

**EDUCATION AND SKILLS COMMITTEE
THE SENIOR PHASE OF SCHOOL: HELPING YOUNG PEOPLE PURSUE THE
RIGHT PATHWAY FOR THEM
SCOTTISH CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE**

About the Scottish Chambers of Commerce Network

Scottish Chambers of Commerce (SCC) is Scotland's largest business network. SCC brings the views of the business community together, forming a clear and powerful expression of Scottish business opinion through its network of 26 accredited Chambers of Commerce, representing 11,000 members.

Introduction

Scottish Chambers of Commerce welcomes the opportunity to respond to Scottish Parliament's Education and Skills Committee, specifically related to the Young People's Pathways Inquiry and recommendations linked to the Developing the Young Workforce Initiative.

Context

The call for views around this enquiry is linked to the results of the Learner Journey survey commissioned by the Education and Skills Committee on the experiences of young people and the transition from school into work.

This survey received 895 responses from individuals aged between 15-24, of which 45% were from individuals aged 15-17.

The survey had a number of clear findings which provide some insight into the young people's perception of the school environment.

60% of young people surveyed believed that they were provided with more information about how to enter University than other comparative options, such as College (~16%), how to find a job (5.7%), or how to get onto a training programme (3%). It should be noted that a significant minority did believe they were provided with similar levels of information for all options, at 15.5%.

When split out by type of school, those in private schools were even more likely to receive more information on university than other options, at 84.5% of young people. The survey also suggests that young people believe that this information may not have been provided because it was most relevant to them. 67% of respondents believed that the information was provided to them because "*it was what the school thought most people would do next*". Fewer respondents selected choices which suggested that the advice was personalised for that individual's circumstances, although in some cases these could be significant minorities (e.g. 38.5% for "*it was the option the school thought would be best for me*".)

The survey also provides some evidence on school support. Respondents seemed to recognise that schools did provide support when it came to work experience, and advice on leaving school, but fewer agreed that their school provided 'life skills' support – defined as assistance in preparing applications and other transferable skills linked to the purpose of securing a job or interview.

Linked to these results, the Education and Skills Committee has asked for feedback from the Scottish Chambers of Commerce Network on two recommendations derived from work undertaken by the Commission for Developing Scotland's Young Workforce. These are:

Senior Phase Vocational 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.

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 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.

Recommendation 1 – Senior Phase Vocational Pathways

What is making a difference:

Generally, there's a recognition that in many areas, momentum is being gained and delivery is improving. Particularly when it comes to Foundation Apprenticeships, which have mixed success across the country. In addition, the long standing programme of Senior Phase College Transitions continues to deliver significant numbers. In some areas outstripping the current FA provision by 13:1. Many regions cited that despite some challenges with uptake and completion rates, outcomes for the young people involved remain a positive upside of senior phase vocational routes.

Challenges / Barriers:

A number of challenges were identified on this specific recommendation, many of which have are shared across a number of regions:

School perception & engagement with senior phase pathways: A number of regions identified that, as with the evidence summarised in the SPICe report / survey, there are still some challenges with students being appropriately informed as to their options around qualifications such as Foundation Apprenticeships (FAs) and other senior phase vocational routes. Many regional chambers cited engaged head teachers, at school level, as being key to improving this perception and engagement.

General uptake: Dependent on the area, there was some concern around the level of uptake, particularly around FAs. Reasons for this were more diverse across areas, with some regions experiencing challenges engaging employers, and others finding this more challenging because of pupil / school engagement. Certain regions currently report more employers engaged in delivery than young people selecting the route.

Completion rates – Some regions cited drop out and partial completion as a challenge. This can be in part explained by the perception of schools placing a greater importance on school based academic learning and encouraging students to focus their time and attention on those.

Timetabling / transport / access: In both urban and rural areas, timetabling was seen as a significant barrier to ensuring success. Challenges linked to both the position of the block of time allocated for these courses, and the total period of time allocated. Specific challenges occur both in sector / course specific areas, relating to time consuming activities such as applying PPE / protective equipment, and by geography – with lack of appropriate public transport to FE institutions acting as a barrier. Although timetabling was often cited as a key issue, this linked to challenges with connectivity and the impacts this presents on delivery.

Perception of parents: Generally, there still appears to be some work to engage parents in the value of vocational pathways. Use of the *Foundation* term, has led to some confused perceptions as to the value of the qualification when compared to Highers and equivalent qualifications. Limited acceptance with universities was also cited as a barrier to both parent and pupil perception.

What remains to be done:

Immediate considerations should link to the challenges detailed above. In particular, flexible timetabling, developing with vocational pathways in mind, should be considered to ensure that all students are able to pursue these as an option. Creating timetables with protected time was a common theme among most respondents.

Dedicated members of staff with a DYW focus or DYW appropriate KPIs, were also cited across submissions as a potential positive step. Having a clear point of contact for DYW within schools, with focused goals, would be one way to ensure that young people are provided with balanced advice on vocational routes and supported to sustain and complete.

Consistency of delivery continues to be cited as one of the main areas for improvement. Taking steps to align schools more closely on timetabling and staff resources would act to ameliorate some of the broader challenges around perception and delivery.

Recommendation 2 – Preparing Young People for the World of Work

What is making a difference:

Respondent chambers / DYW teams cited several initiatives as making a difference in this area, such as:

- Career Education Standards
- The overall delivery of the Regional DYW network, with initiatives which support the standard and the entitlements.
- The launch of Marketplace and Founders4Schools and the continued success of these initiatives.
- MCR Pathways as a specific programme for engaging a targeted population of young people.

A number of regions noted best practice examples of continuous engagement, with sub-networks of schools being convened to regularly meet and discuss best practice on a term by term basis, and short-life working groups established to review and embed specific standards into implementation.

The development of Skills Pathway structures generally has allowed for continued, improved dialogue. Employers can engage more directly with the curriculum and

SDS career advisors are able to be upskilled / better informed around the world of work.

Challenges / Barriers:

Career Education Standards: Still need to be fully embraced by teachers, some challenges remain in ensuring that this is a priority focus alongside broader attainment.

Employer recruitment branding / talent attraction: Employers need to consider their own marketing and making their organisation attractive to young people, this includes internal work in developing career paths within organisations.

Careers advice: Some consideration should be given to how careers advice is currently delivered in schools, with some areas experiencing success by focusing on 'peer group' advice, through younger industry ambassadors.

Reliance on online resources: In some areas, particularly rural regions, some concerns were raised around greater reliance on My World of Work over local knowledge / engagement.

Employability skills / teaching: Concerns were also raised, perhaps supported by the general themes of the Learner Journey survey findings, that employability needs to be recognised, at a school level, as being important for all students, not just those going down the vocational route / senior phase pathway.

What remains to be done:

Although employers remain engaged, some concern that, particularly with larger organisations, employer fatigue is growing due to a wide variety of stakeholders and contact points. It was suggested that a coordinated approach across all stakeholders should be considered to ensure continued employer engagement.

Protected time for teachers to engage with DYW / employability initiatives was identified as a challenge across many regions. More broadly, it is recognised that teachers lack time (especially in rural areas with acute shortages of staff) to engage with these initiatives in depth.

As with vocational pathways, a dedicated coordinator for employability activity within schools was identified as a one way to improve performance in this area

Conclusion

Through engagement with chambers, it is clear that there is positive, increasing momentum throughout DYW activity, particularly in Foundation Apprenticeships where levels of engagement, both with employers and local authority partners, continue to improve.

In this submission, an attempt has been made to highlight some of the shared challenges across regions which are acting as barriers to the pace of this continued success.

Chambers of Commerce will continue to support DYW teams to develop sustainable links with local business communities, and support school teams as they build on their DYW plans and activity.