

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

**Monday 5th December 2016 10.00 to 11.45
Forth Valley College, Alloa**

MINUTES

In attendance:

Jayne-Anne Gadhia (Chair)
Shirley-Anne Somerville (for item 1)
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)
Philip Whyte (NUS Scotland)
Shona Struthers (Colleges Scotland)
Annag MacLean (Castlebay Community School)
Erin McAuley (Scottish Youth Parliament and Student)
Russell Gunson (IPPR)
Louise MacDonald (Young Scot)
Geraldine Campbell (Scottish Government)
Jennifer Finn (Scottish Government)
James Boyce (Scottish Government)
Stephen White (Scottish Government)
Emily Cox (Virgin Money)
Stephen Pearson (Virgin Money)

1. Welcome

1.1 Jayne-Anne Gadhia thanked the Working Group members for attending and introduced the Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science, Shirley-Anne Somerville. The Minister welcomed the Working Group, thanked them for their involvement and set the scene for the Review. She encouraged the group to:

- Be bold, inquisitive and consider long-term goals
- Cover further and higher education together
- Look for outcomes that are fair for all students
- Focus on undergraduate support
- Consider connections across Scottish Government policies elsewhere, e.g. early years childcare expansion and welfare reform.
- Be mindful about public finances

The Scottish Government remains committed to its manifesto policies which include free tuition – this is out of scope for this review.

1.2 The Minister then handed the meeting over to JAG as Chair and left for another engagement.

2. Introductions

2.1 JAG then introduced herself to the group explaining why she had accepted the challenge to chair the review and why Education is such an important topic for businesses. She asked each Working Group member to introduce themselves and explain what they regard as the key issues in this review. The responses are summarised

below:

Angela Toal, Child Poverty Action Group

- Ensure that benefits students can claim are considered
- An ambition not to disadvantage particular groups
- Consider the consequences of change and impacts on different groups of students

Yvonne MacDermid, Money Advice Scotland

- Improve debt advice for students
- Consider the needs of ethnic minorities
- Improve the provision of information and advice
- Improve financial literacy amongst students

Paul Lowe, Student Awards Agency Scotland

- Improve the design of the support service
- Meeting and listening to students directly
- Identifying the problem that needs fixing
- Considering duplication across systems

Dr John Kemp, Scottish Funding Council

- Improving support to widen access
- Increasing skills and broadening the ambitions of students
- Considering the outcomes and the impact of non-lucrative ones

Alastair Sim, Universities Scotland

- Improving pastoral and learning support
- Alleviating financial stress
- Consider loan repayment terms
- Access to benefits for students and interactions with welfare system

Vonnie Sandlan, NUS Scotland

- Removing inequalities and issues from the system
- Summer employment issues
- Aversion to student loans in some quarters
- Helping students to plan and budget
- Age disparity issues
- Local college issues/inconsistencies
- Inconsistency in support for FE level students

Philip Whyte, NUS Scotland

- Widening access to FE and HE
- Creating a simplified system of financial support for different age groups post -16 onwards
- Avoiding penalties e.g. for going part-time

Shona Struthers, Colleges Scotland

- Removing the college "lottery" dependant on choice
- Tackling age issues – impact on FE level students
- Funding issues – a fixed pot for variable cohorts doesn't work
- Look at totality of system, e.g. connections to Learner Journey programme of work

Annag MacLean, Castlebay Community School

- Helping students find positive destinations through support
- Funding issues caused by transport/accommodation costs
- Dealing fairly with students in remote areas

Erin McAuley, Scottish Youth Parliament and Student

- Supporting students not supported by their families
- Resolving lack of support/accommodation for students over summer months
- Enabling students to sign on for job seekers allowance and other benefits
- Helping students avoid predatory lenders
- Appreciate links between student finance and retention

Russell Gunson, IPPR

- Being clear about the purpose of the review: what is the purpose of the student support system?
- Produce a report that is meaningful and influential
- Supporting students to "get in, get on and move on"
- Removing the barriers to fair support

Louise MacDonald, Young Scot

- Improving financial capability and literacy of students
- Getting the design of the student support service right
- Being open and accessible in the review process
- Helping students with access and transport issues
- Making better use of existing public sector infrastructure, where appropriate

3. Remit and Scope 3.1 JAG explained her view of how the Working Group could operate, its purpose and how each member can contribute.

4. Proposed Review Themes The Chair referred to the 3 themes set out by Scottish Government and invited the group to consider whether they agreed with these and whether there are additional themes to be considered.

Based on the issues previously identified by each member, the following structure emerged and was agreed:

- 4.1. Product Design: The core purpose of the review is to design a Student Support Service that works simply and effectively, enabling students to "get in, get on and move on" and removing existing barriers to that goal. This is the umbrella under which the following themes stand.
- 4.2. Benefits and Support: Access to maximum benefits and support for all and in particular to those students who need most help. This would include access to alternative sources of support such as discretionary funds and charities.
- 4.3. Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) and Financial Literacy: Access to helpful, user-friendly information and financial advice including advocacy and action with a focus on positive outcomes. This would include advice and training about financial literacy, budgeting, loans schemes and how to apply, thirds sector alternatives (as in 4.2. and how to avoid predatory lenders and other adverse outcomes).
- 4.4. Effective Administration and Delivery: to ensure that once the right support package is designed, it can be administered and delivered as effectively as possible. The benefits of local delivery need to be weighed against any disadvantages. Differences between FE and HE need to be highlighted but streamlined.

5. Obtaining Evidence

- 5.1 It was noted that Scottish Government has helpfully confirmed that there is budget available to assist with the gathering of evidence and research. It was agreed that the group should communicate direction of travel by Spring of 2017 and it would be helpful to conduct a survey at that stage once the shape of the review and key issues were more sharply defined.

In the meantime it was agreed that working groups would be convened to cover the 4 review themes outlined above, recognising that there are many overlapping areas between them. Members are asked to consider each theme and volunteer to be in one or more of the groups. The Chair will nominate sub group chairs from main group. Scottish Government will provide the secretariat and administration for these sub-groups. It was agreed that members could nominate specialist colleagues to participate in the sub-groups, subject to their oversight and supervision. Sub-groups are encouraged to share resource, invite evidence from third parties and use video recording and social media for sharing in a transparent manner.

6. Governance

- 6.1 Meetings of the main group will be every two months, with calls between. Scottish Government will circulate dates and details. It was also agreed that the work of this review would, as far as possible be "relevant, practical and open". Scottish Government will advise on the best way to share the work of the review publicly, for example through a 'Student Support Review' Twitter account, requesting comments from the public and seeking feedback.

7. AOB

- 7.1 There was consensus that in approaching this issue the group should not be constrained by budget, at least at the start of the review, and should aim to produce a report that is highly influential. The best way to do that is to aim for a relatively small number of recommendations that can be implemented well. The process will likely involve a much wider review to start with, narrowing to the final outcomes.

The phrase "vulnerable students" needs to be used with care and alternative use of language should be explored.

It was agreed to conduct a survey roughly half way through the process.

Interested stakeholders should include students but also parents/carers, rural communities, advisors and others. It would be helpful to include a student representative on each sub-group.

The Chair thanked everyone for their positive contributions and agreed to circulate minutes of the meeting. She would also ask each member to volunteer themselves (or a colleague under their supervision) to the sub-groups.

The meeting closed at 11.45am.