

EDUCATION AND SKILLS COMMITTEE**9th Meeting, 2018 (Session 5), Wednesday, 14 March 2018****Ask the Minister questions****Ask the Minister questions**

The Committee has received a number of questions for the Minister generated through Ask the Minister tweets and emails.

Louise Moir (by email) louise.moir@aberdeenshire.gov.uk

The role of SDS within schools has changed to help support the DYW agenda which is already starting to bear fruit from my perspective as a HT. However, there still appears to be barriers to effective partnership working with schools through the lack of effective data sharing, especially in relation to destinations data which hampers timely intervention and learning by schools. How does the government intend to enable more effective data sharing between SDS and its partner agencies to support the learner's journey?

Megan Hare (by email) megan.hare@hotmail.co.uk

I have a question from someone who has considerable experience working with young people to get them into work. The question concerns employability programmes and how to encourage people who are not quite ready for work to consider the programme as a valuable option. There used to be pre-apprenticeship courses to help with transition, sometimes run by local councils (which were a good starting point with work tasters, induction, assessment processes and employability skills). Now there are Activity Agreements but young people don't always buy into them especially if they are not eligible for an EMA and the progression into work is not obvious. Any plans to invest more funds into employability programmes and perhaps change the name of Activity Agreements?

Jane O'Donnell (COSLA) (by email) jane.o'donnell@cosla.gov.uk

- Local Authorities are clear that the loss of the Apprenticeship Levy has adversely impacted on their ability to do more within their communities and as the largest employer in most areas. Is there scope to return the Levy paid by councils back to them to continue their initial good work in this area?
- Will the Apprenticeship Levy be practically used to address the DYW equalities targets i.e. gender, disabled young people and those young people who have been 'looked after', given the lack of sufficient progress with the equalities key performance indicators (KPIs) for DYW?

- Given the remarkable and positive progress made by the DYW Programme, does the Minister not have any concerns on proposed changes to education governance that will likely disrupt and put at risk the DYW Programme's progress?
- When will the DYW Regional Groups clearly demonstrate added value, given some were set up some time ago with significant resources invested in them?
- How can the value of work based learning through apprenticeships be better communicated to young people and their parents?

Jennifer Hunter (Culture Counts) (by email)
Jennifer.hunter@scottishtheatre.org

- What is happening to ensure that businesses on the ground are given the right support to help make apprenticeships work for them?
- What is the minister working on to improve the numbers of young women entering traditionally male training and professions, and vice versa?

Elaine Brackenridge (Head teacher Royal Blind School) (by email)
richard.baker@royalblind.org

Can the Minister outline what support the Scottish Government believes should be provided to disabled graduates in securing employment? The Royal Blind School is aware of disabled people who are gaining first class degrees and doctorates but cannot get a job. Does the Minister agree it is vital there is a better understanding among employers that much more effort and drive is required to gain any qualifications if you are disabled than when you are able bodied?

C/O James Bream (Research & Policy Director, Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber of Commerce) (by email) James.Bream@agcc.co.uk

- What needs to be done to ensure all teachers buy-in to the ethos of DYW and take a more flexible approach to allowing young people out of school to take up work inspiration and work-based learning opportunities?
- What have the local authorities been asked to do by Scottish Government to ensure that the DYW agenda is seen as a priority within their schools?
- Scottish Government has reduced the contribution to Modern Apprenticeship Funding to Hospitality and Food and Drink businesses and training providers, by 47% since 2014. How can the quality of experience be assured and apprenticeship opportunities be available with such a dramatic decrease. Many SME's in Hospitality cannot afford to pay for any aspect of the apprenticeship themselves how will government address this?

- How can the Government support the North East in generating demand for engineering training among young people which has fallen during the downturn in the oil and gas industry?
- For large employers who previously recruited apprentices and now pay the apprentice levy too, what additionality can they see or do you think they are now simply paying more tax?

Isobel Taggart (via twitter)

In supporting young adults with Down Syndrome into work, does the Scottish Government have any plans to emulate the excellent support provided by @DSWorkFit [Down's Syndrome Association's Workfit] in England and Wales.

Will McLeish (Colleges Scotland) (by email)
will.mcleish@collegesscotland.ac.uk

- Colleges in Scotland are working with Skills Development Scotland, schools and employers to continue contributing to the delivery of the apprenticeship target and are keen to increase the apprenticeship programme. Would you favour a change in the way apprenticeships are awarded that could benefit colleges over private sector companies? If so, what changes would you like to make?
- It is great news that youth unemployment has been successfully tackled through recent collaborative efforts through a greater focus on full-time courses. Equally, it is encouraging that the Scottish Government's Outcome Agreements recognises the importance of part-time courses, too. What do you believe is the right balance for the college sector right now between part-time courses for people studying while in work and full-time courses?
- Last year, Colleges Scotland welcomed the Scottish Government fulfilling its commitment to reduce youth unemployment by 40%, four years ahead of schedule. This achievement represents a great example of the collaborative efforts of Scotland's schools, colleges, and skills agencies. However, it is clear that a renewed focus must be directed towards those young people with protected characteristics who are less likely to have positive outcomes. How will the Scottish Government ensure that opportunities available through Developing Scotland's Young Workforce are targeted effectively towards these young people?

Gregor Scotland, Senior Policy Executive – Scotland CBI (by email)
Gregor.Scotland@cbi.org.uk

Flexible Workforce Development Fund

The world of work is changing and business is clear that upskilling and retraining staff has a crucial role to play in helping to close skills gaps. To that end, the introduction of a Flexible Workforce Development Fund was welcome. However, the £10,000 cap per employer significantly restricts the range of high quality training the Fund should be designed to support, while businesses would also benefit from the delivery model being opened up to include all accredited training providers, rather than being restricted exclusively to the college sector. With an external evaluation of the first year of the FWDF underway, is the Scottish Government open to making significant changes to the Fund based on the feedback they receive, particularly around the delivery model and the size of the cap, to ensure the FWDF delivers maximum benefit to individuals, employers and the Scottish economy?

Age restrictions on Apprenticeship Frameworks

Feedback from CBI Scotland members shows that age restrictions on apprenticeships prevent some employers, notably in the retail sector, from getting support in their efforts to help the long-term unemployed back to work. This includes, for example, women returning to work after having children and people who have previously worked in traditional industries. While the focus in recent years has understandably been on tackling youth unemployment, is the Minister willing to look at where age restrictions on apprenticeship frameworks could be lifted to broaden the availability of apprenticeships to help support the long-term unemployed back to work and to allow apprenticeships to be used as a way of upskilling existing staff members?

Business' relationship with the skills system

Business is committed to investing in skills – 9 in 10 have a learning and development strategy and more than 8 in 10 have a dedicated training and development budget. With the Apprenticeship Levy entering its second year, how does the Minister see the Levy impacting on business' relationship with the skills system in the long term? What areas does the Minister see as opportunities for closer collaboration to meet the skills needs of the future? And is the Scottish Government looking at collaborative models elsewhere that we could learn from?

Jodie Waite NUS Scotland Vice President (Education) (by email)
jodie.waite@nus-scotland.org.uk

- What provision does the Government have in place to ensure the recognition of learning and continued employment of apprentices who are directly and indirectly impacted by the closure of their employers or training provider, such as we saw with Carillion?
- As we celebrate the achievement of apprentices around Scotland what progress has been made in reducing the cost of travel for apprentices?

Kate Samuels (by email) katesamuels2016@gmail.com

More and more people in Scotland are taking up apprenticeships, but the number of disabled apprentices is still very small. What will the minister and the Scottish Government do to increase the numbers; given that such a big part of the apprenticeship process is employer-led?'

Developing the Young Workforce

Edinburgh, Midlothian & East Lothian Regional Group

Michelle Fenwick Michelle.Fenwick@edinburghchamber.co.uk

- 1) What are the plans for how the Apprenticeship Levy will be distributed up to 2021 and what opportunity is there for the future development of flexible workforce fund to include higher funding to large levy payers?
- 2) Would it be Possible to broaden the academic awards recognised for MAs (beyond SVQs) to align with existing career pathways?
- 3) It is vital that all sectors are represented and consulted on within tech advisory groups, how will you better consult and include Health and Social Care?
- 4) Health and Social Care as one of our key sectors requires more support for the challenge of workforce development. Currently this is restricted by financial models based on low contribution rates for many awards required in workforce, eg healthcare clinical and non-clinical, Social Services and Healthcare – needs to be better for 19-24yrs. How can this be improved?
- 5) How will Graduate Apprenticeships be funded after the current cohort of students?