

ENTERPRISE AND LIFELONG LEARNING COMMITTEE: FINAL REPORT ON LIFELONG LEARNING

INTERIM RESPONSE FROM THE EXECUTIVE

1. The Scottish Executive welcomes the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee's report on the future direction of lifelong learning in Scotland. It is the product of a detailed, thorough and wide-ranging investigation by the Committee, which has in many ways broken new ground in the processes adopted. The Executive agrees that lifelong learning is crucially important - for Scotland's future economic success; for social cohesion; and for the enhancement, in every sense, it brings to the lives of individual Scots.

2. The Committee has recognised that the Executive offered to defer work on further policy development in this field until its report was completed. The Executive will now take full account of the Committee's findings in drawing up a new strategy for lifelong learning in Scotland, together with the outcomes of other reviews and stocktaking work in which it has been engaged. These include reviews of Higher Education, Vocational Education and Training and Enterprise in Education. The value and range of evidence that the Committee has gathered is a valuable resource for the Executive to draw on in this evolving process.

3. This is a brief, interim response to the Committee's report, to assist debate in the Parliament. The Executive will provide a full response in the context of the publication of its strategy document early in the New Year.

4. There have been a number of significant developments in the field of lifelong learning following the publication of the current lifelong learning strategy, 'Opportunity Scotland' (1998) and the Executive's 'Programme for Government' (1999). The Executive has:

established *learndirect scotland*, Careers Scotland and Futureskills Scotland to significantly improve the information, advice and guidance available to individual learners and businesses about how learning can help them and to engender a culture of lifelong learning in Scotland;

provided significantly increased funding for further (FE) and higher education (HE), to increase student numbers, improve infrastructure and quality;

designated UHI Millennium Institute as eligible for funding by the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council and supported developments in south-west Scotland at the Crichton Campus to bring HE to rural areas of Scotland where it was not previously available;

published a science strategy for Scotland and established a new Scottish Science Advisory Committee;

placed learning and skills at the heart of our enterprise strategy, 'Smart Successful Scotland', to encourage workforce development and ensure the delivery of training meets the demands of the modern economy;

increased the number of Modern Apprenticeships in order to help people of all ages gain relevant skills and qualifications to help them in work;

created the Scottish Union Learning Fund to complement the unions' active support of workforce development;

conducted a review of community learning, resulting in the establishment of strategic community learning partnerships in all local authority areas to help widen access to learning through community learning and development;

invested in inclusiveness, implementing the recommendations of the Beattie Committee; and

developed a programme to tackle the historic neglect of adult literacy and numeracy in collaboration with Communities Scotland, local authorities and their community learning partners.

5. The future holds new challenges - and the Executive will be building on a sound foundation of achievement in addressing them.

6. The Committee has said that lifelong learning is important for Scotland's future because:

a highly skilled, motivated and flexible workforce is the key to Scotland's future economic success, and projected demographic changes mean that it will be important that there is support for people currently in work to re-skill and re-train as well as support for people preparing to enter the workforce;

it has an important role to play in tackling the enduring problems of social justice because lifelong learning opens up opportunity; and

lifelong learning enables the people of Scotland to participate actively in society.

The Executive agrees.

7. The Committee has highlighted a number of key proposals and issues in its report. The first of these is a recommendation that the Executive should lead the development of a comprehensive Lifelong Strategy for Scotland, taking full account of the views of a range of key stakeholders. The Executive agrees.

8. The Committee has placed the concept of entitlement at the heart of its report. It recognises the difficulties inherent in this concept, and that the extent to which entitlement can be fully realised depends to a considerable degree on how it can be resourced. The Executive fully appreciates the complexities that surround this issue and that there is no simple solution to them. The Executive believes this principle merits further consideration and debate - in Parliament, and in the wider community.

9. The Committee makes a number of recommendations about tackling various barriers to access including socio-economic, age, ethnic background, gender, disability and care responsibilities, and calls for equality of opportunity for people whatever their background and circumstances. The Executive believes strongly in extending access to lifelong learning, in encouraging and supporting 'life-wide' learning as well as 'lifelong' learning and in closing the opportunity gap. In particular, the Executive values the specific contribution that voluntary and community organisations make in engaging and bringing benefits to people who do not feel that learning is for them. The Executive considers that removing the barriers to learning will be the key to stimulating more involvement in learning in Scotland. The Executive believes the crucial issues of entitlement and access merit further consideration and debate - in Parliament, and in the wider community.

10. The Committee sees a key role for the emerging Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). The Executive agrees, and has put in hand both investment and structures to assist the delivery of the SCQF through its development partners. The Executive recognises the detailed and complex challenges inherent in this approach, and welcomes the Committee's support for taking them forward.

11. The Committee has raised some questions about the differences between FE and HE funding. By 2005-06 the Executive will be investing a combined total of £1.3billion in the two sectors through the two Funding Councils. The Executive's aim is to ensure that this funding is invested in the way which best supports its overall lifelong learning agenda and which will deliver its priorities in both further and higher education. As the Committee recognises, there are complicated issues here. Care needs to be taken with the way the figures are analysed as comparisons based on simple averages do not do justice to the complexities of the sectors. The Executive believes that what is important is that the resources and the calibre of management required to secure good quality provision are in place, at all levels and in all subjects. The Executive will be giving further consideration to the Committee's proposals and would welcome the Parliament's views on them.

12. The Committee has placed considerable emphasis on the importance of workplace learning and vocational education. The Executive supports this emphasis. It is committed to delivering additional resources to Modern Apprenticeships to extend the coverage of this programme; reviewing and modernising, with the Enterprise Networks and other stakeholders, the Skillseekers programme; considering the concept of Business Learning Accounts; taking forward the work of the Review Group on Enterprise in Education; and working with learning and skills providers and the business and employer community in improving the relevance and responsiveness of vocational learning and training.

13. Raising awareness about the value of workforce development to business growth is as important as the provision of opportunities for the workforce to upskill. In all of this there is a key role for the Enterprise Networks.

14. The Executive recognises that it is vital to ensure good connectivity between the demands of the learning and labour markets; and, within the learning landscape, to encourage demand, facilitate supply, and ensure that information on both supply and demand is readily available. The Executive believes that, to meet employers' future skills needs, Scotland's education and training system must be swift to respond to the needs of the economy. People should have the chance to reach a level of learning they need for work and life. The Executive believes its role in this is to ensure that the right mix of different learning opportunities and routes through the learning landscape is available so that individuals can choose what best suits their circumstances. The Executive would particularly welcome the Parliament's views on these matters.

15. The Executive recognises that the experiences children and young people have at school have a crucial influence on participation in post-school learning. The Executive believes it is important that good progression routes and partnerships continue to be developed between schools, the FE and HE sectors and employers. The National Qualifications framework, resulting from the "Higher Still" reforms to fifth and sixth year secondary education, enables students to build up academic and vocational qualifications flexibly over time and promotes collaboration between schools and other centres of learning. The need to assist young people to make more effective transitions from school to post-

school life and learning is also one of the themes emerging from the National Debate on Education.

16. The Committee has emphasised the importance of quality in the delivery of all aspects of lifelong learning and the need for quality assurance to be achieved in the least burdensome way. The Executive agrees, whilst recognising that the particular needs of individual sectors, and the diversity of routes and pathways open to learners, demand a sophisticated approach to quality assurance in lifelong learning. The Executive welcomes views on the need for and scope of changes that could usefully be made in this area.

17. The Committee has emphasised the importance of coherence between the various elements of the lifelong learning system and has made a number of specific recommendations on this including, for example, the merger of the Scottish Higher and Further Education Funding Councils. The Executive supports this general approach and will develop specific proposals in relation to the Funding Councils.

18. Finally, the Committee wishes to see arrangements developed which will encourage the engagement of stakeholders in monitoring and developing further stages of lifelong learning policy, and has made some specific suggestions. The Executive agrees with the Committee's aspirations for widespread engagement in lifelong learning policy development, delivery and evaluation. The Executive will be giving further consideration to the Committee's proposals in this regard, and would welcome the Parliament's views on how this is best taken forward.

Scottish Executive
November 2002