

West Lothian College

Learning to Work Two consultation: developing the Council's employability strategy

SFC/03/2990 C

Priority One consultation questions – work-related learning and work placements

What are your views on the proposals on work-related learning and work placement?

There needs to be clarity on what is commonly understood by terms such as 'employability' and 'work ready', which should involve consultation and agreement from employers, educationalists and training providers.

West Lothian College supports the proposal that all learners should be encouraged to reflect on – and articulate – what they are learning through all aspects of their student experience, and to learn and adopt the skills needed to plan and manage their careers. This is already good practice throughout Scotland's Colleges, with their commitment to Personal Development Planning and Individual Learning Plans to support students' personal development and career planning, and should be exploited as best practice to inform the student experience at HEIs in terms of their future employability.

West Lothian College firmly believes that colleges and HEIs should explicitly take account of their learners' future employment needs in developing the curriculum and in the learning and teaching methods used, however the issues faced by colleges and HEIs are quite different. The differences in use of funding between the institutions clearly marks a focus on research-based learning for HEIs whereas the focus for colleges rests more visibly with employability skills and associated work-related learning. Core Grant funding is determined strategically, however the reality is that the funding is distinctively used for operational delivery.

West Lothian College suggests that there should be more emphasis to produce concise information that is available to students for informed choice about what their potential opportunities for employment are following any particular course of study. For instance, issuing new and potential students with information on the jobs that previous graduates went on to secure. Furthermore, HEIs should focus on improved recruitment and selection processes to ensure that candidates are fully aware about their chosen programme of study and all that it involves, including potential employment and earning capacity opportunities.

West Lothian College agrees that input from employers is vitally important, particularly in providing opportunities for direct work-related learning such as student placements. To encourage sharing of good practice, consideration and funding should be given to the setting-up of an Employer Engagement supportive network between colleges and HEIs, building on the existing good practice of SHEEN.

West Lothian College agrees with the principle that it is ultimately up to individuals to take responsibility for their own learning and career development, however this can only be successfully achieved with reference to concise and informed workforce planning frameworks to meet Government agendas and taking cognisance of an existing economic status and subsequent changing markets. There lies a responsibility with SQA and other awarding bodies, including HEIs, to rationalise and modernise curriculum design to provide qualifications that meet employer demand and which grant accreditation to knowledge, skills *and* competency. Currently, qualifications at FE level are predominantly competency-based whilst those at HE level are predominantly knowledge-based.

Furthermore, industry has a key role to play in adding value to the student experience and more emphasis, with appropriate funding, should be placed on joint working and engagement with employers to make work placements more productive.

Should work-related learning be an expectation of every institution, or an area where we encourage a degree of specialism?

West Lothian College supports the view that work-related learning should be an expectation of every institution. FE colleges currently provide work-related environments and it should be more widely acknowledged that work-related learning enables FE students to be more employable and 'work ready'.

West Lothian College supports the view that any course of a vocational nature should include a work placement. However, there needs to be a consensus on a framework to assess students' employability skills and, possibly, grade these. Moreover, the focus should be to reflect on and assess the benefits of all previous work experience that students have gained and not see work placement relating to a course of study as the starting point.

What is the capacity to extend the supply of work-related learning from core provision?

In the first instance, key measures should be identified in terms of national priorities versus local priorities. Progress should be identified and measured in relation to FE's focus on and commitment to meeting local priorities, compared to the focus from HEIs on meeting national priorities.

However, the question remains to be asked as to why an extension to the supply of work-related learning should come at the expense of an already

over-stretched core provision funding, rather than be deemed of significant imperative value to merit enhanced funding?

In considering an 'apprenticeship' model for full time courses, the use of work-based assessors to support work placements would allow candidates to continue onto a ten-week work placement following successful achievement of their course and subsequently attain a skills' assesment certificate to recognise competencies for future employment.

What are your views on the specific initiatives outlined in paragraph 21 in terms of the feasibility, likely costs, benefits and implementation issues?

Why would this initiative focus on HEIs, and not seize the opportunity to extend and develop the provision of work placements and internships in Scotland's Colleges? Scotland's Colleges already have evidenced excellent links with the public sector, particularly Local Authorities and NHS Boards, so why would this good practice not be rewarded with additional funding?

Priority Two consultation questions – enterprise education and entrepreneurship

How should we develop enterprise and entrepreneurship education in further and higher education?

West Lothian College supports the view that enterprise education and entrepreneurship should be developed in further and higher education but cogniscance needs to be made of, in considering general entrepreneurship education, the fact that not all students would want to start up their own business and that there should therefore also be an emphasis on *intrapreneurship* education to develop concepts and ideas when working within an existing business. Enterprise education and entrepreneurship development should have a focus on local market opportunities as well as international ones.

Should enterprise and entrepreneurship education be an expectation of every college and HEI, or an area where we encourage a degree of specialism?

West Lothian College believes that enterprise education and entrepreneurship should be an expectation of every college and HEI. Students should be encouraged to develop wide-ranging, enterprising mind-sets progressing to a development of specialist skills such as: recruitment of staff; tax returns; contract agreement; and ICT infrastructures to support and grow a business.

What are your views on the areas for potential specific initiatives outlined above, and on ways of taking these forward?

West Lothian College agrees that ways of working jointly with the Scottish Government should be investigated, in particular to support colleges and HEIs

in building-upon school-based activities such as Determined to Succeed and Curriculum for Excellence. There currently exists, however, a lack of institutional responsibility amongst HEIs that they have to engage with work-based enterprise education. Funding to enable joint CPD across institutions should be established and formal agreements established to support capitalisation on schools' previous experience of developing enterprising education and entrepreneurship.

More students graduating from Further Education start up their own business than those graduating from HEIs, however current funding structures, such as the Scottish Programme for Entrepreneurship, focus on supporting HEIs. Rather than such a fund being extravagantly spent on establishing specialist academic Masters programmes and Professorships, the fund could be more equitably used establishing a Business Start-Up Mentor within, or shared by, FE colleges to support students for their first year on leaving college to run their own business.

Priority Three consultation questions – workforce development

What are your views on the workforce development issues outlined? How should progress be achieved? What would be required?

West Lothian College agrees that the Council should align its work with any emerging work from agencies that also have responsibility for employability and workforce development. However, the Council should also give consideration to links with the local Chamber of Commerce.

Prioritisation should be given to further development and availability of accredited work-based and on-going assessment qualifications, including credit-rated Professional-body qualifications.

How far should public funds for further and higher education be used to support this?

In terms of curriculum re-design, West Lothian College agrees that there should be more emphasis and funding to support the development of work-based degrees, currently offered by the Open University, particularly to meet the demand from employers that graduates evidence more vocational and practical learning.

Should workforce development be an expectation of every college and HEI, or an area where we encourage a degree of specialism?

West Lothian College agrees that workforce development should be an expectation of every college and HEI.

One consideration could be that FE concentrates on specialist input in differing colleges to develop Centres of Excellence, rather than having a

broad spectrum portfolio across all colleges. However, colleges tend to serve their local communities and there needs to be reflection given, therefore, as to whether this should continue to be the approach. Niche markets can become too specialised. Market forces and demand change and, therefore, more work should be done working with industry, local Chambers of Commerce and SQA and others to modernise qualifications to meet current employability demand.

West Lothian College recommends that the Scottish Funding Council continues to ring-fence money to FE colleges and HEIs for employability and that prioritisation should be given to:

- Curriculum re-design to embed enterprise education and employability skills, including further development and availability of accredited work-based and on-going assessment qualifications, together with credit-rated Professional-body qualifications. In rationalising and modernising curriculum design, qualifications must be provided that meet employer demand and grant accreditation to knowledge, skills *and* competency
- Any course of a vocational nature to include a work placement. However, there needs to be a consensus on a framework to assess students' employability skills and, possibly, grade these
- Joint CPD between schools, colleges and universities, to keep academic staff in touch with employability and to promote the development of a Curriculum for Excellence
- Encouraging learner participation in employability through support for initiatives such as SPARQS
- Industry having a key role to play in adding value the student experience with more emphasis and appropriate funding being placed on joint working and engagement with employers to make work placements more productive to support mentoring of learners
- Producing concise information that is available to students for informed choice about what their potential opportunities for employment and earning capacity are following any particular course of study
- Sharing of good practice. Consideration and funding should be allocated to the setting-up of an Employer Engagement supportive network between colleges and HEIs

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