

Cross-Party Group on Skills

Friday 26 September 2025 (0930-1030)

Minute

Present

MSPs

Dr Pam Gosal MSP
Sharon Dowey MSP
Alexander Stewart MSP
Miles Briggs MSP
Paul Sweeney MSP

Invited guests

Jason Miles-Campbell, Director, Scotland and Northern Ireland
Alison Muckersie, Programme Director for Data-driven Innovation Skills Gateway,
University of Edinburgh
Alistair Rodgers, Director of Enterprise Development, Ayrshire College

Non-MSP Group Members

Tom Hall, Colleges Scotland
Anastasia Kourtis, Scottish Conservatives
Yvonne Wilson, Select
Victoria Manson, Federation of Small Businesses
Stuart McKenna, Scottish Training Federation
Paul Zealey, Skills Development Scotland
Fiona Harper, Select
Wendy Burton, Scottish Trade Union Congress
Al Walker, National Farmers Union Scotland
Keith Robson, Open University
Jim Millar, Scottish Land and Estates
Aimee Logan, Universities Scotland
Georgia Marks, Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS)
Ibiyemi Omeihe, University of the West of Scotland
Fiona Stewart, Skills Development Scotland
Sean Cameron, Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland
Stuart Farmer, Institute of Physics
Shona Matthews, Chartered Banker Institute
Robert Bruce, Enginuity
Kevin Kelman, NHS Scotland Academy
Liz Barron-Majerik, Lantra Scotland

Apologies

Stephen Kerr MSP, Scottish Conservatives
George Brown, Scottish Qualifications Authority
Ian Rogers, Scottish Decorators Federation
Steven MacLennan, CLD Standards Council Scotland
Rachael Nicholls, University of Strathclyde
Lauren Pennycook, Construction Industry Training Board
Georgia Marks, UCAS
Pauline Radcliffe, Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership
Kirsty Summers. Scotch Whisky Association

Welcome

The group's Convener, Dr Pam Gosal MSP, opened the meeting and noted apologies.

Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 30 May were approved.

Presentations

The topic for this meeting was Innovation and presentations were heard from:

- Jason Miles-Campbell, Director, Scotland and Northern Ireland
- Alison Muckersie, Programme Director for Data-driven Innovation Skills Gateway, University of Edinburgh
- Alistair Rodgers, Director of Enterprise Development, Ayrshire College

Discussion

Jason Miles Campbell covered the role of Jisc in Tertiary Education System and how this provided a foundation for innovation within colleges and universities, by facilitating innovation processes and providing the infrastructure to enable collaboration. This included the development of skills in AI and Automation to support innovative approaches to learning and teaching and working with College Local Innovation Centres, alongside the role of the Jisc Innovation Hub in enabling hands-on access to technologies.

Another aspect of Jisc's role of Innovation involved supporting institutions to make effective and efficient use of digital technologies to support connectivity and network security whilst being responsive against a context of challenging financial settlements. The intention is to build on this activity and continue to progress innovative approaches to shared services and create capacity, which was noted to have generated £1.5bn of economic impact in the wider UK economy.

Alison Muckersie provided an overview of the Data Skills Gateway Project and the activity that had been progressed in Developing Digital Literacy. The Project consists

of four interconnected projects on a multi-partner basis, including the Moray House School of Education and four Scottish colleges involved, alongside the Data Lab who held a current focus on mapping skills requirements and trialling approaches to the world of work. The Project was also focusing on innovative approaches to identifying gaps in provision and to that effect was working closely with the SQA on a new Data Science qualification.

Alison also touched on the partnership working with the college teams in supporting professional development through the Project, with an upskilling programme open to colleges across the region to develop data skills in school pupils and students. This partnership working also extended to the third sector through a shared focus on equality of opportunity, targeting underrepresented groups including women and returners to work and disabled citizens through innovative upskilling and reskilling activity.

Across this activity, the Project was recognising the importance of developing pathways for career enhancements along the skills pipeline, and connecting this to the development of innovative approaches to learning and teaching. Through employing this no one size fits all approach the Project had received external recognition including a British Data Award for Education Initiative of the Year. The focus in future would include AI Literacy giving the emerging importance of this to the wider economy.

Alistair Rodgers opened his presentation by focusing on the role of Ayrshire College in progressing activity related to the Prestwick Hub and facilitating Applied Innovation was in relation to the Aerospace sector was also explored, with the changing skills requirements of this sector forcing responses from the college sector and independent training providers.

The connections between colleges and Innovation Centres were also explored, including in relation to the Renewables and Energy Transition sectors and support being provided to industry partners in upskilling and reskilling activity, including through inward investment opportunities working with XLCC on sub-sea cable development and installation, with innovative practices being developed and delivered through this work, including through industry conversation programmes and new technologies.

To build on this work Alistair advised there was a need for a dedicated allocation of Knowledge Exchange and Skills Funding, which would enable the college sector to delivery activity which was previously facilitated through the Flexible Workforce Development Fund. This would ideally be complemented by increased capital investment across the college sector to match the ambitions and requirements of industry in Scotland. Alistair also recommended that the current limit on funding for Modern Apprenticeship places be considered by the Scottish Government, to provide increased numbers of skilled workers coming into key sectors for Scotland.

A Q&A followed, with Stuart McKenna making the ask of Alistair around Modern Apprenticeship provision. Alistair advised that currently Ayrshire College was unable to build on industry demand and respond to this within its current MA Funding Allocation, with SMEs and business missing out. Stuart queries whether there was a

reluctance from employers to contribute towards funding for Modern Apprentices, with Alistair highlighting the role of the Apprenticeship Levy and the need to see more value and return from this in a Scottish context, to match the return on investment seen in England. Stuart noted that contribution rates had not changed and were lower than in England. Fiona Stewart advised members on the procurement exercise conducted by Skills Development Scotland and that Ayrshire College had the opportunity to secure additional places in the system.

Shona Matthews queried on the disparity between Scotland and rest of the United Kingdom regarding the Apprenticeship Levy and how parity could be achieved in this context. The Convenor advised that an ask could be made on this agenda to the Scottish Government.

The Convenor raised concerns around AI and the pace of development and whether members had similar concerns around the education and skills system being left behind, and what discussions had been held around AI policy and regulation. Alison circulated an [AI Literacy Guide for Teachers](#) which evidenced examples of practice currently being employed. Jason advised that the majority of colleges and universities had AI policies but that there was always ongoing work required to support staff development regarding AI knowledge and understanding.

In concluding the discussion, the Convenor asked the presenters what their top asks of the Scottish Government would be, to inform correspondence to the Scottish Government on behalf of the group.

Close

With no other business to conduct, the meeting was brought to a close. It was noted that the next meeting would be the AGM, which would be scheduled for later in the calendar year, with further details to be provided in due course.