

21st MEETING - NATIONAL ECONOMIC FORUM: 19 NOVEMBER 2018

DISCUSSION REPORT: Implementing the Enterprise and Skills Board's Strategic Plan

Host: Derek Mackay, Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Economy and Fair Work
Ivan McKee, Minister for Trade, Investment and Innovation

Facilitators: Gerry McCusker and David Coyne

Scribe: Louise Halpin

Summary

The discussion group tested some of the key actions and recommendations from the Enterprise and Skills Strategic Board's Plan, particularly where they related to business, and considered how these could best be implemented.

Introduction and Background

Derek McKay introduced the session by welcoming everyone. Ivan McKee also welcomed all, and took time to discuss the planned Export Action Plan, which would tie in with the Strategic Board's plan. Noted that Innovation and digitisation would be key discussion points for the session.

David Coyne seconded the focus on business models and workplace innovation within the strategic plan. He introduced two of the actions for discussion: the innovating workplaces campaign, drawing on plenary discussions around providing coherent messaging to businesses, and using data-led approaches to supporting sectors and firms. Gerry McCusker discussed the Strategic Board's interest in Business Creation and Growth before introducing two more of the Board's actions: to work with partners to establish a campaign to foster ambition and entrepreneurship, and supporting Scotland as a digital nation.

Topics discussed:

Bottom up messaging

The idea of bottom up messaging, to ensure delivery of planned outcomes via organisations was discussed. Mr McKay noted the importance of organisations understanding planned outcomes, and that this should allow the growth of the economy, and access to meaningful jobs for individuals in Scotland. Part of this is about getting messaging correct.

Scaling up

The Strategic Plan sets out a foundation for companies to receive support, but private sector has a role to play in developing companies. The best way to have larger companies support smaller ones hasn't been discovered yet. There is a role for an element of CSR, but particularly with larger firms supporting SMEs. The private sector should cooperate and collaborate to empower their workforces: productivity gains are there to be gathered from sharing and supporting each other.

Prescriptive Plan

It was raised that some in the room felt this was too prescriptive. Mr McKay noted that government is told by sectors that more prescriptive support is needed and the Plan helps to provide this. There is also a lot of support for Innovation Centres, though these should have industry involvement to ensure success.

Inward Investment

Inward investment can put pressure on Scottish-based companies, and the Scottish Government should help support local small companies to ensure they thrive against larger competitors. Mr McKee supported this idea, noting that this ties into the fair work agenda.

Skills system

General agreement from participants that there is a need to consider the current education and skills system, including funding models and which graduates are considered 'work ready'. Both Mr McKay and Mr McKee agreed with this, noting the importance of recalibrating the education system as part of the Strategic Board's plan. A lot of work has gone into STEM support, and DYW and Early Years work is key to the Scottish Government's work.

International Hubs

These Hubs work with SDI to provide support to businesses, but other options are available including the Global Scots Network, Chambers of Commerce, Universities and private trade bodies. These organisations are always interested to hear potential ways to improve connections.

Patient Capital

Mr McKay noted that legislation for the SNIB is going forward shortly, and hopes that the Scottish Parliament will not be overly prescriptive when they consider this. The bank should feel like non-governmental body, and the provision of long term patient capital is a key part of that.

Export support

DIT is an underused resource when it comes to 'selling' Scotland to international partners. Industry Leadership Groups could be supportive to the Strategic Plan, but they have to make this decision.

Access to talent

The Scottish Government's work on People and Skills, and infrastructure, will help bring people to Scotland from London. There's also a role for industries to figure out what they can do to attract people to Scotland.

Scottish Government November 2018