

Colleges Scotland and College Development Network's Response to the Scottish Funding Council's (SFC) Gender Action Plan Consultation

1. Of the work currently being undertaken by Scottish colleges and universities to address gender imbalances at a student level:

a) What do you think is working well? Why do you think this?

- Proactive responses by some colleges in their local communities via:
 - School roadshow events showcasing female engineering apprentices
 - Primary Engineer workshops aimed at S2 schoolgirls
 - Using female role models in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) industries to deliver inspirational talks
 - Launching computing coding clubs in partnership with national agencies
 - Use of female lecturing staff in school visits, interviews and to build links with industry
 - Use of female Modern Apprentices to speak at recruitment events
 - Working with local authority to set up men only evening classes in Childcare Studies – five men achieved the group award
 - Development of STEM clubs aimed at primary school pupils, attracting more females than males
 - Working in partnership with Skills Development Scotland (SDS), Jobcentre Plus, local authorities and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) as part of an Occupational Segregation Project to promote a regional wide approach
 - Working with Equate Scotland, Construction Industry Training Board (CITB), National Lottery and Edinburgh Napier University to set challenging targets for recruiting females on to engineering courses.
- What stands out from all of these is the variety of different approaches used and the need to develop strong partnerships with schools and local authorities as well as with external stakeholders.
- Modified admissions policies and procedures which minimise the possibility of unconscious bias in the important admissions stage. This only applies to those who have actually made an application to a course. The evidence suggests that there has been a less than anticipated impact of previous initiatives on the gender imbalance of applications.

North East Scotland College: In 2014/15 actions taken to address gender imbalance in School Link programmes resulted in a number of female learners enrolling on Construction programmes, and a number of male learners enrolling on Hair and Care programmes. A range of private sector sponsored 'Girls Into Energy' courses, where groups undertake the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) Skills for Work National 5 Energy course, also operated with some success.

b) What do you think is working less well? Why do you think this?

- Using marketing and publicity in college prospectus/website/materials to promote gender role models (e.g. women engineers, male beauty therapists)
- Offering taster courses in a wide spectrum of vocational areas to both boys and girls at school
- Offering targeted courses e.g. Women into Computing.

These initiatives are not working well enough due to ingrained social norms and cultural bias (found both in parents and peers). And targeted initiatives often do not seem to leave sufficient legacy in changed practice.

These activities on their own are not enough. What works appears to be a variety of different ways of tackling the issue along with strong partnership initiatives.

There is evidence that where a small minority (in gender terms) exists in a course, the attainment rate for that minority tends to be lower than the rest of the group. Most of this can be attributed to higher drop-out rates for the minority.

Dundee College: Recruitment analysis for areas with gender imbalance found that overall recruitment outcomes reflected the enquiry and application rates. The college is aware that in the majority of cases, subject decisions are made in advance of contact with the college. The college has previously undertaken a broad range of activities to develop awareness and encourage interest in 'non-traditional' subject routes. This has included extensive partnership work with local schools, and the creation of specific curriculum projects (such as women into construction).

Edinburgh College: Females continued to be underrepresented in Construction and Engineering, while there was a shortage of males in Childhood Practice and Hair, Beauty and Complementary Therapy. Student comments in a pre-exit survey confirm that being the only male/female student in a class can feel isolating, which could negatively impact on early retention.

c) What could be done to improve this work?

Colleges need to work with school teachers and parents to promote the opportunities on offer as teachers and parents are often the key influencers of career choices.

Forth Valley College: At subject level there is under-representation of females within STEM subjects, which has been highlighted as a target for improvement. The college has a number of initiatives, such as its STEM club aimed at primary aged pupils which has attracted more girls than boys. The purpose is to ignite the enthusiasm of young (predominantly female) learners in STEM subjects.

d) What could be done to improve this work and what do you think the gaps are, and how can these gaps can be filled – by the sectors, SFC and SDS?

Any initiatives should firstly address how to change cultural expectations around job roles and gender. In particular, parents of school-age children should have access to information that fully explains the range of options that are open to their children, irrespective of gender. This objective calls for well-planned multi-channel communications and media strategies.

There is a need for SDS to provide all organisations and individuals involved in Careers, Information, Advice and Guidance (CIAG) with all the information they need, including role models, to avoid any bias (whether conscious or unconscious) in the guidance or advice offered by CIAG to young people and their parents.

A very important lever for change must come from employers. Industry sectors should look towards structuring their workforce in a way that avoids excessive gender imbalance, and signalling that change in the clearest terms to young people and prospective employees.

And employers must address any gender gap in their remuneration schemes (a current government policy objective).

2. Much of the work to tackle gender imbalances by the sectors requires close partnership working with schools:

a) How can colleges and universities enhance their work with schools?

College staff who engage with young people of school-age (either in school or in college) have a good working knowledge of their own industry sector and its work practices and staffing structures. This experience and knowledge could be harnessed in a more explicit manner so that the right messages are conveyed to young people (and their parents).

Colleges can model a more desirable gender balance by ensuring that young people of school-age are not taught solely by staff of one gender. Similarly for all staff who provide support and guidance to this student group.

In their collaboration with schools, colleges should avoid being drawn into patterns of provision that serve to emphasize gender imbalance (e.g. Motor vehicle technician provision only offered to boys).

Some colleges have worked with their local authority to introduce joint CPD sessions for school and college staff, particularly targeting guidance staff who will be advising pupils.

West Lothian College: The college works with Equate Scotland, which is supported by Scottish Government, the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB), The National Lottery and Edinburgh Napier University, to make a positive difference to recruiting and retaining girls into science, engineering, technology and the built environment courses. The college has set itself a challenging target of recruiting 50% females onto the new NC Civil Engineering Foundation Apprenticeship course starting 2015; a project fully supported by CITB and Civil Engineering Contractors Association (CECA).

Dumfries and Galloway College: The college organises an annual 'Schools Competition' to provide S3 pupils with an introduction to the college. Individual events provide pupils with a brief insight into college life and the various programmes delivered across the college. The competition also challenges gender balance with all competitions requiring at least one boy and one girl to compete. Employer engagement has become a large part of the Annual Competition with local businesses large and small supporting every area.

b) What are the current issues in working with schools?

School staff involved in providing CIAG are not always fully aware of the potential for challenging perceptions related to gender imbalance in certain career routes.

As a result of this, complemented by parental prejudices, subject choices made by young people at the end of S2 or S3 may already have closed off opportunities to engage in an area where their participation could improve gender balance.

Timetabling and prior choices of subjects can also close off a range of options that might have helped students move into areas where gender balance could have been improved.

c) What can SFC do to support this work?

- Provision of more and better quality of guidance for college staff working with school-aged students
- Publish exemplars of good practice across the full range of career opportunities
- Support officers to go out into the field and assist colleges and schools to address gender imbalance
- Carefully consider its use of Performance Indicators so that a college could confidently address gender imbalance without having concerns about criticism of its attainment rates.

3. The key aims and subject focus for the gender action plan are outlined in the consultation document:

a) Do you think they are appropriate? Why/Why not?

Aim 1: Yes – gender should be mainstreamed in institutional policy and practice. In colleges this already is, and is reflected in the Equality Mainstreaming Reports published by colleges.

Aim 2: Yes – approaches to target underrepresentation ought to be tackled at a subject level as this is where the actions can be tailored to have the greatest impact.

Aim 3: No – the choice of a gender imbalance of 25:75 is an arbitrary one and is not likely to be reflective of the de facto situation in any particular industry. It would be better to devise targets that represent a steady progression from that de facto position to an improved one (which may be more imbalanced than 25:75).

Aim 4: Yes – colleges are already committed to policies for high quality teaching and learning that are equitable for the protected characteristics.

b) What outcomes do you think are missing? Why do you think they are important?

- A target for the creation of CIAG resources and information that reflect the desire to address gender imbalance
- A target for the creation and delivery of a communications and media strategy that is effective in changing public opinion in relation to job roles and gender
- Working with parents and schools to tackle gendered expectations around career paths

4. What are the key activities colleges and universities should undertake to meet these outcomes?

- Provision of exemplars of good practice and case studies that would underpin the resources and communications mentioned in the responses to Q3.
- At a local level, colleges could provide briefing sessions for school staff to make them more fully aware of the potential for changing gender balances in the workplace through judicious subject and career choice.

5. How can SFC best support the sectors to deliver these outcomes?

- Funding for promotional activities and support officers
- Publishing guidance based on successful initiatives from around the world
- Showcasing best practice from Scottish institutions.

6. What level of change can we expect from both sectors in 10 years?

- In the college sector we can expect that each of the targeted superclass areas has reached any agreed targets for gender balance
- All college staff fully aware of their role in promoting gender balance in their industries, through engagement with employers and planning of their subject learning and teaching
- Secondary school staff able to give informed careers advice and guidance to pupils at the important subject choice points
- Colleges and universities engaging with pupils in primary schools to raise awareness of career choices and progression pathways.

7. Is there any further evidence you would like to draw to our attention on what works to address gender imbalances?

There are several examples provided in the set of regional Outcome Agreements that colleges have agreed with the SFC for 2015/16.

Ayrshire College: The college will take advantage of the heightened publicity around a series of high profile campaigns throughout the year and arrange events targeted at girls and young women. In addition, the college will promote success stories of female students who have achieved in these areas. The campaign days/weeks targeted include Ada Lovelace Day (October 2015), Scottish Apprenticeships Week (May 2016), International Girls in ICT Day (April 2016), and Women in Science and Engineering Day (June 2016).

Ayrshire College: The college will continue to work in partnership in 2015/16 with the Women's Engineering Society and build on a very successful Magnificent Women and their Flying Machines workshop held in 2014 at our dedicated aeronautical centre. The event attracted 40 second and third year school girls and gave them exposure to female industry experts, hands-on activities in building aircraft and a tour of the facilities at the aeronautical centre.

Ayrshire College: In 2014/15, the college piloted a number of Men into Care taster sessions which resulted in attracting increased numbers of men on health and social care courses.

Forth Valley College: Their School-College Opportunities to Succeed (SCOTS) courses are designed to provide a taster of subjects for school pupils entering their senior phase, and these courses have been deliberately designed to allow both females and males to experience subject areas they may not have experienced before e.g. females experiencing Construction & Engineering, and males experiencing Hairdressing & Care. From its first year of operation, two males progressed on to Childcare courses from this course.

West Lothian College: The college is represented on an Occupational Segregation Project Steering Group working with SDS, Jobcentre Plus, West Lothian Council, Mind the Gap, and Engender on a pilot to promote a regional wide approach to increase participation and ensure equality of successful outcomes to address gender imbalances where girls and boys face barriers to subject and career choice at school and women and men face barriers to subject choice in college.

West Lothian College: The college recently worked with James Young High School to support a Girls into Physics and Engineering event with over 100 attendees from S2-S4 West Lothian schools. A series of workshops such as rocket launching, car racing and heart monitoring were held by employers, universities and colleges.

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