

## MSP briefing: Scottish Government debate – Increasing Opportunities for Women – Wednesday 20 August 2014

### Key Messages

- Despite women making up more than 50% of student numbers they are under represented within a number of college courses.
- The focus on delivering learning hours to young people, who study on a full-time basis has impacted adversely on the number of women studying.
- Colleges Scotland welcome the renewed focus of the Scottish Government on the issue of gender segregation and believe its actions will complement the existing work in colleges to overcome gender segregation.
- Longer term, Colleges Scotland believes efforts must be focused at primary and secondary school level to tackle the culture of gender stereotyping and address any issues in the careers service.

### Background

In terms of gender balance in 2012-13, female learners are outnumbered by male learners in the 24 and under age group, however, they significantly outnumber male learners in the older group. There are around 3,000 more male learners in younger age group (68,933 v 65,717) but almost 18,000 greater numbers of women in the 25+ group - 61,806 compared with 44,119 men. <sup>i</sup>

The 2014/15 flat cash settlement of £521.7m saw a fall in cash terms by £34m during the period 2011/12 to 2014/15. Since 2011, with the funding reductions and the focus on the Scottish Government's Opportunities for All guarantee, colleges have delivered proportionally more learning hours to young people, who tend to study on a full-time basis, at the expense of other learners i.e. part-time, older learners and female returners. For example, there has been a drop in FE part-time female students from 199,577 in 2007/08 to 99,033 in 2012/13. Although the number of FE full-time places for women has increased from 37,209 to 41,834 over the same period. <sup>ii</sup>

Female Students	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
Full time	37,209	39,105	41,639	42,540	43,021	41,834
Part time ( day release, evening, weekend, block courses at al)	199,577	192,181	168,478	138,149	109,455	99,033
Total	236,786	231,286	210,117	180,689	152,476	140,867

### Gender segregation

The Wood Commission's report rightly notes the challenges faced by women and men that do not wish to adhere to career stereotypes, with only 3% of women enrolling in engineering apprenticeships and only 4% of women enrolling in electrical engineering college courses<sup>iii</sup>. The low level of female participation in these courses is a likely consequence of gender stereotyping at a young age, with the Commission reporting that girls in S2/S3 were disinterested in studying maths and sciences because they were 'not cool'.

Colleges Scotland agrees with the assessment made by the Commission; that gender stereotypes limit opportunities and that there is a need to counter this culture early on by focusing efforts at both primary and secondary school levels. As well as addressing gender expectation amongst pupils, teachers and parents, Colleges Scotland believes the government should review the careers service to ensure it is effective, relevant and flexible to support learners who may wish to pursue non-traditional careers.

We welcome the recommendations about the development of an action plan from the Commission to address gender disparities within both the college sector and modern apprenticeships. These plans must include clear targets, timelines and funding to equalise gender participation across college courses and modern apprenticeships, to ensure that the Commission's aspirations will be achieved.

Nonetheless, it is important to stress that the sector can and is playing a constructive role to address this imbalance. The recent guidance from the Cabinet Secretary for Education to the SFC<sup>iv</sup> will helpfully provide a renewed focus to the sector's efforts to encourage men and women onto non-traditional courses and build on already successful initiatives (see case study below).

**Case Study:** North East College Scotland has developed the '**Girls into Energy**' programme, sponsored by Shell UK, which provides an introductory experience to the energy industry for female pupils in local secondary schools. Upon completion of the engineering programme, learners can apply for membership to the Institute of Mechanical Engineers, which allows successful learners professional recognition of their achievement. A work placement arranged by Shell UK develops learners' employability skills and supports them to apply their academic understanding to real life situations. So far 28 learners have undertaken the programme which has a success rate of 92% of learners gaining employment within the oil & gas sector and a further 7% progress onto further education.

**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, Chief Executive, Colleges Scotland, email: [shona.struthers@collegesscotland.ac.uk](mailto:shona.struthers@collegesscotland.ac.uk) or Tel: 01786 892100.

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<sup>i</sup> The SFC Infact database

<sup>ii</sup> The SFC Infact database

<sup>iii</sup> Commission for Developing Scotland's Young Workforce Final Report

<sup>iv</sup> scottish funding council (SFC) – letter of guidance 2015-16