



# **Educational attainment gap - Commission for Developing Scotland's Young Workforce -**

## **Response to the Call for Written Evidence from the Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee**

**The UNISON Scotland Submission to the Scottish Parliament's  
Education and Culture Committee**

**February 2015**

## **Introduction**

UNISON is Scotland's largest public sector trade union. UNISON members deliver a wide range of services across every sector in education including nurseries, primary schools, secondary schools further education colleges and universities as well as careers advisors in Skills Development Scotland. UNISON is able to analyse and collate their experience as service users and staff to provide evidence to the committee. UNISON welcomes the opportunity to provide evidence to Education and Culture Committee.

## **Evidence**

UNISON welcomes the committee's inquiry into closing the attainment gap. There is widespread agreement that children from low income households do significantly worse at school than those from better off households and that this gap starts early and continues. What there is little agreement on is what to do about it. Research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation<sup>i</sup> also points out that "the quality and quantity of attainment data from primary and early secondary school pupils vary widely. This makes data-driven project design and evaluation difficult". If we are to succeed with evidence based policy making the Scottish Government needs to get much better at collecting and collating data and ensuring that it is available for researchers to use. They recommend a national evidence base of what works. The Rowntree report indicates that that by age five the gap between children from low income and high income households is between 10 and 13 months. By age 12-14 pupils from better off areas are more than twice as likely to do well in numeracy as those in the most deprived areas. Parental socio economic backgrounds has more influence than the school attended

The report suggests the following as routes forward

- High quality full day pre school education
- Parental involvement programmes
- Literacy teaching
- Children working together in small groups
- Nurture groups
- Academically focussed after school activities
- Peer tutoring, meta-cognitive tutoring and one-to-one tutoring
- Mentoring
- Professional development for teachers
- Targeted funding
- Evidence based whole school reforms

Given the shortage of Scottish data the recent Department of Education report <sup>ii</sup> based on an extensive longitudinal study of children from pre school to age 16 provides useful evidence.

Key findings:

- Enduring legacy of pre-school: the positive effect of high quality pre-school lasts up to and beyond compulsory education. This is most significant for relatively low earners. Attending a pre-school (or not) was a significant predictor of higher grades in GCSE
- The difference represented is getting 8 GCSE at C grade as opposed to 8 at A grade. The effect is stronger for those whose parents had low qualification levels. High

quality preschool was also linked to better self regulations, pro-social behaviour and lower levels of hyperactivity

- Even after controlling for individual, family and neighbourhood influences and GCSE results, children who attended a high quality pre-school had a “greater likelihood of” entering the most demanding academic route.
- Interestingly “positive relationships with teachers” and to a lesser extent “teacher professional focus” had a significant impact on GCSE scores and academic progress in maths in secondary schools.
- The strongest predictor of exam success is family influences. While there is a significant gap between exam scores of children receiving free school meals and those not (a full grade in English or Maths) family income and socioeconomic status while significant have a weaker effect than parental education. Again while “place poverty” or living in a deprived area both predict poorer exam results over and above family status, it is still a weaker influence than a student’s own family demographics.
- Learning opportunities at home and outside school: “the current capacity of students’ families to support academic enrichment activities had significant effects on GCSE scores and on social behavioural outcomes.” Enrichment activities include independent reading or educational visits outside school. So while there has been previous support for school support for these types of activities for younger children there is a strong argument for similar activities for those in secondary school.
- Girls’ success at school doesn’t translate into later life: they outperform boys consistently but boys aspire to higher status jobs than girls with similar exam score.

There is no evidence to back up claims that low levels of aspiration amongst children from poorer economic backgrounds contribute to their lower academic achievements. Over two thirds of children receiving free school meals aspired to go to university. Choices of ideal job did though still show strong gender stereotyping.

UNISON is concerned that the current cuts particularly to local government budgets will not only prevent improvement they will also make things worse. High quality childcare is clearly very important and while we welcome the Scottish government promises of expanded hours we are concerned that this has not been properly costed or funded. The current system is expensive, complex and hard to navigate. This further disadvantages those on low incomes. Scotland needs a comprehensive childcare strategy. To provide high quality childcare requires qualified staff and continued professional development for those staff. The most cost effective way of providing this service is in the public sector paid for via taxation.

Academic enrichment activities are also effective in improving attainment. Cuts in local authority budgets are increasing charges for a range of activities either provided directly by the councils or through increased letting charges for local authority facilities hired by private/voluntary providers. This makes it harder for children from low income families to take up the opportunities. School trips whether for a day, afternoon or a week are increasingly costly again reducing the ability of children from low income families to participate. There is evidence that children from low income families do not even ask parents if they can participate in activities which require payments a they don’t want to put

pressure on their parents for money as they know the sacrifice that it would involve. Children from better off families are therefore able to undertake a range of activities: sports clubs and outdoor activities, visits to museums, galleries and theatres and trips abroad either provided directly by their parents or via schools which boost their educational attainment.

According to an EHRC report <sup>iii</sup>

- Less than 0.5% of all Modern Apprenticeship placements are taken by someone with a declared disability. Around 8% of the target population (16-24) is disabled.
- 98% of construction placements are still taken by men.
- Although men are increasingly moving into “traditionally female” apprenticeship programmes, there is no evidence of an increase of women entering “traditionally male” apprenticeships.
- Less than 2% of all apprenticeships in Scotland are taken by ethnic minorities. Around 4% of the target population (16-24) is from an ethnic minority

The report also states that the vast majority of industry demand statements published for key sectors in Scotland do not mention equality issues, despite in some cases being written by Scottish Government agencies, which have specific duties with regards to the advancement of equality. Indeed the first part of the Wood Commission report specifically stated that it had not yet looked into equalities as that would take place in the next part of the review rather than ensuring that these issues were mainstreamed into all their work.

Where equality issues are considered, they do not make firm or measurable commitments for improvement. Again (equality employment) data remains a significant hurdle to equality analysis across the key sectors. UNISON Scotland agrees with the STUC that the expansion of modern apprenticeships can only be successful by tackling inequality and improving diversity as a key factor. This is supported by their research on modern apprenticeships undertaken through the Scottish Union Learning Fund

UNISON Scotland believes that the application of the Equality Act 2010 and the general duty and specific duties (Scotland) need to be applied in a consistent and positive way that would enhance and deliver on a diverse apprenticeship programme. We recognise that many modern apprenticeship programmes are in the private sector and that these companies are only covered by the Equality Act and not the Public Sector Duty. Nevertheless, the Act allows for positive action measures to be taken, if required and we believe that would provide many employers with the opportunity to diversify their workforce.

We also believe that the Scottish Government can play a key role by, through the promised statutory guidance to Procurement Reform Act, ensuring that private companies who receive Scottish Government contracts are required to implement the SDS Equality Impact Assessment & Action plan.

UNISON agrees with the Wood Commission that all school pupils need to be better prepared for employment and better informed in career choice. It is however disappointing that the crucial role careers guidance professionals play in ensuring young people and parents are informed about routes into work, career planning and employment opportunities merits only limited reference in both the final report and Scottish Government’s implementation plan.

Whilst understanding the viewpoint (Recommendation 1 and 2) that young people should commence vocational pathways alongside academic studies during mainstream schooling it is equally crucial that young people are supported to help them integrate these experiences

into their career management skills and their personal future plans. Before, during and after exposing young people to these wide ranging opportunities they should be guaranteed, as a minimum, ongoing face-to face interactions on a one to one basis with a Careers Guidance professional. Recently published academic research by Edinburgh University<sup>iv</sup> on the impact of careers websites and other careers support indicated that if the effectiveness of public funding for Careers Information Advice and Guidance is to be maximised then resources should be predominantly directed towards face to face services. The research further stated that whilst careers websites are and will continue to be an essential and valuable component of Careers Information Advice and Guidance provision they have a limited impact on young people's careers management skills compared with other approaches.

Indeed, UK wide this position is shared by many others as there are now growing calls for face-to-face career guidance to be made available to all young people. The report states:

“it is notable that in its review of careers guidance for young people in England, the House of Commons Education Committee stated that ‘We believe that face-to-face guidance is an integral part of good quality careers guidance’ and went on to recommend that ‘a minimum of one personal careers interview with an independent adviser should be available for every young person’ (House of Common, 2013 p3).

Furthermore, a recent Barnardo's<sup>v</sup> study of careers advice concluded that face-to-face advice is vitally important in providing quality career guidance to young people and it calls for face-to-face guidance to be guaranteed for all young people who ask for it

The Commission report also raises valid concerns that there may exist an ill-informed culture that somehow vocational education is an inferior option. Our members welcome the opportunity to assist with raising the status of vocational and further education amongst school pupils but again fear our ability may be limited unless resources are re directed to both personal face to face approaches alongside additional group sessions to young people and their parents. A website can in no way challenge the perceptions of students or their parents round gendered work or the value of vocational/academic pathways.

An important aspect of career guidance is to challenge gender and stereotypical thinking, occupational segregation and to encourage individuals to consider alternatives and to raise aspirations .Unless current under-represented groups have in depth face to face contact with a careers professional then hoping to encourage all pupils to be aware of and consider the merits of e.g. Modern Apprenticeships will be difficult to achieve. Careers guidance professionals are ideally placed to highlight the benefits of work placed learning as a respected career option and alternative to university.

The current SDS risk matrix used to assess the need for service is largely based on social, economic and educational need. Some consideration should be given to how an enhanced targeted support can also be offered (and resourced) to groups believed to have difficulty entering and sustaining the wide range of opportunities including apprenticeships.

In recognising the importance of Recommendation 13 it should be noted that there are also many examples of historical good practice delivered by careers professionals within Skills Development Scotland for disadvantaged groups ranging from care leaver to young parent initiatives. Other initiatives such as Activate which delivered an employability based programme to targeted pupils. The common theme was the early intervention of a linked

careers' guidance professional who offered on-going support to young people making the transition to the world of work. These programmes made great strides towards improving employability outcomes for targeted groups at risk of not progressing into a positive destination and would be a good basis for developing future initiatives aimed at improving successful transition and participation levels of specific pupils.

The Commission's report also suggests (Recommendation 2) that young people in S1 to S3 should have access to the Careers Service to help prepare them for employment. Whilst historically this was on offer in lower school this tended to be only for S2 subject choice and predominantly consisted of one-off class talks alongside possible attendance at S2 parent evenings. Whilst this is now changing as part of service modernisation, if all pupils by the end of S3 should have a demonstrable understanding of the process of finding, applying for and successfully getting and sustaining a job, this will have resource implications. Furthermore, the ability of all S3 pupils to reach and demonstrate this standard of awareness and knowledge may also prove challenging without the knowledge and expertise of careers guidance professionals.

UNISON believes our members in SDS have a fundamental role to play in developing Scotland's Young Workforce and can achieve this by concentrating on what actually works. Whilst the evidence session is focussing on the implications for schools, teachers and pupils it is important to realise that the implementation plan will also have capacity and resource implications for key partners such as Skills Development Scotland. Careers professionals have a crucial role in a future inter agency partnership approach to widening awareness of the range of choices available to young people and supporting them in making the most appropriate choices.

The development of a high quality, trained workforce is crucial in any modern and progressive economy. That can only be achieved by addressing the significant inequalities in the workforce whether in the private or public sectors.

A good modern apprenticeship programme should include strategies to ensure that Modern Apprenticeships are accessible to the widest possible demographic spread of people. Recruitment and retention policies should not discriminate against anyone.

The further education sector has gone through a period of substantial change at the same time as substantial cuts in its budget. UNISON members working in colleges do not share the government's optimism about the sectors readiness to deliver on these new commitments. The report's recommendations will clearly have an impact on the sector and staff. The changes will result in additional training requirements for staff. Job cuts and increased workloads mean members are already under severe pressure. Colleges need more staff and this means additional funding if colleges are to meet the commitments contained in the bill

UNISON members do not have the same level of confidence as the Scottish government that colleges are well placed to meet new challenges. The regional structures are very new and there has been no evaluation yet of its effectiveness. Edinburgh College has recently "lost" its Principal and Clyde College in Glasgow has suspended its Principal amid allegations regarding management style and acrimony with regional board. Members are very concerned about the future of this vital sector. Colleges are important places for the delivery of vocational training and for many, particularly those from less well-off backgrounds, are

the first step to a more academic qualification. Any serious strategy to reduce the attainment gap needs to invest substantially in further education institutions.

The sector is struggling to meet current demand and does not have adequate funding to meet any increased demand from the Developing the Young Workforce strategy. Feedback from our members indicates a pattern of students being rejected or given course full letters every year. The government needs to better collate data on current demand for college places and those who are missing out. This should include part-time as well as full-time courses and demographic data to insure that for example women or people with disabilities are not being disproportionately affected. This data can be used to work out the funding requirements to deliver the government's aims.

UNISON as the largest public sector trade union in Scotland represents a range of staff working across all sectors of education including nurseries, primary schools, secondary schools further education colleges and universities as well as careers advisors in Skills Development Scotland could therefore play a significant roll on the National Advisory Board to support the Delivering Young Workforce programme.

### **Conclusion**

UNISON is the largest public sector trade union in Scotland. We are able to analyse and collate members' experiences of the sector, as service users and staff, to provide evidence to the committee. UNISON believes that tackling inequality and its consequence, like the gap in educational attainment, are vital. This will require resources. There is no indication that the resources needed are being calculated far less allocated. UNISON welcomes the opportunity to provide evidence to the committee.

### **For further information, please contact:**

Dave Watson [d.watson@unison.co.uk](mailto:d.watson@unison.co.uk)

Kay Sillars: [k.sillars@unison.co.uk](mailto:k.sillars@unison.co.uk)

Mike Kirby, Scottish Secretary  
UNISON Scotland,  
UNISON House,  
14, West Campbell Street,  
Glasgow  
G2 6RX

---

<sup>i</sup> Closing the Attainment gap in Scottish Education E Sosu and S Ellis May 2014

<sup>ii</sup> Student's education and developmental outcomes at age 16: effective pre-school, primary and secondary education project K.Sylva et al September 2014 Department of Education

<sup>iii</sup> "Modern Apprenticeships: Equality & The Economy - Spreading The Benefits" ( July 2014),

<sup>iv</sup> What's the evidence? Comparing the impact of career websites and other career support. Dr Cathy Howieson and Sheila Semple Edinburgh University 2013 House of Commons Education Committee (2013) Careers guidance for young people: The impact of the new duty on schools, Seventh Report of Session 2012-13, HC 632-I, the House of Commons London: The Stationery Office Limited

---

<sup>v</sup> Barnardo's (2013) Helping the Inbetweeners: Ensuring careers advice improves the options for all young people.  
[http://www.barnardos.org.uk/helping\\_the\\_in\\_betweeners.pdf](http://www.barnardos.org.uk/helping_the_in_betweeners.pdf) (accessed 1.10.2013)