



DEVELOPING SCOTLAND'S YOUNG WORKFORCE INTERIM REPORT

Unison Skills Development Branch represents over 70% of Skills Development Scotland Careers Guidance practitioners. We welcome the opportunity to comment on the Commissions Interim report especially in the areas of particular relevance to our membership.

In the current challenging economic times our members believe it is more important than ever that Scotland's young people have access to high quality impartial careers advice and guidance. With a backdrop of massive state cutbacks, we have worryingly high levels of youth unemployment within Scotland. Combined with high student drop-out rates and the competition for jobs harder than ever, the need for high quality face-to-face guidance accessible in the local community and schools is of paramount importance. We thus wholeheartedly agree with the Commissions assertions that all school pupils need to be better prepared for employment and better informed in career choice. It is clear to our members however that this will only be achieved by ensuring the appropriate support system is in place.

Whilst understanding the viewpoint (Recommendation 1) that young people could commence pathway options in their senior phase of schooling we must ensure that as a pre requisite all young people have made a well informed choice. Thus, when at the stage of considering these options all school pupils should be offered face to face advice and guidance on a one to one basis with a Careers Guidance professional.

This position is also supported by the recently published academic research by Edinburgh University on the impact of Careers websites and other careers support on over 1000 S4 pupils in Scotland. Published in September this year it concluded that whilst Careers websites are and will continue to be an essential and valuable component of Careers Information Advice and Guidance provision they have a limited impact on young people's careers management skills compared with other approaches.

Indeed, UK wide this position is shared by many others as there are now growing calls for face-to-face career guidance to be made available to all young people. To quote the aforementioned research:-

it is notable that in its review of careers guidance for young people in England, the House of Commons Education Committee stated that *'We believe that face-to-face guidance is an integral part of good quality careers guidance'* and went on to recommend that *'a minimum of one personal careers interview with an independent adviser should be available for every young person'* (House of Common, 2013 p3).

Furthermore, a recent Barnardo's study of careers advice concluded that face-to-face advice is vitally important in providing quality career guidance to young people and it calls for face-to-face guidance to be guaranteed for all young people who ask for it (Barnardo's, 2013).

The Commission also raises valid concerns that there may exist an ill-informed culture that somehow vocational education is an inferior option. Our members welcome the opportunity to assist with raising the status of vocational and further education amongst school leavers but again fear our ability may be limited unless resources are re directed to personal face to face approaches.

Current SDS policy assumes that MyWoW (and associated web chat and contact service) can meet all the requirements of the majority of pupils but the evidence from the Semple and Howieson research does not support this policy. It was not simply the case that pupils prefer such personal contact with a careers adviser but that such approaches actually have a greater effect on their career management skills than using MyWoW. Indeed, they concluded that face-to-face approaches on a one-to-one basis represent a better use of existing resources.

An important aspect of career guidance is to challenge stereotypical thinking and to encourage individuals to consider alternatives and to raise aspirations .Unless all pupils, including those perceived as academic, have in depth face to face contact with a Careers professional then hoping to encourage all pupils to be aware of and consider the merits of e.g. Modern Apprenticeships will be difficult to achieve.

This viewpoint was further backed up by a recent survey of the Unison SDS membership in 2012 when commenting on SDS's then service modernisation. Many commented that web based on line services should complement and supplement face to face provision and never be viewed as a replacement. On line services, careers professionals believe, cannot challenge, discuss and reflect on issues raised. Furthermore, not everyone can make sense of the information available to them, worryingly without guidance school pupils could make ill-informed career decisions.

As one Careers professional put it :-

"How can we be pushing clients towards web based services when it is clear young people don't just need information but advice and guidance on how to interpret and evaluate careers information?"

The Commissions Interim report also suggests (Recommendation 2) a strong case has been presented that young people in S1 to S3 should have access to Careers Service to help prepare them for employment. Whilst historically Careers Services did offer input in lower school this tended to be only for S2 subject choice and

predominantly consisted of one off class talks alongside possible attendance at S2 parent evenings. If all pupils by the end of S3 should have a demonstrable understanding of the process of finding, applying for and successfully getting and sustaining a job, not only will this arguably have resource implications and need delivery support from teaching colleagues. Furthermore, the ability of all S3 pupils to reach and demonstrate this standard of awareness and knowledge may also prove challenging.

Lastly, in terms of recommendations pertaining to Modern Apprenticeships our members on a daily basis strive to promote the value of these opportunities to all young people they assist in schools and communities across Scotland. The Commission is right in highlighting the need to consider possible changes which include the creation (re introduction) of Access to Apprenticeship programmes alongside a clearer branding and awareness raising of the various progression levels. Our members would also welcome any possible future expansion of the current 25000 a year Modern Apprenticeship numbers alongside the creation of more high level good quality apprenticeships. If the creation of a Modern Apprenticeship Supervisory Board will create the appropriate environment and maximise the possibility that many more Modern Apprenticeships will lead to permanent and sustained employment then this would have the fulsome support of Careers Guidance professionals only to keen to assist all young people enter and sustain employment.

In conclusion, whilst the Committee have only just produced an interim report Unison SDS branch welcome many of its initial recommendations especially as consideration is being given to a more appropriate title for a future school /college vocational initiative being "attainment for all". We believe our members in SDS have a fundamental role to play in developing Scotland's Young Workforce and can achieve this by concentrating on what actually works. Indeed, this can be achieved if as stated in SDS Corporate Strategy the agency focuses their resources on the services that make the most difference to their customers. We need thus to all take on board the conclusions of Dr Cathy Howieson and Sheila Semple which provides strong evidence of the need to redirect resources towards more personal face to face approaches so that the career management skills of young Scots can be developed more effectively. Attainment for all can be achieved by ensuring one to one face to face advice and guidance is also available for all.

Unison SDS branch would welcome the opportunity to speak to the Commission at any later stage if we can assist with their deliberations.

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References

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