

## EDUCATION AND SKILLS COMMITTEE

Thursday 31<sup>st</sup> May 2018

### Young Women Lead project focus group

The Convener facilitated a focus group with 15 young women from the Young Women Lead project on Thursday 31<sup>st</sup> May. Around half of the group were currently at school and a number of the other attendees are in roles where they work with young people currently at school and considering what to do on leaving school. The experiences shared of those that left school a number of years ago are not included in the note, especially any that pre-date the implementation of DYW. Case studies from three young women were produced for the launch of the Committee's survey have also been incorporated into this note where the young women were in attendance at the focus group. One woman who provided a case study for the launch of the Committee's inquiry was not in attendance and her anonymised case study is at the end of the note.

The Convener began by asking those still at school whether: they knew what they wanted to do; they have been encouraged towards a particular option; and they have received information and guidance to support them. The following is a reflection of experiences of attendees on a case-by-case basis.

**Young woman 1** - The first comment was from a young woman in S4 at school who suggested that they had decided through consulting friends and parents that they wanted to go to college and raised this with the school as an option. It was not an option that had been covered at school and when the young woman sought advice the school suggested remaining at school was the best option. The young woman suggested the college had not been particularly welcoming when they visited as they considered S4 to be too young to move to the subjects she was interested in. She said the reason she was still at school was because she does not know what to do next.

**2** - A second young woman in S4 suggested they had received guidance in PSE on how to write a CV. She said you get much more information in S5 but this information should be provided earlier as selecting subject choices should be more linked to the consideration of information on future career choices. They added that websites were shown to them during Personal and Social Education lessons and the young people are required to navigate this information themselves.

**3** - A third young woman in S4 at the same school suggested advice on subject choices and career guidance was completely different despite being at the same school as other focus group attendees and this was due to which house at the school they each were in. Some students in one house had received the most information about university whereas students in her house had received less on university than other options and more on vocational pathways and jobs than on university. It was suggested it depends of the personality of the house head. She said friends of hers had been advised not to come back to the school for the last years of the senior phase because the school did not see them progressing and saw them as part of the 'lad culture' and a disruptive influence on others. A number of other attendees suggested an awareness in their schools of similar happenings.

**4** - Another young woman had completed S5 and had been strongly encouraged to stay at school through S6 and go on to university. She suggested that most of her teachers told her to stay on at school and get more advanced Highers. However after work experience with MSPs she had decided she wanted some more life experience before she decides on a university course and goes to university. She heard of adult learning by word of mouth and is now undertaking it. She suggested her school wants 95% of people to go to university so that the school's positive destination statistics will make it an appealing school to attend. Modern apprenticeship information was provided at her school however there could have been more information on the range available. She arranged an internship for herself based on who she and her family knew as opposed to through the school. She said My World of Work is hard to navigate and has limited options.

**5** - A young woman whose job involves speaking to young people about the option of university suggested there is a wide variety of responses when she asks what advice and support has been received. This ranges from people who have not had any conversation or information about their future at school to people who have received lots of support and advice. She also suggested that advice should happen before 5th year to ensure it feeds into subject choices and that it should not just be about destinations, but the logistics of how to get yourself there. She considers that careers advice needs to be multifaceted and holistic - with information about different options, realistic financial advice and practical application support. Where schools have low progression rates into higher education the pressure on those deemed capable of getting into university was strong. She suggested SIMD was a 'warped measure' for widening access.

**6** - A woman who left school a number of years ago observed that modern apprenticeships are promoted much more at her old school now and all pupils are informed about them. She said her younger brothers are in the senior phase and are being pressured to leave school to go into a trade by their parents. The school has said they are supportive of this as they can be a disruptive influence in the school. One of the two wants to go to university. The woman felt strongly that her brothers should be treated as individuals with aspirations as opposed to people to 'cull' from school.

**7** - A woman whose job included encouraging take up of funded applications on STEM suggested that when she sought from schools individuals to come and hear about funded places, the school did not send people who needed this assistance they sent those most likely to take up and succeed in these places. This approach prevented the harder to reach young people who may not have realise their potential from being reached by her work.

**8** - A woman who works in the third sector gave a similar example, where they were 'speed mentoring' young women in S4, S5 and S6 and some schools selected which young people could attend and her view was that this meant that those with lower confidence who would not think they could achieve more did not receive mentoring.

**9** - A woman who is at university having recently left school suggested that 'we talk about schools speaking to pupils but in reality it is individuals speaking to individuals

so there is a big inconsistency'. There was support in the group and agreement that the variation of experience of young people was largely down to the personality of the school staff.

### **Positive examples**

Having heard personal experiences the Convener sought examples of positive work.

Examples included:

- the Young Women Lead project;
- a school running three jobs fairs partly focussed on STEM where colleges, apprenticeships and local businesses were promoted;
- a careers adviser from a local school attending a third sector forum to seek work experience for 100 of their school's pupils. This involved a period a week for a year being set aside for tailored work experience. If a pupil does not undertake work experience they have to undertake an additional subject during that year;
- JET where students request work experience of their choice, subject to availability, and school time on a Friday is used to attend;

### **Additional points**

- Two attendees who left school a number of years ago highlighted the value of the education maintenance allowance to them. They said this removed the guilt of continuing with their education as without this support they would have needed to go straight into employment to contribute money towards their families.
- Rural areas can have more limited opportunities and perhaps more limited numbers of role models meaning young people feel there are limited options for them. A small number of big local employers and the community perspective can have a big influence.
- One young woman on a YoungScot advisory group suggested schools should have a closer relationship with YoungScot, for example is has an advisory group on STEM.

### **Case study (18 year old woman)**

My teachers didn't push me towards university but I don't really remember there being any other options discussed for what we would do for when we left school. There wasn't anything obvious but there was definitely a very subtle emphasis on the grades that you get at school and where these could take you.

I worked hard at school and followed the path that was expected of me by going to study law at university. Once I was at university, it quickly became clear that this wasn't something that was for me and I experienced severe stress. The support I got from the university wasn't great and I was told that I would have to wait more than six months to receive counselling. My stress added up and I eventually had to leave university for the good of my health.

After I left university, I didn't really know what to do as so much of my life until that point was studying and getting the qualifications to go to university. I started to look

for work and now do range of different jobs including working at local radio station and working with the local youth theatre.

I also work back at my old school where I mentor pupils and help them figure out what they want to do when they leave school. One of the things I really focus on is the fact that there are different types of success and that people don't have to follow a set path. College or university doesn't have to be part of your future; just do what is right for you.