

# CROSS PARTY GROUP ON SKILLS

Tuesday 21 November 2017, 1300-1400 hours  
Committee Room 2, Scottish Parliament

## Minutes (Draft)

### Present

- James Dornan MSP
- Gillian Martin MSP
- Joanne Buchan, Colleges Scotland
- Svea Miesch, ScotlandIS
- Gillian Docherty, The Data Lab
- Drew McGowan, West College Scotland
- Ian McCulloch, ITC Academy
- Cara Hilton, CECA Scotland
- Robert Girvan, CITB Scotland
- Paul Mullan, SDS
- Fiona Stewart, SDS
- Kevin Patrick, Lantra
- Grant Thoms, Ingeus
- Elaine Ellis, Select
- Simon Williams, NHS Education for Scotland
- Ishabel Bremner, EDAS
- Alex James, Scouts Scotland
- Stephen Young, Young Artwork
- Ian McCaskey, BESA

### Apologies

- Johann Lamont MSP
- Jamie Halcro Johnston MSP
- Colin Smyth MSP
- Anne Galbraith, SECTT
- Christine Powell, Essentials Plus Ltd
- Aileen Ponton, SCQF Partnership
- Julie Cavanagh, SCQF Partnership
- Jim Metcalfe, College Development Network
- George Brown, SQA
- Cate Nelson-Shaw, This Is Remarkable
- Tommy Laughlin, ScotlandIS
- Kirsty Conlon, Universities Scotland
- Jay Smith, Employment Enterprise
- Shona Matthews, Chartered Banker Institute
- Stephen Williams, Scottish Enterprise
- Kate Still, Rathbone
- Robert Bruce, SEMTA
- Keith Geddes, Pagoda Porter Novelli
- Paul Little, City of Glasgow College
- Anne Meikle, Women's Enterprise Scotland
- Stuart McKenna, Scottish Training Federation
- Andy Witty, Colleges Scotland
- Baljinder Birdi, Pearson UK
- Gerry McGinn, G.M.G. Contractors Ltd

## 1. Welcome and Apologies

James Dornan MSP opened the meeting and noted apologies from members of the group.

## 2. Annual General Meeting Business

There was a review of activity over the last year and the Annual Return Form was approved. The following MSPs were re-elected as office bearers:

- James Dornan MSP, Convenor
- Johann Lamont MSP, Deputy Convenor.

## 3. Approval of Minutes from the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the 20 June 2017 meeting were ratified.

## 4. Presentation and Discussion

The topic for the meeting was 'digital skills' and presentations were heard from Svea Miesch, Research and Policy Manager, ScotlandIS and then from Gillian Docherty, Chief Executive Officer, The Data Lab.

Svea focused on digital tech skills and the variety of roles available. She stated that there are 90 thousand people working in digital tech positions across the country and that demand is

outstripping supply, creating a skills gap. Svea highlighted the key challenges which are: a narrow skills pipeline with graduates from mainly computer science; aligning skills provision to employer demands; the image of the tech sector with computer programmer stereotypes and it not being seen as a rewarding career; and gender imbalance – only 18% of the workforce are women. Svea said that these were being addressed through the Skills Investment Plan, managed by Skills Development Scotland, which includes various actions such as CodeClan, the digital skills academy; a marketing campaign called 'Digital World'; and a mentoring programme. Next steps would be to do more of the same, increase the number of places available in further and higher education as well as developing the existing workforce.

Gillian presented on innovation, taking the group on a journey to 2037 and exploring a day in the life of a young person. She considered what technology might be available and become the norm such as embedded microchips, artificial intelligence, holograms and augmented reality etc, and highlighted that in the future there will be no borders or boundaries. Gillian talked about the need to invest in technology now and for Scotland to get involved to design and architect the future. This will require the right skills, innovation, investment and opportunities.

A question and answer session followed. There was a discussion on the misalignment of skills provision; Svea highlighted that research undertaken by SDS shows where the gaps are and where people are needed for the digital tech industry.

The group then talked about the language used around the industry not being particularly inviting to encourage more women to consider a career in digital skills, especially in schools. Gillian Docherty stated that a bigger societal shift was required to challenge stereotypes and she highlighted that there is a move to change STEM to STEAM, to include the wider arts as all skillsets will be required in future. Svea mentioned that coding clubs and extra-curricular activities were starting to address some of the issues.

It was noted that there is a strong emphasis on young people and there was a question on what is being done for adults as well as a question on what work has been undertaken with employers to encourage them to look beyond only taking on graduates. Gillian stated that a raft of activity is needed in every sector and that we have a culture of always learning. She said it would be impossible to close the skills gap only with people straight out of education due to the numbers needed. Svea said that there needs to be more willingness from employers to take on apprentices and that graduate apprenticeships were now being delivered. She said that CodeClan had been a successful route into employment for people.

There was a question around what can be done to get labour intensive industries such as on-site construction involved. Gillian mentioned the new Construction Innovation Factory which is run by Construction Scotland Innovation Centre which provides the opportunities for organisations to experiment with new technologies including augmented and virtual reality.

There was a discussion on small-medium sized enterprises (SMEs) and how tech skills can filter down to this market through upskilling and reskilling of the workforce. It was noted that there needs to be a more cost-effective solution for SMEs to access the expertise required and support needed.

## **5. Dates of Future Meetings**

The dates for future meetings are as follows:

- Tuesday 6 February 2018 (Committee Room 1)
- Tuesday 1 May 2018 (Committee Room 1)

It was noted that any suggestions for topics should be sent to Joanne Buchan at Colleges Scotland.

## **6. Close**

With no further business to conduct, the meeting was closed.