

**Further and Higher Education Student Support Review  
Working Group**

**Friday 27th January 2017 14:30 to 16:00  
University of Edinburgh**

**MINUTES**

**In attendance:**

Jayne-Anne Gadhia (Chair)  
Angela Toal (Child Poverty Action Group)  
Yvonne MacDermid (Money Advice Scotland)  
Paul Lowe (Student Awards Agency Scotland)  
Dr John Kemp (Scottish Funding Council)  
Alastair Sim (Universities Scotland)  
Vonnie Sandlan (NUS Scotland)  
Phillip Whyte (NUS Scotland)  
Shona Struthers (Colleges Scotland)  
Annag MacLean (Castlebay Community School)  
Erin McAuley (Scottish Youth Parliament and Student)  
Russell Gunson (IPPR Scotland)  
John Gallacher (UNISON)  
Louise Macdonald (Young Scot)  
Stephen White (Scottish Government)  
Liz Shevlin (Scottish Government)  
Emily Cox (Virgin Money)  
Graeme Hudson (Virgin Money)

**Secretariat**

Stephen Pearson (Virgin Money)  
Lisa Keevash (Virgin Money)  
Geraldine Campbell (Scottish Government)  
Jennifer Finn (Scottish Government)

1. **Welcome**
  - 1.1 Jayne-Anne Gadhia (JAG) thanked Working Group members for attending and referenced the case study circulated in the papers.  
  
**Action** - JAG asked that sub-group chairs share any further case studies with the group and suggested case studies should feature within the final report.
  
2. **Timetable**
  - 2.1 Graeme outlined the proposed timetable to preliminary recommendations which Working Group members agreed. He also suggested that an evening reception may take place on 24<sup>th</sup> or 25<sup>th</sup> May to launch preliminary findings.  
  
Louise asked if further communications are required on interim reporting. The group agreed this was a significant point to engage relevant parties and make clear the interim nature of findings released in May.  
  
**Action** – Scottish Government secretariat to consider whether further communications required on interim reporting.
  
  - 2.2 Alastair asked how the student survey fits with the proposed timetable. Emily explained that the intention is for survey findings to be available w/c 13<sup>th</sup> March – in time for working group half day

workshop (scheduled for 20<sup>th</sup> March).

Phillip suggested that consideration be given to an incentive to encourage students to complete the survey.

### 3. Background

3.1 Geraldine talked through the differences between Further (FE) and Higher Education (HE) student support as well as the complexities with welfare benefits interaction.

Erin provided a recent example of not having the full information available to her on the financial support she is eligible to receive and the challenges this caused.

Russell suggested that under current arrangements, the onus is on the individual to navigate a complex system rather than a system that works for the student.

JAG suggested that consolidated advice is required which makes clear to prospective students what they will be entitled to dependent on their personal circumstances.

John G said that the FE and HE cohorts are different and we should remain mindful of that, including the ability to repay loans.

Vonnie stated that she would not be supportive of any reformed student support system that maintained the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) for young students studying FE courses. She explained this as given the original policy intention of EMA as an incentive for young people to remain in school for the senior phase. John K said that caution would be required however in ensuring it's not more financially beneficial to leave school and go to college.

JAG asked sub-group chairs to consider what can be done to improve the current offer with an emphasis on principles of accessibility and customer focussed.

Paul suggested that the group utilise the network of student support advisors across FE and HE who can provide good intelligence, in addition to that from students directly.

Stephen W suggested that the group be mindful of the substantial interactions between student support and welfare reform, including those issues currently reserved to the UK Government.

### 4. Sub-Groups

4.1 The Chair invited the 4 sub-group chairs to outline their proposals to the group:

- **Product Design** (Shona Struthers)

The group agreed that a fair overall principle to observe as part of dialogue at the product design sub-group is that no student should be 'worse off' by undertaking further or higher education.

- **Benefits and Support** (Russell Gunson)

The group agreed that this sub-group will consider the strengths and challenges to the current system, including the interaction with welfare benefits, with the aim of reporting main principles for improvement. The group also agreed to be mindful of the nuances between cohorts of students, level of study, student support and welfare benefits.

- **Information, Advice & Guidance (IAG) and Financial Literacy** (Louise Macdonald)

The group agreed that the main principle of this sub-group will be to ensure that all students are clear, prior to undertaking a course of study, on the financial support available to them.

- **Effective Administration** (Dr John Kemp)

The group agreed that this sub-group needs to better understand the delivery aspect of support across FE and HE, and seek to offer principles for improvement.

## 5. Obtaining Evidence

- 5.1 Emily outlined the proposal for a student survey to be issued as soon as possible and report wc 13<sup>th</sup> March. The intention would be for sub-groups to simultaneously gather evidence whilst the survey is underway and that survey findings influence formal consultation.

Paul suggested that a draft survey be shared with a focus group of students ahead of release.

The group agreed that the survey should also include; welfare benefits interaction, suggestions for improvement and information on characteristics.

The group also agreed on the need for clarity in terminology contained within the survey, e.g. 'support, financial support, care experienced'.

**Action** - JAG asked Emily to circulate a revised draft survey to Working group members for further comment.

## 6. Finance Sub-group

- 6.1 JAG outlined plans for a fifth sub-group that she would chair on finance to better understand the total current budget for student support across FE and HE. The group agreed the benefits of this.

## 7. Communications

- 7.1 Stephen W explained to the group Scottish Government protocols on sharing information.

## 8. AOB

- 8.1 The Chair thanked everyone for their positive contributions and agreed to circulate minutes of the meeting. The next meeting will take place by teleconference on Friday 24<sup>th</sup> February at 14:00. The meeting closed at 16:00.