

EXCERPT OF MINUTE OF MEETING OF THE COMMUNITY SERVICES (COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT) SUB-COMMITTEE HELD ON 25 AUGUST 1999

SCOTTISH OFFICE CONSULTATION PAPER: "OPPORTUNITIES AND CHOICES: POST SCHOOL PROVISION FOR 16-18 YEAR OLDS"

6. There was submitted a report (docketed) dated 23 July 1999 by the Director of Community Services (1) advising of the receipt of a Consultation Paper from the Scottish Office entitled "Opportunities and Choices: Post School Provision for 16-18 Year Olds"; (2) intimating that a Working Group comprising representatives from the Community Services, Chief Executives, Education and Social Work Departments had prepared a draft response to the Consultation Paper; (3) providing his observations on the aspects of the Consultation Paper; (4) recommending that the Sub-Committee approve the proposed response detailed within the report, and (5) further recommending that the report be referred to the Education, Social Work and Social Inclusion Committees, for their interest and information.

Decided:

- (1) that the Director of Administration be authorised to forward a response, based on the views outlined within the report, to the Scottish Office;
- (2) that the report be referred to the Education, Social Work and Social Inclusion Committees for their interest and information, and
- (3) that the report be otherwise noted.

NORTH LANARKSHIRE COUNCIL

REPORT

To: COMMUNITY SERVICES (COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT) SUB-COMMITTEE		Subject: SCOTTISH OFFICE CONSULTATION PAPER: "OPPORTUNITIES AND CHOICES : POST SCHOOL PROVISION FOR 16 - 18 YEAR OLDS"
From: DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES		
Date: 23 JULY 1999	Ref: JMcG/VB/MC	

1 **BACKGROUND**

- 1.1 "Opportunities and Choices" published on 24 March 1999 is a Scottish Office consultation paper designed to stimulate debate around the issue of post-school provision. It sets out a number of issues and problems and explores possible responses and approaches to solutions. It seeks the views of interested parties on how to extend the range of opportunities and choices open to 16 - 18 year olds. The full text of the document is available in the members' library.
- 1.2 The paper emphasises the finite nature of available resources and the competing demands being faced by the Scottish Parliament. It therefore seeks ways of using existing resources and to build on good practice at local level which might be more widely applicable. However the paper does not preclude suggestions for new constructive and creative proposals.
- 1.3 The paper sets out the current position on participation and attainment among 16 - 18 year olds and describes the range of provision now available. It discusses recent findings about the characteristics, concerns and circumstances of young people which can affect their access to education or training and their ability to acquire skills and qualifications.
- 1.4 "Opportunities and Choices" finally sets out the key aspects upon which it seeks views. These are:
- (i) the objectives of post-school education and training for young people who are going into higher education
 - (ii) guidance and support
 - (iii) the age range and eligibility for training programmes, in particular "Modern Apprenticeships"
 - (iv) the role of employers
 - (v) the development of integrated provision

A series of 18 questions are included to aid the consultation and responses are sought by 15 September 1999.

2 **THE COUNCIL'S RESPONSE**

- 2.1 A group of officers, convened by the Department, analysed the consultation paper and prepared suggested responses to each of the consultations paper's 18 questions. These are set out in the

following paragraphs for members' consideration. The working group comprised representatives of the community services, principally careers and community education, chief executive's, education and social work departments.

2.2 The working group would propose the following responses to individual consultation questions:

Q1: Are the suggested policy objectives of post-school education or training the right ones? Are there others?

The first policy objective should seek to engage with young people and a further objective should be about the sustainability of a place in work-based training or in education.

The skills to be acquired should be more clearly defined in terms of appropriateness, especially given the differing levels of maturity of young people.

A definition of the particular barriers and difficulties young people face and the additional support to be provided would be helpful, as would a working definition of employability. A shared understanding of employability, given realistically what this means to young people, their parents and employers, would also help with coherent profiling. This would provide a national baseline from which all organisations could work.

In addition, the objectives should include planned early intervention involving a multi-agency approach and a strengthened objective for employers involving increasing their commitment to young people.

A further objective should be to carry out an evaluation of the impact on parents' benefits when the last child leaves school. This would require a holistic approach to family benefits and would be in keeping with the thinking behind a Single Work-Focused Gateway. Such an evaluation should also consider financial parity of esteem to take place, regardless of the young person's choice being a vocational or academic route.

Taking a holistic view will involve an enhanced guidance need for clients. An extension to the careers guidance role can include the vital sub-text of decision-making for clients, especially in the acquisition of personal skills.

Q2: How can the value of work-based training be increased?

A cultural shift is really required, which involves the empowerment of young people to enable realistic career routes to be chosen without stigma or stereotype. The Social & Vocational Skills Standard Grade provided many of these skills but recent trends have shown that fewer young people are opting for this course in S3/4.

Introducing self-directed work-based training, similar to Lanarkshire New Deal Strategic Partnership's innovative "Create Your Own New Deal", is a way of raising decision-making skills and personal development. The young people, with appropriate support, could design their own training and learning as a group, using the funding which would otherwise be spent on their Skillseekers.

Increasing the value of work-based training needs to be tackled from several angles as a way of overcoming the legacy of previous training programmes and the views associated

with government labels. However, it should be pointed out that up-skilling should not be confused with aiming for a higher education which can in turn lead back to undervaluing the work-based route.

New national publicity is required, possibly with a new name and allowances in line with bursaries/grants to promote parity of esteem. The content of VQs should also be made more meaningful for the young trainees.

The need to promote success stories, keep Labour Market Information (LMI) up to date and create links to enterprise can help. Support for Small to Medium Enterprises (SMEs) who tend to have less resources for personnel training is also important as is linking the opportunities to sectors with growth potential.

In addition a robust baseline assessment of a trainees 'accredited prior learning' should enable individual training to begin at an appropriate and challenging level. Otherwise, this can be demotivating.

However, much of this can be dependent on the buoyancy of the local economy and how training can be seen as a major business tool, rather than an add-on or burden.

Q3: Should more be done to assist young people make the transition from work-based training to further education (or vice versa)? How can progression be ensured?

At present, there are several sources of funding all offering different routes and pathways. This can be confusing for young people and their parents. Local Community Learning Plans should help to map out and promote the variety of choices, but impartial guidance will be required to ensure that appropriate choices are made.

Progression should be seamless and young people should be clear about the routes they can take and their alternatives. Individual responsibility for ongoing personal and professional development can be encouraged through the use of Individual Learning Accounts for work-based as well as education routes.

Impartial high quality careers guidance can ensure progression, understanding of the choices and monitoring of appropriate spending of the Individual Learning Accounts. Ongoing careers guidance and support can boost retention rates in training ensuring a complementary approach rather than competition between providers.

Co-ordination of the roles of different organisations is needed to ensure a client-led approach. This should build on multi-agency approaches in school where the guidance teachers' roles and responsibilities should be reconsidered in light of a work focus for all leavers and the promotion of individual responsibility.

A fresh look at how costs are allocated in middle and upper schools could include the possible articulation of a range of courses prior to leaving which furnish the leaver with a balanced perspective on the choices available for a work-based or continued education route. A multi-agency approach including FE colleges and training providers could also be considered here.

Q4: How can the assessment of the post-school education and training needs of 16-18 year olds be improved? What other agencies should work with the Careers Services to ensure that the whole range of needs are assessed? Local Authorities

(Social Work? Education?) Colleges? Training Providers? Should there be more involvement from parents, teachers and the young people themselves?

Improved communication and information exchange between agencies could include common client management systems and a potential New Deal type Gateway for 16-17 year olds with appropriate resourcing. The use of a diagnostic assessment tool should result in channelling resources to develop a wider range of options - both formal and informal. This can also build on the schools National Record of Achievement or Profile and Careers Service Careers Plan of Action and as stated earlier provide a realistic and challenging next step for the young person.

The question remains, would parental involvement support or oppose a 16-17 year old's career choice? If we are trying to encourage personal responsibility, the level of parental involvement remains an issue for consultation with both young people and parental organisations.

Q5: When young people have more difficult and complex needs, how can they get the right level of guidance and support?

The potential for a 16-17 year old New Deal type Gateway that works should ensure that young people can access a broad range of appropriate services to remove barriers and support their career choices and progression. A case conference approach can help this process and develop and iterative rather than sequential involvement with support organisations.

Family benefits continue to be an issue if time at school becomes extended beyond the optimum leaving date and cuts across the potential for career choices. The evaluation of both family benefits and the individual 16-17 year old needs to be clear, as claiming Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) at 16-17 can in itself become the barrier to accessing opportunities through careers guidance and placing services.

Q6: Once the young people have entered education or training, what mechanism should be put in place for ongoing support? Should this responsibility lie with the college or the training provider or are there other agencies who need to be engaged to deal with external factors such as homelessness?

The key issue lies in how and by whom ongoing support is carried out and how this is monitored. A multi-agency approach can further weaken this monitoring need if appropriate roles are not clearly assigned and resourced. The quality and experience of staff and the quality of relationship built up between the young person and the worker are paramount in the success of this.

Joint Social Work/Careers Service development of 'Throughcare' models have been successful to date and could form the basis of a way forward.

Q7: Is there a case for offering Skillseekers training to all 18 year old school leavers on the basis that this would be their first entry into the labour market? Would this case also apply to young people who have pursued a further qualification at an FE college?

Given the youth training legacy it will be a hard task to persuade all school and FE college leavers to consider this route (unless it is rebranded). Skillseekers is currently

discretionary rather than mandatory due to funding. Given limited opportunities in some occupational areas for 16-17's, increasing the Youth Training (YT) Guarantee group to include 18 year olds will need an increase in places and a commitment from large well-known companies to ensure status credibility and quality as well as quantity.

With diverse economies across Scotland, there is no level playing field regarding the opportunities available. Training can only mirror the local economy, unless places leading to training without jobs are created. There is also perceived displacement in the number of places for 16-17 year olds caused by New Deal for older age groups and the Minimum Wage.

On balance mandatory skillseekers training would therefore tend to undermine the credibility of opportunities and choices.

Q8: Should the funding continue to be discretionary but on the basis that it should be available across all LEC areas?

At present some Vocational Qualifications (VQs) attract higher rates of resourcing than others, due to the differentials in costs associated with their intrinsic needs. However, funding should also be targeted in a way to address requirements of the labour market too.

Areas of greater need should attract more funding, to inbuild additional support. For instance, in-building employability skills in an occupational area, as well as for identified individuals.

If the funding remains discretionary, it will continue to be used sparingly. As stated in question 8, there is a case for funding to be used to support all school-leavers, regardless of age. However, the escalating costs of this should also be considered alongside a needed evaluation of 16-18 years benefits and the impact of this on family benefits. This exercise, ahead of the likely roll-out of Single Work Focused Gateways, would help clarify the parity of esteem issues surrounding both training/academic routes and the resultant funding each attracts.

The level of maturity of the young person should also be taken account of in terms of their ability to access and sustain their place within the opportunities available.

Q9: If so, should the funding be targeted specifically towards the high skills levels (SVQ Level III or Modern Apprenticeship) or should the scope be widened to include SVQ level III?

Providing enhanced support to enable less able leavers to achieve SVQ III will be expensive, but may help improve the image that vocational training is a viable alternative to the academic route. The quality of the training and the credibility that it has both challenged and supported the young person, is something that the wider community may need to know more about. However, disadvantaged clients are often those who 'scheme hop' leading to increased costs for little outcome for both client and provider.

Improved articulation between levels II and III would also help. The range of Modern Apprenticeships on offer needs to be increased, opening up more choice across occupational areas.

As Careers Service statistics show, many young women, compared to young men, choose to continue their education in FE/HE rather than choose a work-based route. Much of this is due to the VQs on offer tending to be in traditional work-based training occupational sectors such as construction and manufacture. Further statistics show that gender stereotyped career choices have shown little change in 10 years.

Q10: How can the number of young people taking up a Modern Apprenticeship be increased? In particular, how can the number of young women in both traditional and non traditional sectors be increased?

Only a few of the adults who can influence career choices know and understand what Modern Apprenticeships can offer. This lack of information and understanding fails to make it a high profile option. However a range of strategies could be applied to improve the uptake of all, including young women. It needs to be recognised that gender issues in the workplace relate to more than an individual's personal choice in training or education. The following possibilities would be worth considering:

- * employer incentives to recruit non-stereotyped staff, although this can be difficult, especially in SMES with no personnel department and companies' perceived buoyancy levels in the economy. SMES can also find difficulty in relating to National Council for Industrial Training Organisations (NCITOs).
- * traditional apprenticeships could be phased out and replaced by Modern Apprenticeships, possible with a new name
- * young people could be paid equitably, whether in training, or in education, based on their circumstances, rather than institution-based
- * use of personal success stories
- * a national framework for careers education, including early intervention and quality standards
- * increased emphasis on impartial careers guidance throughout peoples' working lives, to ensure neither the employer nor the learning provider is advocating a partial path for the young person and realistic progression is monitored and reviewed with the young person.

Q11: How can more young people from ethnic minority groups be attracted into training? And into Modern Apprenticeships? What are the factors which may create barriers to participation?

Overcoming prejudice is more than an educational or training issue, although education can play a key role in overcoming barriers. How current 'liaison' posts are deployed and the kinds of success measures used are aspects which could be further explored.

There needs to be a recognition that each ethnic community has its own profile. One particular area to be discussed within communities is that FE/HE and 'real' jobs may be seen as having status, whilst training is seen as failure.

Positive role models need to be used.

Discussions with the ethnic minority communities about the changing labour market, changing employability skills and how these relate to their views and traditions is something which should be encouraged. The perception of racism in the workplace will need to be overcome before real progress can be made here.

Q12: How can more employers be encouraged to support young people in training through Skillseekers and Modern Apprenticeships? What more could the National Training Organisations do?

Employers are not one homogeneous body and therefore there are many views, ranging from training being an extra they have little time for to training being the basis of their business development. Sometimes though, training is only carried out if they cannot recruit new staff with the required skills. However there is some evidence that training providers are shifting the focus of their business from Skillseekers to employee development.

Funding mechanisms can also mean training providers are less likely to take a chance on trainees' achievement which contradicts the widening of opportunities for all as any young person showing a hint of disaffection may find themselves at a disadvantage. Indeed, if the New Deal and Minimum Wage are causing any displacement in the labour market, then these policies are running contrary to the thinking behind Opportunities and Choices.

NCITOs can be seen as too remote from SMEs, but playing more of a management/co-ordinating role in Skillseekers and Modern Apprenticeships could improve this. NCITOs could also offer 'cluster' training for a range of SMEs and link more effectively with LEC Skillseekers and Investors in People teams.

Overall an active marketing campaign is needed - possibly aimed at individuals rather than employers, given the limited success of the New Deal campaign with employers. If NCITOs can deliver tailor-made programmes which genuinely meet individual need, then both individual and employer will benefit.

If NCITO's work with the Careers Service, who can provide impartial careers guidance in support, this would provide a customised service for employers.

Q13: Would the development of a bigger range of integrated provision offer a way to improve the delivery of post-school education and training for young people whose prime objective was the labour market?

This question seems to raise more questions than elicit answers. The provision of additional options may replace employer-based training entirely, with the potential for a return to the traditional day release. This may raise the profile and status of training routes but will funding reflect support for young people or be purely outcome-based?

Whilst integrated provision can bring an improved perception of training and value to it, does it really depend on the understanding of those involved? At present it has been identified that understanding levels are patchy. Also, is a bigger integrated model necessarily suitable for those young people who need additional support?

Will the bigger provision necessarily match the needs of the current/future labour markets either locally or nationally?

Will the bigger provision challenge or accept young people's views on, for example, travel to work?

This would really need a combination of output-based funding and attendance funding, with credit for partial achievement, but how would this be monitored?

Q14: How should integrated provision be managed? Should one agency take the lead? Or should there be a partnership arrangement?

This is a crucial question in how local delivery of a national framework is managed. The number of organisations involved and the complexity of relationships, whether contractual or within evolving current service provision, is matched only by the complexity of supply and demand between our unemployed registers and the labour market needs.

Proposals for a Funding Alliance in Lanarkshire to support a range of organisations working with the unemployed provides a potential management board to oversee integrated provision. However, drawing on employers' expertise has proven more difficult, as evidenced in the New Deal Strategic Partnership. A lead agency approach tends to focus around contractual arrangements, but a broader approach such as the Funding Alliance may need to be considered in light of local preparations for Single Work Focused Gateways.

Devolution of particular elements could be assigned to recognised bodies within this management framework.

Q15: Who would be responsible for funding the provision? Should there be integrated funding and would budgets be pooled? What kind of funding system should operate - output based funding or attendance funding or some combination?

In an ideal world, all young people training and working within the integrated system would be funded on an equitable basis. However it has to be recognised that different VQs need different funding levels and that some young people need further personalised support.

Whether the young person's needs are the starting point to determine costs or whether an attendance based approach would bring more security to the forward planning of providers and thereby reduce their costs could be the subject of research and testing. The funding regime should be sensitive to changes in the labour market. Perhaps the pilots in education maintenance grants and Single Work Focused Gateways form part of this funding analysis alongside the evaluation of benefits for 16-18 year olds.

In terms of funding responsibility, a Funding Alliance could form part of overall strategic thinking within Lanarkshire to ensure that funding adds value to the system rather than working in a contractual vacuum. There are other issues here:-

- * how would self-employment training be funded/monitored?
- * could enterprise be funded on a similar basis?

Q16: What range of qualifications should be funded?

Level I funding could be different from II/III upwards, to ensure frontloading for more needy clients. Both SVQs and GSVQs should be funded, within progression available between levels.

What is agreed to be funded could be subject to an agreed Career Plan of Action where funders can pay clear client progression, monitored independently by the Careers Service, rather than on the provider's own training plan.

Q17: What should be the financial support arrangements for the young people?

As stated earlier, the whole financial picture needs to be considered on the basis of family/individual need rather than the choice of training or education. At a macro level, the issue of bursary/grant/training allowance should be based on the same personal criteria. Genuine parity of esteem in choice should be supported by parity of esteem in allowances.

The Single Work Focused Gateway should not ignore the benefits and allowances paid to young people as part of its work, including JSA/Hardship Allowances/Housing Benefits which many 16-17 year olds claim successfully.

Q18: Is it right that the main focus of integrated provision should be the labour market? How would employers be brought into the design and delivery? Should it reflect national as well as local labour market needs?

It is agreed that the focus should be the labour market. The difficulty lies in forecasting its needs and the implications of this on the individual. If the focus were to be the individual, their changing role in society and relationship with the State, then perhaps the drive to learn is with the individual, rather than a company, thus creating a market between employers for those engaged in lifelong learning and thereby driving up salaries. This psychological contract shift is a major but important undertaking and affects everyone in society, not just the school-leaver. Achieving it would need to be a stepped process but other initiatives, such as Scottish University for Industry, all point in this direction.

Employer commitment to such an approach may be more cash-driven than philosophical, but with a global economy much control over markets can be lost anyway.

Training provision for school-leavers, therefore, should set the scene for this and instil the merits of self-responsibility, and strike a balance between support and motivation on the one hand, and genuine opportunities with prospects on the other.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 Members are asked to:

- (i) note the contents of the report and authorise the director of administration to forward a council response, based on section 2.2., to the Scottish Office
- (ii) refer the report to the education, social work and social inclusion committees for their interest and information.

