEM subjects.

SMA

Training for people working on fishing boats is funded (to a large degree) through the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund. This training is mandatory safety training and essential if individuals wish to start and progress their careers in fishing. Ms Hope stated that the training is improving the safety of working at sea.

Education reform

Ms McIntyre praised the way that local authorities had, under Developing Young Workforce, taken a strategic role and a useful conduit for the college to engage with young people and offer a variety of pathways. Headteachers are involved and have a relationship with the college, however it is the local authority which has the strategic and funder roles.

Ms McIntyre was concerned if this role were lost and the college had to negotiate separately with every secondary headteacher. There may also be a risk of heads seeking to duplicate provision that may be better delivered in a college.

Positive destinations

Ms McIntyre noted that it is easier to track destinations for students who progress to university rather than those who progress to work. In the latter case, the data relies on survey responses.

Senior phase/learner journey

Ms McIntyre said that NESCOL is making a good contribution to senior phase, including stepping in to offer courses that schools are unable to offer, e.g. Higher Psychology and Computing.

Ms McIntyre suggested that the value of S6 should be examined, especially with a 4 year degree structure. She said that there may be more value for some to start Higher National courses, which would then allow articulation to degree courses.

She mentioned an initiative called "Campus 6" which allows pupils to take part in courses at college without breaking their link with the school.

Discussion with students on Class 2 Deck Officer Fishing course

MSPs present: Richard Lochhead and Ruth Maguire.

Outlook

The students were positive about the future of the industry. One particularly highlighted the improving safety record as a reason he was seeking to change career; having worked on standby vessels until then.

Some concerns were raised about rising costs, especially the cost of diesel.

Students

The students were mostly from Scotland and many from Peterhead and the surrounding area. Two had come from England and commented that the fishing courses were not regularly offered in England.

The course is 12 weeks' long and students were not paid during this period. The fees are recoverable from the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund.

Brexit

The main concern raised was about funding for mandatory training courses. One also had concerns about access to the Republic of Ireland's fisheries.

Getting into the industry

The consensus was that schools did not support young people to get into the fishing industry. Most of the students had family ties to the industry, e.g. shares in a boat.

Training is focused on health and safety and most other learning is done on the job.

The group discussed how not enough young people were choosing a career in fishing. Furthermore, there were difficulties getting a place on a boat. It was noted that there are many foreign workers with tickets on fishing vessels and that these workers keep the industry going. The students identified improved support for young people to get into fishing as a key issue.

Discussion with EU27 students from NESCOL, Fraserburgh Campus

MSPs present: Ross Greer and Gillian Martin

All the nine students in attendance were young women. The majority were from Lithuania, two were from Latvia and one from Poland. The students were all studying Computing and English as a second language. A number had plans for further study, including childcare, teaching drama and mechanic. All attendees were also working at the same time as studying.

All but one of the students said they came to Scotland before the Brexit vote. The main response to being asked about their feelings on Brexit was about the uncertainty on their future in Scotland. A number of students notes how established they were in the North-East, having lived there for 7 years and their husband had been there for 15 years.

When asked whether the students knew of other people deciding not to seek to come to Scotland as a result of Brexit, one student responded that friends of hers in Lithuania still planned to come but they were delaying this plan 'until everything is settled'.

Students said they had lots of questions about work visas but had received little information from their embassy or the UK Government (one of nine had received an embassy email). They had received a letter from the Scottish Government in relation to tuition fees.

When asked if they still feel welcome one student said she had heard of bullying in England. Another suggested she is asked more questions since the Brexit vote to access services, such as joining a GP practice.

Brexit aside, everyone in the group said they wanted to remain in the North-East, having come here for various reasons (job, family, study, came on a holiday and stayed). UK Citizenship was touched upon but the consensus was that it was too expensive to apply.

NESCOL was praised for support on CVs, interview skills and work experience opportunities. One student stated 'if you ask for advice they will always help you'.