

# **SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE CONSULTATION ON 'EUROPEAN AREA OF SKILLS AND QUALIFICATIONS'**

## **Position paper of the Scottish Government in response to the European Commission consultation on Towards a European area of Skills and Qualifications**

The Scottish Government welcomes the opportunity to provide a response to the consultation by way of this position paper. We recognise the significance of the range of tools and initiatives supported by the Commission and agree that these need to be well articulated, relevant and linked firmly with Member State policies and procedures. We also concur that in order to maximise impact the initiatives must be compatible and provide a coherent and joined up approach to education, training and learning.

This paper focuses on each of the key issues set out in the Commission's background paper.

### **1. How to place a stronger focus on higher and more relevant skills?**

In Scotland our record for attainment is good and continuing to improve. Scottish pupils currently perform above the OECD average in reading and science, and at the OECD average in maths (OECD Programme for International Student Assessment 'PISA' 2012). The PISA results also show a reduction in the performance gap between disadvantaged pupils.

Further 2013 has delivered record exam passes in Scotland with rates increasing in all major qualifications. Our national performance in reading and writing is very good both in primary and secondary education.

We continue to work to raise attainment and close the equality gap through our key implementation programmes for children and young people - including the Early Years Framework, Getting it Right for Every Child, Curriculum for Excellence and Opportunities for All.

Scotland has maintained the high standards in our schools and underlines the importance of curriculum design. **Curriculum for Excellence** provides schools, and their partners, with greater flexibility to offer a range of pathways which better meet the needs and raise the attainment levels of all their learners – including those who in the past have been least engaged at the Senior Phase. In the Senior Phase curriculum young people have a range of options including staying on at school,

going to college or university, entering work-based learning or community-based learning, volunteering or a combination of these. These options all offer young people the opportunity to obtain qualifications and work on the skills they need for learning, life and work in the type of provision that best suits their individual needs and aspirations.

We note the suggestion around producing European reference frameworks like the language competence framework for other areas of key competence. While we agree that language competence in Scottish pupils can, and must, be improved, we believe that these matters are very specific to each Member State and remain unconvinced that it would be assisted by some form of common European set of outcomes.

Scotland is currently the only part of the UK which has adopted a language learning policy which is in line with the Barcelona 1+2 model. We have made a commitment to *create the conditions in which every child will learn two languages in addition to their own mother tongue*.

## **2. Further strengthening links between education/training, mobility and the labour market**

Like the Commission, Scotland fully recognises the importance of a modernised education and training system which reflects and addresses the needs of current and future labour markets.

Scotland's performance in terms of youth unemployment is consistently around the OECD average; with a ratio of youth to all age unemployment rates generally around 3 to 1 irrespective of where we are in the economic cycle. While Scotland's youth unemployment rate has been dropping since 2011, the current rate is still higher than it was before the 2008 financial crisis.

While a similar pattern is repeated across most OECD countries there are a small number of countries who have bucked the general trend with single digit youth unemployment rates and consistently low ratios of youth to all age unemployment rates. They share a strong and highly valued approach to vocational education and significant employer engagement in that system and on youth employment.

In January 2013 the Scottish Government appointed the independent Wood Commission for Developing Scotland's Young Workforce, with the remit to make recommendations to Scottish Ministers on improving vocational and further education and training, (senior phase of school through to college and apprenticeships) and to encourage more employers to engage with education and youth employment.

While the final report is expected in Summer 2014, the Wood Commission's interim report (published in September 2013) focussed on supporting young people who choose non-university pathways through the development of vocational pathways so that they link more closely to the skills needs of industry.

The Wood Commission sees the Government's reforms to the school curriculum, college structures and apprenticeships as a base upon which a much more effective system can be built. The report contains 12 main recommendations including employability in school education including careers advice; school/college partnerships; alignment of college education with economic growth and labour market demand; development of the Modern Apprenticeship programme; and quality assurance and improvement.

Across these themes there is a significant focus on the use of labour market intelligence to move the vocational education system away from being driven by generally poorly informed student choice toward a more strategic response to short, medium and long term labour market trends at the regional and national level.

In line with the Council resolution of 2008 recognising the importance of lifelong guidance, Skills Development Scotland, our national skills agency delivers all age Careers Information Advice and Guidance (CIAG) at key points of transition and beyond. Working with young people at school, young people transitioning from education towards employment (16-19 years) and an adult service (age 20+) the CIAG services include supporting people to develop Career Management Skills (CMS) through a comprehensive service offering intensive one-to-one coaching, group sessions, industry contact and labour market information – all supported by My World of Work (MyWoW). MyWoW is SDS's web service for individuals, offering valuable information and resources to people in Scotland looking for jobs or developing their careers.

Similarly we agree with the Wood Commission's interim view for a need for a common language between education and the labour market and recognise the role that the EQF and ESCO can play in that context.

The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework is central to Scotland's education and skills system and Scottish Government encourages those involved in education and training to make full use of it. Commended by industry (Chartered Institute of Bankers in Scotland and the Federation for Small Businesses) the Framework can help individuals access appropriate education and training, and help employers understand how various qualifications contribute to improving the skills of their workforce.

We are aware of the range of sectorial work which is going on and strongly believe that we need to try to link this to NQFs in each Member State in the first instance rather than the EQF. We fully understand the need for mobility and recognition of

qualifications and training in that regard and are pleased that the Commission has agreed to establish a sub group of the EQF Advisory Group to look at the issue of international qualifications. We note that the UK is a member of that sub group and is represented by Aileen Ponton CEO of the SCQF Partnership here in Scotland. This we understand is in recognition of the fact that the SCQF probably more than any other Framework has within it a wide range of “stateless” qualifications such as Microsoft and Oracle and has found a robust and transparent way of including them.

The Statement of Intent on School Education and training between Scotland and France was signed in October 2013. The statement focuses on policy exchange and on partnerships and cooperation between the two education systems. Scottish Government is currently working with partners to draft an action plan to take forward key developments in line with the agreed areas.

The Scottish Government provides annual funding to the British Council towards the administration of the language assistant programme. This offers mobility opportunities to young people, normally at HE level, from the UK and Europe through part-time postings to various countries. Although not funded by the EU, the programme is a positive example of current mobility activity available to young people in Europe.

### **3. Adapting to internationalisation trends**

As outlined above we have within our Framework a very wide and diverse range of qualifications including those from professional bodies; employers; public services such as health, social care, police and fire and a range of programmes targeted at young people in relation to employability and skills. All of these qualifications and programmes appear on our database and in addition to the SCQF level and credit value the database also shows the EQF level. We are committed to working with the Commission on the development of the EQF portal and wish to make sure that learners in Scotland receive as much information as possible regarding the portability of their qualification to other countries in the EU and beyond.

We are aware of, and support, the move to look at the potential for referencing with third countries beyond Member States and see the referencing of frameworks internationally as one way of promoting mobility and ensuring mutual trust.

Scotland's higher education system is fully committed to implementation of all facets of the Bologna Process including enhancing international mobility and increasing recognition of credits and qualifications.

### **4. Ensuring overall coherence of tools and policies and further implementing the learning outcomes approach**

Scotland has been committed to the learning outcomes approach for over twenty years. All of our provision be it general, vocational or higher education is developed using learning outcomes. When our SCQ Framework was launched in 2001 the use of learning outcomes was a clear and fundamental criterion.

The SCQF Partnership runs workshops for institutions and providers on how to ensure that their provision is learning outcome based and also how to develop assessment and quality assurance process that are fit for purpose in a learning outcome based approach. We fully understand how difficult it is for Member States using an outcome based approach for the first time and we can confirm that Scottish Government along with key partners in Scotland have invested heavily over the last twenty years in supporting teachers and others in assessing within this kind of system.

Whilst the EC has supported a range of Peer Learning Activities related to learning outcomes we would suggest that work has to be done within country at the level of the teachers and assessors within institutions to really make this work.

In relation to overall coherence we are committed to the EQF, the QF EHEA and also ECTS and ECVET. However in Scotland we have one lifelong learning Framework with one definition of levels and one definition of credits used by all. We would therefore strongly support any work to try to ensure greater coherence between these initiatives.

## **5. Ensuring clarity of rules and procedures for the recognition of skills and qualifications for further learning**

We do not hold the view that European criteria or processes should be developed to further support the recognition of all types of learning provision as this could divert member states focus from delivering such systems within the Member State. It is the Scottish Government's view is that the tools already developed and in place, including the most recent one on the Recognition of Informal and Non Formal learning provide an appropriate setting for these discussions to take place and further European criteria would not advance that discussion.

## **6. Increasing the focus on quality assurance**

We fully support the Commission's view that education and training systems must ensure the highest quality in their offering which creates a strong focus on quality assurance.

In Scotland we have applied the EQAVET principles and self-assessment to appraise our offering with positive results, although we recognise there was still room for improvement particularly in data capture around student destinations. In May through legislation we will bring into practice better data tracking of young people which support our ambition to improve the life chances of our young people, to

support Scotland's economic ambitions, and to create a more sustainable and secure system. Through a data portal public sector bodies will be able share current information and work together to help young people make successful transitions from school through to sustainable employment. And also offer targeted extra support where it is needed.

The Scottish Credit and Quality Framework as a whole also has key quality assurance principles which apply to all types of learning in Scotland so whilst the mechanisms may vary the key principles of assessment linked to outcomes, internal and external quality assurance still apply. As a result of this we believe that learners are able to move between sub sectors and can apply for credit transfer as all of the learning has been achieved within the overarching quality assurance principle of the Framework.

## **7. Providing learners and workers with a single access point to obtain information and services supporting a European area of skills and qualifications**

With more than 70% of homes in Scotland with internet access and a significant rurality dimension in the country, Single Access Points (SAP) can if effectively delivered offer end users easy access to information and services.

Our national skills agency Skills Development Scotland has developed such a SAP in MyWoW a fully integrated web careers advice service which is responsive and intuitive to the needs of its customers. SDS has integrated a number of tools into MyWoW which provide customers with access to LMI; information on different jobs and sectors; interviews with employers; information on an infinite number of potential career pathways; searches and direct links to course vacancy services offered via UCAS and a job search offer via through UK Government portals. The tools improve an individual's understanding of who they are in a career such as My CV Builder, My Strengths, My Interview and course searches.

MyWow is however only part of a blended Careers Information Advice and Guidance Service which SDS offers. Face to face contact, coaching, telephone services and information materials all support a learner's journey towards skills development and sustainable employment.

We recognise that as learners search for information in different ways for different purposes the channels to access these supports must also be varied. The number of learners in Scotland who wish specifically to search for information about their recognition in a European context is likely to be very small. We have placed considerable effort in working with our guidance organisation here in Scotland to build an online set of guidance resources linked to a face to face guidance intervention for those most in need. We believe the key will be in ensuring that we can link to European information when it is required or requested rather than setting out to build a system which has European information as its prime purpose.

