

CROSS PARTY GROUP (CPG) ON SCOTLAND'S COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

The Learner Journey: Sharing Best Practice

13.00 – 14:00 on Wednesday 13 December 2017, Committee Room 1, Scottish Parliament

Note of Meeting

Present:

Scottish Parliament	Ms	Liz Smith MSP
Scottish Parliament	Mr	Iain Gray MSP
Scottish Parliament	Ms	Sandra White MSP
Building Engineering Services Association	Mr	Iain McCaskey
Colleges Scotland	Mr	Andy Witty
Colleges Scotland	Ms	Vonnie Sandlan
Colleges Scotland	Ms	Shona Struthers
Edinburgh Napier University	Mr	Finlay MacCorquodale
Glasgow Caledonian University	Ms	Eleanor Wilson MBE
Glasgow Caledonian University	Mr	Rob Flett
Glasgow Caledonian University	Ms	Roisin-Alana Di Giacomo
LEAD Scotland	Ms	Rebecca Scarlett
NUS Scotland	Ms	Jodie Waite
NUS Scotland	Ms	Shuwamma Aaron
NUS Scotland	Ms	Risga Carson
NUS Scotland	Mr	Fergus Boden
Open University	Mr	Kenny Stewart
Queen Margaret University	Ms	Jane Scott
Robert Gordon University	Mr	James Dunphy
Scottish Funding Council	Mr	Martin Fairbairn
Skills Development Scotland	Mr	Paul Mullan
sparqs	Ms	Morven Stewart
UCU Scotland	Ms	Ann Gow
Universities Scotland	Mr	Alastair Sim
Universities Scotland	Ms	Susannah Lnae
Universities Scotland	Mr	Boab Thomson
University of Edinburgh	Prof.	Grant Jarvie
University of Edinburgh	Ms	Moira Gibson
University of Glasgow	Dr	Neil Croll
University of the Highlands and Islands	Prof.	Matthew MacIver
University of the Highlands and Islands	Ms	Alison Lochhead
West Highland College/UHI	Ms	Lydia Rohmer

Apologies:

Scottish Parliament	Mr	Jeremy Balfour MSP
City of Glasgow College	Mr	Paul Little
Edinburgh Napier University	Dr	Sandra Cairncross
EIS	Ms	Anne Keenan
Heriot-Watt University	Mr	Martin Spence
QAA	Ms	Rowena Pelik
University of Aberdeen	Mr	Terry Brotherstone
University of Glasgow	Mr	Peter Aitchison
West College Scotland	Mr	Drew McGowan

1. Welcome and introduction from the Convener

The Convener, Ms Liz Smith MSP, welcomed everyone to the sixth meeting of the CPG on Colleges and Universities in session 5 of the Scottish Parliament, on the topic of: *The Learner Journey: Sharing Best Practice*. Ms Smith welcomed the speakers: Mr James Dunphy, Director of Enhancement of Learning, Teaching and Access, Robert Gordon University; Ms Eleanor Wilson MBE, Head of Glasgow Caledonian University's Outreach; Ms Lydia Rohmer, Principal and Chief Executive, West Highland College/UHI; and Ms Shona Struthers, Chief Executive, Colleges Scotland.

Ms Smith thanked University of the Highlands and Islands for sponsoring the lunch for the meeting.

2. Apologies

Apologies were noted.

3. Approval of minutes from 25 October 2017 'procedural' meeting

Ms Smith invited the Group to approve the minutes from the previous meeting on 25 October 2017, which included the re-election of the office-bearers. Members approved the minutes of the meeting and the re-election of the office bearers.

4. Introduction to topic: *The Learner Journey: Sharing best practice*

Ms Smith invited the speakers to make their presentations.

Mr James Dunphy, Director of Enhancement of Learning, Teaching and Access, Robert Gordon University.

Mr Dunphy informed the group of Robert Gordon University's aspiration to lead and shape the debate on the future of higher education. In order to achieve this, the university places students at the centre of the education it offers. Mr Dunphy stated that the strength of Scotland's higher education sector is its diversity. He explained that central to Robert Gordon University's aspiration is the view that skills-rich professional education adds significant value to learners, employers and

Scotland's economy. Mr Dunphy explained that skills-rich professional education must be industry-led and make extensive use of work-based learning. He added that pathways must make sense and work for learners. An integrated curriculum, which embraces collaboration with employers, schools, colleges and students, is essential for smooth pathways for learners.

Mr Dunphy then explained the importance of getting articulation right for the student experience, and maximising impact with public money. He said a whole system approach was necessary, involving schools, colleges, universities, right through to work. Mr Dunphy informed members of the Associate College Agreement, the first formal agreement of its kind in Scotland, which encourages extensive partnership between North East Scotland College and Robert Gordon University in the North East. The university also offers the Degree Link programme, which allows students to complete a degree without any time loss. The programme is typically offered on a 2+2 basis (two years studying HND at college, followed by two years at university) but 1+3 routes (one year at college followed by three at university) are also available. There are 38 routes which learners can choose from, allowing the university to focus on transition and student success. Mr Dunphy also explained that Degree Link:

- Embeds institutional commitment
- Guarantees articulation places, so students they know they have a place with Robert Gordon University.
- Has effective transition support, enabling students to adapt to university life.

The group learned that the number of articulating students had increased at Robert Gordon University. In 2011/12, there were 292 who articulated from college to university. In 2016/17, there were 493 articulating students, an increase of 68%. Over 1500 students had articulated in the last 5 years with 9 in 10 receiving a degree. And, 95% were employed or in further study after graduation. Mr Dunphy explained the success of articulation at Robert Gordon University was due to resolute strategic commitment, driven by effective leadership. The engagement of staff at all levels, including the lecturers who are delivering the curriculum, was also attributed to the success of articulation at the university. Finally, Mr Dunphy thanked the Scottish Funding Council for their continued support, which has been fundamental in increasing articulation at Robert Gordon.

In closing, Mr Dunphy commented that for the Learner Journey to continue to be enhanced, there needed to be clear and consistent information for learners; enhanced access and support for under-represented groups; and increased strategic ambition and joint working across education providers.

Ms Eleanor Wilson MBE, Head of Glasgow Caledonian Outreach

Ms Wilson began her presentation by informing the group that she had worked in widening access for over 17 years and was previously a school teacher. She then explained 'Outreach' at Glasgow Caledonian University, an outreach and transition support department which consists of five areas: the Caledonian Club, which raises educational aspirations in nursery, primary and secondary pupils and their families; the Advanced Higher Hub, an on-campus centre for delivering Advanced Highers to Glasgow secondary schools; School Connect, a programme providing support to ensure that secondary school pupils applying to GCU have the resources to gain the maximum benefit from their university studies; College Connect, which provides transition support to college students

articulating to Glasgow Caledonian University; and the Routes for All programme, developed to inform and guide school pupils in S5 and S6 to study Higher National Courses at college.

Ms Wilson stated that the main aim of Outreach is to make Glasgow Caledonian University accessible to all, especially to people from disadvantaged backgrounds. This ambition is in keeping with the university's motto of '*For the Common Weal.*'

The group was then told the story of Reece Coyle, who is a S6 pupil who has worked with Outreach since he was ten years old. Reece lives in the Castlemilk area of Glasgow, in a SIMD20 postcode. His primary school had a 21.3% higher education conversion rate and no one in his family has even applied to university, let alone attend. The university's Caledonian Club first started working with Reece when he was in P5 in 2009. The project entailed school work and spending a whole day at the university's campus. The following year, when he was in P6, he returned to the university where he and his classmate presented an award to Sir Alex Ferguson CBE, an honorary graduate of the university. Ms Wilson informed the group that Sir Alex founded the Glasgow Caledonian University Foundation after seeing the work the university was doing with Reece and his peers. The university continued to engage with and support Reece throughout high school and he is now in the university's Advanced Higher Hub to study Advanced Higher English. Ms Wilson concluded by informing the group that Reece has applied to study Psychology at university, the first in his family to do so.

In closing, Ms Wilson stressed the importance of the student mentors who support the various teams in the department. Mentors are recruited from the university and most have been through the Outreach department themselves. Since most learners from disadvantaged backgrounds have no family who have attended a university before, the student mentors are a source of valuable advice and knowledge. Finally, Ms Wilson said raising school attainment is critical for the learner journey, which is why partnerships with schools is vital.

Ms Lydia Rohmer, Principal and Chief Executive, West Highland College and University of the Highlands and Islands

Ms Rohmer began her presentation describing the unique model of the University of the Highlands and Islands: a partnership of 14 colleges and research centres, spread across the length and breadth of Scotland. The institution currently has over 8000 higher education students and 31,000 further education students. In 2014, the university received the Research Excellence Framework award for the best performing young university in Scotland and had 69% of its research rated as world leading or internationally excellent. Ms Rohmer commented that the university is geographically accessible; the various campuses throughout Scotland mean it is available to every Scottish learner, regardless of location.

Ms Rohmer described the university's integrated learning system, which provides articulation and progression pathways for a wide range of learners across Scotland. Working with schools, communities and employers means students are offered further education, higher education and work-based learning. Learners have access to curriculum regardless of location and there are no institutional barriers learners. Furthermore, the university offers an integrated tertiary curriculum

from access-level to post-doctoral research, meaning the whole of SCQF is offered in a single organisation.

The group then heard how learners have a seamless tertiary journey and can access the university from school, work and the wider community. This unique approach enables learners to have non-linear entry and exit points and receive maximum recognition for prior learning, maximising individual opportunity and progression.

Ms Rohmer explained that innovative learner support facilitates the widest possible access to tertiary learning. This is achieved by:

- Highly innovative use of learning technology in a unique blended learning model
- Seamless learner support arrangements with complementary local and central policy, support and guidance systems
- A single admissions policy for access to Higher Education, including mainstreamed practice of contextualized admissions and extensive Recognition of Prior Learning system
- Focus on access for learners from SIMD/rural deprivation backgrounds, care experienced learners, carers and mature learners
- Strategically planned curriculum pathways with inbuilt progression and articulation

Ms Rohmer informed members that a higher percentage of school leavers in the Highlands and Islands move into employment than progress into further and higher education. The university has a coordinated and consistent approach to school-college and university engagement activity and focuses on schools with low progression to university. There is also a regional SCQF Level 7 provision for pupils in the senior phase, with an emphasis on STEM and humanities themes.

The group learned about the university's Regional Work-Based Learning Hub which works with 55 schools and 100 employers across 10 Foundation Apprenticeship frameworks. Ms Rohmer commented that the Hub has been very successful, demonstrating a year-on-year growth in apprenticeship numbers, with 360 planned apprenticeship enrolments for 2017/19. The Hub allows for the focus on pathways, ensuring there is a collaborative approach to the work-based learning curriculum and development of materials.

Ms Rohmer commented that although intra-UHI progression is not reflected in the Scottish Funding Council's National Articulation Database, the university's articulation record is very impressive: 75% of UHI students who were awarded a HNC in 2015/16 progressed to degree with advanced entry (Y2) in 2016/17 whilst 98% of UHI students awarded a HND in 2015/16 progressed to degree with advanced entry (Y3) the following year. This means 86% of students who were awarded a HN qualification in 2015/16 entered a degree with advanced standing (either Y2 or Y3) in 2016/17.

Questioning whether the UHI model works, Ms Rohmer highlighted the high number of learners in positive destinations; the increase in learner demand across FE and HE courses; the retention of local learners as well as attracting new learners to the region; and the value and economic impact of UHI partnership as evidence of the model's success. She notes that success indicators for learners, such as attainment, progression and post-course success, are consistently and well-above the national sector averages.

Ms Rohmer closed by informing the group that the university would continue to make a positive difference by:

- Continuing to focus on fair access for FE and HE entrants from targeted areas of rurality and rural deprivation (including development of recognised measure in addition to SIMD20)
- enhancing strategic partnerships with schools for access to vocational, academic and work based learning, including remote delivery
- developing the work based regional hub to full capacity, providing access to widest range of work based qualifications

Finally, Ms Rohmer commented that the fully integrated college and university system means UHI are uniquely placed to contribute the national debate on fair access and improving learner journeys in Scotland.

Ms Shona Struthers, Chief Executive, Colleges Scotland

Ms Struthers began her presentation by describing the college system in Scotland, which after the regionalisation process was completed in 2013, is home to 26 colleges in 13 regions across Scotland. Colleges work within their regions to deliver high quality learning that meets student's demands, employers' requirements and society's needs. There are 227,258 further education students in Scotland whilst 28% of all higher education is delivered in colleges.

Ms Struthers stated that the language around further and higher education needed to change; for learners, it's not a binary choice between college and university. There are many routes and pathways to education. The current learner journey in Scotland was then compared to the London Underground:

- Too many young people still make the wrong initial choices (get on at the wrong station).
- Too many learners and their families don't understand the language (what each qualification means to them, employers etc).
- Too many learners repeat stages and levels unnecessarily (not the most efficient tube journey).
- Too many learners are not well enough supported through complex pathways (not clear on which tube line you should be on).
- For many learners' time is wasted and entry into the workforce is delayed (you might find yourself on the circle line going round it twice).
- The landscape is cluttered and confusing which leads to costly inefficiency (its not about the tube stations – schools/colleges/universities – it's about the destinations i.e. the qualification and appropriate skills for the learner).

Ms Struthers then shared good practice with members, with the examples of Glasgow Clyde College and Forth Valley College. Firstly, Glasgow Clyde College has strong relationships locally with schools and employers. School pupils do work-based learning in the senior phase of school as part of their school curriculum, building independence and practical, transferable skills. This then enables students to enter college with clear progression pathways beyond the phase of education they're currently in.

This delivery model includes significant expectation of placement, which is tied into the assessments for each module, ensuring that employers are part of the process ensuring the workforce of the future is gaining appropriate work-based skills, and that graduates have well-rounded experiences and are work-ready. Ms Struthers commented that efficient learner journeys maximise public investment, as there is no repetition of study for the learner so no repeated funding from the public purse

Secondly, interdisciplinary study at Forth Valley College was used as another example of good practice in the college sector. Students studying Sports Science observed Bricklaying students, and observed how they move whilst on the site. It was then hypothesised that since elite athletes undertake extensive, designed, warm-up exercises before competing that a similar principal should apply to construction workers. The students designed a series of warm-up exercises aimed at reducing musculoskeletal injuries at work, outcome of successful pilot was increased productivity and fewer days lost to injury and illness. The warm up pilot was picked up by a national construction company and rolled out to their sites successfully.

Ms Struthers closed by comparing the vision of the learner journey in Scotland to a river map, with its multiple entry and exit points; recognition that the next destination can be reached from a diverse range of pathways; and a decluttered landscape which is easy to understand which leads to improved skills costly inefficiency.

5. Discussion and questions

The convener thanked the speakers for their presentations and opened the floor for discussion.

Sandra White MSP, Scottish Parliament

Ms White asked what provisions were in place there were for care-experienced students applying and studying at university.

Ms Wilson said that Glasgow Caledonian University have a Care Experienced Strategy which supports individuals both when applying and studying at the university. She added that the university takes supporting care leavers very seriously and there are a range of services available. However, she advised that it can be quite difficult to obtain data on care-experienced learners and that more could be done to identify these individuals.

Iain Gray MSP, Scottish Parliament

Mr Gray asked about scalability. He said he was touched by Reece's story and noted it seemed like there was a lot of intensive work involved. He then asked if the level of work which is put into supporting one child means that other children don't benefit from the programme.

Ms Wilson replied by saying that Glasgow Caledonian University focuses on primary schools with low progression rates and works with the entire class. Although she appreciated that the Outreach programme did sound like a lot of work, visits to schools were conducted over a two-year period.

Mr Gray then clarified that in a particular low-progression school, all pupils in a particular class will have the same opportunity to be supported by the university, to which Ms Wilson confirmed. She added that the university's work in nurseries is more about education the parents about university, which is very important given that the majority have no experience of higher education.

Alastair Sim, Universities Scotland

Mr Sim noted that although more of an observation, due to work carried out by Universities Scotland for the *Working to Widen Access* publication, he now recognises that there are a finite number of subjects where full articulation takes place. Degree subjects such as social studies and law, have below-average articulation rates. Mr Sim commented that it was important to drill down on specific qualification routes and identify reasons for systemic blockages in subject areas.

Iain Gray MSP, Scottish Parliament

Mr Gray commented that it was encouraging to hear about the University of the Highlands and Island's recognition of previous learning and asked why, in general, articulation is often hard to define and hard to do right.

Mr Dunphy replied that institutions needed to do more detailed work with individual learners and a 'one-size fits all' solution would not work. Programmes needed to be more specific to the individual, as oppose to broadly catering for all.

Rebecca Scarlett, LEAD

Ms Scarlett asked the speakers if there were any programmes which widened access to people with disabilities.

Mr Dunphy replied that institutions need to consider that widening access is not exclusive to socio-economic status and that there are many underrepresented groups in university. He noted men are an underrepresented group in a midwifery course, for example. A whole-school approach is needed to see who is underrepresented in a particular subject or field.

Ms Scarlett replied that an issue with disability and access to university is that lots of people who have a disability do not consider themselves disabled, to which the speakers agreed.

Neill Croll, University of Glasgow

Mr Croll commented that he was impressed with the UHI's record on articulation and asked if all curriculum was matched to individual learners and if all routes to the university were planned.

Ms Rohmer replied that UHI undertake strategic curriculum planning and have developed a new online tool to generate personalised curriculum maps and pathways.

6. Close

The Convener closed the meeting with thanks to all for attending.

Ends