

## **MSP briefing: Scottish Government debate – Developing Skills for Scotland’s Digital Economy: Thursday 3rd April 2014**

### **1. Vision for Digital Inclusion**

In 2011, the Scottish Government outlined its vision in *Scotland's Digital Future: A Strategy for Scotland*<sup>i</sup> to make Scotland a world leading digital economy by 2020. Increasing skills, ensuring connectivity and encouraging participation are vital if the Scottish Government is to be successful in reaching this aspiration.

The digital economy brings benefits to those with the appropriate technological skills, however, it threatens to leave behind those unable to access digital technologies. Education remains one of the key factors in providing people with the skills to use digital technologies productively and responsibly. As such, Scotland’s colleges have a vital role in providing both young and adult learners with the skills and confidence necessary to harness digital technologies’ full potential.

### **2. Overall benefits from Digital Participation**

Digital inclusion is an important mechanism for people to engage online with the people around them, access learning and services, and play a full role in the economy and society.

The benefits of digital participation are clear from a business point of view. A report by e-skills UK, the Sector Skills Council for Business and Information Technology, suggested that Scotland could increase its GVA by up to £3.7 billion over the next 5-7 years if action is taken to stimulate the digital economy by increasing the range and quality of online services, promoting digital literacy and skills at home and at work, and encouraging innovation and enterprise across different sectors.

On the other hand, digital exclusion can have serious implications on society and is strongly linked to deprivation. The Royal Society of Edinburgh recently published an interim report on *Spreading the Benefits of Digital Participation*<sup>ii</sup>, claiming that where there is deprivation—in employment and income, in education and health, in housing and geography – there is generally lower instances of broadband uptake.

### **3. Role of Colleges in growing a Digital Economy**

There has been a general decline in students taking computing courses in schools with a 27% decline in Standard Grade, a 17% fall in intermediate 1 and a 1% fall in Higher uptake from 2007–2011. The number of enrolments onto IT and Telecoms related courses in colleges also fell to 51,840 in 2013, a drop of 31% from 2005/06.

Scotland's colleges have a responsibility to stimulate and support the digital economy by delivering courses that ensure employers in the digital technologies sector have the right skilled employees needed for the industry to expand and flourish.

#### **3.1 Participation in the workplace**

Digital technology can help increase participation in education by reaching out to more students. For example the E-Skills placement programme, a 3-year programme funded by the Scottish Funding Council, will place 750 students from universities and colleges across Scotland in IT companies between 2014 and 2016.<sup>iii</sup>

### 3.2 New qualifications

Colleges have also worked in the past to introduce industry-recognised options into the SQA's ICT and digital media qualifications through the Digital media and ICT Vendor Alliance (DIVA) programme, a collaboration between SQA, industry and education partners across Scotland.

At the time this partnership, from the perspective of some of its stakeholders, was an example of 'global best practice' in collaboration between the education sector and industry<sup>iv</sup>.

### 3.3 Responding to the needs of industry

Collaboration works best when colleges work together to meet the needs of similar employers, especially in large key sectors. There are long-standing, highly successful national college responses to developing and qualifying the care, early years and health care sectors with sustainable consortia approaches and agreements. The recent example of the Energy Skills Partnership also shows how much can be achieved through collaboration between colleges and industry and the value of really serious engagement with and guidance from industry bodies.

It is important that employers across the sector have the opportunity to engage in curriculum design in schools, colleges and universities. Creating effective industry and education partnerships will support learners to develop the necessary skills as well as gain a better understanding of the range of career opportunities available.

As such, Colleges Scotland welcome the Digital Technologies Sector Skills Investment Plan published by Skills Development Scotland published in March 2014<sup>v</sup>. It notes the crucial contribution that colleges can make in the following areas:

- Supporting a comprehensive mapping exercise to understand the supply of FE and HE, retention rates and graduate destinations.
- Helping develop an industry-led talent academy model to provide transition training to individuals and provide them with the skills to access ICT and digital technology jobs. This could support up to 11,000 jobs per year.
- Developing effective industry and education partnerships.
- Delivering 750 work placements for FE/HE students in IT companies by 2016.

**Colleges Scotland:** This briefing has been provided by Colleges Scotland for MSPs' information. More information can be found on [www.collegesscotland.ac.uk](http://www.collegesscotland.ac.uk). To discuss, or for further information, please contact Shona Struthers, Director of Policy and Public Affairs, Colleges Scotland, email: [shona.struthers@collegesscotland.ac.uk](mailto:shona.struthers@collegesscotland.ac.uk) or Tel: 01786 892000.

<sup>i</sup> Scottish Government, [Scotland's Digital Future: A Strategy for Scotland](#)

<sup>ii</sup> Royal Society of Edinburgh, [Spreading the Benefits of Digital Participation](#)

<sup>iii</sup> Our Skillsforce, [Digital Technologies Sector Skills Investment Plan](#)

<sup>iv</sup> BiGGAR Economics, [Evaluation of the Digital Media and ICT Vendor Alliance \(DIVA\)](#)

<sup>v</sup> Our Skillsforce, [Digital Technologies Sector Skills Investment Plan](#)