

NATIONAL ECONOMIC FORUM – TWENTIETH MEETING : 16 MAY 2018

DISCUSSION REPORT: Developing the Young Workforce – Building a bridge between education and employers.

Host: Deputy First Minister & Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, Mr Swinney MSP

Facilitators: Debra Nichol-Storie, The Scottish Salmon Company and Chair of the Outer Hebrides DYW Regional Groups. Iain Steele, SP Energy Networks and Chair of the Dumfries and Galloway DYW Regional Group

Summary

The discussion on Developing the Young Workforce centred around 5 themes, awareness, measurement, aspirations, equalities and sectorial needs.

The discussions highlighted a need for improved visibility and promotion of DYW, a need to raise aspirations amongst young people and more collaborative working with economic sectors so that their opportunities are used to influence the choices of the future workforce as early as possible.

Introduction and Background

The session was opened by the Deputy First Minister thanking participants attendance and highlighting the achievements so far of the Developing the Young Workforce programme. The DFM highlighted the early achievement of the DYW programme target to reduce youth unemployment by 40% by 2021. The Deputy First Minister highlighted the work of the Learner Journey Review, highlighting the need to ensure the right measures are in place to demonstrate the impact of both DYW and Learner Journey. The Deputy First Minister was keen to hear from the audience on their experience of engaging with schools and whether his ambitions on how open they are to employer engagement was realistic.

Debra Nichol-Storie provided an overview of an employer's experience of the DYW Programme highlighting examples of best practise that are built on clear leadership structures to support the DYW agenda. Debra explained to the audience that from an employer's perspective the language and acronyms attached to qualifications which are commonly used in Education are a barrier for employers – employers don't have that knowledge to understand the current landscape. Debra highlighted her experience of working with DYW Regional Groups commenting on the fundamental role they play in providing a brokerage between education and employers, it has allowed her an employer to work with education and gain a better understanding of the wants and needs of both parties.

Iain Steele gave his perspective on DYW, highlighting his involvement with DYW stemmed from his own business experience in SP Energy on what actions they needed to take to manage an ageing workforce. Iain explained his engagement with DYW Dumfries and Galloway has been instrumental to allowing him to address his business needs by providing a bridge the gap between young people in education and his organisation. Iain felt that the pivotal role of the DYW groups in providing young people with an insight to the opportunities in his sector allowed them to make better informed choices about career paths and highlighted the vocational pathway

Topics discussed:

The discussions covered main themes as set out below:

Awareness of Developing the Young Workforce

The main theme of the discussion was awareness of DYW and vocational pathways more widely among young people, parents, teachers and other partners.

Employers shared their perspective on the barriers they faced in accessing and recruiting young people. Some employers highlighted the challenges of employing young people in the rural economy stemming from the nature of the businesses and the seasonality of work. There was information provided from a participant on the roll out of Ringlink's pre apprenticeship programme which supports those employer within the rural sectors to take on a young person. The participant highlighted the programme was being piloted with a hope for it to be rolled out further.

It was suggested further work is needed to promote the work of DYW and suggestions were made of implementing a National Campaign.

The Deputy First Minister highlighted the great work already progressing across Scotland and highlighted the opportunity to better promote and harness that good practise more widely in order to ensure the original policy objective is achieved.

Measurement

Discussion around measurement started off with a delegate highlighting that the focus of schools still remains on the number of qualifications achieved. The Deputy First Minister highlighted the need for achieving good solid outcomes for all young people, further explaining that getting the best outcome for all young people through academic or vocational pathways sits at the core of the education reforms.

Discussion continued around achieving parity of esteem between the different pathways. Delegates felt that although progress was being made some people still stuck to an outdated view that academic pathway was still the gold standard. A number of participants made reference to the importance of careers advice and ensuring that the advice given by and to schools must reflect the need of the economy and focus on achieving the most suitable outcome for the young person.

Aspirations

Delegates highlighted that young people simply did not have access to the information that they needed to make informed choices. The lack of awareness of opportunities available meant that some young people are missing the opportunities of vocational learning and employers are missing out on talent. It was recognised that the CIAG system had been improved but also that the way that young people communicate and interact with systems (including the world of work) was completely different from previous generations. There's a need to ensure that our public services are leading on that and that employers and role models are an integral part of the communication.

Contextualising Learning

Employers have an important job to work with schools to contextualise the curriculum. Bringing subject to life will raise aspirations and allow young people to put themselves on the best pathway possible for their chosen career. However, further work is needed from the schools side on how best to plan and integrate this into schools system and timetables. We also need to do more to give teachers knowledge of the world of work and DYW has a role to play in that work.

Equalities

Participants agreed that it was important that we support every young person to achieve the best outcome for them. A tailored approach to delivering national programmes was needed as a single model will not achieve the best outcome for every young person. It was

highlighted that low unemployment, demographic changes and the potential impact of the UK leaving the single market might offer an opportunity to engage groups of young people who struggle to enter the labour market even during a period of growth. It was highlighted those young people who are hard to reach need additional support, but we can mitigate that by identifying those young people early and offering tailored interventions to highlight the different options available to them.

Supporting Sectorial needs

It was agreed further work is needed to better understand the needs of different economic sectors in order to better plan for the future workforce. Employers needed to do more to plan workforce and skills needs and to work coherently with sector bodies and schools to influence young people so they have the knowledge and information they need for the future. By working with sectors more closely it allows schools/colleges/parents/DYW to directly influence the curriculum to ultimately equip young people with the skills they need to succeed in the labour market.

Other

- In addition to the above themes participants also raised the need to improve transport links and affordable housing as both of those factors are a barrier for young people gaining employment.
- Recognition that although public sector procurement was already doing a lot to deliver community benefits we needed to do more to incentivise employers to engage with the DYW agenda.
- We need to do more to influence the influencers. Teacher and parents should be provided with the information they need to support their young people in making the best decision for their future.

Closing Comments

The Deputy First Minister closed the session by thanking participants for an open and interesting discussion. The Deputy First Minister highlighted the main themes from the discussion and informed delegates of the need for discussions such as these to better inform policy progression.

**Scottish Government
May 2018**