

RESPONDENT INFORMATION FORM

Please Note this form **must** be returned with your response to ensure that we handle your response appropriately

Views and comments can be made to EmployabilityinScotland@scotland.gsi.gov.uk by 9th October 2015.

1. Name/Organisation

Organisation Name

Colleges Scotland

Title Mr Ms Mrs Miss Dr Please tick as appropriate

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3. Permissions - I am responding as...

Individual / Group/Organisation

Please tick as appropriate

(a) Do you agree to your response being made available to the public (in Scottish Government library and/or on the Scottish Government web site)?

Please tick as appropriate

Yes No

(b) Where confidentiality is not requested, we will make your responses available to the public on the following basis

Please tick ONE of the following boxes

(c) The name and address of your organisation **will be** made available to the public (in the Scottish Government library and/or on the Scottish Government web site).

Are you content for your **response** to be made available?

Please tick as appropriate
 Yes No

Yes, make my response,
name and address all
available

or

Yes, make my response
available, but not my name
and address

or

Yes, make my response
and name available, but
not my address

- (d)** We will share your response internally with other Scottish Government policy teams who may be addressing the issues you discuss. They may wish to contact you again in the future, but we require your permission to do so. Are you content for Scottish Government to contact you again in relation to this consultation exercise?

Please tick as appropriate

Yes

No

Colleges Scotland's Response to Creating a Fairer Scotland: Employability Support: A Discussion Paper

QUESTION 1

What types of employment support services work best in Scotland, reflecting the very different needs of individuals who are unemployed?

Comment

The college sector has a long history (spanning back over 100 years) of supporting individuals who wish to improve their employment prospects, either through acquiring new skills and knowledge or by taking them to a higher level.

Colleges Scotland believes that the college sector is well placed to make significant contributions to the Scottish Government's ambitions for a Fairer Scotland where provision and services are tailored to be right for the individual. Colleges have well-recognised advantages over other forms of training. College staff possess formal qualifications in teaching and learning combined with experience as competent practitioners in their own industry sector. This allows staff to develop approaches to learning that take full cognisance of the needs of individuals who require employability support and help them gain the skills, knowledge and confidence that they require to be successful in the modern contexts of their industry sector.

Also, colleges provide a whole range of additional support services for their students – from extended learning support for those with identified learning difficulties, through pastoral and counselling support to the availability of rich resources such as study space, resource centres and freely-available IT services. College staff also work with students as tutors and guidance advisers, offering advice on career pathways and routes to further education, training and employment.

QUESTION 2

How best can we ensure the needs of different businesses and sectors in Scotland, are aligned with employment programme outcomes?

Comment

A first step is to properly identify the needs of businesses and sectors and then align employability programme outcomes to ensure that they are going to meet these requirements. Otherwise employability programmes would produce individuals whose skill sets did not match what employers are looking for.

There are many agencies that engage with industry sector organisations and businesses across Scotland. Colleges themselves engage with employers and acquire a knowledge and understanding of their current needs to address skills shortages and skills gaps, as do other agencies with whom colleges work in partnership: Community Planning Partnerships, Youth Employment Partnerships, Local Authority Economic Agencies, Chambers of Commerce, Scottish Enterprise, and Skills Development Scotland. This would suggest that there could be a risk of mixed or confused messages about the real needs of employers.

Colleges understand that they must respond to specific sector needs rather than a 'national' plan for employability skills. Therefore any solution must be able to identify and accommodate the differing requirements for each sector of the Scottish economy.

QUESTION 3

What are the strengths and weaknesses of existing employment support programmes and delivery mechanisms in Scotland?

Comment

The college sector notes that there are several weaknesses in the current system for [Employability Funding \(EF\)](#).

The five stages of the employability pipeline are a useful benchmark for pre-assessment of candidates, but aligning a college's EF contract to that is problematic. In reality, there is a significant gap between a stage 2 candidate and a stage 3 candidate. Someone who finishes a stage 2 training programme may well still have significant barriers which prevents his/her progression through stage 3 (which could include a 190 hour work placement). Some candidates would benefit from an intermediate level programme not requiring a work placement. Putting candidates on a placement which they are not ready for, can be damaging for the individual, the employer – and potentially damaging for any ongoing relationship between the college and the employer.

Furthermore, the existing system whereby colleges are required to forecast where employment opportunities will be and bid accordingly for EF places in specific industry areas (e.g. engineering, construction, hospitality, etc.) up to a year in advance of delivery, is also inflexible and fails to respond to current market conditions and employer demands. This reduces the likelihood of successful outcomes and is potentially wasteful in terms of public funding. The bidding process needs to allow any training provider to match candidates and relevant training to current employer demands.

A further weakness of the current system is that provision of employability support is spread over a large number of providers such as third sector organisations, training organisations and others. While some organisations will have well-established systems for quality improvement and professional updating of staff, others may not and as a result there is a detriment to the overall quality of provision. Colleges have proved themselves to be highly competent in designing, planning, delivering and quality assuring the provision that they make. They collaborate very well with local agencies to ensure that what is delivered is matched to the local need. Colleges have the capacity to do more and to have a stronger role in determining the 'what' and the 'how' of employability training for their regions.

Colleges are well placed to deliver a wide portfolio of courses in different subject areas to meet current candidate and employer demands but at times are prevented from delivering the optimum solution by the inflexibility of the existing arrangements and associated funding.

QUESTION 4

Where are the current examples of good practice in relation to alignment of services to most effectively support a seamless transition into employment?

Comment

Colleges in Scotland have particular success in aligning services to help the unemployed in their transition to work. Examples include:

Dundee and Angus College

Dundee and Angus College established a state-of-the-art dedicated contact centre training suite in order to support contact centre recruitment and efficient workforce development for a range of SMEs and large global organisations serving a diverse client base.

Dundee and Angus College worked with JCP, Aviva, HMRC and Tesco to develop a bespoke training solution that provided the relevant technical knowledge and skill requirement. This programme was aimed at unemployed adults over 25 and to date over 250 individuals have completed the training and developed skills in employability, problem solving, team working and communication.

Forth Valley College

Retraining local unemployed people for jobs as overhead electrical lines technicians was the focus of a partnership programme at Forth Valley College. The college teamed up with SP Energy Networks, Falkirk Council and Job Centre Plus to deliver a training course which addressed a real skills gap in the overhead electrical lines sector.

Unemployed individuals who successfully completed the programme were then employed as trainees with SP Energy Network's contractor SPIE ENS and continued to study for further nationally recognised qualifications.

Perth College UHI

Perth College UHI, in conjunction with Job Centre Plus, created an Environmental Academy to up-skill unemployed adults to gain knowledge, skills and work experience in preparation for work in the waste management industry. The bespoke programme focused on supporting candidates to develop an appreciation of different working environments and making an effective contribution to the economy of the local community. Successful students received a number of industry related certificates.

Local employers supported the programme and offered site visits and placements. Their engagement was a major influence on the design and delivery of this programme to develop key knowledge and skills that were essential for working in the waste management and recycling industries and make them job ready and able to gain employment in this industry.

West Lothian College

The West Lothian Pre-Employment Training concept was developed by West Lothian College in partnership with the Centre Livingston and Job Centre Plus. Launched originally in 2012 with the main aim of finding employment for 50 people in the retail, hospitality and tourism sectors the scheme was re-designed to recruit 60 unemployed people in three cohorts over 2013/14.

The programme was specifically designed by West Lothian College to help those ready for work into secure employment based on a two-week training period followed by work placement supplemented with online training. A guaranteed job interview and work placement/job was available at the end of the training. The initiative enabled successful applicants to enhance their CV writing skills and interview techniques and gain valuable industry accredited awards such as the REHIS Health and Safety certificate, WorldHost™ Principles of Customer Service and WorldHost™ Sales Powered by Service.

This programme has been highly effective in supporting unemployed people into sustainable jobs and careers in retail. It represents high quality collaboration between the college, Job Centre Plus and local employers.

QUESTION 5

What are the key improvements you would make to existing employment support services in Scotland to ensure more people secure better work?

Comment

The existing referral process does not work as efficiently as it could. Agency partners are clearly stretched in some areas and appear to have conflicting priorities. This is compounded by the timelines that the EF contract requires with referrals having to be made within 28 days of the course start. This does not appear to allow agency partners enough time to meet, interview, refer, await confirmation of acceptance by the training provider, then interview again before the start of the programme. Low referral rates and course postponement is the common conclusion.

Colleges Scotland sees the partnership between training providers and employers to be key to helping the unemployed secure better work. We ought to be ensuring that each person taken on to an employability support is matched to an employer who will provide a work placement and then a guaranteed job interview for an identified job. This will provide the trainee with a clear sight of their route to employment and help to motivate both the trainee and the employer to engage positively with the training and work experience package.

Colleges find that the current arrangements for securing funding could be improved to offer them longer-term contracts and thus ensure more stability to this element of their funding income stream. This would help colleges with their own staff contracting and management as well as giving continuity of professional experience that will contribute to higher quality provision. The actual arrangements for tracking and monitoring trainees on employability support programmes are also cumbersome and over-bureaucratic and are usually additional to the college's own internal systems for student management. These could be simplified to the benefit of all concerned.

QUESTION 6

How best can we assess the employment support needs of an individual and then ensure the support they receive is aligned with their requirements?

Comment

Colleges Scotland believes that a well-developed framework of employment support needs is a necessary foundation for this type of assessment. The further development of this framework should draw on the most up-to-date research findings so that the framework remains fit for purpose. Those who administer this framework (i.e. assessors of employment support needs) will require training and development to ensure fair and transparent application of the framework in all cases. Colleges would be well placed to deliver such training.

QUESTION 7

How best can the employability pipeline framework help providers best assess and deliver services people need?

Comment

Colleges would prefer that the framework should be tied more closely to SCQF Levels. Also there could be better exemplification of how progression is achieved in the pipeline, possibly through a set of case studies.

The five stages of the employability pipeline are a useful benchmark for pre-assessment of candidates, but aligning the EF contract to that is problematic. In reality, there is a significant gap between a stage 2 candidate and a stage 3 candidate. Someone who finishes a stage 2 training programme may well still have significant barriers which prevents his/her progression through stage 3 (which could include a 190 hour work placement). Some candidates would benefit from

an intermediate level programme not requiring a work placement. Putting candidates on a placement which they are not ready for, can be damaging for the individual, the employer – and potentially damaging for any ongoing relationship between the college and the employer.

QUESTION 8

How can early intervention best be integrated into employment support and the design of future programmes?

Comment

Colleges Scotland believes that early intervention is likely to deliver the best results for the individual, the Scottish economy and society. Consequently it ought to be a necessary element in the design of future programmes. Colleges have no particular view on what mechanisms are the most appropriate to deliver this.

QUESTION 9

What is the optimal duration of employment support, in terms of both moving individuals into work, and then sustaining their employment?

Comment

The minimum period should be no less than 12 weeks – this allows a period of settling in and sufficient time to complete one or more units of a vocational qualification before moving into work placement.

The experience of colleges in providing employment support shows that there is a need for individuals to be supported beyond the day that they take up employment. There is often a need for further counselling, confidence building and reinforcing of core skills.

QUESTION 10

What are the benefits and challenges of a national contracting strategy for Scotland's future employment support service(s)?

Comment

Colleges would prefer a system of contracting that provided some stability in the funding stream so that staff delivering employability programmes are not subjected to a 'hire and fire' cycle. Colleges would prefer to have a partnership with Skills Development Scotland (SDS) in which colleges have the status of trusted partners and have guaranteed contracts for longer periods than at present – i.e. for 2 or even 3 years.

Colleges are very well connected (through CPPs and LEPs) to the needs of employers in their regions. This would point to the benefits of contracting at a regional rather than a national level. Also the information that SDS assembles for its skills planning is at the level of regional (Regional Skills Assessments). Colleges note that the establishment of Developing the Young Workforce Regional Groups will provide opportunities for more engagement between employers and education at a regional and local level. As an example of this, Dumfries and Galloway College operates an Employer Advisory Board for each of its faculties to ensure that the college is providing the right kind of employability skills for local consumption.

QUESTION 11

How best can we secure effective regional and local delivery of employment support in future?

Comment

In the view of the college sector this is best accomplished by giving longer contracts to trusted providers – such as the colleges themselves. This would allow providers to be confident about hiring staff, investing in premises and equipment and training of staff.

This arrangement would also help to reduce the levels of administration required on the part of SDS. The intervention of private companies as brokers between colleges, purely for profit, would also be avoided.

QUESTION 12

Do national or more localised employment support programmes work better for different client groups? If so, which ones and why?

Comment

Colleges are used to operating at a regional level with their partners, and aiming to target the education and training needs that have been identified at the local level. It is our view that all client groups should have the benefit of localised (and therefore tailored) provision.

QUESTION 13

Who should be the contracting authority for devolved employment support provision?

Comment

Colleges Scotland has no view on this matter.

QUESTION 14

Which client groups would benefit most from future employment support in Scotland and why?

Comment

Recent Scottish Government policy in relation to the funding of education has resulted in a substantial reduction of college provision for women wishing to return to employment after a time out of the workplace (e.g. to raise a family). It is important that support should be available to allow previously economically-active women return to the workplace.

QUESTION 15

What should be our ambitions for these client groups?

Comment

To ensure a rapid return to the workplace by providing support that is tailored to the needs of that client group. Colleges are well placed to develop and deliver tailored provision that will equip each client group with the competences and personal attributes to succeed in their return to work.

QUESTION 16

How can we maximise the effectiveness of devolved employment support in Scotland, in relation to the broader range of resources and initiatives available in Scotland?

Comment

Colleges Scotland believes effectiveness can be increased by investing employability funding in colleges where there is an excellent record of success, experienced staff and high quality resources. Our view is that it is relatively inefficient to spread employability funding over a large number of providers, rather than focusing it on providers with rigorous quality processes and proven success.

QUESTION 17

What are the advantages, or disadvantages, of payment by results within employment support? What would form an effective suite of outcomes and over what period for Scotland? What does an effective payment structure look like?

Comment

For a sector as large as that of the colleges in Scotland, there is no advantage to a system of payment by results for employability support. There would be a relative disadvantage through the increase in bureaucracy that it entails, both for the colleges and for the funders, and from the lag that it introduces into funding flow at a time when cash flow is critical to colleges.

QUESTION 18

What are the advantages, or disadvantages, of payment for progression within employment support? What measures of progression and over what period? What does an effective payment structure, which incentivises progression, look like?

Comment

Colleges Scotland has no view on this matter.

QUESTION 19

What are the key aspects of an effective performance management system, to support the delivery of employment support outcomes in Scotland?

Comment

A performance management system must be based on measures that are easy to understand, straightforward to collect, and are based on robust and reliable data. The data systems themselves must be straightforward in their operation and avoid some of the bureaucracy that has been experienced by colleges in the past.

QUESTION 20

Collectively, how best do we encourage active participation and avoid lack of participation on employment support programmes?

Comment

Colleges Scotland believes that a powerful means of persuasion can be found in case studies from individuals who have found benefit and work from their participation in employability support. These can be in the form of video presentations or web-based case studies with images.

QUESTION 21

Do you have any other comments/views in relation to future employment support that have not been covered in the questions above?

Comment

Colleges Scotland has no further comment.

Colleges Scotland
9 October 2015