Scottish Funding Council Gender Action Plan

An individual’s gender should not determine their life’s course, but too often at the moment it does, with early life experiences differing for boys and girls in fundamental ways that go on to determine outcomes and earnings. As part of our ambitions to ensure equality lies at the heart of Scotland’s education system, the Scottish Funding Council is developing a gender action plan, in partnership with Skills Development Scotland and the Scottish Government.

This consultation

Following the Consultation event, held on Monday 15 June, 2015 we would like to enable as many people as possible to contribute to the development of the Gender Action Plan. We are inviting responses from colleges, universities and any other interested parties to the broad range of questions posed on page 6 by Monday 17 August, 2015.

Our approach in developing the plan

We are adopting a phased approach to the development and implementation of the plan. Whilst it will ultimately have a broader focus, our first phase will outline how we plan to address gender imbalances amongst students, as we were tasked to do by the Government through Developing the Young Workforce: Scotland’s Youth Employment Strategy (DYW). Our action plan will however go beyond the expectation of that strategy to identify the key actions to tackle gender imbalances within colleges and universities, as well as outlining the aspirations and ambitions of both sectors. We believe that an aligned action plan between the sectors is necessary as we recognise the systemic issues underpinning gender imbalances across both sectors require action from partners across the educational system and beyond, if they are to be tackled. Secondly, there are many different routes an individual’s journey through the education system can take and an aligned plan will help address the issues at each stage of the journey in a more coordinated fashion than when addressed separately. To ensure alignment across the sectors, we are working closely with Skills Development Scotland.

Actions and ambitions for the first phase of the plan will be published by the end of 2015, at which time we will also signpost our key priorities for the second phase of development, those associated with broader issues of gender inequality. These priorities will then be developed into concrete actions during the beginning of 2016. In parallel, we will enhance our expectations on both sectors to tackle gender
imbalances in the next round of Outcome Agreement (OA) negotiations (guidance to be published in summer 2015). The full action plan, covering both staff and students, we propose will be published by the beginning of the next three year cycle of OAs, with the OA guidance updated to reflect this (summer 2016).

In parallel with the development of the plan, we will be allocating funding from the Scottish Government to support the further implementation of DYW, in particular colleges’ ambitions to tackle gender imbalances, as well as commissioning research to understand and evaluate current approaches to tackling gender imbalances across both sectors.

The rationale

Many courses in both sectors are heavily gendered: that is, their students tend to be mainly men or mainly women. These courses are often those most closely related to particular occupations. They therefore have a significant effect on subsequent career options. This is the main issue we want to address. There are other gender issues in further and higher education. These cannot be separated from the main focus of this work and we will address them in the second phase of its development.

While there are many arguments for reducing gender imbalances in subject choices the principal reason for SFC is that the course choices students make affect the career pathways that create ‘women’s jobs’ and ‘men’s jobs’, this affects wages and perpetuates a system where young people can’t make genuinely free choices on their futures. Changing these patterns cannot be done by colleges and universities alone – but gendered choices in college and university are such a big contributor to patterns in the workforce that they have to be part of the solution.

The challenge

There are people who believe that as gender imbalances at a subject level reflect individual choices, there is not an issue to solve or that the issue is so deeply rooted within society, that colleges and universities cannot play a role in tackling them. We do not agree with either position. With sociocultural factors impacting differently on boys and girls from birth, we believe it is essential that both sectors work in close partnership with their school and local authority partners to affect change in the structural barriers that prevent both boys and girls making genuine choices.
We will do it through.....

**Culture change**

- An improvement culture - where practice development, learning, sharing and accountability are welcomed
- A transformation in culture in which the links between equality and quality are fully recognised
- Alignment with broader equality and diversity efforts committed to through the Equality Act and its Specific Duties for Scotland

**Leadership and partnership**

- Leadership at a national and institutional level with ambition for change - only engaged, committed and consistent leadership across education at all levels will promote the required change
- A strategy for partnership – only with aligned agendas that seek change from school to employment and corresponding focused actions across all stakeholders in further and higher education will progress be made
- Accountability – we will work in partnership with institutions to agree their aspirations and ambitions and will hold them accountable for upholding their commitments

**Our focus**

For the first phase of the plan, our outcomes will be focused on three key parts of the learner journey: getting in, staying in and moving on. For each of these stages, we will outline in terms of gender imbalances:

- The key aims and outcomes we wish to achieve
- The current situation
- The action we will take to support colleges and universities to achieve the outcomes; and
- How we will know we are making progress.

**For universities**

SFC analysis has indicated that the most extreme gender imbalances for undergraduate entrants are in the following subjects: Subjects Allied to Medicine; Education; Computer Sciences; Engineering; Technologies; European Languages, literature and related subjects; Social Studies; Architecture, Building and Planning and Psychology. We propose this is where our focus will be. Further analysis will determine specific imbalances within these broad subject areas which we need to address, as well as differing patterns for higher levels of study.
**For Colleges**

The Scottish Government, through DYW, has set out its ambitions for the Colleges in tackling gender imbalances. The relevant KPI from DYW is to ‘increase by 5 percentage points the minority gender share in each of the 10 largest and most imbalanced superclasses among 16-24 year olds by 2021’. Table 1 (below) shows the first two years of data for this KPI.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Superclass</th>
<th>2012/13</th>
<th>2013/14</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Enrolments</td>
<td>Minority Gender share</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hair/Personal Care Services</td>
<td>8254</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ChildCare Services</td>
<td>3383</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT: Computer Science/ Programming/Systems</td>
<td>1545</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering/Technology (gen)</td>
<td>4054</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanical Engineering</td>
<td>2610</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vehicle Maintenance/Repair</td>
<td>2311</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electrical Engineering</td>
<td>2806</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction (gen)</td>
<td>4708</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Build/Construction Operations</td>
<td>2425</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building Services</td>
<td>1604</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Government has gone on to reproduce these KPIs for regions. We propose that the KPIs are shared at a regional level with negotiation about how each region will contribute. We hope such an approach is aligned with our aim to work in partnership with the sector - ensuring alignment with the sectoral KPIs for DYW but not undercutting the strategic and practical approaches to tackling gender imbalances, for all ages, already being undertaken by the sector. This approach should lead to an improving picture, owned by each region, which will ultimately impact on the overarching KPIs.

Whilst there was good overlap between the 10 KPI superclasses and the largest and most imbalanced subject areas across the regions, there were four exceptions in Newbattle, SMO, SRUC and Borders, where there was limited or no overlap with the KPI superclasses. We will discuss with these institutions how best to tackle subject imbalances. Furthermore, as the Government’s KPIs are focused on 16-24 year olds, we will ask for regions to address imbalances for those above 24 years old as well as particular issues of representation for part-time students.
Key aims

- Gender is mainstreamed throughout institutional policy and practice
- All institutions have targeted approaches to tackling underrepresentation at a subject level
- No subject at entry level has an extreme gender imbalance (75:25)
- There is no difference in recruitment patterns between male and female students entering from deprived backgrounds and the wider student population
- There is no difference between male and female engagement and retention
Consultation questions

1. Of the work currently being undertaken by Scottish colleges and universities to address gender imbalances at a student level:

   a) What do you think is working well? Why do you think this?
   b) What do you think is working less well? Why do you think this?
   c) What could be done to improve this work?
   d) What could be done to improve this work and what do you think the gaps are, and how can these gaps be filled – by the sectors, SFC and SDS?

2. Much of the work to tackle gender imbalances by the sectors requires close partnership working with schools:

   a) How can colleges and universities enhance their work with schools?
   b) What are the current issues in working with schools?
   c) What can SFC do to support this work?

3. The key aims and subject focus for the gender action plan are outlined in the consultation document:

   a) Do you think they are appropriate? Why/Why not?
   b) What outcomes do you think are missing? Why do you think they are important?

4. What are the key activities colleges and universities should undertake to meet these outcomes?

5. How can SFC best support the sectors to deliver these outcomes?

6. What level of change can we expect from both sectors in 10 years?

7. Is there any further evidence you would like to draw to our attention on what works to address gender imbalances?