

CROSS PARTY GROUP (CPG) ON SCOTLAND'S COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

13.00 – 14:00 on Wednesday 10 May 2017, Committee Room 3, Scottish Parliament

Topic: How universities and colleges engage with their local communities (including community relations and additional community contributions such as teaching and research).

Note of Meeting

Present:

Ms Elizabeth Smith MSP	Scottish Parliament	CPG Convener
Mr Iain Gray MSP	Scottish Parliament	CPG Deputy Convener
Mr Fergus Boden	NUS Scotland	
Dr Sandra Cairncross	Edinburgh Napier University	
Mr Gary Campbell	University of the Highlands and Islands	
Dr Martin Campbell	University of St Andrews	
Ms Risga Carson	NUS Scotland	
Ms Roisin-Alana Di Giacomo	Glasgow Caledonian University	
Mr Martin Fairbairn	Scottish Funding Council	
Ms Jackie Galbraith	Ayrshire College	
Ms Moira Gibson	University of Edinburgh	
Mr Davy Gray	EUSA	
Ms Mhairi Harrington	West Lothian College	
Ms Jess Husbands	EUSA	
Professor Grant Jarvie	University of Edinburgh	
Ms Sheona Lawson	EUSA	
Dr Finlay MacCorquodale	Edinburgh Napier University	
Professor Matthew MacIver	University of the Highlands and Islands	
Mr Drew McGowan	West College Scotland	
Mr Duncan McKay	Universities Scotland	
Mr Paul Mullan	Skills Development Scotland	
Mr Stuart Ritchie	Deloitte MCS Ltd	
Ms Rebecca Scarlett	Lead Scotland	
Ms Jane Scott	Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh	
Mr Alastair Sim	Universities Scotland	
Ms Heather Sloan	Universities Scotland	
Ms Christine Tudhope	Heriot-Watt University	
Mr Hamish Trench	Cairngorms National Park Authority (CPNA)	
Mr Andrew Witty	Colleges Scotland	

Apologies:

Mr Peter Aitchison	University of Glasgow
Ms Jennifer Jamieson Ball	Heriot-Watt University
Ms Joanne Buchan	Colleges Scotland
Ms Anne Keenan	EIS
Professor Karl Leydecker	University of Dundee
Ms Susannah Lane	Universities Scotland
Mr Paul Little	City of Glasgow College
Dr Judith McClure	SCEN
Professor Peter McGeorge	University of Aberdeen
Mr Martyn Spence	Heriot-Watt University
Mr Kenny Stewart	The Open University in Scotland
Professor Charlie Jeffery	University of Edinburgh

1. Welcome and introduction from the Convener

The Convener, Ms Liz Smith MSP, welcomed everyone to the fourth meeting of the CPG on Colleges and Universities in session 5 of the Scottish Parliament, on the topic of: *How universities and colleges engage with their local communities (including community relations and additional community contributions such as teaching and research).*

Ms Smith welcomed the speakers:-

- Mr Gary Campbell, Key Account Director, the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI).
- Mr Hamish Trench, Director of Conservation and Visitor Experience, Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA).
- Ms Jackie Galbraith, Vice Principal of Strategy, Planning and Performance, Ayrshire College.
- Ms Moira Gibson, Head of External Affairs, University of Edinburgh.
- Ms Mhairi Harrington, Principal & Chief Executive, West Lothian College.

Ms Smith thanked the University of Edinburgh for sponsoring the lunch for the meeting.

2. Apologies

Apologies were noted.

3. Approval of the minutes from 8 March 2017 meeting

Members approved the minutes of the meeting.

4. Introduction to topic: *How universities and colleges engage with their local communities (including community relations and additional community contributions such as teaching and research).*

Introducing the topic, the Convener commented that an issue that is often forgotten is that institutions are part of communities, and they are an important way of developing relationships with their local communities. Ms Smith then invited the speakers to make their presentations.

Mr Gary Campbell, Key Account Director, The University of the Highlands and Islands and Mr Hamish Trench, Director of Conservation and Visitor Experience, Cairngorms National Park Authority

Mr Campbell informed members about the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed on 9 March 2017 between the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) and Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA), an agreement, in a key sector, to work together to benefit communities and businesses in the park and its surrounding area. The MoU is one of eight signed by UHI, a tertiary organisation, around areas of collaboration including research and student learning.

The group heard about areas of research collaboration including studies on rivers running low and Orkney College looking at the environmental impact; the A9 dualling programme and its economic impact; upland flood elevation; game-keeping and new ideas for recreation and tourism.

Mr Campbell also discussed:- the opportunities for approved business cases arising from funding from the Inverness and Highland City-Region to allow UHI University of the Highlands and Islands School of Health, Social Care and Life Sciences to progress their plans, and to deliver economic growth through collaborative and commercial research; developing course at Glenmore Lodge (Scotland's National Outdoor Training Centre).

In closing, Mr Campbell said that UHI doesn't yet know the economic impact of the MoU, however for every £1 of public investment, UHI delivers £4 back. The partnership give a single point of contact and the ability to connect up.

Mr Trench explained that the national park covers an area of 4,5000 km, is home to 18,000 residents and has a tourism economy. The partnership offers a number of connections and areas of research collaboration, with areas of the university's research being relevant to the work of the CNP. The CNP in turn provides a learning resource for students at UHI. It also provides a single point of contact so access to research or the needs of student learning provision can be fed back.

The CNP is a designated area of conservation and the Centre for Mountain Studies (part of UHI) is located in the CNP.

Mr Trench commented that the MoU provides a formal recognition, of the worth of staff in both institutions, and also in helping to bring in other partners. He closed by stating that the economic impact of the partnership would be an asset for the region.

Ms Jackie Galbraith, Vice Principal of Strategy, Planning and Performance, Ayrshire College

Ms Galbraith informed members that Ayrshire College sees challenges every day. It identifies itself as a college of vision, of increasing opportunities for students and business, and does critical work within the community to ensure it is healthy, safe and skilled. The college has a culture of engagement at all levels, and supporting the community is built into course curricula. e.g.

- Sports volunteering helps build capacity of communities and having empathy with people.

- Mental Health Awareness Week - during Mental Health Awareness week students out on streets to raise awareness as part of care course. A full time Mental Health Officer also helps 'signpost' people to mental health care.
- Safety courses for prisoners are run to help them integrate back into society
- Broader areas of safety e.g. raising awareness of knives, looking out for signs of domestic abuse e.g. students of hairdressing are trained to look out for signs of domestic abuse.
- Working and skills for communities – 'Skills for Life' training programmes. In partnership with North Ayrshire Council and third sector partners the College has recruited 27 student who are lone parents and supports them into work by providing them with the confidence and necessary skills required for the workplace.

Ms Galbraith explained that the key thing is that colleges are critical to achieving raised aspirations; critical to re-engagement in the workforce. Members were informed that 50 % of P1 pupils from the most deprived areas start school with the skills of a two year old. It is therefore critical that colleges invest in core and employability skills.

Ms Moira Gibson, Head of External Affairs, University of Edinburgh

Introducing her presentation, "The University in the community" which centred on enhancing the University's engagement with its communities, Ms Gibson commented that the University of Edinburgh is a different institution with a different set of challenges. It is a 'global' university and has five campuses spread out across the city. The University works with communities for variety of reasons including: - as a social responsibility; as part of the University's mission; the location of its campuses means the University is 'embedded' in the city; it is in both the city-region as well as the University's interest. The University can enhance the wealth and opportunities in the city and region. Half of the University's undergraduates want to come to live in Edinburgh, not only because of the top university by because they want to live in a prosperous and safe city.

The group heard how the University enhances the wealth, health, culture and international diversity of the city including: - providing for Scotland £2bn GVA; supporting 31,000 jobs; and is the 3rd largest employer in Edinburgh. The University also provides free legal advice and vet clinics; works with schools; and delivers lectures.

In questioning if the University could do more, Ms Gibson pointed out that following a survey of perceptions, 90% believe the university is an asset to the city but 66% are unsure what the university does and few had been on the website. One of the challenges the University acknowledged included the need to work harder to harness relationships. They developed a Community Engagement Strategy in order to strengthen and sustain relationships of trust, provide more opportunities to interact with communities and listen to what they want. Ways in which the University contributes locally to the community include: recycling iPads and teaching the elderly how to use them, students and society volunteering, 'Dirty Weekenders' a conservation scheme; befriending the elderly; and the £6.5m investment in the St Cecilia's Concert Hall and Museum opening imminently.

Ms Mhairi Harrington, Principal & Chief Executive, West Lothian College

Ms Harrington's presentation focussed on the three key priorities of the College:-

1. **Developing a skilled workforce for the economy and the community of West Lothian.** Ms Harrington commented that although colleges have core similarities there are different needs in areas e.g. West Lothian has one local authority and one regional college; it is an area of relatively high level employment but a low economy; and Murieston has the highest disposal income. As a college the overriding mission is driving up skills in the work place and community and developing a skilled workforce for the economy is a priority as the community that has to bounce back e.g. the area used to have the company Motorola and has lost three main companies with high value jobs in retail.
2. **Supporting the wider community.** An example of how the College is at the heart of supporting the wider community is through an employability partnership 'Project Search'. This business-led programme prepares students with learning needs for integrated employment. Members were informed that as part of this partnership, Jabil Livingston worked with eight West Lothian College students, who have learning disabilities, to provide them with an opportunity to gain on site work experience with the aim of getting them into sustained, quality employment at the end of the programme. A further example cited was "Food in Later Life" (FILL) research which provide a perspective on how the preparation of food and eating should change over the years to accommodate changes in nutritional needs and living styles.
3. **Being a vibrant business in their community.** Ms Harrington stated that colleges are all vibrant businesses in their own right. West Lothian College is a large, local employer, employing 350 staff, and is a member of the Chamber of Commerce; its 6000 students are also local customers, volunteers, staff and citizens. The College sits in the heart of Livingston – the College location is an important factor as it contributes to localities and the town centre.

5. Discussion and questions

The Convener thanked the speakers for their interesting presentations and opened the floor for questions.

Understanding what institutions do: In reply to a question put by the Convener on whether people don't understand what colleges and universities do, Ms Gibson commented that her institution operates its own local part of the city, so will pilot projects locally e.g. in Dumbiedykes. There was a need to do more and listen to what will help the people in the area i.e. the institution wants to do more with, rather than for, the area.

Ms Galbraith highlighted successful local and sustained campaigning in regional press around for example, what students, colleges and universities do to help people in the community.

Failures/lessons to learn: Mr Gray asked if there was an example of what had failed and any lessons to learn. Mr Campbell cited a 'communications' example whereby Inverness College had promoted that it was moving location to a new campus, which would also provide a base for UHI. Unclear communications promoted it as a new university and new opportunity, which had the knock-on effect of people thinking that the college had closed.

Mr Fairbairn informed members that when he worked at Stevenson College it was difficult to engage with the Wester Hailes area. However when the college established a new centre in that area it

made a difference, therefore going to the community, rather than providing what you think is required, is beneficial.

Successful engagement: Ms Scott asked about engagement and how successful institutions were in getting people to share for the good of everyone?

Ms Gibson said that at her institution they bring together people once a month to share best practice and what the challenges are e.g. if working with schools, what are the challenges.

Mr Campbell commented on the issue of the geography of UHI as a difficulty, as UHI covers such a large area. He also recommended a 'softly, softly', two way approach – talking and listening to people to find out what they benefit from.

How to manage community engagement for PVG clearance: Ms Galbraith answered that in terms of students, all those engaging with young people are put through PVG on enrolment; leaders in curriculum areas work with Local Authorities etc. and that results in active partnerships. Engagement is driven by the curriculum; staff are encouraged to share thoughts on blogs and twitter; staff sharing sessions weekly.

How to engage with institutions: In response to a question from Ms Scarlett, Ms Galbraith advised contacting an SMT or just to 'pop-in'. She cited an example of people coming to her institution to simply get heat.

Ms Harrington suggested getting in touch with local networks and that her institution had open facilities which are used by communities.

Ms Gibson commented that her institution was hoping to get a virtual 'front door' on its website and about the master's students' participation with the institution's free legal advice centre to help people from the community.

Individual Learning Accounts (ILAs): In response to a question from Mr Gray on ILAs Ms Harrington commented on the speed of change to the scheme and that they had stopped. Members were informed that a letter was sent on 29 April advising that a new scheme would be in place in October, which will have an impact on colleges as the May – October period is the busiest time for colleges. Ms Harrington also commented on lack of consultation.

6. Date and topics for the next meeting

The Convener advised that members would be notified of the date of the next meeting which would incorporate the group's AGM.

7. Close

The Convener closed the meeting and thanked everyone for attending.

ENDS