

# Think Piece

The Learning and Skills Journey  
October 2016



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# 1. Introduction

The time has never been more appropriate to identify how a more coherent and equitable post-16 learning framework and system can be established that improves the learning and skills journey. The college sector recognises the Scottish Government's key priorities and challenges. Uncertainty around the future following Brexit and the year on year constraints on the public purse, means that the Scottish Government will quite rightly look for efficiencies and productivity gains where they can be found and it is vital that public sector funding, particularly the delivery of education, provides clear value for money to the taxpayers who bear the costs. It is in the interests of its users, the economy and the public purse that the learner journey is as effective and efficient as possible.

Schools, colleges and universities along with key partners already play a critical role in other significant post-16 initiatives including *Developing the Young Workforce*, widening access to higher education and delivery of apprenticeships. However, users and learners continue to voice that the current post-16 landscape is complex, and potentially confusing, with a plethora of potential routes and providers which can be unclear and unhelpful.

Colleges Scotland has been advocating for a review of the learner journey and the implementation of a more co-ordinated framework as part of the college sector's submission to both the 2016 and 2017 Scottish Government Spending Reviews. The sector firmly believes that by doing this, it will benefit not only learners but improve effectiveness, and release efficiencies and productivity gains across the educational landscape.

The current Skills and Enterprise Review and the Schools Governance Review provide an ideal opportunity to start this review process. This paper aims to set out initial thoughts from the college sector around what a potential co-ordinated learning and skills framework could look like, one which has the progression of the learner at its heart, with particular consideration given to transition between school-college and college-university pathways. The paper also outlines the potential for a co-ordinated approach to delivery of Modern Apprenticeships (MA), recognising the economies of scale that could be achieved through greater utilisation of the existing resources.

## 2. The Principles

Colleges Scotland has previously set out the concept of the learner journey as part of the sector's submission to the Scottish Government's 2017 Spending Review. The sector envisages that the learner journey should follow four basic principles:

- 1) Learners must be given full recognition for their prior attainment as they progress between institutions without unnecessary repetition of any Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Level unless it is in the interest of the learner.**

For example, a learner with a Higher National Diploma (HND) might choose not to enter the third year of a degree course because they do not have the confidence to do so. A student with Highers in the Arts would not be advised to enter the second year of an HND in Engineering as they lack the specialist knowledge to succeed.

- 2) Learners should be able to progress flexibly and not be inhibited by systemic or institutional factors.**

In many cases, different institutions give different recognition for the same qualification when applying to the same or similar courses at the same SCQF Level. In other instances, for reasons of institutional sustainability, learners are not encouraged to pursue a route with a different provider.

Programmes should also be designed to be followed in a non-linear way particularly by those combining work with study, or those seeking re-training or up-skilling as they look to return to the workforce.

**3) All learners should have equal access to a consistent and coherent post-16 learning framework available nationally.**

The implementation plan for *Developing the Young Workforce* presents the details of how *Curriculum for Excellence*, a regionalised college system, a significantly expanded MA programme and purposeful employer engagement will be brought together to drive the creation of a world class vocational offer aligned to widening access to higher education opportunities. However, as a result of the factors identified above and the very different approaches adopted by school-college partnerships in supporting *Developing the Young Workforce* in different regions, the opportunities available to learners differ widely.

**4) Learner choices should be informed by comprehensive, objective and transparent advice and guidance.**

Despite the best efforts of Skills Development Scotland (SDS), the current complexity and lack of coherence in existing post-16 provision means that there is no one comprehensive source of information available which learners can use to explore all the potential routes to employment, through the learner journey. The situation is exacerbated by existing regional variations and advice from careers staff in schools which can be restricted by their immediate context.

The initial thoughts set out in this paper including a potential co-ordinated learning and skills framework are founded on these four basic principles.

### **3. The Vision**

The college sector sees the vision for the learning and skills journey as:

***“A collaborative leadership model, where a common approach and consistent policy implementation is adopted by key stakeholders who support and deliver across the education and skills landscape”.***

## **4. Delivering the Vision for a New Educational Landscape**

### **4.1 The Framework**

The college sector is of the view that the collaborative leadership model will require a new framework to support the educational landscape from which productivity gains will be achieved and an appropriate skilled workforce delivered for the public sector, commerce and industry.

It is envisaged that a new framework while working in a regional context and ensuring quality of provision is maintained, will:

**For Learners**

- personalise each individual learner journey by delivering sustainable education provision for the benefit of the learner in their career choice
- provide clear and seamless routes and lower the transitional barriers between schools, colleges and universities
- recognise linear and non-linear journeys that are undertaken by individual learners.

**For Businesses**

- meet the needs of commerce, industry and communities
- produce an appropriately skilled workforce through the delivery of recognised qualifications and work readiness.

### **For the Wider Economy**

- tackle inequalities
- widen access opportunities and achieve greater fairness
- focus on positive purposeful destinations
- deliver efficiencies at specific transition points between different institutions on an individual's learner journey
- support the Scottish Government's priorities and contribute to Scotland as a nation
- increase growth and productivity in the Scottish economy
- provide high value in return for the public investment in the sector.

Outlined in this paper, are examples of how elements of the framework could operate.

## **4.2 School-College-University Pathways**

There are already examples of regions in Scotland which have well-established curriculum mapping across schools, colleges and universities. For example, [North East Scotland College](#) and Forth Valley College have both mapped against SCQF the different pathways which a young person can follow from school, college and university into work for each of their regions.

Explored below are various scenarios in which pathways across the educational landscape could be better aligned and navigated by individual learners.

### **School-College Pathways**

Staying-on rates in schools have steadily risen over recent years while participation in further and higher education has also grown. For the majority who remain, it is vitally important that their onward learning and skills journey should be purposeful and successful.

*Curriculum for Excellence* is intended to give every young person a broad general education (BGE) up to the age of around 15. The curriculum is similar for all learners and provides a basis for more diverse educational experiences during the senior phase in school and thereafter. The senior phase starts at the beginning of S4 and lasts up to three years. This phase is intended to be highly flexible and suited to the needs of the individual. Consideration should be given to, instead of following a pre-determined pattern, the three years being seen as a coherent whole, which may include a mix of academic and vocational courses and may involve experience of college or the workplace as well as school. This would provide opportunities for learners in the lowest SIMD deciles to fulfil their learning potential as the attainment of this group falls significantly below the highest SIMD deciles. This difference is most notable at SCQF Level 5 and above.

The SCQF supports this flexible approach and encourages parity of esteem among courses of every kind and flexible approaches to progression as it is solely concerned with the level of study rather than its location. Furthermore, it makes it easier to see where the learner journey has stalled or involves unnecessary duplication.

The recommendations from the *Commission on Developing Scotland's Young Workforce* are also beginning to exert a powerful influence on this part of the learning and skills journey. They are giving rise to more varied provision during the senior phase of schooling and to new opportunities and qualifications, sometimes requiring involvement with college as well as school. The notion of progression and continuity in the learner journey is again a vital ingredient.

Progress is clearly being made across the educational landscape, but much remains to be done. There is, as yet, little sense of a national pattern, nor of comparable opportunities being made available to all pupils across Scotland.

The diagram below illustrates in general terms possible flexible pathways available to young people leaving the period of BGE at the end of third year in secondary school. In practice, the range of pathways and the possible progression routes is much greater than illustrated and therefore this seeks to show only the possible options.

SCQF Level	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
<b>Broad General Education</b>			Higher			Degree/Honours Degree		Masters
	National 5		Higher	Advanced Higher				
	VRQ Level 1	VRQ Level 2	VRQ Level 3	Modern Apprenticeship	Graduate/Advanced Apprenticeship			
	NC Level 4	NC Level 5	NC Level 6	HNC	HND			
	Introductory Vocational Courses							
	Skills for Work 4	Skills for Work 5	Foundation Apprenticeship					
	SVQ Level 1	SVQ Level 2	SVQ Level 3	SVQ Level 4				Professional Apprenticeship

Note:

- 1 The courses listed at the left of the table are more likely to be studied in school while those further down the table are usually followed in college or the workplace. The college sector would welcome a model which caters for individual need rather than institutional interests.
- 2 Progression routes are, of course, guided by course content. National Certificate (NC) courses can lead easily into Higher National Certificate (HNC) courses however for example, an NC in Childcare does not easily allow a learner to articulate in an HNC in Computing.

## **Potential Benefits**

Learner journeys should move at a pace consistent with learner capacity. At the same time they should be cost-effective and avoid duplication. Such an approach to the learner journey would show significant productivity gains.

Scotland will be better able to resource personalised learning and skills journeys if it eliminates duplication and inefficiencies. If this is to be achieved, further consideration is needed to the following:

1. National 4/5 in S4 followed by Highers in S5 remaining the default school pattern, however much more flexible approaches are required.
2. If there is value in acquiring formal qualifications in S4, should a focus be on National 5 and where appropriate on introductory vocational qualifications?
3. Whilst a traditional view of the senior phase is as linear progression from N4/5 in S4 through Higher in S5 to Advanced Higher and some additional subjects in S6, other pathways should be available. This includes NC courses from the end of the BGE phase onwards.
4. There is obviously a place for *Skills for Work* courses, courses leading to Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs), Vocationally Related Qualifications (VRQ) and similar awards, as well as a range of other options. Learners should be able to mix together courses of these various kinds. Clear pathways among the options should be established leading through the senior phase. Matters of provider and location should be secondary to meeting the need of the learner.
5. Whilst it is acknowledged that achievement of Advanced Highers can be a differential factor in applications, it is still the case that having Advanced Higher (SCQF Level 7) qualifications does not generally lead on to an SCQF Level 8 course in Scotland (such as Year 2 of a Scottish four year degree or Year 2 of an HND) but only to a SCQF Level 7 course (such as Year 1 of a four year Scottish degree or Year 1 of an HND). As such, there appears to be an inefficiency in the system that allows for duplicating what has been achieved previously.
6. Requirements regarding registration with the General Teaching Council for Scotland impede college outreach into schools.

A case study outlining the potential benefits of a more streamlined journey through a school-college pathway to the learner, along with the potential financial productivity gains is outlined in Appendix 1.

## **College-University Pathways**

The college sector has many years' experience of working with university partners to make the transition from college to university as smooth as possible and to remove any duplication that might hamper a student's progress. These articulation arrangements allow students to progress through the various stages of the educational landscape, whilst ensuring the removal of duplication, and hence delivers efficiencies that are of benefit to the learner and the public purse. However, up until now, college-university articulation arrangements have not been compulsory and have been entered into locally.

The final report of the *Commission on Widening Access* which was published in March 2016, recommended widening access to higher education by promoting a systemic approach to addressing socio-economic inequalities that obstruct fair access. It identified a number of areas where colleges can work closely with early learning providers, schools and universities to support disadvantaged students in the earlier stages of their learning.

The college sector believes that as part of a new framework and to help promote equal recognition of academic forms of study and work-based technical and professional learning, agreements between colleges and universities would look to be formalised through a 'National Articulation Agreement'. This agreement would require to be developed and agreed by all relevant stakeholders to then allow standardised local agreements to be created directly between individual institutions, taking into account curriculum mapping and regional offerings, recognising the needs of commerce and industry.

## **Potential Benefits**

One such area where colleges can play a crucial role as collaborative partners in driving improvement is the articulation of learners from secondary school education and access programmes in college to further study at university Degree and honours Degree level. An example of this partnership working would be moving to a '2+2'<sup>1</sup> model of delivery of a Degree as a standard approach across all colleges and universities in Scotland. This would assist in shortening, but not reducing the benefits, of the learner journey.

A case study outlining the potential benefits of a more streamlined journey through a college-university pathway to the learner along with the potential financial productivity gains is outlined in Appendix 1.

## **Regional Skills Hub Model**

The consultation on new regional education boards for Scotland as part of the Schools Governance Review could be a timely opportunity to develop a collaborative leadership model, where a common approach and consistent policy implementation is seen between key stakeholders who support and deliver across the education and skills landscape. If a 'Regional Skills Hub' model was adopted that encompasses schools, colleges, universities, local authorities, SDS, employers and Community Planning Partnership, this could provide the much needed joined up approach within which the framework could operate.

If the Scottish Government were to consider aligning the new regional education boards, if such boards were established, with the 13 college regions and the 19 universities, this would provide greater opportunity for partnership working and introduce better collaboration between schools, colleges, universities and employers. There would however be some consideration required to how multi-college regions (Lanarkshire, Glasgow and Highland and Islands) would work in this type of model.

The potential role of the 'Regional Skills Hub' would be to:

- develop a collaborative vision for post-compulsory education (including senior phase education in schools) for that region
- maximise the number of young people progressing to further and higher education
- increase the proportion of disadvantaged learners progressing to higher levels and sustainable positive destinations
- improve the employability of all learners
- implement standardised articulation routes
- diversify the choice of courses available to learners in schools
- streamline and personalise learner journeys
- establish common applications processes
- eliminate duplication
- use resources more cost-effectively e.g. consider shared services where appropriate
- share data amongst relevant institutions
- improve career advice and planning.

## **4.3 Apprenticeship Family**

Apprenticeships are a vital part of helping employers to develop their workforce by training new staff and upskilling existing employees. They also allow individuals to earn a wage and gain an industry-recognised qualification as the same time.

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<sup>1</sup> '2+2' model, means where the first two years of education towards an honours degree is undertaken at a student's local college, before articulating into year 3 and completing the final 2 years at a university in order to complete the honours qualification

In 2013/14, the college sector delivered approximately **2,500** apprenticeships directly contracted by SDS. In addition that year, there were a further **3,000** apprenticeships sub-contracted to colleges directly from private training providers, to deliver some or all of the training elements.

Working within a 'Regional Skills Hub' model, the college sector would be best placed to ensure seamless provision across the continuum of the family of apprenticeships from Foundation Apprenticeships, through MA to Graduate Apprenticeships. By working in partnership through a streamlined approach with key stakeholders, the college sector could continue to deliver apprenticeships with minimal bureaucracy. This would allow for efficiencies in the supply chain, bringing clear added value to both the learners and employers.

### **Potential Benefits**

There is an opportunity as part of a new framework to address the current inefficiencies and administrative burden associated with the current apprenticeship contracts, thus maximising the resource made available to the frontline. This could initially be achieved by commissioning the college sector to work with employers to deliver an additional 5,000 apprenticeships in order to reach the Scottish Government's target of 30,000 MA by 2020.

## **4.4 Career Planning**

Career planning is a vital part of the learning and skills journey and underpins the new framework. Learners who make the right choices along their journey are more likely to ensure positive outcomes. The college sector believes this process should begin as early as P1 in primary schools. This will allow the beginning of fruitful discussions around the different types of jobs and skills required. A national programme developed by all stakeholders with relevant time assigned as part of the school's curriculum would allow pupils to undertake a career planning journey through a step-by-step developmental and decision making process, helping them become aware of their own strengths and uniqueness and the opportunities in the working world.

The implementation of well-defined Career Development Plans for all (P4-S6) pupils in both primary and secondary schools which clearly illustrates the learner's journey would help pupils to choose career paths they would be best suited to. Currently, secondary school pupils are expected to make subject choices in S3 for N4/5 and S4 for N5/Highers, however many pupils are making these choices without having a clear understanding of what their desired career pathway is or the qualifications and experience they require. This has serious consequences and poses a risk of pupils making the wrong choices for them which could delay their learner journey. It is vital that every child leaves secondary school with a positive destination. It is envisaged that these plans would follow the learner as they embark into further or higher education.

The provision for work experience placements from S2-S6 needs to be built into the national programme but tailored to individuals' needs. Careers fairs also provide an opportunity for pupils to engage directly with local employers, finding out first hand of the type of job opportunities in their area.

All colleges and universities provide an in-house careers advice service to their students. Their staff are qualified and offer one-to-one guidance and support to help students achieve their individual career goals. The positioning of colleges as a bridge to employment and to university means that their ability to offer such guidance is unparalleled. By considering bringing the Career Information, Advice and Guidance function currently provided by SDS into colleges as part of the new framework, would reduce the distance between education and training provision and employers thus improving the currency of information and understanding of career progression routes both regionally and nationally. As key partners in 'Regional Skills Hubs', colleges would be aware of, map and provide up-to-date and comprehensive information on all potential learner routes.

## **4.5 Learner Support**

The college sector continues to support the need for a standard and fair system for student support funding that provides students with adequate financial support, as well as reasonable certainty on the support they are likely to receive for the duration of their study. Current student support funding does not fully meet the cost of college student support funding demand related to further education courses, in contrast to pre-16 year old students and those undertaking a higher education qualification.

In line with the principles for the learning and skills journey outlined earlier, the progress of a learner should not be inhibited by systemic or institutional factors. One way that this issue, in relation to learner support can be addressed, is to ensure that fair funding follows the learner, rather than the institution. This will help ensure flexibility within the learning and skills journey and will allow for the specific and personalised learner journey to be undertaken in an efficient a manner as possible. This in turn will bring benefit to the individual, who will be aware of the financial support on offer and prevent any unnecessary expenditure for both students and institutions.

## **4.6 Workforce**

This new framework will be delivered by our workforce to ensure our staff have the appropriate skills, knowledge, competencies and mind-set to deliver the vision for a new educational landscape. It will be essential that the college sector develops an HR framework which recruits, develops and retain staff to ensure that there is the right capacity to deliver the type of learning that society, the economy and individuals will seek in the future. This is a key element of the current college National Bargaining agenda. This will naturally be an area which will have to be well considered as part of any new educational landscape and framework. Specifically, in the college sector it will need to be addressed as any changes to the current college workforce will need to be supported and adequate additional investment provided.

## **5. Conclusion**

This paper aims to provide the college sector's initial thoughts on what a co-ordinated learning and skills framework could look like, along with the potential efficiencies that could be achieved across the education sector as a whole, by having a more joined up, seamless and efficient learner journey, and one which places the individual learner at the centre.

The college sector is now looking for the Scottish Government to agree a policy position that would allow key stakeholders to progress this area further and start to shape the future educational landscape for post-16 learning. However, until any progress on a new landscape has been made and is fully embedded, it is important that investment across the current education landscape and in particular, the college sector who have seen a significant reduction in funding over the last three years, is protected in the coming years.

## Case Study 1 – Career Planning/Relevant Work Experience: Melanie

During her time at secondary school, Melanie attended a half-day guidance session in S4 around the different opportunities for pupils after leaving school. On this knowledge only, as there was no work experience opportunities provided by her secondary school, she decided that by taking into account her strongest subjects, she would be most suited to a career in either social work or the prison service. This was at a time where it was expected that pupils who achieved academically would go to university to embark on a Degree course. Although Melanie received the grades required in S5 to receive an unconditional offer at university, it was deemed common practice to stay on to S6 before starting university.

Melanie left university after successfully completing a four year MA (Hons) in Psychology and Sociology. Although she thoroughly enjoyed the course and experience, it became more and more apparent after speaking to other students studying the same course and professionals that a career in social work or the prison service was not for her. After leaving university, not sure what to do next, Melanie applied for a variety of different graduate jobs with leading firms in the UK. This was a highly competitive market and after being unsuccessful she decided to look at opportunities locally and was offered a position as an Auxiliary Nurse at a local nursing home. During her short experience working in Care sector, Melanie realised that Nursing would be an ideal profession and embarked on a Postgraduate Diploma in Nursing. This was a two year Diploma (three years for an undergraduate) and combined theoretical work in the classroom with practical experience in clinical settings.

After graduating, Melanie was successful at securing full-time employment. She worked as a Nurse for five years within the NHS, reaching Grade E. She left Nursing temporarily to start a family. To accommodate a young family, Melanie has since started her own business (not for profit) in the provision of an out of school club for her local community as well as becoming a registered childminder. A recommendation by the Care Commission upon an annual inspection specified that as a manager of the out of school club, she should have a BA in Childhood Practice. Melanie successfully completed this two year degree via distance learning and funded it privately.

### Learning and Skills Journey

If Melanie had been provided with effective careers guidance earlier on as well as having had the opportunity to find out more about the professions she was considering, through work experience opportunities, it is likely that she would have embarked on her preferred career path much earlier and saved on unnecessary duplication of government funding, based on spend per head (SPH). The diagrams below illustrate where the learning journey post-S4 could have been more efficient if better planning had been made to acquire qualifications and develop the skills needed for her chosen career path. Also if prior learning had been recognised, then there would have been no requirement for her to have acquired an additional qualification such as the BA in Childhood Practice.

#### Diagram 1 – Journey Taken



The total government funding for this journey would be **£55.2k**.

#### Diagram 2 – Streamlined Journey



The total government funding for this journey would be **£27.6k**.

## Case Study 2 – 2+2 Articulation Model: Daniel

Daniel was fortunate that during his time at secondary school, the school had a work experience programme where students could go on two-week work placements. Unfortunately placements arranged by the school were limited and not specifically tailored to individual needs. With his interest in veterinarian studies and with assistance from a family friend, Daniel embarked in a two week work placement at his local Veterinary Practice. It was during his placement which provided him with a wide range of different experiences, he decided that he wanted to go on and study biomedical science at university. The only careers guidance Daniel received during secondary school was several one-to-one sessions with a careers advisor in S5. This support was generally around which university offered Degree courses in biomedical science and what the entry qualifications were.

Unfortunately in S5, Daniel did not receive the grade in Higher English he required for entry into university. It was agreed that he would stay on to S6 and re-sit his Higher English. As friends left school after S5 and moved on to university and college, Daniel become increasingly disengaged during S6. Having to repeat the same subject left him feeling uninterested and he failed again to receive the required grade in his Higher English to be successful at gaining a place at university.

Having left secondary school, Daniel was left on his own to determine his next steps. He was adamant he still wanted to go to university to study biomedical science. His options were 1) he went to university for one year to sit his Higher English for the third time in the hope that he improved his grade or 2) he went to college to study a HNC in Applied Biological Sciences. Success at either would allow him to transition into a Year 1 on the Degree course. Daniel chose to go to college and study a HNC in Applied Biological Sciences which he successfully completed. He then articulated into Year 1 of a four-year degree course at university to study a BSc (Hons) in Biomedical Sciences.

After leaving university, Daniel was successful at securing full-time employment within a global UK business working in their drug dispensary department and has undertaken further training to meet their own industry requirements.

### Learning and Skills Journey

If Daniel had been provided more guidance after S5 on his options, rather than the only option of re-sitting his Higher English in the hope he improved on his initial grade, then he could have embarked on his preferred career path much earlier and saved on unnecessary duplication of government funding, based on spend per head (SPH). The diagrams below illustrate where the learning journey post-S4 could have been more efficient if better planning had been made to acquire qualifications and develop the skills needed for his chosen career path.

#### Diagram 1 – Journey Taken



*The total government funding for this journey would be **£44.6k**.*

#### Diagram 2 – Streamlined Journey



*The total government funding for this journey would be **£27.4k**.*

## Case Study 3 – Adult Female Returners: Magdalena

Magdalena, originally from Poland, applied to study a vocational education qualification in hairdressing while attending secondary school in Poland. Unfortunately due to the course being oversubscribed, she had to settle for a course in hospitality. Elements of this qualification were worked-based learning and the business that provided this training also offered her private work outwith the course.

Due to the lack of job opportunities in Poland, Magdalena finished her course and moved to Scotland 22 years ago with her partner. Since arriving in Scotland, she has worked for 15 years in permanent full-time employment in the hospitality sector, mostly as a waitress. She also rented accommodation. Seven years ago she became a mother and reduced her hours to part-time, mostly evening and weekend work to accommodate family life and childcare arrangements.

A few years ago, Magdalena and her husband were successful in acquiring permanent residency in the UK and have since bought their first home. With her child now in primary school, she was keen to achieve her initial aspiration of becoming a hairdresser and applied for college last year, however again due to the course being oversubscribed, she was unsuccessful. She has since been accepted to a college to study City & Guilds in Hairdressing (Level 2). This is a two year course.

Magdalena is thoroughly enjoying Year 1 of her college course and intends to start her own mobile hairdressing business upon completion, to work around her family life.

### Learning and Skills Journey

The financial gains to the Scottish Government by providing Magdalena, as an adult learner, the opportunity to attend college and acquire skills and a qualification in her chosen profession is not as clearly defined as in the other case studies. However, by currently being in a career which is capped in terms of progression and income, Magdalena sees this upskilling as an opportunity to embark on a career path which not only she enjoys but will provide her with an increased income, benefiting not only her family but increasing her tax contributions, which benefits the economy.

### Diagram 1 – Journey Taken



*The total government funding for this journey is **£6.8k**.*