

Minutes of Meeting 15th December 2011

Cross Party Group on Skills

Date: 15th December 2011
 Location: Holyrood, Committee Room 2
 Present:

Association of Accounting Technicians	Helen McGougan	SECTT	Anne Galbraith
Barnardo's Scotland	Simon Warr	Scottish Conservative Party	Gavin Brown MSP
Chartered Institute of Bankers in Scotland	Shona Matthews	SIO	Alan Thornburrow
Creative Scotland	Helena Ward	Scottish Labour Party	Margaret McCulloch MSP
Federation of Small Businesses	Mary Goodman	Scottish Labour Party	John Park MSP
ICS Learning	Joanne McManus	SQA	George Brown / Joe Wilson
IRISS	Sarah Cockburn	STUC	Suzanne Motherwell/ Sylvia O'Grady
Improve Scotland	Kelvin Thomson	Scottish Youth Parliament	Andrew McGowan MYPSP
NHS Education for Scotland	Simon Williams	Skills Development Scotland	Fiona Stewart
OU Scotland	Bruce Heil	Unite the Union	Pat McIlvogue

Apologies received:

Barnardo's Scotland	Helen Brown	OPITO	Gillian Black
Bio Reliance	Louise Rice	Rathbone Scotland	Jim Murphy
Castle Douglas Community IT Centre	Alison Barrett/ Chris Fyles	RBS	Omar Mohammed
Chartered Banker Institute	Simon Thompson	Remploy	Austin Hardie / Margaret Barton
Cogent SSC	Paul Coffey	Scottish Liberal Democrats	Liam McArthur MSP
Construction Skills Scotland	Graeme Ogilvy	Scottish National Party	Marco Biagi MSP
Economic Development Association [Scotland]	Anne Meikle, Irene Bell	Scottish Labour Party	Drew Smith MSP
Education Scotland	Ruth Ohdlag / Alan Runcie / Anne Jardine	Scotland IS	Polly Purvis
Institute of Physics	Alison McLure	SCQF	Aileen Ponton
Investors in People	Judith Ackerman / Vicki McLean	SELECT	Newell McGuinness
Learning & Skills Improvement Service	Marian Healy	Skills for Logistics	Chris Campbell
Learning Link Scotland	Susan Walls	Universities Scotland	Susannah Lane
Loch Lomond & Trossachs Community Partnership	Kate Sankey	Working Links	Nick Young

Agenda Items:

1 Welcome:

John Park MSP welcomed all for attending and thanked Jenny Duncan for arranging the mince pies, and the Chartered Banker Institute for sponsoring the teas and coffees, and also for providing the Secretariat function of the CPG. JP noted that Shona Matthews would say a few words about the developments that had taken place over the last year at the Institute under item 3 of the Agenda.

2 Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising

- 2.1** The Minutes of the meeting of 26th October 2011 were approved. The matters arising were noted as the ongoing discussions regarding the workplan of the CPG and the agenda had been developed around the one key workplan theme: supporting the development of skills for those already in the workforce.

3 Chartered Banker Institute

- 3.1** Shona Matthews referred to the theme of the meeting agenda – looking at the ongoing development of skills for those already in employment. The Institute, like many other professional bodies, continues to work hard to support individuals in their working lives, through qualification and access to onward learning once qualified. Working in the banking sector, the Institute aims to rebuild trust in the individuals working in the banking sector by assisting them in achieving higher standards of their ethical professionalism. Shona noted that the Institute had recently worked with the 9 of the UK's main high street banks to establish a Professional Standards Board which would now work to develop clear standards of professionalism for all levels within the banking workforce, helping outline clearer pathways for ongoing development and to better define the skills needed for the future. She highlighted the fact that FE and HE should not be seen as the only resource for skills development in the workplace. However, whilst the Institute offers its own qualification framework and is an SCQF credited rating body, the Institute also actively seeks out suitable partnerships with more traditional learning establishments, for example supporting an OU Foundation Degree, an MSc with Glasgow Caledonian University, and an MBA programme through Bangor University. The Institute is always open to non traditional measures of assessment and to learn from others in developing flexible learning solutions and looked forward to the presentation from the OU.

4 OU and STUC presentation

- 4.1** John Park in introducing the speakers declared his own interest having been himself involved with Union Learning. He was delighted therefore to invite Bruce Heil of Open University and Pat McIlvogue of Unite the Union to take the floor and outline the benefits of the workforce coming together to benefit from learning.

Mr Heil thanks John for the opportunity to address the CPG and referred to presentation slides. The case study outlined how OU was approached to help offer a degree in Engineering to workers on the shop floor to help get better engagement from staff and to make better use of their skills.

Mr Heil provided some background on the OU highlighting the fact that approximately 80% of its students are in employment, and that OU operates an open entry approach to its courses. OU also links with FE provides to support the move, for example from an HNC to an Engineering degree. Working organisations such as Unite has helped the OU in delivering learning opportunities into the workplace.

Pat McIlvogue of Unite the Union explained the roll Union Learning took in helping the delivery of learning in the workplace. As many workers have been out of formal education for so long, it was important that the learning environment was friendly and familiar. Other considerations included shift patterns, and encouraging older workers to re-engage with learning. Mr McIlvogue noted that most employers train to match business needs. However skills were underutilised with knowledge and skills often formally unaccredited. Union Learning representatives seek to drive the learning from the bottom up; to facilitate collective bargaining and set the parameters for the learning. They engage the workforce through surveys and meetings to identify their needs. If there is interest in learning then the need can be analysed. The learning rep can find out what is available, whether there is any credit transfer from previous learning and importantly if there is any commonality an approach can be made to the employer. Mr McIlvogue noted that consultants are often brought into organisations when there are underutilised skills within the business – why not tap the internal skills resource instead.

The main challenges has been to help get people back into learning and the cost of learning itself, with this often seen as a luxury not a necessity. There is no single source of funding and often the employer and employee will both contribute.

Mr Heil outlined the case study of Roll Royce. It is funded by the Scottish Funding Council's Skills Utilisation Project Fund, and contributions from the employer and employee. The project is designed to create a pathway from the shop floor to a BEng degree. This pathway did exist but for fast track individuals, not volume take up. Added to the model was a workplace support combining peers, the union rep and a tutor coming to the workplace – a model which could be replicated in other businesses. Of critical importance was to involve the line manager to ensure that the skills learned were used. This involved regular meetings, sign off for modules choices by managers and regular dialogue. Colleague advocacy has also supported an increased uptake.

So successful is the model that the OU, working with the Union, is discussing its application with three other organisations. They are also working with OPITO to look at how a similar approach might work for the ship building sector.

Mr McIlvogue highlighted again the frequency with which training had previously only be made available to these workers when skills were required, often without support and without consideration for shift patterns and family commitments. To help get some back into work they started through social learning, languages for example, and also some ICT courses, getting the workers familiar with learning in the workplace before introducing the opportunities through the OU. Through the 'collectivised' approach retention has been high and pass marks impressive. The next step is to demonstrate the value of the new skills in the workplace – it is hard to quantify the overall business benefit but some examples of improved maths and statistical skills has made improvements to processes which have enhanced production and the delivered product. Showing the progression pathway has also been important. Mr McIlvogue closed by stating that this important and pro-active union role is not always noted despite the benefits it brings to all. He quoted the figure that 90% of the training budget is usually spent on 10% of the workforce. His experienced showed that OU was a great learning provider that could help improve this statistic and could bespoke the offering to suit the business.

Mr Heil summarised by stating that this had been a very different experience for the OU – working within the organisation. This had allowed them to ensure the development of a programme that supported better skills utilisation. In this they had benefited greatly from working with the Union and recommended their services to others. The presentation closed with a video link to testimonials from both employees and employers engaged from the Rolls Royce case study.

John Park thanks Mr Heil and Mr McIlvogue. He thought it was great to see what had changed over the last 10 years since his own involvement as a Union learning rep. He then opened the floor to questions.

- 4.2** Fiona Stewart of SDS asked what sort of split there was between the 3 funding parties. Mr Heil answered that it was 1/5 from the individual, 2/5 from the employer and 2/5 from the project fund.
- 4.3** Margaret McCulloch MSP asked whether Individual Learning Accounts had been used. Mr McIlvogue replied that no, the income level was a barrier to accessing that funding.
- 4.4** Ms McCulloch also noted that there were no women shown on the testimonials and asked whether any had been involved in the programme or indeed been offered the opportunity to participate. Mr McIlvogue replied that it was a male dominated workforce in this case. One female member of staff had started the programme and this would have been representative of the overall population [approx 10% are women]. However they were seeking to engage more women in the programme. Mr Heil added that in another programme over half the participants were women. Mr McIlvogue also commented that to be a union learning rep one had to be a shop steward. In his experience where female union learning reps were involved more women did engage in the process.

- 4.5** Margaret McCulloch also noted that Rolls Royce takes on apprentices and asked whether they were offered progression to this or other degree programmes. Mr McIlvogue advised that there were other degree programmes offered particularly to harness potential but that this was for smaller groups. The aim of this project had been to open up access to others that would not normally have been supported. The apprentice programme can lead to an HNC, then HND or a degree depending on individual needs and managerial input, and noted that some have already made this progression. Mr Heil advised that OU was investigating how to create such opportunities with another employer.
- 4.6** Kelvin Thomson of Improve Scotland asked about the time commitment required of participants per week, month or year. Mr Heil explained that it was a 4 year course which generally broke down into 30 per week full time study. As a part time course it was spread over 6 years with approx. 15 hours of study per week. At Roll Royce modules were reduced in size to break-in students, building in size as they progress.
- 4.7** Helen McGougan of AAT noted that her own organisation was developing learning pathways to try to engage employees in learning again. She was interested to know more about how important it had been to initiate the process with social learning such as Spanish. Mr McIlvogue explained that the aim was to generate interest in what was available, learning being easier where there was a genuine interest and the feeling of being told to do something. Learning could then become contagious. Mr Heil added that OU offers free online learning resources without any formal assessments as a way of helping people back into learning. Joe Wilson of SQA asked whether these resources offered a credit transfer. Mr Heil explained that a discussion with SQA is needed as it was OU's understanding that some of the learning available such as 'communication' would not be at a sufficient level to attract transferable credit. Mr Wilson offered his support to look into this with Mr Heil.
- 4.8** Mary Goodman of the Federation of Small Businesses asked about flexibility. How sustainable is the programme beyond the current funding. For her members the concern would be the cost implications of flexible, tailored programmes like this as once scaled down flexibility can become less viable. Mr Heil felt similar programmes could be developed for even the smallest firms. What was important was to have the right dialogue with the manager. In some cases people were released for study during the hours of work, however OU offers flexible learning to aid study outwith working hours. With regards to long term sustainability, with other employers Unite is seeking funding or the employer is contributing. For OU they are happy to offer their time to consult to ensure the right programme is in place. Mr McIlvogue noted that some SMEs are operating the stakeholder model of the 3-way split. There real issue is that there is no single sustainable fund and often they are jumping from one pot to another. However, the users are less interested in the wiring behind the programme.
- 4.9** Fiona Stewart of SDS noted that there were now some Modern Apprenticeships at level4 and even some at level 5 for some sectors. Mr McIlvogue referred to Scotrail where there is a programme to take semi-skilled workers through adult apprenticeships. The aim is to try and

provide the employer with an alternative to bringing in people and to utilise the skills of the existing workforce.

- 4.10** Suzanna Motherwell of STUC referred to the Closing the Gap programme noting the success of the model. She asked, in reference to earlier comments, about whether there are figures indicating the involvement from, for example women in work, or carers. Mr McIlvogue said no, but elsewhere they had noted that the gender gap went the other way with fewer men participating.
- 4.11** John Park noted that there remained some barriers in how guidance and careers advisors understood the opportunities to learn at work through vocational training. These attitudes can be reinforced at home. He added that it was possible to rely on the private sector alone to develop the skills needed for the future. Looking at current vacancies the top 10 jobs available did not exist 10 years ago. It is impossible to estimate the number of times an individual will need to reskill and change to support the development of the economy. The case study from OU and Unite is a great example of a partnership aimed at developing a workforce to be ready for future needs and to fulfil new roles. Mr Heil highlighted the importance of workplace learning by quoting the current statistics which indicate 60% of the working population is female and also that 60% of the population is between the ages of 25-45. Sylvia O'Grady of STUC stressed the case study offered a model of best practice. She added that there are over 2000 Union Learning Representatives helping with engagement. There was also a growing trend in social learners becoming more interested in upskilling and should anyone wish to discuss further she welcomed them to get in contact with her.
- 4.12** John Park thanked everyone for their participation in the discussion and particularly the representatives of Open University and Unite for their presentation.

5 A.O.C.B

- 5.1** John Park noted that many members had been feeding into the workplan and the convenors planned to bring some of these matters forward for discussion at the next meeting. Members were invited to continue to submit ideas for further developing the workplan.
- 5.2** There were no other matters of common business raised.

6 Close and date of next meeting:

As there was no further business for the Group to discuss the Convenor thanked all members for their contributions and closed the meeting. The next meeting would take place on 9th February 2012 at the 12.45pm. The Convenor wished everyone the very best of the season and looked forward to reconvening in the New Year.

Appendix 1.

Cross Party Group on Skills

AGENDA

12.45pm, 15th December 2011

Committee Room 2, The Scottish Parliament.

- 1. Welcome**
- 2. Matters arising from the Minutes of the meeting of 26th October 2011**
- 3. Update on Work of Chartered Bankers Institute – Shona Matthews**
- 4. Open University Case Study – Bruce Heil**
 - A partnership approach to workplace delivery of Higher Education. The experience in Rolls Royce.
- 5. AOCB**
- 6. Close and date of next meeting – 09th February 2012**