

# Cross-Party Group on Skills

Friday, 3 November 2023 (1000-1100)

Minute

Present

MSPs

Pam Gosal MSP  
Stephen Kerr MSP

Invited guests

Terry Dillon, Skills Development Scotland  
Donella Beaton, Robert Gordon University  
Jon Vincent, Glasgow Clyde College

Non-MSP Group Members

Andy Witty, Colleges Scotland  
Joanne Buchan, Colleges Scotland  
James McKean, Colleges Scotland  
Sean Mosby, Enginuity  
Robert Bruce, Enginuity  
Stuart Farmer, Institute of Physics  
Chris Walker, CITB  
Marie Hendry, CDN  
Dr Sanjana Mehta, ISC2 Inc  
Dr Liz Barron-Majerik MBE, Lantra Scotland  
Geoff Campbell, Nithcree Training Services  
Yemi Omeihe, University of the West of Scotland  
Shona Matthews, Chartered Banker Institute  
Tommy Breslin, STUC  
Wendy Burton, STUC  
Keith Robson, The Open University  
George Brown, SQA  
Rachel Cook, Federation of Small Businesses  
Gregg Cullen, ITC Training Academy  
Stuart McKenna, Scottish Training Federation  
Lauren Pennycook, CITB  
Helen Bolland  
Anne Galbraith, SECTT  
Sheila Dunn, SCQF Partnership  
Helen Murdoch-Wilson, SCQF Partnership

Fiona Harper, Snipef  
Dale Thomson, Snipef  
Aimee Logan, Universities Scotland  
Lauren Wards, Universities Scotland  
Frankie Walker, Jisc

## Apologies

Clare Adamson MSP  
Kaukab Stweart MSP  
Beatrice Wishart MSP  
Maureen Douglas, CECA Scotland  
Niall Evans, Lantra Scotland  
Gordon Nelson, Federation of Master Builders  
Kirsty Summers, Scotch Whisky Association  
Kirsty Conlon, Universities Scotland  
Wendy Burton, STUC

## Annual General Meeting

Andy Witty, Colleges Scotland, chaired the Annual General Meeting and noted apologies. The following office bearers were re-elected:

- Convener – Pam Gosal MSP
- Deputy Convener – Stephen Kerr MSP
- Secretariat – Colleges Scotland.

## Welcome

The group's Convener, Pam Gosal MSP, opened the meeting.

## Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 May 2023 were approved.

## Presentations

The topic for this meeting was Apprenticeships. Presentations were heard from:

- Terry Dillon, Senior Programme Manager, Skills Development Scotland
- Donella Beaton, Vice Principal for Economic Development, Robert Gordon University
- Jon Vincent, Principal Glasgow Clyde College.

## Discussion

Terry Dillon gave a presentation on behalf of Skills Development Scotland (SDS), providing an insight into apprenticeship development which consists of three elements – occupational standards development, qualifications development, and the development of training plans. He said that since 2019, SDS has been taking forward a systems-based approach and engaging with all parts of the system together to reduce development time and get programmes out to market quicker. This involves understanding what individuals need and what employers need – these have to be met and matched up.

Terry said this approach is also identifying opportunities for metaskills to enhance personal effectiveness, supporting transitions and progression, and supporting the use of new technology and sustainable practice. He said that this approach should lead to programmes that support Scottish industry and the economy while matching up with the individual and their careers.

Donella Beaton from Robert Gordon University highlighted that she had previously ran her own SME and had been committed to staff training and development. She said she still sees a country of SMEs, a lot of whom are rural which is challenging in terms for finding structured training opportunities. She highlighted the need for acceleration in every sector and that the pathways and lifelong opportunities are not there but noted that a lot of the ingredients are.

She said that Graduate Apprenticeships (GA) has had a significant impact on universities working with employers and what can be delivered e.g. Robert Gordon University has had 200 new GA starts this year and is working with 50 new companies this year alone. She said that GAs have enabled individuals to earn and learn, while minimising time on campus. They also have success coaches for students on campus and in-company mentors.

Donella noted that funding was challenging, for example, Robert Gordon University has had a £5m reduction this year which is hindering progress. She said there is a need for the system to work together to build new model to deliver programmes and work with employers both regionally and nationally which has flexibility built in.

Jon Vincent, Glasgow Clyde College discussed Foundation and Modern Apprenticeships, stating that they are excellent programmes providing on-the-job, off-the-job, and meta skills. He said Foundation Apprenticeships are a key plank of Senior Phase vocational education, providing high-quality employer-led frameworks, however, noted that they are difficult to deliver for a number of reasons including the size and demand of the frameworks, complexities of school timetabling and transport, and inconsistency of popularity and promotion.

In terms of Modern Apprenticeships, Jon highlighted that demand was high stating that employer need outstrips the number of places available in some areas. He discussed the complex contracting system and noted that it was common for contract holders to subcontract delivery back to colleges.

Jon also discussed the challenges of the income model which comprises of contribution from SDS which has remained static for some years, expectation of contribution from the employer on top of the cost of the apprentice, which is challenging particularly for smaller businesses, and, for colleges, reliance on receiving some funds from the Scottish Funding Council. He also noted the rising cost of delivering some apprenticeships because of the increasing cost of materials and equipment.

A question and answers discussion followed.

Tommy Breslin noted that the work that SDS has put into this is really powerful and a huge step forward where we're going to get a better quality of framework, with the inclusion of partners.

Fiona Hodgson reiterated this, stating that this review has been far more engaging for employers. She also noted that a lot of employers who are recruiting are micro businesses, and, in the downturn, are asking for reduction in cost and labour is the best place to cut cost, meaning redundancy and layoffs – businesses can't commit – so they won't be able to put more money into a skills model.

Jon Vincent agreed with Fiona on the employer financial contribution, saying that MAs are a challenging financial model, with the amount from SDS becoming less and less viable and cannot be easily sorted by asking employers. He said he gap is destabilising some of the provision.

Liz Barron-Majerik highlighted the challenges of delivering land-based learning, for example, sometimes it is a six-hour trip to see one apprentice. Liz asked a question on national occupational standards, and a question about a change in approach to apprenticeships when we short of people in the workforce.

Terry Dillan said the new national occupational standards strategy is published and we are working on pilot areas on work across Scotland and how we can align it to that strategy. He also said that SDS is taking a new approach to make engagement easier, including hybrid, to make engagement far wider. For example, in construction having early breakfast meetings to engage, creating a more flexible approach. Donella Beaton agreed, and emphasised the need that flexible approach to enable it to work for employees and employers.

Geoff Campbell asked what happens to Apprenticeship Levy money and why we can't draw down like for like in Scotland. Pam Gosal noted that the model ought to be simpler and more money should be going back to employers. Jon Vincent said that the Flexible Workforce Development Fund is paid for by levy-paying businesses but noted that providers have no clarification yet about what this budget is for this year, which is a risk. Stephen Kerr said that marrying up of the money that comes to Scotland that doesn't get spent on apprenticeships that needs to be addressed.

Liz Barron-Majerik said it's important that we have parallel apprenticeships systems UK-wide to make sure that there are independent reviews of the approaches being taken – great flexibility is required amidst the challenges we are facing. Jon Vincent said that we can learn from England, for example, college lecturer salaries are substantially higher here – between 15% - 20% per hour higher – and this has a knock on effect on what colleges can deliver, but the contributions that SDS are making are smaller compared to ESFA in England.

## Close

With no other business to conduct, the meeting was brought to a close. It was noted that the next meeting would be held in the new year.