

Minutes of Meeting 9th February 2012
Cross Party Group on Skills

Date: 9th February 2012
Location: Holyrood, Committee Room 2
Present:

Alliance of Sector Skills Council Scotland	Jacqui Hepburn	SCQF	Aileen Ponton
Association of Accounting Technicians	Helen McGougan	SECTT	Anne Galbraith
Bio Reliance	Louise Rice	Scottish Enterprise	Linda Murray
Chartered Banker Institute	Shona Matthews	Scottish Conservative Party	Gavin Brown MSP
Cogent SSC	Paul Coffey	Scottish Investment Operations	Alan Thornburrow
Creative Scotland	Helena Ward	Scottish Labour Party	Liza Gilhooly for Rhoda Grant MSP & David Stewart MSP
Economic Development Association [Scotland]	Irene Bell	Scottish Labour Party	John Park MSP
Federation of Small Business Scotland	Mary Goodman	Scottish Parliament Education Committee	Jonas Rae
Improve	Kelvin Thomas	SQA	George Brown / Joe Wilson
MHPC	June Deasy	STUC	Suzanne Motherwell/ Sylvia O'Grady
NHS Education for Scotland	Simon Williams	Scottish Youth Parliament	Andrew McGowan MYSP
NSCC & Independent Roof Training Association	John McKinney	Skills Development Scotland	Fiona Stewart
OPITO	Gillian Black	The Open University	Úna Bartley
		Universities Scotland	Susannah Lane, Heather Sloan, Mark Wild

Guest Speakers

University of Abertay Dundee / SHEEF	Prof. Steve Olivier	Queen Margaret University Edinburgh	Prof. Alan Gilloran
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Apologies received:

Aplus Training	Robert McHarg	Investors in People	Vicki McLean / Judith Ackerman
A4E Scotland	Gerry Croall	Loch Lomond & Trossachs Community Partnership	Kate Sankey
Barnardo's Scotland	Helen Brown	Rathbone Scotland	Jim Murphy
Close the Gap	Emma Ritch	Remploy	Margaret Barton
Construction Skills Scotland	Graeme Ogilvy	RBS	Omar Mohammed
Education Scotland	Anne Jardine	Scottish Liberal Democrats	Liam McArthur MSP
Fife Council – Enterprise & Protection Services	Lucinda McAllister	Skills for Logistics	Chris Campbell
Construction Skills Scotland	Graeme Ogilvy	Working Links	Nick Young
ICS	Joanne McManus		

Agenda Items:

1 Welcome:

Gavin Brown MSP welcomed everyone and thanked Scottish investment Operations for sponsoring the lunch and invited Alan Thornburrow SIO's Chief Executive to say a few words.

Mr Thornburrow, was delighted to have the opportunity to talk about Scottish Investment Operations, who it represents and what it does. The organisation is celebrating its 10th anniversary and was set up by investment banks in order to support the upskilling of those in their employ. Employability was a very key issue and, as a global sector, SIO has looked to examples from other countries to help identify gaps and drive the development of learning to address these. This also works in reverse and Mr Thornburrow referred to a trip to India in March. Investment companies had been one of the main contributors to inward investment through SDI. Most firms find the skills base they are looking for, however note attitude and motivation as an issue. SIO has therefore collaborated with its sector skills council, the Financial Services Partnership and others, aware that these issues are not unique to the financial services sector. This has led to work with universities Scotland and Mr Thornburrow drew attention to an event planned for late February which would be the first in a series to look at delivery real outcomes. Mr Thornburrow agreed to pass details on via the Secretary for anyone interested in attending the event.

2 Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising

- 2.1** The Minutes of the meeting of 26th October 2011 were approved. There were no matters arising.

3 Workplan presentation

- 3.1** The convenor turned to the workplan agenda item and was delighted to introduce guest speakers from 2 of Scotland's Universities. Dr Steve Olivier of the University of Abertay Dundee and Chair of the Scottish HE Employability Forum [SHEEF] and Vice Principal of Learning Teaching Scotland, was invited to address the group first.
- 3.2** Dr Oliver confirmed that he would also be attending the event referred to by Mr Thornburrow and encouraged interested members to attend. He then proceeded with an overview of SHEEF which had been established to provide a 'go to' body for employers on matters of engagement and employability. It was clear that graduates required to develop more positive attitudes and dispositions and this was being introduced across university disciplines and in relation to all sectors. Ultimately the HE sector wished to develop graduates that know their discipline but to also be capable of working at the edges of it and with others. Each university programme was introducing graduate attributes to support this objective. Most have fully engaged with over half those responding to a recent survey having set employability as a significant part of their overall strategy, tailoring teaching to this aim. Almost all had

embraced the concept of graduate attributes and were actively engaging with industry to seek panel members to support the review and development of qualification and / or professional accreditations, citing as an example from his own university, the work to develop a masters in professional computer gaming.

Scotland has some excellent graduate statistics, with Scots graduates the least likely to be unemployed, the highest rate of a positive employment destination and the highest starting salaries for the UK Numbers for graduates in graduate level jobs had dropped but is now starting to increase again.

With the decline in lower skilled jobs, universities wish, as far as possible, to match what the employers want. A survey of Scottish employers found that approximately 80% that had recruited straight from university felt their employees had been well prepared for work. Prof. Olivier also noted that an OECD report had linked the proportion of graduates in the workforce with economic prosperity. However growing the economy was not the responsibility of one sector alone. All stakeholders need to work together, including colleges and universities to help grow the economy. He noted that it was however difficult to identify who to work with and at what level and welcomed the opportunity to engage with members of the CPG.

- 3.3** The convenor thanked Prof. Olivier and asked members to save questions until after hearing from the next guest speaker, Prof. Alan Gilloran of Queen Margaret.
- 3.4** Professor Gilloran noted the theme for the agenda item had been bridging the gap but felt the question of whether a gap truly existed should be first addressed. He was concerned to ensure that universities are not considered inaccessible ivory towers - an image which was outdated. He echoed the views of Prof Olivier regarding the introduction of graduate attributes and the importance of professionals on educational panels.

Universities are trying to up their game and focus on employability and on working with employers. He noted the work of Universities Scotland and LTS in creating an employer summit and Scottish Funding Council support of a project in South East Scotland where the University was working with local colleges to develop programmes aligned to the regions SMEs and micro businesses. Prof Gilloran also commented on the proliferation of relevant bodies and the challenge of knowing who exactly to engage for each sector. QMU was hosting a Senior Business Leaders' lunch in March to discuss graduate employability.

By way of evidence of the increasingly collaborative approach being taken by universities, Prof Gilloran referred to the work QMU was engaged in with Edinburgh and Lothian Council, Jewel and Esk College and local employers [including two very distinguished chefs] to create the Hospitality and Tourism Academy. The project will formally launch in August 2012 for S5 pupils. Despite being a Scottish Government priority sector it is not a first choice career option amongst school leavers and graduates. The project initially aims to promote greater understanding of the career opportunities and pathways available. Combining work based training and academic knowledge, the 3 way design strives to help blur the transition to

working life. It offers progression from school to college and then university study and includes work placements which focus on the realities of work, such as shift patterns. The project has sought high profile ambassadors to help explain the variety of careers in the sector, e.g., marketing, web design etc. and that the opportunities can build a successful career not just in Scotland but worldwide. Prof Gilloran stressed that this was just one example from a myriad showing the power of the collaborative approach.

The Convenor thanked both speakers for a very interesting set of presentations.

- 3.5** Helena Ward of Creative Scotland was invited to add a few words on the diversity of careers. She was concerned that those delivering learning should take into consideration career flexibility and micro businesses, such as freelancing and crafts. Ms Ward also stressed the benefits of engaging with the Creative sector and the opportunities in what Creative Scotland is defining as the 'project economy'.
- 3.6** The Convenor asked Prof. Gilloran for more information about the new Academy's status. Prof. Gilloran confirmed it was still in the planning stage but with the launch date of August 2012 it was important to get out to schools very soon as future choices will soon be made.
- 3.7** Aileen Ponton made an offer to CPG members. The SCQF has been working with SDS, Universities Scotland SQA to encourage greater employer engagement with the framework. A project was reviewing propositions for new accreditations and would circulate via the Secretary the specification so that interested members could review.
- 3.8** Louise Rice of BioReliance asked for more information about the graduate attributes. She also wanted to know about whether the approaches described incorporate progression from school, through apprenticeship to universities. Prof. Olivier explained that graduate attributes were generally set around 4 characteristics: confident thinkers, creators, flexible collaboration and active enquirers. Course calendars outline how the attributes will be achieved and must include a challenging piece of work scheduled for the weeks following examinations. This piece of work aims to help students understand what will be expected of them in the future and to help them understand what they are capable of.
- 3.9** Ms Rice admired the partnership approaches outlined, which she hoped would help improve the current lack of understanding about the working world. Employers had advised her of concerns around basic skills such as team working as an example. She also felt more could be done to align the initiatives of different bodies. Prof. Olivier admitted that some departments are more aware than others. As far as possible the university aims to create real life initiatives. He was concerned about the feedback on team working as there is a strong focus on this at his university particularly in the healthcare disciplines.
- 3.10** Joe Wilson of SQA asked suggested that reference to National Occupational Standards when designing the academic syllabus and courses would be useful. It would also support progression from HNC and HND courses to degree programmes.

- 3.11** Irene Bell from EDAS spoke about her experience of managing an HE research project on student employability / Work Related Learning (WRL) in Scotland. She suggested that the project findings indicated that employers were very willing to engage with universities to offer WRL opportunities but were often frustrated at not knowing who to contact or how. Employers also suggested that they would like to see more 'enterprising' graduates being developed alongside an emphasis on leadership capabilities.
- 3.12** Prof. Gilloran addressed the query about National Occupational Standards first, noting that many standards may be included. He noted that there is a mandatory module on business in all programmes but it would be useful to test the link. Ms Bell outlined that there is a lot of good practice models but very varied. She wondered how universities adopt best practice.
- 3.13** John Park suggested that there is a need to engage earlier in the learning process and that the need for good career advice and guidance is important. Whilst there are some good examples, often the guidance is focused on making the individual as employable as possible, and does not necessarily build career potential and relevant skills. He noted the valuable role of mentors and cited the positive example of some Abertay projects. Alan Thornburrow of SIO raised the point that slightly younger sectors like his own do not necessarily have the same presence in the school guidance system and the need to develop links systematically.
- 3.14** Fiona Stewart of SDS highlighted the efforts being made to get information into schools, particularly the 'My World of Work'. Skills Councils and employers have been working together to create new materials and are now seeking customer feedback.
- 3.15** Sylvia O'Grady of STUC noted that people already in work had much to offer. The Union has seen high demand for education from those in the workplace. However, there are many barriers to part time study. It is important that programmes acknowledge the employers desire to 'grow their own'. Prof. Olivier agreed this was an example where universities had been less successful. He had been surprised by the low uptake of a programme aimed at people who had been made redundant. Prof Gilloran agreed with Prof. Olivier stating that there are successful programmes at doctorate and masters level, less so at undergraduate study – possibly due to lower levels of funding. Ms O'Grady referred to the positive example of the work of the Open University where demand was growing. Una Bartley of OU commented that funding distribution was a significant barrier to uptake. John Park added that it can be very lonely being a part time student or undertaking distance learning and highlighted the additional realities of people working longer hours on top of earnings stagnating.
- 3.16** Louise Rice observed that there are many existing initiatives all giving advice such as STEM which champions science in Scotland. She was concerned that many graduates still do not know what to do after graduation or what opportunities there are, or how to make things happen. Ms Rice also noted the work required in deprived areas which desperately need access to good career advice and learning.

4 Youth Unemployment Strategy

- 4.1** The Convenors would be attending a debate immediately after the meeting on this topic. The matter is regularly raised during debates in chamber and there is a general awareness amongst all MSPs of what is happening. He asked whether this was something the CPG wished to consider and noted it might be something that the new Minister Angela Constance might be invited to speak on. The Group was in favour and Alan Thornburrow of SIO also cited the Edinburgh Guarantee, suggesting that the group might invite Sue Bruce to speak.

5 Changes to Sector Skills Councils

- 5.1** Jacqui Hepburn advised the Group of some significant changes to the SSC funding set-up. This would now work on the basis of grant and aid bids awarded from the Employer Investment Fund. 3 of the 21 SSCs had not received any and are reconsidering their position although optimistic to continue their work. 12 had received more than expected, 6 less. Overall there would be a fundamental change in Scotland; the move to project delivery requires less representational work and will be managed by a small team based in London. Over the years this may develop into a lack of commonality amongst the SSC structure. For their NOS work, the universal services are contracted up until 2013 but potentially this could also change. Stakeholder may not be understanding of these changes and within the CPG itself, some representatives may not be at future meetings as there may be no local presence.
- 5.2** Paul Coffey added that some or most SSCs will have to work within their project funding parameters: therefore some of their activities have been enhanced whilst some will disappear.

6 Renewable Energy Focus

- 6.1** John Park's office had been contacted about developing an agenda for a joint meeting with the CPG on Renewable Energy. He suggested that this might be worth considering as a topic of the Festival of Politics, for which the CPG had been invited to make an application to run an event. Mr Park outlined the success of the CPG's previous engagement with the Festival and suggested that the topic could be attractive to visitors and could highlight matters such as how Scotland would meet its green targets and ambitions; do we have the skills and could it supply skills to other sectors? Jacqui Hepburn noted that 5 SSCs were currently conducting research into the future skills required by the energy sector. Prof. Olivier referred to a new degree in Renewables which was proving itself and had been a 3-partite development.
- 6.2** John McKinney of NSCC brought the Group's attention to a key issue which had been highlighted in the recent housing survey, i.e. 70% of Scotland's buildings were in disrepair and 73% of these were showing critical elements for repair. It was odd to discuss renewing energy whilst Scotland's homes were leaking. The phrase 'dirty green energy' was used to explain the concept of improvement to the energy efficiency of buildings such buildings in disrepair.

7 Festival of Politics

- 7.1** JP asked whether there were any additional suggestions for the CPG's application to participate.

- 7.2 John McKinney suggested a focus on the project by Historic Scotland to reintroduce traditional building skills.
- 7.3 Alan Thornburrow suggested the young people's agenda and was supported by Louise Rice, adding the need to support the concept of reaching the reality of the workplace.
- 7.4 Joe Wilson supported the idea of the renewable topic feeling that this is a matter of interest to visitors from the rest of the world present in Edinburgh during the Festival and therefore an opportunity to put Scotland's skills in this area firmly on the map.
- 7.5 It was agreed that all ideas would be circulated for members to vote on and the most supported topic would be presented in the CPG's application.

8 A.O.C.B

- 8.1 Helena Ward wished to draw member's attention to the exhibition in the Parliament lobby: *Design and Democracy*. It was a great example of how design can help improve lives and encouraged all members to take a look on their way out. She was also pleased to update the convenors on the position of Creative Scotland and to report the development of its National Youth Arts Strategy.
- 8.2 John McKinney highlighted the Flexible Training Opportunity from SDS. There was up to £500 per unit of training available but funding was due to finish at the end of March, although there was hope it might continue.

9 Close of Meeting

- 9.1 The Convenor thanked everyone for their contributions. The next meeting would incorporate the AGM and takes place at the slightly earlier time of 12.45 on 10th May. The meeting was formally closed.

Appendix 1.

Cross Party Group on Skills

AGENDA

12.45pm, 9th February 2012

Committee Room 2, The Scottish Parliament.

1. Welcome

- **Scottish Investment Operations** - Alan Thornburrow

2. Matters arising from the Minutes of the meeting of 15th December 2011

3. Workplan presentation: Bridging the gap between HE and Industry

- Presentation from Universities Scotland:
 - Professor Steve Olivier of the University of Abertay Dundee and Chair of the Scottish HE Employability Forum (SHEEF).
 - Professor Alan Gilloran of Queen Margaret University Edinburgh

4. AOCB

- Youth Unemployment Strategy
- Changes to SSCs
- Renewable Energy focus
- Festival of Politics

5. Date of next meeting / AGM – 10th May 2012

6. Meeting close