

## **EDUCATION AND SKILLS COMMITTEE**

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

#### **SUBMISSION FROM SCOTTISH SECONDARY TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION**

##### **Comment on the SPICe 'Learner Journey: Education, Training and Work' survey results:**

The survey is interesting, and we note that by its own admission respondents were self-selecting meaning that it may not be particularly representative of the wider picture, and there remains some qualitative work to be done.

In our experience, Guidance teachers (also known as Principal Teachers of Pastoral Support) report that they work hard to tailor information about post-school options according to each young person's interests and needs. This is not something that only begins to happen as youngsters approach leaving age, but starts early on in their secondary education as part of learning and teaching in Personal and Social Education. As part of their learning in PSE, pupils are encouraged to explore a lot of potential career ideas and to discuss approaches to careers.

Alongside other learning, pupils are encouraged to explore Skills Development Scotland's 'MyWorldofWork' to think through what skills and qualifications might be required for their post-school ideas, and many schools also seek additional input from outside speakers to talk about their experiences of paid work. In some areas there are also opportunities to engage outside agencies to organise workshops with classes on managing budgets as an earner and as a student.

In the majority of schools we believe that pupils are given experience in the type of skills they need for getting started in the workplace, e.g. application completion, interview practice, and building up a better understanding of the importance of dress and body language.

When it comes to making decisions about course choices in S3, S4 and S5, it is becoming increasingly common for schools to extend the discussions they have with individual pupils to include face to face discussions with parents and carers also. Schools collaborate closely with SDS to ensure that youngsters in most need of support received it, prioritising those considered by Guidance staff to be most vulnerable, most in need of assistance, and taking account of SIMD rankings.

The nature of the UCAS application process, which can be quite intensive, we can understand why some young people might feel that university has a particular focus in schools. Each UCAS application takes several hours of work to complete, both from the applicant and the referee, and UCAS deadlines fall before application deadlines for college or training programmes. The first question asked as pupils move into S5 and S6 is who is interested in making an application for university,

because a late application is not guaranteed for consideration, and we can see it is entirely possible that it could be construed that university might be a school's first interest. However, by the time they leave school many young people will have already had the opportunity to experience a range of wider learning opportunities by attending college courses, engaging in work shadowing and work experience, and volunteering. There is strong evidence for this in the wide range of opportunities available in course choice forms shared with parents and pupils in S3, S4 and S5.

The system needs to develop a partnership approach that all the achievements of the young person are recorded to an area or postcode. This would value the contributions of school, college, employer and the community collectively.

One of the biggest challenges which remain for teachers is workload. Shortages in all areas of the system continue to have an impact on teachers' ability to keep all the plates spinning in the way they support youngsters at every point in their educational journey. In many schools it remains common for the PSE curriculum to be taught by non-specialists, despite the fact that personal and social education should be at the heart of a school's teaching.

Furthermore, Guidance teachers tend to have huge remits which make it hard to encompass fully all that is expected of them. In addition to their duties offering immediate pastoral support to pupils, often with caseloads of 280 or more pupils, Guidance teachers have very busy jobs in which they:

- maintain oversight of tracking and monitoring the progress of pupils in their caseload, promoting good health,
- organise and contribute to meetings of the Team Around the Child,
- coordinate and deliver programmes of education including careers, substance misuse, choices and changes, relationships, sexual health and parenthood, equality and diversity,
- monitor attendance and latecoming,
- contribute to mental, emotional, social and physical wellbeing of pupils,
- arrange for appropriate counselling when required,
- seek out, arrange and oversee volunteering opportunities,
- coordinate UCAS and college applications,
- offer references to employers, colleges and UCAS for current and past pupils,
- attend meetings with Social Services and a range of other agencies,
- and teach.

Successful careers education depends on a well-resourced partnership approach in which youngsters, parents, teachers, careers advisers, employers, and further and higher education providers collaborate. While schools are naturally at the heart of this kind of collaboration, the constant pressure on time and resources creates

barriers to making the kind of progress which could be achieved with actions rather than words.

## **Progress towards the 2 DYW recommendations**

### **1 Senior Phase Vocational Pathways**

There is strength in schools working in partnership with colleges to deliver industry recognised qualifications, and this is helping to broaden a curriculum which has become narrowed in recent years. It is vital that school leavers' skills and qualifications give them the flexibility to know how to approach employment, training and learning opportunities, both at the time of leaving school and as they progress through their lives, and school leaver data needs to encompass all of pupils' learning rather than the narrow information provided by exam passes.

When publishing school performance indicators, it will be important to note that it may not be solely the school which is accountable for the outcomes of young people's learning. Members have reported to us problems in college partnerships, where courses are discontinued at short notice, or entry qualifications are mis-stated, or lecturers do not properly account for attendance. It is important that colleges and other training providers fully understand and meet the same standards expected of schools and registered teachers.

### **2 Preparing Young People for the World of Work**

There is a danger in reducing the role of the curriculum into simply producing people suitable for employment. CfE has much wider value and worth, and its focus on successful learners who are confident individuals and responsible citizens who can contribute effectively to society should naturally lead to people ready for the workplace.

A society which works, however, needs workers, and we believe that there would be value in beginning good quality careers education before young people enter secondary education, broadening their aspirations and encouraging them to think beyond what may seem obvious career ideas. We strongly agree that careers guidance needs to be appropriately resourced.

In secondary schools, it is a pupil's Guidance teacher who makes it their duty to get to know each young person well and to help them make good, well informed choices about life and their future plans. We believe that properly resourced school Guidance/Pastoral Support teams play a strong and central role in promoting good quality careers education, and that there is a need to find more time and resources to enable these teams to work more effectively.