

## **EDUCATION AND SKILLS COMMITTEE**

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

#### **COLLEGES SCOTLAND**

#### **Evidence to the Education and Skills Committee Inquiry on Senior Phase Pathways and Work Readiness**

##### **Introduction**

Colleges Scotland is the collective voice for the college sector in Scotland, representing its interests with the aim of positioning colleges at the heart of a world-class education sector that is recognised, valued and available to all. Colleges Scotland, as the membership body, represents all 26 colleges in Scotland, which deliver both further education and around 28 per cent of the provision of all higher education in Scotland.

To inform the Education and Skills Committee's inquiry on progress made on the two identified Developing the Young Workforce recommendations, Colleges Scotland has prepared this written submission and is grateful to the committee for the opportunity to do so.

##### **1. Senior Phase Pathways**

*Recommendation 1: Pathways should start in the senior phase which leads to the delivery of industry recognised vocational qualifications alongside academic qualifications. These pathways should be developed and delivered in partnership with colleges and, where necessary, other training providers. Their delivery should be explicitly measured and published alongside other school performance indicators.*

##### **What progress is being made to deliver this recommendation?**

Working locally, regionally, and nationally, colleges have extensive relationships with employers to ensure that the education and training available to students through our wide-ranging curriculum offer and different course levels is relevant. This approach means that students have learning and skills-development experiences which equip them to effectively transition into work and deploy their skills, and that the training and education they receive is up to date with the newest and most innovative practices in the sector.

Through school-college partnership arrangements, colleges have long provided opportunities for school pupils to undertake vocational qualifications as part of their school timetable. A significant proportion of college provision for school pupils is at Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework (SCQF) level 4 or below, for example in Glasgow this represents more than half of all delivery to this demographic.

The offer to school pupils has been enhanced since 2016, when pupils in the Senior Phase of school were first offered work-based learning through the new Foundation Apprenticeship qualification.

Pegged at SCQF level 6, Foundation Apprenticeships are usually started in S5 and are undertaken as part of the school timetable delivered exclusively in colleges. It usually takes two years for a pupil to complete the Foundation Apprenticeship and currently pupils have access to 12 different frameworks which are aligned to industries with skills shortages, providing a pathway from school to employment. The Foundation Apprenticeship framework is mapped onto the Modern Apprenticeship framework, giving school pupils a head-start on the way to their career.

In addition to the Foundation Apprenticeship pathway, school pupils can undertake a variety of course levels and curriculum areas in college. These range from Skills for Work and National Progression Awards through to Higher National Certificate (HNC) qualifications. The curricula available to school pupils are agreed locally and regionally in order to support the needs of learners.

### **What is making a difference?**

Extensive opportunities exist for school pupils and young people who look to colleges to provide industry-recognised vocational qualifications. These pathways are used mostly by young people where there is support from the school, the information, advice and guidance they have access to is up to date, readily available and fully appraised of the offer, and vocational pathways are treated with the same esteem and respect as academic pathways. However, this is not consistently applied across the country.

A number of colleges run events to target schools and specific sectors to generate interest in and understanding of opportunities

Employer engagement is essential to the successful delivery of vocational qualifications.

### **What are the challenges?**

Opinions vary within the college sector as to whether having the Foundation Apprenticeship pegged at SCQF level 6 provides the greatest opportunities at the earliest stage possible for young people looking to undertake work-based learning as part of their school timetable.

As the Foundation Apprenticeship is an SCQF level 6 qualification, a student commencing a Foundation Apprenticeship would be in S5. Pupils who undertake a National or Higher National Certificate qualification will accrue credits as they progress through their course ensuring that even if they don't complete the entire certificated course, they will have achieved recognised qualifications in their own right. The Foundation Apprenticeship is expected to be delivered over two years, but should a student leave the course before completing it they may receive no

recognition for any of their learning dependent on the framework they are undertaking.

As the Foundation Apprenticeship is a relatively new qualification, there remains a societal lack of understanding and knowledge about what the Foundation Apprenticeship is, how it is undertaken, what the value of the training and learning is, how it maps onto further opportunities and what the value is in comparison to the National 5 or Higher.

As a young person looks for guidance and support from those around them when making important decisions about what modes and subjects of study would best suit their interests and skills, it is important that the guidance they receive is accurate and credible based on what is the most appropriate pathway for the learner. There is still an overemphasis on Highers when considering Foundation Apprenticeship programmes with young people. The recommendations within the recent report reviewing the 15-24 Learner Journey acknowledge this and look to make systemic changes which will improve this.

In a similar vein to the lack of common understanding about Foundation Apprenticeships, anecdotal evidence suggests that post-15 opportunities are not presented to young people with parity of esteem. This is easily evidenced by reviewing the focus placed on the UCAS cycle in S5 and S6 in comparison to the focus placed on applying to college, for an apprenticeship or for a job. Similarly, for young people who decide at the end of the senior phase that a university pathway is the right one for them, it can be difficult to communicate the value of their completed Foundation Apprenticeship as they are recognised at different tariffs dependent on each individual university's requirements and expectations.

As of this academic year (2017/18), there are 13 different Foundation Apprenticeship frameworks. With Scottish Government targets increasing year on year, an expansion of Foundation Apprenticeship frameworks will be necessary to provide opportunities in different subject areas for the Foundation Apprenticeship to be perceived as a valid and valuable choice.

In progressing vocational education opportunities for school pupils, it is important not to focus solely on the Foundation Apprenticeship qualification to the detriment of all other opportunities. Currently, the offer to school pupils is variable and inconsistent across the country, due to a variety of factors, including (but not limited to) the value placed on vocational education and training by the school, the school's relationship with their local employers and the school's relationship with their local college.

The new Regional Improvement Collaboratives may offer an opportunity to improve the consistency of the vocational offer in schools moving forward. However, there will require to be sustained involvement by colleges within this structure to ensure appropriate curricular pathways are created and supported.

On a practical note, feedback from within the college sector would suggest there are logistical challenges in sourcing vocational qualification assessors for every framework. As an example, there are only three assessors in the whole of Glasgow

for laboratory science. This poses delivery challenges for colleges, or anyone supporting Foundation Apprenticeships.

Finally, it should be noted that this generation of senior phase pupils is likely to have parents who undertook the Standard Grade qualifications during their own school experience. As a result, the connotations of the word 'foundation' have particular meaning which does not best reflect the opportunity presented by the Foundation Apprenticeship. It should not be underestimated what impact this may have on parents or carers supporting young people to make the best choices.

### **What remains to be done?**

School pupils require better information advice and guidance about the pathways available to them, and at an earlier stage than they currently receive it. Similarly, school staff need better training and information for in relation to available provision for pupils transitioning from school. The national focus on STEM has produced excellent practice in engaging early years and primary pupils in STEM activity and demystifying STEM jobs. This presents an opportunity to reflect on how such an approach could be consistently offered and extended beyond a focus on STEM.

There are examples of outstanding practice between the secondary school and college sector which produce confident young people with industry-ready skills. The new Regional Improvement Collaboratives offer an opportunity to further develop these practices – if there is collaboration across the sectors – by supporting and promoting a consistent, coherent and accessible vocational training and education offer for pupils in the senior phase across all schools.

All qualifications undertaken by a young person should be included the Insight Tariff score.

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

*Recommendation 2: A focus on preparing all young people for employment should form a core element of the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence with appropriate resource dedicated to achieve this. In particular, local authorities, Skills Development Scotland (SDS) and employer representative organisations should work together to develop a more comprehensive standard for careers guidance which would reflect the involvement of employers and their role and input.*

### **What progress is being made to deliver this recommendation?**

Students in Scotland's college sector are predominantly taught by lecturers recruited with industry experience – and maintenance of industry links through CPD – ensuring that not only are students receiving cutting edge learning and training, but also up-to-date information and guidance about transitioning from college into the workplace.

### **What are the challenges?**

Within schools, due to the timing of the UCAS system within the cycle of exams and study leave, there remains a disproportionate focus on pathways to university to the

detriment of careers information, advice and guidance focused on applying to college, finding and securing an apprenticeship, or applying for a job.

### **What remains to be done?**

As part of the review into the 15-24 Learner Journey, Colleges Scotland submitted a position paper to the Scottish Government outlining the sector's ambitions for the final report. This was the submission to Project Two of The 15-24 Learner Journey Review (Review of the Delivery of Career Information Advice and Guidance in Colleges and Universities)

*“The college sector’s preferred position is that Project 2 recommends a national, independent, and universal approach to careers information, advice and guidance. It is felt that the ambition should be for a professional, defined and well-signposted careers service with a national common standard. This must ensure equity of access and support for all learners across Scotland, providing advice for those moving between school, college, university and moving into work.*

*The sector suggests that to deliver such a service, resources must be identified and invested. Young people, adult returners and those who have taken a non-linear path from school must be empowered to get work experience and opportunities to identify their skills. It should be noted that there is a difference between recruitment activity, and advice and support, so open days, regional networks and similar activity should and will continue under the leadership of the colleges, with regional collaboration.”*

The college sector's ambition is for a quality careers information, advice and guidance service to be available to all students, with a coherent national standard which also retains some regional flexibility so that colleges are able to focus on their students' needs and target the resources on those who require them the most. Such an approach would also help inform the work being done in our schools by SDS. The service should be designed and resourced to meet regional needs but underpinned by national standards.

Colleges Scotland  
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