

A learner journey that works for everyone

Daniel faced an uphill struggle in his efforts to become a vet. He didn't get the guidance needed at the start to understand the qualifications required to get into university. Having been unable to get sufficient grades in his fifth year at school he resat his Highers in sixth year, but was still without success. He left school without a clear way forward. However, he looked at his options and found that he could do an HNC in Applied Biological Sciences at his local college. Following completion of this he was then able to go on to university. Daniel's future is now bright, but it's not been easy. This is not a unique story, and there are many examples across Scotland of people not benefitting from the potential of a joined-up approach. It is in all our interests to develop a simpler education system with the learner at its heart, which ensures that everyone can fulfil their potential.

The pathways between Scotland's 369 secondary schools, 26 colleges and 19 universities are too often varied and complex. Scotland is a relatively small nation, which should be an asset in developing joined up working between schools, colleges, universities and indeed employers. It is only right that we make the routes between and beyond our educational institutions as simple and flexible as possible for people to navigate.

That is the focus of an event taking place in Glasgow today, which brings together people from across Scottish education to discuss what is called the 'Learning and Skills Journey'. As the term suggests, it refers to the journey through different education providers with the aim of ensuring that every person is supported in reaching their goal as flexibly and efficiently as possible. We need a framework in Scotland to ensure that this is the rule for our learners as they progress in life, with no exceptions.

Under the current arrangements there is not sufficient recognition of qualifications that have already been achieved by learners as they progress from one institution to another. Learners who have attained qualifications with schools or colleges should not have to attend additional courses at similar levels to progress. It is wasteful and inefficient for all involved. There is a need for parity of recognition of qualifications – particularly between college education and university education. This brings genuine benefit both to the individual learner by shortening, but not reducing the value, of the time spent studying; and also to the Scottish economy through increased availability of a skilled workforce, higher productivity and individuals paying their way in society earlier.

People are all too often confused as to where to look for guidance about courses and their potential course options. If someone can avoid setting off down the wrong route in the first place, then there are significant financial savings for the education system as well the learner, as well as precious time saved. We need a simpler, consistent approach and the learner needs to have access to the right advice and guidance, so that they can make informed choices and have access to a single comprehensive source of information.

Not only do all of these adjustments make good sense for the learner, they also have the potential to save significant amounts of money for the taxpayer by cutting duplication and incorrect choices. For example, Daniel's journey took seven years and cost the taxpayer nearly £45,000. However, the streamlined journey that Daniel could have taken would have cost almost half that amount, and taken only five years. For every thousand learners like Daniel moving from college to university, the saving to public expenditure could be over £17 million.

Colleges Scotland is pleased to be taking the initiative in setting out solutions that will help people like Daniel. Having launched a substantial 'Think Piece' on the Learning and Skills Journey at the end of last year, today's event in Glasgow is an opportunity to continue exploring, with others, how this can be delivered in practice. The college sector has a strong track record of delivering for learners and the Scottish economy. We want to play a leading role in contributing to the development of simpler, seamless approach that works better for individuals and society as a whole.