Business in the Parliament Conference 2019

Agents of Change: Scottish Business Leading the Way (BiPC in the 20th Year of the Parliament)

Workshop Note – Aligning Our future talent with the future skills needs of industry

Hosts: Richard Lochhead, Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science
Dean Lockhart, MSP, Economy, Energy and Fair Work Committee member

Speakers: Geoff Leask Young Enterprise Scotland
Marie Leck Young Enterprise Scotland
Julija Juodzeviciute City of Glasgow College
Scott Weir Homesure

Summary

As a third sector body supporting young people who often struggle in a formal learning environment like school, YES recognise the value of less formal approaches. They have programmes they deliver in schools, from primary through to senior phase secondary but also support young people who have left school. The programmes offer learning through practical activity, whether about developing entrepreneurial skills or more practical vocational ones.

Julija talked about the skills linked to the work her team at college learned from the PR campaign they developed through a YES programme that was subsequently run across Glasgow.

As a successful entrepreneur who had himself grown up in an environment where no-one had any belief in him, Scott highlighted the work he does to recruit young people who may not have qualifications, but clearly have the passion and drive to do well. On top of the long standing commitment to recruit apprentices every year, he is changing his recruitment approaches to enable people to either earn a permanent post through long term paid work placements in the organisation, or through a business ‘pitch’ model. This would see prospective employees pitch an idea for a job they could do which would add value to the organisation.

Key points discussed

Technology will change everyone’s working lives – jobs that exist now will not exist in the future and this offers an opportunity for people to retrain or upskill. But the right learning infrastructure needs to be in place to ensure this can happen. Adults can’t attend full-time courses that last 9 months or more. Colleges and Universities have to consider adapting delivery to meet future needs.
The labour market now demands a hybrid of skills. People will have to work in multi-disciplinary teams across all sectors and universities, colleges and other training/learning providers need to address this.

Codeclan’s short term intensive programming course is a very successful model which can enables people to move into junior programmer/developer jobs after 16 weeks.

**Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM)** remains a challenge in encouraging young people and young women in particular to enter STEM jobs. Many train in STEM but move to other sectors because STEM skills are much in demand. The Education and Skills Committee will shortly publish its report on the STEM Strategy which will highlight what’s working in this respect, although there was a feeling that STEM needs ‘disassembled’ because teachers and other influencers feel more comfortable with some elements of this than others (e.g science and maths) and this affects outcomes for young people.

On qualifications, there was a feeling that the system is geared too much towards formal qualification without taking account of the breadth of work in schools, colleges, universities and less formal environments. These develop the essential creativity, resilience, and communication skills so important to young people entering the labour market and must be recognised. An observation was also made that many see going to university as a sign of success at the expense of vocational learning, starting a business or going into employment.

For those already in work, university and learning more generally has to consider people’s working patterns to be accessible. Developing a culture of lifelong learning is key.

In terms of **recognising less formal learning**, the Awards Network Forum brings together 28 youth awards, such as the Duke of Edinburgh award, that provide opportunities for young people to develop meta-skills for the workplace. These awards can help engage young people and encourage them back into formal learning where they have previously become disengaged.

Employers are much less likely now to ask for new employees with the specific technical skills for the job – they are more often seeking the skills to learn, taking account of the rapid changes in the labour market and the jobs people are now and will be doing in the future. Although it was noted they still often look for qualifications as a starting point. There were examples of employers who now undertake blind recruitment and who note that it enables them to recruit talented and creative young people they otherwise wouldn’t reach.

**Community learning** very important as it’s often a route back into learning. The Scottish Government is currently developing a new Adult Learning Strategy, with a view to supporting a broader SG ambition that there will be no wrong path for people.

The observation was made that society and how people access learning shouldn’t be seen as a disconnected series of Venn diagrams. The opportunities and routes should be better connected.
[Actions suggested]

- Scottish Government should build on the commitments made by the Enterprise and Skills Strategic Board to support the recognition and development of “Meta Skills” by supporting Third Sector organisations to work together to explore their use in learning programmes.

- Scottish Government, in its Developing the Young Workforce activity, should consider how the work of the Awards Network can contribute to providing the skills young people need for today and tomorrow’s workplace.

- Scottish Government to consider the output from the discussion in its refresh of the Adult Learning Strategy.

- In engaging with employers, the Scottish Government should consider how it can encourage more employers to refresh their recruitment policies to reduce reliance on formal qualifications where possible.

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