

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

**Friday 10th March 2017 10:30 to 12:00
City of Glasgow College**

MINUTES

In attendance:

Jayne-Anne Gadhia (Chair)
Angela Toal (Child Poverty Action Group)
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)
Russell Gunson (IPPR Scotland)
Louise Macdonald (Young Scot)
Geraldine Campbell (Scottish Government)
Emily Cox (Virgin Money)
Graeme Hudson (Virgin Money)

Martin Clark (UNISON, on behalf of John Gallacher)
Jon Gray (Scottish Government - Learner Journey section)

Secretariat:

Jennifer Finn (Scottish Government)
Stephen White (Scottish Government)
James Boyce (Scottish Government)
Stephen Pearson (Virgin Money)
Lisa Keevash (Virgin Money)

Apologies:

Erin McAuley (Scottish Youth Parliament and Student)
Yvonne MacDermid (Money Advice Scotland)
John Gallacher (UNISON)
Liz Shevlin (Scottish Government)

- 1. Welcome**
 - 1.1 Jayne-Anne Gadhia (JAG) thanked Working Group members for attending and to City of Glasgow College for hosting the meeting.
 - 1.2 JAG also referenced the useful discussions held with beauty and photography students who JAG and sub-group Chairs had met earlier that morning. She summarised their conversations to include requests for; improved communication/guidance on financial support, consideration of how parental/household income is taken into account and that loans be made available to students studying Further Education (FE) courses.

- 2. Product Design**
 - 2.1 JAG invited Shona to present the principles/recommendations to come from the Product Design sub-group.

Shona expressed her thanks to Product Design sub-group members for working at pace on this complex area to produce an output for this meeting. She went onto say that there would be further opportunities to refine the principles through the workings of the

remaining sub-groups and that this was very much still a development stage.

- 2.2 Shona outlined that the group had directly engaged with both students and sector professionals and used their feedback to shape the principles. She made specific reference to the challenges students can face in finding employment during summer months. John K explained that the majority of withdrawal rates are during the first year of study and prior to the Christmas break. He explained that this can be due to a delay in student support finance being processed. Vonnie said she would be particularly interested to know if there has been a significant change in withdrawal rates before and after academic year 2012/13 as since then, SAAS processing of payments had improved.

Action – Shona and John K to investigate withdrawal rates for students during the summer months, including as a time series.

- 2.3 Shona outlined some of the key themes emerging from the feedback gathered which included; parity across Further and Higher Education (HE), variation across colleges including on travel support, the transition from FE to HE, difference in attendance rules in FE and HE, childcare funding, household income consideration, lack of information on the availability of support and variation in attitude to loans.

Philip stated that some FE students are forced to take on commercial debt given the lack of funding and asked why different levels of support are available for FE and HE students when the cost of living is most likely the same. Shona also referenced feedback received on why young students have to fund their college studies but do not if they stay onto the senior phase of school. JAG suggested that careful consideration is given to ensuring that students who stay on at school, and who want to, remain there rather than leaving to take up college courses. Russell suggested that financial incentive and the impact on learner choice is an important issue that the group should consider in more detail.

- 2.4 Paul asked what was meant by the need for 'simplicity' in the financial support system – is that, a simple system or a system that easy to navigate. Shona suggested that it should be in all parts of the system. Alastair went onto say that a simple system for the user could still remain complex to deliver. Paul also said that over simplification can add further complexities in delivery. JAG said that her observation was that the systems have become complicated over time often with good intention. She also suggested that to her it was more about 'clarity' than 'simplicity'.

- 2.5 Alastair explained to the group that he had a useful conversation with Professor Diamond who led the Review of Student Support in Wales on students taking on commercial debt and the concept of 'good debt' versus 'bad debt' for students. Russell suggested that the split between FE and HE student support might not be as relevant now as it previously was and that further consideration is required to better understand why some HE students do not take up loans and some FE loans would like access to loans.

Shona outlined the high level principles contained within the paper to the Working Group and thanked Russell for his input. JAG said that her overall observations were that the system needs to be flexible, clearer and fair.

Shona explained that the Product Design sub-group had also considered, for discussion purposes, how a single system of support that met the agreed principles could be delivered. Various options using the 'Diamond' model of maintenance support were discussed. The group agreed that further work is required to understand and test the models. JAG suggested that further consideration of models of support should now take place within the remaining 3 sub-groups and Louise suggested that time should be built-in to reflect on potential models and their impact.

Action: Scottish Government to take forward more detailed scenarios for discussion by the group.

- 2.6 JAG suggested that 4 key themes should be further considered which were; parity, clarity, role of loans and the option for a single system of support. JAG went onto say that it might be helpful to visualise a system of support as having a base level with other layers built on dependent upon specific needs. Russell went onto say that in the past the distinction was between FE and HE but not between groups of students who receive student support and those who remain on welfare benefits whilst studying. JAG further commented that any system should start with people rather than labels.

Philip said that pastoral care should also be considered as part of financial support services, particularly the potential for a difference in need across FE and HE and transitioning between the two levels.

John K raised summer support for students and said that the current HE system of support is intended to cover 52 weeks so in theory, there shouldn't be an issue but of course we are hearing feedback from some groups that there is an issue over this period. The group agreed to consider the number of weeks of support under any revised system. JAG also suggested that the group consider attendance policies as these are currently different across FE and HE. Vonnie said that attendance is a key issue for students as if not met at FE level can result in students facing withdrawal of funding which can have implications for childcare availability.

Paul suggested that the group also consider residency issues in the context of student support to which the group agreed.

Martin said that consideration must be given to student support staff working in institutions and any impact a new financial support system would have on them which the group agreed.

Vonnie asked whether consideration should also be given to the impact of Brexit. JAG suggested that for the purpose of this Review, consideration can only be given to the here and now and what is within the control of the group which was agreed.

JAG expressed her thanks to the group for a useful discussion and for Shona for her work in leading the Product Design sub-group and the group agreed to consider these issues in more detail at a workshop on 20th March.

3. Sub-group Updates

- 3.1 The Chair invited the 4 remaining sub-groups to provide an update to the group:
- **Benefits and Support** (Russell Gunson)
Russell outlined the 'Principles Plus' approach that the Benefits sub-

group have adopted in their consideration of the interaction between the student support system and welfare benefits. The group are considering where there are gaps in the system and where early improvements can be made. Russell went onto say that the FE/HE split of support no longer seems a relevant way to split support.

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

JAG expressed her thanks to Louise in her role of IAG sub-group Chair but advised the group that Yvonne will be taking over as sub-group Chair given Louise's appointment to lead the new National Advisory Council for Women and Girls.

Louise recorded her thanks to Yvonne for taking over the role of chair and explained that a wide range of work on evidence gathering is underway. The group is particularly interested in the results of the student survey, stakeholder survey and focus groups. Louise explained that further evidence is required on FE and that further work will be undertaken to understand financial literacy in FE.

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

John K explained that he is pleased that the work of the Effective Administration sub-group is consistent with that of the Product Design principles. He explained that the group intend to look at discretionary funds in more detail and simplicity in systems.

- **Finance** (Jayne-Anne Gadhia)

JAG explained that work is ongoing to understand the current finance and allocations within the student support systems.

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| 4. Evidence Gathering | <p>4.1 Graeme advised that the student survey has now closed with detailed results to be shared with the Review group at the half-day workshop on 20th March.</p> <p>4.2 Geraldine explained that the secretariat team are coordinating evidence gathering across the remaining sub-groups with the intention of centrally coordinating activity to avoid duplication of effort and to ensure evidence being gathered is available to all. Further information will follow on that.</p> |
| 5. SG Learner Journey Review | <p>5.1 Jon explained to the group his role as Programme Manager of the Scottish Government's (SG) 15-24 Learner Journey Review. He went onto explain that the Review contains 5 projects which are; Learning, Choice, Careers and Application; Access; Provision; Transition/Progression and; Funding, Structures and Legislation and outline timetable for reporting.</p> <p>Action – Jon and SG secretariat to consider aligning the Student Support and Learner Journey Reviews, particularly around timings of reporting and evidence sharing.</p> |
| 6. Half-day Workshop | <p>6.1 JAG explained that the group will meet ahead of the next formal Review Board meeting at a half-day workshop on Monday 20th March from 10:00 to 13:00.</p> |
| 7. Closing and AOB | <p>7.1 JAG thanked the group for attending and for their contributions. The next formal meeting of the group will take place on Friday 28th April at 10:30 at the Kilmarnock Campus of Ayrshire College.</p> |