

The EU Lifelong Learning Agenda: Scotland's Opportunities and Challenges

November 2007

Presented at the seminar "Bridging the European Learning Society: from the past to the future", Scotland House, Brussels, 20 November 2007

Networking Scotland in Europe

SCOTLAND EUROPA ★

www.scotlandeuropa.com

SCOTLAND EUROPA PAPERS

The Scotland Europa Papers are a series of occasional papers which have two objectives:

- to make a Scottish contribution to key issues that will affect the development of the European Union;
- to promote a wider understanding of European issues in Scotland.

The Scotland Europa Papers are intended to provide a forum for interested parties in Scotland and other European countries and regions to promote ideas and perspectives on issues that are of importance to the development of Scotland and the EU. The papers will be given wide circulation. We welcome contributions to the series.

The views expressed in the Scotland Europa Papers are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of Scotland Europa or its members and partners.

We would be very pleased to have your views on any of the ideas raised in the papers or for you to arrange to receive further papers in the series. Please contact:

Luca Polizzi
Scotland Europa
Scotland House
B-1040 Brussels

T: +32.(0)2.282.8315, F: +32.(0)2.282.8300

E: luca.polizzi@scotent.co.uk, W: www.scotlandeuropa.com

Paper 30

“The EU Lifelong Learning Agenda: Scotland’s Opportunities and Challenges”

**Presented at the seminar “Bridging the European Learning
Society: from the past to the future”
Scotland House, Brussels, 20 November 2007**

**Alison Hunter
Economic and Public Policy Consultancy (EPPC) Limited**

November 2007

About the author

Alison Hunter, Economic and Public Policy Consultancy (EPPC) Limited

Alison is a highly experienced, freelance consultant, operating between Scotland and Brussels. With a background in education and skills, she has delivered a wide range of policy, research and evaluation assignments for national and local level clients, predominantly in Scotland. Operating across the public sector, Alison has particular experience in education, skills and lifelong learning.

Executive Summary

This paper has reviewed elements of European Union (EU) and Scottish training and education policy, to identify areas of 'convergence', gaps and opportunities for future Scottish policy. While focused on Scotland, the paper, and its recommendations have relevance beyond Scottish parameters.

Some key EU messages have been echoed in recent Scottish Government policy, most noticeably those referring to an urgent need to support early school leavers, improve pathways to learning for all (through greater choice, access and progression) and improve the general transparency of learning systems.

Scotland – as a strong, regional player in the EU education and training field – has a wide range of strengths which align clearly with the EU's proposed direction. These include efforts to address early school leavers (ESLs), Scotland's contribution to the Bologna Process through the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) and Scotland's specific approach to addressing adult literacies. Scotland's extensive 'early intervention' schools programme, which aims to preparing young people for life after school, is another strong signal of our commitment to invest in education and training.

Equally, a range of gaps and challenges exist which Scotland must address if it is to 'have a stronger voice in Europe'. These issues are confounded by the absence of a specifically Scottish evidence base of progress (relating to EU programmes and reporting measures for education and training), due to an aggregated approach to performance measurement at the UK level. Addressing pathways to learning for all ages remains a key challenge for Scotland and its competitiveness within the EU. There is a clear 'cultural deficit' in Scotland which prevents the promotion of learner and worker mobility, and so inhibits exchange of practice and promotion of Scotland's education and training successes. Poor performance in Scotland's multi-lingualism is linked to this agenda.

The paper proposes a strategic framework for enhanced Scottish engagement with the EU education and training agenda, and which offers greater leverage for improving Scottish and EU competitiveness. This framework has 5 groups and 11 recommendations. A summary of these is listed below:

Group 1: Consolidate Scotland's Education and Training Position in the EU

- **Recommendation 1: Generating Scottish level debate and consensus** – Scotland requires a stronger strategic direction which should emanate from its EU Strategy. This requires a clearer evidence base of Scotland's EU performance, dis-aggregated from the UK's, and a focused debate concerning how Scotland can and should engage with Europe through its training and education agenda.

Group 2: Address Challenges

- **Recommendation 2: Understanding and addressing 'mobility'** – Scotland's 'cultural deficit' should be addressed through: 1) instilling a mobility 'culture' in school education 2) considering what prevents staff and students in Scotland from better engagement with the Erasmus programme; 3) improved information concerning the benefits of learner and worker mobility. Scotland's multi-lingual deficits are linked to this agenda;
- **Recommendation 3: The youth agenda and funding access** – Scotland requires to bring together its various workstreams in youth policy, to support youth education, employment and VET;
- **Recommendation 4: Participating in the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP)** – no coherent overview exists at the Scottish level to identify Scotland's engagement with the 5 strands of the LLP and its relative performance within these. A better Scottish evidence base across the LLP would support a more focused, future programme of engagement with the LLP.

Group 3: Clarify Policy and Direction

- **Recommendation 5: Addressing pathways to learning** – Scotland should review its Lifelong Learning Strategy and the various 'entry' and 'exit' points from one part of the learning system to another. In particular, Prioritising the learner progression landscape is crucial to this.

Group 4: Promote Strengths and Practice Sharing

- **Recommendation 6: Greater promotion of how the SCQF supports the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the Bologna Process** – Scotland's specific contribution to Bologna through the SCQF (and supporting role of SQA) should be better promoted across the member states (MSs) and regions;
- **Recommendation 7: Sharing practice in how Europe is preparing its young people for life beyond school** – Scotland has invested heavily in 'early intervention' for its young people to contribute to life beyond school. Balancing the scales of academic and life skills / vocational learning has been critical to this;
- **Recommendation 8: Promoting greater inter-EU dialogue concerning the ESL / NEET agenda** –Scotland could lead discussions and co-ordinate practice sharing across MSs and regions, with greater potential to learn from others and to shape the future direction of this agenda;
- **Recommendation 9: Showcasing the Adult Literacies learning model and its contribution to access to learning** – Scotland's 'social practice' model offers a good practice example of a learner-led philosophy;

- **Recommendation 10: Sustaining momentum for the EU's evaluation culture** – Scotland could offer significant support at the EU level in promoting the value of evaluation, especially *ex-post*. This could involve leading efforts across the EU in promoting an evaluation culture.

Group 5: Take Action on EU Platforms

- **Recommendation 11: Stronger Scottish engagement in Europe** – Scotland should take a more pro-active stance in supporting 'bottom-up' policy influence from the regional to the EU level.

1. Introduction

This paper has been developed as an occasional, policy paper for Scotland Europa's web-site and as a discussion paper for the forthcoming Lifelong Learning Conference 2007.

It takes a 'high level' perspective of the respective education and training agendas of the European Union (EU) and Scotland and assesses the extent to which these are mutually supportive and reinforcing. It is mainly focused on the post-compulsory education and training setting - further education (FE), higher education (HE) and vocational education and training (VET). It also highlights issues for youth (the 'cusp' between compulsory and post-compulsory settings), especially the 'not in education, employment or training' (NEET) agenda.

The European Union (EU) is becoming increasingly involved in Europe's education and training agenda. This influences, and is influenced by, both member state (MS) and regional policy in these areas. Scotland's engagement with education and training – devolved policy areas - at the EU level has important implications for Scotland's position in the EU and how it is perceived at the EU level. This paper focuses on strategic, policy levers for education and training which are in place at EU and Scottish levels and examines the relative coherence of these. It notes key similarities / areas of alignment and where gaps exist in this alignment. The paper offers policy conclusions and recommendations for Scotland to have a 'stronger voice in Europe'¹ within the context of education and training policy. While focused on Scotland, the paper, and its recommendations have relevance beyond Scottish parameters.

Aims

The aims of the paper are:

- To explore the overlap between EU education and training policy and Scottish policy (focused on FE, HE and VET), and assess the extent to which these are compatible / mutually reinforcing;
- Through the above to identify potential opportunities for Scotland, including:
 - strategic signals of access to funding;
 - stronger promotion of Scotland's good practice;
 - addressing current gaps and challenges;
 - proactive influencing of EU policy via a consideration of the areas where Scotland could enhance current EU policy;
- To contribute to the research agenda which reviews Scotland's comparative 'performance' with the EU policy agenda, and to promote the stimulus for further research in this area.

¹ Taken from a Scottish Government news item to raise awareness of Scotland's forthcoming EU Strategy:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Government/International-Relations/Europe/Priorities>

Paper Focus and Limitations

The paper is necessarily summarised in relation to EU and Scottish education and training policy. The Scottish political position, with a recent change of Administration, implies some current uncertainty about Scotland's future education policy context. However, a range of historical and recent strategies / initiatives will be referred to, which offer insights into current and future direction. Scotland's position as a region within the UK member state poses challenges for 'extracting' the performance of Scotland in its relative performance with EU education policy. Providing an accurate measure of Scottish performance is complex and – in many cases – not possible. For this reason, the paper does not provide statistical evidence.

2. The EU Strategic Education Policy Context

This section does not attempt to list or explore all relevant EU-level policies but focuses on those which provide the 'framework' for MSs and EU regions in considering education and training policy objectives. The EU's influence, here, should be considered in the context of 'non-competence' – i.e. the EU does not have the authority to extract compliance from MSs, but rather promotes a strategic framework, based on agreed objectives and good practice guidance.

The policy infrastructure is set out by the following:

- **The Lisbon Strategy** – this was agreed in 2000 and aims to make the EU the most competitive economy in the world, and to achieve full employment by 2010. It is based on 3 pillars – economic, social and environmental – and sets out criteria and guidance for laying the foundations for the EU to adapt to and invest in a knowledge-based economy;
- **The Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP)** – the new Programme was proposed in 2004 and operates across 5 dimensions – Comenius (a pre-school and compulsory education programme); Erasmus (for HE and advanced level learning); Leonardo Da Vinci (for vocational education and training); Grundtvig (for adult, non-higher or advanced education) and a transversal dimension (covering, for example, languages, ICT and the dissemination of learning and results). Actions are supported by a new Jean Monnet programme which includes Tempus (a trans-European programme of co-operation) and Erasmus Mundus (promoting the EU as a centre of excellence in learning). The 2007-2013 programme has 7,000 million Euros allocated to it and is especially focused on 'back-end' results of individual initiatives (i.e. *ex-post* evaluation and reporting). The current programme emphasises enhanced promotion of member states' lifelong learning strategies which 'bridge' the different learning sectors and providers, and cover all types of learning. Developing pathways and partnerships for more coherent and 'linked' learning systems is a key priority, as well as the concept of mobility of those involved in lifelong learning. Reference to the LLP in this paper relates to the latest (2007-2013) programme priorities;
- **European Structural Funds 2007-2013** – the new European Social Fund places particular emphasis on the Lisbon Strategy for growth and jobs, and is therefore heavily geared towards job creation and skills development. Key emphases in the new programme which are relevant to this paper are development of integration pathways for early school leavers, personalising support for those in need and further development of apprenticeship schemes;
- **Education and Training 2010 Programme²** – an 'all-age' document containing 16 core indicators, and focusing on the quality and effectiveness of education and training systems, access for all and opening up our systems to the wider world. Those which are especially relevant for this paper are:

² http://eur-lex.europa.eu/pri/en/oj/dat/2002/c_142/c_14220020614en00010022.pdf

tackling early school leavers and improving upper secondary completion rates; cross-national mobility of students in HE; participation of adults in lifelong learning; investment in education and training. Underpinning these priorities are core themes such as skills for the knowledge economy, making learning attractive, increasing mobility and strengthening European co-operation;

- **The Bologna Process** – commencing in 1999, this process aims to create a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by 2010. This embraces objectives of transparency across systems and enhanced competitiveness of the HE sector. By promoting mutual recognition of qualifications, the Process seeks to ease mobility of staff and students;
- **Copenhagen Declaration, Maastricht Communiqué and Helsinki Communiqué** – these signalled the joint agreements of member states to make VET systems more transparent and effective, and to focus efforts on the quality and attractiveness of VET;
- **Supporting Initiatives** – a range of smaller-scale initiatives exist to support member states. These include:
 - **Youth in Action** – providing opportunities for non-formal and informal learning, with a European dimension, for 13-30 year olds. This includes promoting a European approach to volunteering, and a focus on citizenship and youth engagement in decision making. Multi-lingualism is a core theme of this programme;
 - **'Your First Job Abroad' Initiative** – promoting mobility in young people to seek work across the member states;
 - **European Youth Pact** – this links Education and Training 2010 objectives with strategies for employment and social inclusion. Common themes include widening access to learning and promoting common frameworks for qualifications. Further promotion of mobility is found in the 'Youthpass' and 'Europass' initiatives.
- **The Open Method of Co-ordination (OMC)** – the OMC exists across a range of policy areas including education and training. It is a 'soft law' mechanism which aims to guide and support MSs to share best practice and develop best practice indicators, as well as take part in benchmarking exercises. Results are monitored and evaluated.

The above programmes and processes share common, overarching themes which are particularly relevant for this paper, in relation to post-compulsory learning. These include:

- Learner mobility;
- Transparency of, and access to, learning for all;
- Coherence across learning systems and qualifications to aid access and mobility;
- Development of pathways to support learner progression;
- Enhanced competitiveness through skills and learning improvement.

2. The Scottish Education Policy Landscape

Scotland's new administration has started to lay the foundations for the national education and training landscape and for future engagement with Europe. As a region within the UK member state, Scotland has autonomy through its devolved status, concerning education and training. At the EU-level, Scotland's progress is usually reported as an aggregation with the rest of the UK. Selected policies and strategies below offer a flavour of the broad strategic context and direction which underpins Scotland's education and training policy agenda. Key priorities and plans have been signalled as follows:

- **Existing policy and structures** – the below provides a brief overview of the post-compulsory education and training setting in Scotland, including the 'transition' from secondary school:
 - Scotland has 21 HE institutions and 43 FE colleges, with over 700,000 students between them (including part-time students);
 - The previous Administration's 'More Choices, More Chances'³ strategy was focused on the NEET group (young people not in education, employment or training) and sought to bring together efforts of a wide range of players to provide more tailored support for young people, to make effective transitions to education, employment and training. The importance of early intervention to prevent young people from becoming NEET is a key facet of the Strategy;
 - 'Lifelong Partners' offers a framework for collaboration between schools and FE to allow young people to access appropriate learning. This is further promoted through School-College Partnerships where all secondary and special schools have a partnership with at least one FE college for S3 pupils and above. The pilot 'Skills for Work' programme also contributes to this agenda;
 - A wide range of national-level VET programmes exist for post-compulsory school age and beyond. Some of these are UK-level programmes and some are Scottish. They include SkillSeekers, Training for Work and New Deal programmes;
 - Informal and non-accredited learning takes place through Community Learning and Development structures, at the Scottish local authority level (and in partnership with the FE and voluntary sectors). The adult literacies agenda is a growing component within this;
- **Scottish Government Strategic Priorities⁴** - of the 5 priorities detailed, the 'Smarter' priority is most relevant to this paper. This priority outlines key Skills Strategy objectives and plans for a Government Economic Strategy, for improved economic growth. There is also greater emphasis on early intervention (through, for example, an early years strategy and the piloting of free school meals);

³ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/06/13100205/0>

⁴ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/About/purposestratobjis>

- **Scottish Government EU Priorities⁵** – Scotland’s EU Strategy is expected to be published in early 2008. Early indications of priorities which are relevant to this paper include Structural Funds (and remaining close to the debate concerning the limitations on future funding), European Qualifications Framework (and its role in promoting mobility, progression and transferability of learning across Europe) and the proposed European Institute for Technology (with Scotland being well-positioned to contribute to its development). A key, underpinning theme is ‘a stronger voice for Scotland in Europe’;
- **‘Skills for Scotland: A Lifelong Skills Strategy’⁶** – the Strategy references the EU Lisbon Strategy. It also notes the ‘disconnection’ between Scotland’s skills profile and overall economic performance. A Council of Economic Advisers has recently been appointed to offer strategic guidance and direction for Scotland’s economic future. In post-compulsory learning settings, the Strategy promotes:
 - accountability, especially at ‘transition points’ (e.g. moving on from secondary school);
 - effective working between schools and post-16 learning providers;
 - workplace literacies learning;
 - closer alignment between the Modern Apprenticeship (MA) programme and the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF);
 - integrating job and labour market information with learning information, advice and guidance (IAG);
 - recognition of informal learning.

The above policies, programmes and structures do not provide a comprehensive overview of the ‘supply’ side of education and training provision in Scotland but offer a flavour of this policy framework. Some of the key EU messages have been echoed in recent Scottish Government policy, most noticeably those referring to an urgent need to support early school leavers, improve pathways to learning for all (through greater choice, access and progression) and improve the general transparency of learning systems. Scotland’s Government has an opportunity to demonstrate its commitment to, and alignment with, the EU education and training agenda through its forthcoming EU Strategy. The following section provides an overview of where areas of ‘convergence’ already exist between the EU and Scotland, as well as noting the gaps.

⁵ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Government/International-Relations/Europe/Priorities>

⁶ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/09/06091114/0>

4. The Current Picture: The EU and Scottish Education and VET Policy Environments: Convergence?

EU and Scottish Policy Areas of Coherence

The following specific Scottish policy issues / areas have been identified for their relative 'alignment' to EU policy direction. This is not an exhaustive list, but offers a flavour of where Scotland is moving in the proposed direction of the EU. Any apparent alignment does not suggest that Scotland's focus has been solely or predominantly influenced by EU policy. Rather, it suggests that comparable thinking and converging rationales appear to exist at the Scottish and EU levels, concerning the addressing of education and training objectives:

- **The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) and the European Qualification Framework (EQF), as part of the Bologna Process** – in October 2006, Scotland became one of two countries to verify that the Scottish national HE framework was compatible with that of the EHEA. This signals a clear step for Scotland in promoting mutual recognition of qualifications, as well as a commitment to qualifications transparency. The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) is a key partner of SCQF and has contributed strongly to this agenda through its role in developing, accrediting, assessing and certifying qualifications other than degrees. This is also intended to ease the mobility of staff and students across HE in Europe. As is noted below, the mobility objective remains a key challenge for Scotland. However, the compatibility of the SCQF with the EQF is a key step in this direction;
- **Scotland's NEET Strategy and EU objectives concerning Early School Leavers (ESLs)** – as an area with devolved responsibility, Scotland has for several years undertaken intensive research⁷ to better understand the 'make-up' of the NEET group (and its sub-groups) and to gain further insights into the risks and factors which have a strong correlation with 'NEET-ness'. The EU direction for addressing ESLs places significant emphasis on re-engaging the target group with learning, while the Scottish approach recognises the need to consider appropriate options, which include, but are not limited to, education. What is less clear from Scotland's perspective is the extent to which practice and evidence is shared beyond the UK concerning how other member states are addressing the problem, especially since many other member states have significantly higher rates of NEET than Scotland or the wider UK;
- **Support for Youth and Youth Engagement** – the EU has placed a great deal of emphasis on youth engagement as a means to enhancing personal accountability and incentives to participate in learning and training. In a similar vein, Scotland introduced its 'Moving Forward' Strategy in 2007, to improve young people's chances through youth work. 'Project Scotland' also promotes active citizenship and engagement, through volunteering, albeit that this is an all-age initiative;

⁷ For example, <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2005/10/27175707/57078>

- **Preparing Young People for Life Beyond School** – the EU continues to place significant emphasis on the importance of non-academic skills for effective engagement in the workplace (e.g. interpersonal, team-working and decision making skills). Scotland's Enterprise in Education Strategy – 'Determined to Succeed'⁸ - focuses on skills and competencies such as these and aims to introduce and develop these in school;
- **Adult Literacies** – EU objectives of improved competitiveness and economic growth place strong emphasis on increased participation of the unemployed and under-employed (through both transitions to the labour market and enhanced progression of those already in the labour market). Since 2001, Scotland has developed its unique approach to engaging non-traditional adult learners with literacies needs (mainly literacy and numeracy). This agenda has close links with traditional models and delivery systems for community learning. The Scottish 'social practice' model focuses on learner-led objectives and methods of learning, as opposed to a more rigid, 'deficit' model which dictates what learning is required to reach specified learning levels. There is evidence that the Scottish adult literacies model is attractive to non-traditional learners⁹, especially in addressing social inclusion objectives. Workplace literacies pilot programmes¹⁰ have offered advice for future success and sustainability. A remaining challenge is to align the adult literacies agenda more clearly with Scotland's economic growth objectives. This implies 'bridging' the gap between the existing informal learning approach and a flexible and learner-led approach to accrediting learning.

Remaining Gaps and Challenges in Aligning Scottish Education and Training Policy with EU Objectives

While there are areas of coherence there are also gaps when comparing Scotland's policy environment to the EU's. The examples detailed below demonstrate this but are not exhaustive. They have been selected in order to demonstrate the 'distance' between Scotland's position and EU policy direction. Again, it should be noted that specific Scottish performance in many of these areas is unclear due to aggregation at the UK level.

- **Scotland's Participation in the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP)** - there is little data available to analyse Scotland's specific engagement with the 5 themes of the Lifelong Learning Programme (Comenius, Erasmus, Leonardo Da Vinci, Grundtvig and the transversal element). Scotland's Government has stated very clearly that learning engagement / labour market participation must be underpinned by principles of inclusion and fairness. It is unclear whether participation in the LLP is based on these principles across MSs. There is also a need to better understand the make-up

⁸ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2003/03/16755/19954>

⁹ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/03/20102218/0>

¹⁰ http://www.communitiesscotland.gov.uk/stellent/groups/public/documents/webpages/pubcs_016323.pdf

of Scottish students who engage in Erasmus (in terms of language abilities, academic achievements and financial support) to ensure that it is not only the 'better-off' who benefit from taking part. Such research would also serve to demonstrate how Scotland benefits from Erasmus. A better Scottish evidence base across the LLP – of both Scotland's level and type of engagement - would support a more focused, future programme of engagement with the LLP;

- **Policy Direction and Supporting Infrastructure: Creating the Dialogue** - both Scotland and the EU have signalled recently the importance of 'pathways' to learning to ensure learner inclusion and progression. This 'supply' side focus must be effectively linked with the 'demand' side of providing the right incentives for learner investment and engagement. Scotland's recent decision to merge Careers Scotland with LearnDirect Scotland signals a 'bridging' of the supply and demand sides by building a critical mass of IAG support, underpinned by transparency. The EU is also promoting - through the current LLP - greater active citizenship, participation and dialogue to bring learners and the workforce closer to decision making processes. The evolving dynamics of the learning environment make it fundamental for the learner (at all levels) to have their voice heard, in a way which will shape future learning policy and infrastructure. This includes how learners 'learn to learn', social skills and adaptability – all crucial factors in competing successfully in current and future labour markets. There is currently little apparent emphasis in Scotland on developing the capacity or platforms for Scotland's learners to engage in this dialogue. This could present a serious deficit in including the learner's voice, to build learning pathways;
- **Mobility: establishing a Scottish debate** - learner (and worker) mobility are key underpinning themes in all EU programmes. Currently, there appears to be little advice or support at the Scottish level which is obviously available to learners in informing them about choices, processes and systems to learn and / or work in other MSs / regions. There are political tensions for all MSs / regions, under the mobility theme, relating to risks of not reaping returns on investment, should learners' / workers' contribute their future spending power and taxes in economies other than those which invested early in their learning / training. Much of this debate has been focused on the high end skills and very little has been assigned to those with medium / low level skills who might benefit from a learning / training period away from home. Such benefits are likely to include linguistic, 'soft' (such as interpersonal and team working skills) and cultural skills, in addition to core 'technical' learning. Greater debate is required concerning the potential pros and cons of learner mobility, to allow for a more informed discussion. There is little sign that Scotland has set the national parameters for such a debate to take place;
- **Mobility: Erasmus as a policy lever?** - related mobility 'gaps' are present in the Erasmus programme. While information is reported at a UK level, it is unlikely that Scotland has performed much better than the other regions of the UK. It has been reported¹¹ that low levels of engagement with Erasmus

¹¹ Taken from a speech by Reijo Kemppinen, 'The EU: Going Britain's Way?' London, Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, 24.1.06

(in terms of UK student 'exports') are likely to reinforce the UK's generally poor levels of linguistic prowess. The number of UK students involved in Erasmus decreased from 9,000 to 7,000 between 2000 and 2006. Scotland's response to the Bologna Secretariat in July 2007 makes specific note of the need to 'increase outward student mobility'. The number of UK nationals in European institutions offers an inaccurate reflection of the UK's wider student population and educational standards. This issue is as relevant to academic teaching staff as to students. Scotland does not appear to be using the Erasmus programme effectively to promote externally their strong traditional engagement with, and respect for, higher education;

- **Mobility: laying the foundations** - the Comenius programme also promotes exchange and mobility at school level for pupils and staff. Scotland could do more in this area to lay the 'groundwork' for future mobility and to instil in our young people the interest and curiosity for learning in another member state and learning about other cultures and traditions. A more robust statistical evidence base, which dis-aggregates Scotland's engagement in Erasmus and Comenius from the rest of the UK could provide a stronger platform for debate in this area. An exploration of equity and access should underpin this – for example, what do schools and students know about these programmes and what might prevent engagement?
- **Learning Pathways** - growing concerns to address flexible learning pathways are echoed in both EU and recent Scottish policy documents. Challenges remain in Scotland concerning traditional, cultural 'parameters' around respective academic and vocational routes to learning, and the lack of parity between the two. However, increased efforts to bridge this cultural divide are paying dividends with new and emerging partnerships, structures and initiatives, especially between the secondary school setting and FE colleges. Scotland's recent Skills Strategy has laid the groundwork for the creation of a more robust infrastructure to deliver improved IAG, especially for young people making transitions from school. However, there remains a significant challenge in developing this infrastructure for groups of all ages to take account of the ease of movement between school and the workplace, informal/non-formal and formal education settings and from VET to higher education.

The above provides some selected examples of the extent to which there is an apparent 'convergence' of Scottish and EU policy, and where gaps and challenges remain. The next section looks at the future and offers some ideas for further debate concerning Scotland's future direction in education and training policy.

5. The Future: What More Can Scotland Do and What Are the Potential Benefits?

Wider Promotion of Good Practice and Leading Edge Thinking – In Scotland and Beyond

There are a wide range of policies and practices in Scotland which are of interest to the wider EU community. However, it is not clear that Scotland is sufficiently engaged with other EU regions and member states to promote these efforts. In the first instance, Scotland requires to develop a stronger, internal consensus of what constitutes good practice and effective mechanisms for sharing with others. The suggestions below offer significant opportunity for Scotland to achieve a 'stronger voice in Europe':

- **Early intervention for later returns** - the focus of this paper is the post-compulsory education and training setting. However, in the spirit of early intervention, there is clear scope for Scotland to promote its approach to the school curriculum and the addressing of wider skills and competencies than the traditional academic subjects. Both 'A Curriculum for Excellence' and 'Determined to Succeed' promote teaching and learning which is pupil-focused and purposeful for life beyond school. They are characterised by such skills as problem solving, decision making, communication and inquiry. With a greater emphasis being placed on interpersonal, intercultural and entrepreneurial skills, Scotland has much to contribute to the wider EU debate concerning how Europe prepares its young people for life beyond school and – specifically – the workplace. Early promotion of volunteering is linked to this agenda;
- **Scottish practice to address ESLs and the NEET group** – Scotland could promote more widely its work in this field (including NEET prevention work) and the 'risk factors' which appear to exacerbate and perpetuate NEET status. There is scope for more EU-wide debate and research, programmes of support and increased EU-wide efforts in longer-term evaluation of the ESL / NEET problem, involving longitudinal data. Scotland could lead the debate in this area and co-ordinate efforts for more sophisticated research and analysis;
- **Higher Education** – Scotland requires to build on existing successes in demonstrating alignment between the SCQF and the EQF. There is significant scope for Scotland to support others in this process and to promote leading-edge thinking. Scotland is currently involved in a project to review recognition of prior informal learning and its relationship with the SCQF. This resonates with EU priorities concerning how to build pathways between formal and informal learning, in supporting learner progression. In addition, the quality agenda across Scottish FE and HE has been characterised by an 'enhancement' approach which focuses on the promotion of good practice. This represents an opportunity for Scotland to share practice with other regions and member states in how they address their quality agendas;
- **Adult Literacies** – with a strong EU impetus on demand-led approaches to adult learning, Scotland's 'social practice' model for adult literacies is likely to be of interest to other regions / MSs, especially in relation to workplace

literacies and how this supports both learner and employer objectives. In addition, a strategy is planned for continuing professional development (CPD) and training support for adult literacies practitioners. Such capacity building is strongly supported by the EU, in the spirit of quality improvement;

- **Further accelerating the evaluation culture** – Scotland places great importance on evaluation of policies, programmes and initiatives to elicit lessons learned and scrutinise value for public money. A recent EU evaluation focus has been to encourage greater emphasis on *ex-post* evaluation activity an area where Scotland can demonstrate strong experience. Scotland is readily geared to promote Scottish evaluation practice across regions and MSs. Generating a debate and consensus concerning Scotland’s distinct approach to evaluation requires greater Scotland-wide consolidation of practice before promoting externally An area of growing interest in the evaluation arena relates to measuring ‘distance travelled’. This comes from a recognition that measuring progress in ‘soft’ and more qualitative areas (e.g. interpersonal skills and improved confidence) are often overlooked when measuring outcomes and effectiveness of training and education programmes;
- **Greater efforts to engage in and lead networks of support and influence** – the Transversal programme of the LLP strongly encourages this, to promote policy co-operation and dissemination of results and practice exchange. Scotland could play a greater role in this agenda through many of the policy areas and themes noted above;
- **‘Bottom-up’ practice leading to ‘top-down’ policy influence** – linked to the above issue, Scotland could take a stronger, strategic position in promoting evidence-based policy by demonstrating key Scottish successes which could be transferred to other regions / MSs. A range of ‘platforms’ exist which offer Scotland the opportunity to promote existing practice. At a European level these include: ERRIN (European Regions Research and Innovation Network) and Europace (which fosters networked e-learning). The OMC is currently characterised by a strong MS presence and influence. Regional influence within the OMC for education and training is unclear and could be championed by Scotland. This could serve to demonstrate the value of regional education and training policy and to ensure that the regional level does not get ‘lost’ when aggregated to the MS level.

Addressing Scotland’s Challenges

As noted above, a key challenge for Scotland is in managing its status (with devolved responsibility for education and training) and its position in the EU (as part of the UK member state) where Scotland’s specific activity and performance is aggregated to the UK level. How Scotland performs, as a region within the EU, across the education, training and lifelong learning spectrum is an area which should be prioritised. The points noted below assume that greater future emphasis will be placed on developing this Scottish evidence base. This would offer greater scope to identify strengths and challenges and to promote these on the European stage. It also offers greater momentum for local level activity (in schools, FE and HE sectors and the VET sector) to plan and deliver EU-supported programmes from a more reliable evidence base. The examples below are based

on addressing both Scottish and EU objectives, but from a currently, limited evidence base:

- **The compulsory education sector and laying the foundations for mobility** – The Comenius element of the LLP should be further examined to promote greater promotion and activity for pupil and teacher ‘exchanges’ (whether virtual or real). The rewards of language learning, promotion of Scottish education and the sharing and dissemination of practice should offer all parties the incentives to engage. An exploration of the barriers which prevent such exchanges is essential. A recent Times Education Supplement (TES) article¹² reported that a decrease in ‘foreign exchanges’ involving UK schools could be related to non-comparability of criminal record checks in other countries;
- **ESF and youth investment** – with youth as a core priority in the current European Structural Funds programme, Scotland requires to review its current state-of-play and performance regarding youth strategy and to prioritise areas which are likely to add value to existing activity. Key considerations could be: addressing youth unemployment from a preventative perspective, promoting innovative approaches to developing individual action plans, understanding ‘what works’ in delivering personalised support, new thinking concerning pathways to integrating young people into the labour market. How youth work can be used as a springboard to getting young people ready for labour market engagement is also a critical theme. The VET agenda for young people requires fresh thinking, with robust and long-term evaluation planning;
- **Improving the quality and attractiveness of VET** – new levers and impetus exist through Scotland’s Skills Strategy to address this agenda but it is unclear whether these will be sufficient to effect change. The current LLP offers scope for projects to generate ‘bottom-up’ influence, here, at both Scottish and EU levels. Areas of focus could be greater engagement of employers in setting the agenda and enhancing the role for the FE and HE sectors to bridge the silos of academic and vocational learning. While SQA already plays a key role in this agenda, there is clearly scope for greater involvement of other stakeholders. Another EU emphasis is in improving the quality assurance (QA) of VET through, for example, active learner engagement. This should be supported by robust evaluation of the effectiveness of QA. Worker mobility is a re-curring theme. With fewer than 1% of young people in VET benefiting from placements abroad, there is little opportunity for Scotland to exchange VET practice for young people or to promote cultural exchange and language learning. The mobility of training providers is another challenge. Lack of wider EU engagement is preventing Scotland from achieving greater mileage by generating long-term co-operation with other regions / member states in the VET arena;

¹² http://www.tes.co.uk/search/story/?story_id=2447458

- **Scotland's FE and HE sectors and the 'international' dimension** – The Scottish Funding Council's Corporate Plan details specific objectives and actions to promote the sectors outside of the UK. Both the LLP and the Bologna Process could be used as powerful levers in addressing this. There needs to be a greater consideration of the mobility incentives and barriers which exist to encourage / discourage Scottish students and staff to engage more widely in FE and HE across the EU. Addressing mobility will have a crucial influence on how Scotland is perceived as a place to study and work, as well as improving efforts to address Scottish multi-lingual deficits;
- **Scotland's LLL strategy and 'bridging' the transitions** – the EU is keen for all regions and member states to redefine the scope of their lifelong learning strategies, such that entry and exit points from one learning 'system' to another are sufficiently learner-focused and transparent. Scotland has an opportunity to build on its existing Lifelong Learning Strategy by reviewing the effectiveness of these transitions (e.g. from informal to formal settings, from VET to FE / HE, to strengthen VET pathways within HE and from the compulsory education to post-compulsory education setting). The building of 'employment pathways' is a key EU priority, especially when related to tackling discrimination. This resonates with the Scottish Government's emphasis on improved economic growth for Scotland, through a greater spread of the benefits to all groups. In reviewing the 'scope' of Scotland's lifelong learning landscape, there is a need to examine the role of VET in closing the gap between current learners and non-learners. This is an important equity issue and a challenge to addressing the cultural divide between those non-traditional learners and those who tend to embrace learning throughout their lives.

More Focused Debate and Potential Opportunities

The challenges ahead for Scotland in addressing EU priorities are significant, but there are clear examples of success and 'alignment' which deserve a stronger platform for promotion. Generating a consensus within Scotland regarding how to address this agenda is essential. The forthcoming EU Strategy offers a timely and potentially motivating tool to commencing the education and training debate, and generating necessary action across Scotland. Three, key strategic considerations for Scotland are:

- **Knowing what success looks like from a Scottish perspective** - this requires on-going efforts to dis-aggregate Scotland's performance from the rest of the UK. It also requires more and better use of programme evaluation (especially *ex-post* evaluation) at the local level. Scotland's future engagement with the OMC in the training and education field should also be explored;
- **Examining the mutual benefits of aligning Scottish and EU policy agendas** - leading to a distinct strategic approach in promoting Scotland's education and training agenda on a European platform;
- **Placing greater emphasis at the Scottish level on developing innovative methods for addressing the 'gaps' and challenges** outlined in this paper. This will influence local level activity and offer clearer parameters for projects and programmes which meet both Scottish and EU

criteria. With decreasing Structural Funds support, Scotland requires to tackle this agenda by adopting a strategic and long-term focus. This must move away from a 'chasing the funding' approach. Scotland's long-term standing and success in Europe, in relation to education and training, depends on a strategic focus, with sustainable internal and external partnerships to deliver change and contribute to European competitiveness and economic growth.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

This paper has reviewed elements of EU and Scottish education and training policy and examined areas of 'convergence' between the two, as well as gaps and future, potential opportunities for Scotland. While focused on Scotland, the paper, and its recommendations have relevance beyond Scottish parameters.

The new Scottish Government is beginning to lay the foundations for future education and training policy. Scotland's forthcoming EU Strategy is a key lever to 'strengthen Scotland's voice in Europe' through the education and training agenda. With this agenda as a devolved area, there is much scope for Scotland to establish and sustain a strong position within the EU as a key, regional player. There are also clear opportunities for a strong, Scottish education and training policy portfolio to make important contributions to current and future EU policy.

Mutually reinforcing policy areas for Scotland and the EU should form the focus for Scotland to promote its strengths on an EU platform. Scotland must also clarify and take action to address the various challenges and barriers which exist, predominantly in the areas of access to, and transparency of, learning systems. Led by the Scottish Government, this action requires partnership support across a wide range of players, including local authorities (and schools), Scottish Enterprise, YouthLink Scotland (and other youth work organisations), the Scottish Funding Council (and the HE and FE sectors), employers, training providers, the voluntary sector and community groups.

The following recommendations offer the foundations for a strategic framework for tackling this agenda, based on selected policy areas. There is clearly scope to add to this framework, through a more comprehensive review of Scottish / EU education and training policy. The recommendations have been structured in 5 groups, of which the first 3 are more 'internal' focused (i.e. what Scotland requires to consider from its 'home base') and the last 2 are 'external' focused (i.e. what Scotland can do beyond its own parameters, within the EU). The 5 groups are:

- Consolidate Scotland's education and training position in the EU;
- Address challenges;
- Clarify policy and direction;
- Promote strengths and practice sharing;
- Take action on EU platforms.

Recommendations:

Group 1: Consolidate Scotland's Education and Training Position in the EU

- **Recommendation 1: Generating Scottish level debate and consensus** – concerning Scotland's relationship with the EU vis-a-vis education and training policy. Scotland requires a stronger strategic direction which should emanate from its EU Strategy. Critical to this is a clearer evidence base of Scotland's EU performance, dis-aggregated from the UK's. From this evidence base a focused debate is required concerning how Scotland can and should engage with Europe through its training and education agenda. Engaging current and non-traditional learners in this debate is crucial to understanding the 'demand' and 'supply' side barriers and incentives. A clear and focused action plan is a necessary outcome from this, with a long-term focus which looks beyond 2013 and decreasing Structural Funds.

Group 2: Address Challenges

- **Recommendation 2: Understanding and addressing Mobility** – this is an extensive EU policy area and one where there is a clear 'cultural deficit' in Scotland which prevents the promotion of learner and worker mobility. Scotland needs to consider this on 3 levels: 1) introduce and instil a mobility 'culture' in school education (e.g. through more proactive and extensive use of the Comenius programme); 2) consider what is preventing staff and students in Scotland from improved and increased engagement with the Erasmus programme, such that Scotland's education system is better promoted through Scottish 'exports' to other MSs / regions; 3) lay the foundations for a significant improvement in information concerning the benefits of learner and worker mobility. Scotland's multi-lingual deficits are linked to this agenda;
- **Recommendation 3: The youth agenda and funding access** – the EU has emphasised the need for youth investment (e.g. in education and VET) and has indicated that Structural Funds financing will look favourably upon this area. Scotland has already shown commitment to the youth agenda through NEET efforts, youth work support and volunteering. However, Scotland's VET agenda for young people requires fresh thinking, with robust and long-term evaluation planning, to bring together relevant workstreams (e.g. addressing youth unemployment from a preventative perspective, promoting innovative approaches to developing individual action plans, understanding 'what works' in delivering personalised support, new thinking concerning pathways to integrating young people into the labour market). Scotland should also increase efforts to review how youth work can be used as a springboard to getting young people ready for labour market engagement;
- **Recommendation 4: Participating in the Lifelong Learning Programme** – no coherent overview exists at the Scottish level to identify Scotland's engagement with the 5 strands of the LLP and its relative performance within these. A better Scottish evidence base across the LLP – of both Scotland's level and type of engagement - would support a more focused, future

programme of engagement with the LLP. Set against a set of future, Scottish, strategic priorities this would offer greater guidance to those engaged in the LLP.

Group 3: Clarify Policy and Direction

- **Recommendation 5: Addressing pathways to learning** – in line with EU calls for coherence, transparency and access across MSs / regions' lifelong learning strategies and systems, Scotland requires to review its Lifelong Learning Strategy. This involves an examination of how robust and learner-led the various 'entry' and 'exit' points are from one part of the learning system to another. In particular, Scotland needs to review the supporting infrastructure in the following areas, to improve the learner progression landscape: ease of movement between school and the workplace; informal / non-formal and formal education settings; and from VET to higher education. The role of VET in 'bridging' these gaps deserves urgent attention;

Group 4: Promote Strengths and Practice Sharing

- **Recommendation 6: Greater promotion of how the SCQF supports the EQF and the Bologna Process** – Promoting coherence of systems and qualifications is a long-term challenge for the EU. Scotland has a distinct contribution to make to this agenda. Scotland's specific contribution to Bologna through the SCQF (and the supporting role of SQA) should be better promoted across the MSs and regions. As well as supporting and influencing how others address this challenge, Scotland is well-positioned to further influence the debate concerning the EQF and supporting the development of an EHEA. This also links to Scottish and EU objectives of opening up and generating greater access to learning;
- **Recommendation 7: Sharing practice in how Europe is preparing its young people for life beyond school** – Scotland has invested heavily in 'early intervention' for its young people to prepare them for life beyond school. This agenda has been shaped by both 'A Curriculum for Excellence' and 'Determined to Succeed', as well as vocational programmes such as 'Skills for Work'. Balancing the scales of academic and life skills / vocational learning, in the compulsory education sector, remain a challenge for Scotland and the EU. Scotland should promote its unique contribution to this agenda more extensively across Europe;
- **Recommendation 8: Promoting greater inter-EU dialogue concerning the ESL / NEET agenda** – Scotland's significant work on the NEET group (and its sub-groups) is likely to be of much greater interest to an EU audience where the NEET / ESL problem is extensive. More sharing of practice is needed. While Scotland does not have all the answers to the problem, a willingness to lead discussion and co-ordinate practice sharing across MSs and regions could offer much greater potential to learn from others and to shape and influence the future direction of this agenda across Europe;
- **Recommendation 9: Showcasing the Adult Literacies learning model and its contribution to access to learning** – Scotland's 'social practice'

model offers a good practice example of a learner-led philosophy, especially in engaging non-traditional learners. Within this agenda, workplace literacies features strongly, as does Scotland's plans to invest in the literacies workforce. A remaining challenge in this context is to promote the relationship between adult literacies and learner progression, especially through accreditation and recognition of prior learning. Scotland requires to raise its profile in promoting its efforts and successes in this area;

- **Recommendation 10: Sustaining momentum for the EU's evaluation culture** – Scotland has a robust evaluation culture in education and training and could offer significant support at the EU level in promoting the value of evaluation, especially *ex-post* evaluation activity. By raising our profile in this area, Scotland serves to both learn more from the practice of others and to lead efforts across the EU in promoting an evaluation culture.

Group 5: Take Action on EU Platforms

- **Recommendation 11: Stronger Scottish engagement in Europe** – Scotland should take a more pro-active stance in supporting 'bottom-up' policy influence from the regional to the EU level. Within this, it should investigate a specific regional role for a similar mechanism to the OMC. This should be coupled with more strategic level engagement with EU / regional networks where Scotland can both learn from the practice of others and promote specific Scottish practice in the education and training field.

Glossary of Terms

CPD – Continuing Professional Development

EHEA – European Higher Education Area

ERRIN – European Regions Research and Innovation Network

EQF – European Qualifications Framework

ESL – Early School Leaver

EU – European Union

FE – Further Education

HE – Higher Education

IAG – Information, Advice and Guidance

LLP – Lifelong Learning Programme

MA – Modern Apprenticeship

MS – Member State

NEET – Not in Education, Employment or Training

OMC – Open Method of Co-ordination

QA – Quality Assurance

TES – Times Education Supplement

SCQF – Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework

SQA – Scottish Qualifications Authority

VET – Vocational Education and Training

SCOTLAND EUROPA ★

Scotland House Rond-Point Schuman 6 B-1040 Brussels T +32 (0)2 282 8315 F +32 (0)2 282 8300

Also at: Scottish Enterprise 5 Atlantic Quay 150 Broomielaw Glasgow G2 8LU T +44 (0) 141 248 2700 F +44 (0) 141 228 2114

W www.scotlandeuropa.com E information.desk@scotent.co.uk