

EDUCATION AND SKILLS COMMITTEE

THE SENIOR PHASE OF SCHOOL: HELPING YOUNG PEOPLE PURSUE THE RIGHT PATHWAY FOR THEM

Submission from Scotland's Rural College (SRUC)

SRUC Evidence Submission to the Scottish Parliament's Education and Skills Committee.

With reference to: the Inquiry into careers advice in schools, ensuring that it covers all options to young people

Introduction

Scotland's Rural College (SRUC) is pleased to be able to submit this response to the Enquiry into Careers Advice in Schools.

We present three case studies detailing initiatives which demonstrate that SRUC as an educational provider is committed to working with schools and local authorities to provide relevant and innovative opportunities to meet the needs of individuals who are exploring the scope and potential of careers in the land-based industries.

Challenges

It is pertinent, however, to note some of the relevant and related challenges which SRUC faces in addressing such needs within the context of Developing the Young Workforce (DYW). SRUC was formed as a National College, in contrast to the Regional College structures, and is a designated Higher Education Institution (HEI). We are the main provider of Further Education (FE) provision to the land-based sector in Scotland, operating across a dispersed geography with a national remit and regional presence:

- This "unique" position has not been widely recognised by DYW and within the structures aligned to careers advice delivered through regional colleges;
- The land-based sector is not well represented within DYW regional structures;
- The land-based sector is not well represented within Regional Skills Investment Plans;
- For some of the subjects offered by SRUC, e.g. agriculture, SRUC essentially recruits for the sector.

These are not complaints, but offered to provide context to current challenges and future aspirations for the development of DYW.

It is also pertinent to note that little research has been carried out to formally identify barriers to young people perceiving good career options within the Scottish agricultural sector. However, work in Australia may be relevant, where factors contributing to the perception that the industry offers a poor career choice have been identified, namely:

1. Use of negative language/headlines describing the industry – e.g. droughts, floods, low prices;
2. Poor perception by parents of the industry;
3. Perceived to be low skill jobs – "muck'n'shovels".

It is also relevant to note that “A Future Strategy for Scottish Agriculture – Final Report by the Scottish Government’s Agriculture Champions, May 2018” recognises the challenges this sector faces in promoting a compelling career offer to young people in schools.

It is to be hoped that this report may be the stimulus to encourage an appropriate and coordinated approach to careers advice by all actors in the sector in all geographies. SRUC endeavours to maintain regular contact, and provide all Scottish state secondary schools and local Skills Development Scotland offices, with current information on its courses and stresses career opportunities in its promotional materials and activities. An example of this is the annual STEM careers poster competition open to all Secondary schools which has in its two years of operation yielded 408 individual entries from 37 separate schools.

Case Studies

The following three case studies demonstrate the ways in which SRUC is addressing the challenges presented above.

Case Study 1: Development work to support pathways into land based industries in Dumfries and Galloway

Key partners, National Farmers Union of Scotland (NFUS), SRUC Barony Campus and Dumfries & Galloway Council’s Economic Development and Education departments, have developed a land based employability award at SCQF Level 4. This is a work-based qualification with SQA units developing employability skills and then accrediting the ability to apply those skills on a farm work placement, supplemented by two agriculture units delivered by SRUC. Young people spend one day a week on farm supported and assessed by tutors and one day each term at SRUC Barony, when all participants come together to work on and be assessed in the knowledge based agriculture units.

During 2016/17, 6 students took part in the programme, all achieving positive outcomes:

- 2 stayed at school;
- 1 went on to a Modern Apprenticeship;
- 2 went on to study at SRUC (one FE / one HE);
- 1 has entered full time employment.

During 2017/18, 8 young people are completing the award from eight schools. We hope to expand this provision into other vocational areas including forestry and horticulture, and to develop and deliver a Dairy Summer School as a pre-cursor to a Modern Apprenticeship in Dairy Farming.

Case Study 2: West Lothian “Farm to Fork” Schools Careers Event, SRUC Oatridge

“Farm to Fork” took place at SRUC Oatridge on Wednesday 11th April 2018 and was organised in partnership with DYW and Lantra Scotland. It was attended by over 800 young people ranging from P7 to S2 classes from 25 schools in West Lothian. The focus of the day was careers within the food supply chain, from primary production through to retail, hospitality and food service.

The event was supported by industry and gave young people an insight into the careers available in the agricultural, rural and food processing sectors. Some 19 different career talks were given by SRUC staff and industry partners who each gave an insight into their jobs, and provided interactive activities to inspire pupils and encourage them to think about career choices in these sectors.

Some of the more interactive sessions included Strawberry DNA Extraction (which proved to be particularly popular with the participants), a Tractor Simulator, the Application of Thermal Imaging to Research, Product Tasting, Drone Flying, Virtual Reality Headsets and real life Farm Experiences.

Event feedback from teachers was extremely positive. All teachers thought the event gave participants and themselves a much improved understanding of careers in the rural and processing sectors with some teachers mentioning the variety of careers available as being a surprise to their students, as well as the level of technology used and research needed to produce food. The event demonstrates how important it is to have key influencers like teachers up to date with the potential post-school pathways and opportunities.

Case Study 3: Working Within The Rural Sector, SRUC Aberdeen

Around 120 pupils and teachers from Alford Academy visited the SRUC Aberdeen campus in May 2018 to gain insight into careers and opportunities available across land based and rural industry sectors. S1 pupils spent a full day on campus taking part in a range of interactive workshops designed to give participants a taste of course choices offered at SRUC and the careers each might lead to, including agriculture, animal care and vet nursing, countryside management and environment as well as rural business

Pupils enjoyed a broad and practical insight which included grooming and handling small mammals with the animal care team, learning about careers relating to livestock with the Royal Northern Countryside Initiative (RNCI) and the chance to participate in SRUC's answer to the popular television show "The Apprentice".

The event gave the pupils an understanding of the sector which will help them to make more informed decisions when they eventually make subject choices.

In related activity SRUC has supported the delivery of the National Progression Award in Rural Skills (SCQF5) at Alford Academy, Turriff Academy and the Gordons School, Huntly, supporting some 36 young people annually. Of these, on average 3 or 4 will progress annually on to MA, FE or HE provision with SRUC.