

Knowledge Exchange on Public Policy in Scotland: Promoting Best Practice in Equality and Human Rights

Lifelong Learning and Equity in Scotland: Briefing paper

Lifelong learning has a long and chequered history. It is a widely debated concept and emerged in its current form in the 1990s. Described by some as a *'broad, imprecise and "elastic" term'* (Johnston, 2000, cited in Rogers, 2006:125) and accused of being *'human resource development in drag'* (Boshier, 1998), it is nonetheless in widespread use. Field (2006) argues that the term is useful because people nowadays have to acquire new skills and capacities throughout their lives in order to maintain their position in the labour market. However, he cautions that it can become a mechanism for exclusion and social control. The discourse, according to Field, emphasises individual agency and the expectation that learners will take responsibility for their own learning. People engage in lifelong learning for a range of reasons and there are inherent tensions between economic, social and personal development objectives. Whilst the term implies learning from cradle to grave, it is generally used to describe learning post-compulsory education and this is reflected in most of the policies and strategies developed to promote lifelong learning.

Lifelong learning was adopted by the EU and formed the basis for the Lisbon strategy which aimed at making Europe *'the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world ... with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion'* by 2010 (CEC 2000). The Lisbon strategy influenced lifelong learning developments across Europe and is apparent in the Scottish strategy for lifelong learning entitled *Life Through Learning Through Life* (Scottish Executive, 2003). However, Scotland also contributed to developments in lifelong learning, for example, through the development of the Scottish Qualifications Framework which informed the developing European Accreditation Framework.

The Scottish strategy defined lifelong learning as: *'the whole range of learning: formal and informal learning, workplace learning, and the skills, knowledge, attitudes and behaviours that people acquire in day-to-day experiences'* and states that: *'lifelong learning policy in Scotland is about personal fulfilment and enterprise; employability and adaptability; active citizenship and social inclusion'* (Scottish Executive, 2003: 7). It thus reflected both the employability and social cohesion aspect of the Lisbon Strategy. The strategy set out five goals:

- A Scotland where people have the confidence, enterprise, knowledge, creativity and skills they need to participate in economic, social and civic life
- A Scotland where people demand and providers deliver a high quality learning experience
- A Scotland where people's knowledge and skills are recognised, used and developed to the best effect in their workplace

- A Scotland where people are given the information, guidance and support they need to make effective learning decisions and transitions
- A Scotland where people have the chance to learn, irrespective of their background or current personal circumstances

Six indicators were developed to measure the implementation and success of the strategy:

1. a reduction of 16-19 year olds not in education, employment or training;
2. an increase in support to 16-19 year olds from low income families to stay on at school and/or FE college, thereby raising the participation and retention rates of this group;
3. an increase in graduates as a proportion of the workforce;
4. a reduction of working age adults whose highest qualification is below SCQF level 5;
5. a reduction in the proportion of 18-29 year olds whose highest qualification is below SCQF level 6; and
6. an increase in the proportion of people in employment undertaking training.

While the strategy stressed both personal development and social cohesion, the indicators clearly focus on developing skills and qualifications within the workforce. These indicators formed the basis for an evaluation which was published in the *Lifelong Learning Statistics* in 2005 (Scottish Executive, 2005). It found that:

1. the proportion of 16-19 year olds not in education, employment or training reduced from around 15% in 1999 to just over 13% in 2004, in 2006 the percentage was 12.4%. It suggests that measures are working; however, the average figure hides considerable variation. Thirty percent of those from the 15% most deprived areas fell into this group in 2006. There are also gender differences as more young men found in this category than young women. In 2005 the difference was around 1.2% (there is no gender breakdown for 2006). The period of measurement is one where levels of employment have been high and it would seem important to examine impact on this indicator in the current climate of threatened recession, especially in relation to those from most deprived areas.
2. staying on rates have changed little over the period 1996-07. The Educational Maintenance Allowance came into effect in August 2005 so it was too early to measure this indicator. The uptake in EMA increased in 2006-07 compared to 2005-06, the majority (54%) were female.
3. there has been a steady increase in the proportion of graduates in the workforce. In 1997 15% were graduates by 2007 this had increased to 24.9%. As for the first indicator there is considerable variation between the proportion of graduates in the most deprived areas (11.2% in 2007) and the rest of Scotland (26.5% in the rest of Scotland). Gender differences are also in evidence – in 2005-06 58% of Scottish graduates were women.

4. the proportion of working age adults whose highest qualification is below SCQF 5 (Credit Standard Grade) has fallen from 28% in 1991 to 19% in 2004. In 2007 the proportion of those with level 4 (General Standard Grade) was 16.1% but in the 15% most deprived areas this was 34.6% there is no publicly available data available for gender differences.
5. the proportion of 18-29 year olds whose highest qualification is below SCQF level 6 (Higher) fell from 38% in 1997 to 30% in 2002 and has remained at that level (31% in 2004). It has since decreased slightly and in 2007 stood at 29.8%. In the 15% most deprived areas, however, it was 49.5%.
6. the proportion of people in employment undertaking training increased from 23% in 1995 to 29% in 2005. In 2007 this had decreased slightly to 27.8%. There is no data showing areas by deprivation or by gender. There is some variation by local authority showing that the lowest level of participation in training is in Aberdeenshire (21.7%) and the highest in Edinburgh (31.9%).

These statistics demonstrate some achievements against the goals set out for lifelong learning in Scotland but they also indicate that there are still considerable challenges, especially in relation to engaging those in the most deprived areas in education or training, in engaging men in formal higher and further education and in ensuring that training by those in employment does not fall further. There is a notable omission of any examination of race equality and no data, for example on access to training for those with a BME background. Other statistics (Futureskills, 2006) show considerable variation between sectors in relation to employee training. There are also very low rates of participation by disabled people in training programmes such as Training for Work and Skillseekers (Edward et al, 2008).

In May 2007, the administration changed and one of the key priorities for the current administration was to produce an economic strategy, including a skills development strategy for the current and future workforce in Scotland. The *Skills for Scotland: a lifelong skills strategy* (Scottish Government, 2007b) has a strong emphasis on developing skills and vocational education and provided a Scottish response to the UK-wide Leitch Review of Skills (HM Treasury, 2006). The Scottish skills strategy does not mention the previous lifelong learning strategy but it could be argued that its aims are similar to the earlier document with its stress on learners taking responsibility for their own development:

We need successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors to build a smarter Scotland ... We need individuals to take more ownership of their own development and system that identifies people who need extra support and ensures that support is there. We need a system for developing skills that meets everybody's needs and aspirations and equips individuals with skills that are flexible enough to meet the needs of today and respond to the demands of tomorrow. (Scottish Government, 2007b: 02)

Two key differences though are its clear emphasis on skills and also its adoption of a cradle to grave approach. There is also a strong commitment to equality of opportunity

and elimination of discrimination. Its key priorities aim to develop the workforce and tackle the skills deficits that are barriers to employability and employment. These aims, set out under five headings, are not meant to be exhaustive but are a starting point for action:

Individual development:

1. Developing a distinctly Scottish approach to skills acquisition, balancing the needs of employers and individuals, aligning employment and skills and placing the individual at the centre of learning and skills development.
2. Developing a coherent funding support system for individuals of all ages and in all forms of education and training that encourages participation in learning and work. This will include support for individuals to increase control and choice over their learning and skills development.
3. Ensuring that this Strategy will promote equal access to and participation in skills and learning for everyone. This Strategy aims to promote equality of opportunity to those trapped by persistent disadvantage and to improve numbers of people economically active including those from groups such as race, disability, gender, sexual orientation, age and religion/faith and educational starting points.

Economic pull:

4. Stimulating increased demand for skills from employers, both public and private by:
 - encouraging employers to develop ambitious business strategies from which a need for higher level skills will flow;
 - helping employers to articulate what they need now and what they are going to need in the future;
 - supporting the capacity of learning providers to engage with employers and understand and respond to their needs; and
 - creating structures that facilitate closer working between employers and learning providers
5. Improving the utilisation of skills in the workplace through:
 - encouraging better management and leadership and improved human resource practices (including recruitment) across the range of employers in Scotland;
 - supporting job design that encourages autonomy, makes better use of employees and stimulates enterprise and innovation in the workplace;
 - improving links between skills and the other drivers of productivity, such as investment in technology and infrastructure; and
 - ensuring that individuals can use the skills they have acquired through learning in a way that immediately benefits their employer.
6. Understanding current and project demands for skills to help prepare for future skills needs.

7. Challenging employers, learning providers, awarding bodies and others to use the SCQF as a tool to support learning, specifically to facilitate the recognition of learning for enabling individuals to move smoothly through learning environments, getting credit for learning they have already achieved.

Cohesive structures:

8. Simplifying structures to make it easier for people to access the learning, training and development they need, including formal and informal learning by merging a number of bodies into one, focussed on skills.
9. Ensuring that *Curriculum for Excellence* provides vocational learning and the employability skills needed for the world of work and is the foundation for skills development throughout life.
10. Achieving parity of esteem between academic and vocational learning, recognising that vocational learning is a valuable alternative to the academic pathway and important to all.
11. Challenging our funding bodies to use their budgets to help achieve a step-change in skills development and use.
12. Encouraging providers to see themselves as part of a continuum or provision – links in chain – which helps individuals to see the relevance of learning to them, progress in their learning and make full and effective use of the skills they have acquired. Judging that system by how well it serves those who need the most support.

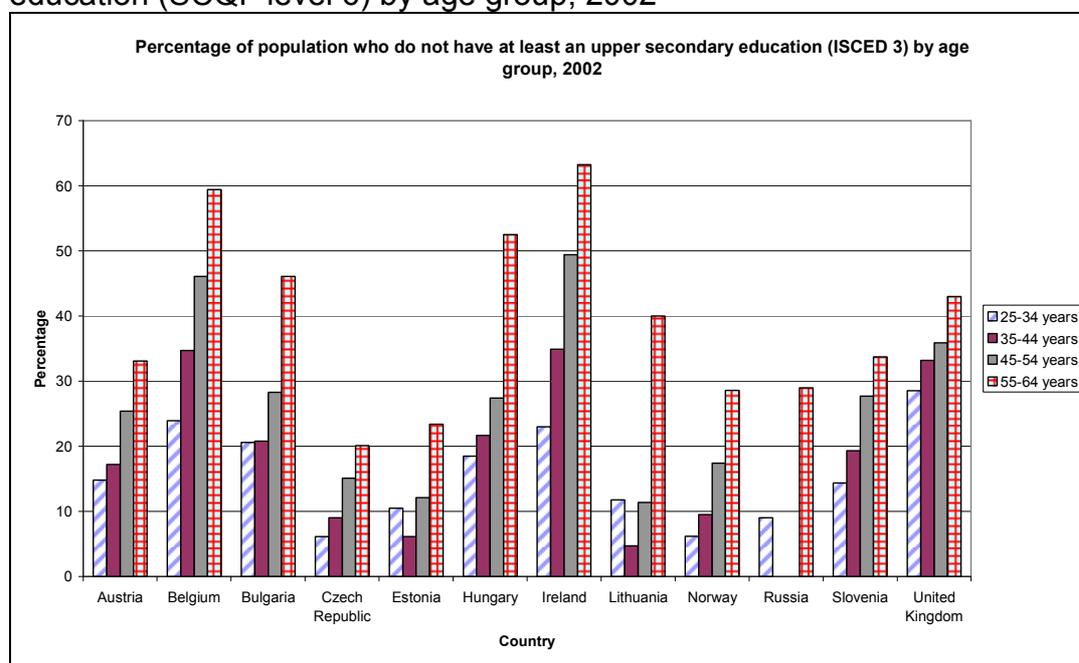
The strategy sets out goals for all those involved with the development of skills in Scotland, but does not include an evaluation of the impact of the strategy. However, *Performance at a Glance* (Scottish Government, 2008) lists a set of national indicators which cover the five main areas of the Government's Economic Strategy (see below). Post-compulsory education features in four of these fifty indicators, but only one concerns people with low levels of skills. This particular indicator aims to '*reduce the number of working age people with severe literacy and numeracy problems*'.

The Government Economic Strategy (Scottish Government, 2007a) highlights the role of learning in developing sustainable economic growth and stresses that the greatest asset to the Scottish economy is its well qualified workforce. It also notes that the high qualifications of the Scottish workforce are not currently reflected in Scotland's rate of economic growth. Scotland, in comparison to other European countries, has a high proportion of graduates in the working age population; in 2001 it ranked in the middle of 31 countries with 15% of its workforce being graduates as classified by the OECD (Scottish Executive, 2005). The Annual Population survey of 2007 shows an increase to 24.9% of the working age population. However, concern has been voiced that there is growing polarisation in the workforce with a sizeable proportion of graduates but also a sizeable proportion of people with low or limited skills, suggesting a gap in intermediate level skills. A brief report commissioned by Futureskills Scotland (Keep, 2007) noted that labour market structures encouraged a growing gap between high skill and low skill employment opportunities:

Disparities in earnings, working practices, employee relations policies, and provision of training and development opportunities within the workplace all seem to be growing, while the political discourse of policy in this field still gravitates towards a vision where everyone becomes a knowledge worker. (Keep, 2007:6)

This is supported by data indicating that there has been very little change in the proportion of 18-19 year olds who do not have SCQF level 6 (Highers/Upper Secondary) – this currently stands at 29.8% of the population. Earlier data indicate that, in relation to the total working age population who do not have SCQF level 6, the UK is in the middle range of European countries. However, the position is broadly the same for younger and older age groups, suggesting that little has changed. By way of comparison, Ireland, Hungary, Belgium and Bulgaria all have higher qualification levels amongst younger age groups (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Percentage of the population who do not have at least an upper secondary education (ISCED 3) by age group, 2002



Source: Eurostat, Key Data on Education, 2005, p. 307;

NB: Figures for Russia are an estimation from year 2003 and are only for the youngest and oldest age group, Source: OECD 2005, Education at a Glance

In comparison to other European countries, Scotland may therefore fall behind in terms of middle level qualifications. This may could maintain and possibly increase the disparities between high and low skills employment opportunities. According to the lifelong learning statistics, the main pay differentials are between those with degree level qualifications and those with no or lower qualifications. This suggests that there may be little incentive to achieve qualifications at sub degree level. Opportunities at work are likely to reinforce this divide as there is evidence that those with the highest qualifications are most likely to receive further opportunities for learning and training. Data from the National Adult Education Survey, Scotland, shown in Table 2, indicate that those with the highest level of qualification are most likely to be involved in further learning and training.

Table 2: Percentages of highest qualification groups reporting different types of learning

	SVQ level 5	SVQ level 4	SVQ level 3	SVQ level 2	SVQ level 1	No quals	Total
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Any learning	100	98	85	88	73	28	83
Taught learning	85	83	67	67	55	23	67
Self-directed learning	94	88	63	74	50	15	67
Vocational learning	98	92	73	83	59	22	74
Non-vocational learning	27	35	27	34	26	10	29

Source: National Adult Education Survey, Scotland 2005

Includes all respondents 16-69 who had been in continuous full-time education but were not currently in full-time education

A Futureskill survey of employers highlights that those in the sector with the greatest proportion of low skilled workers are those who are least likely to get trained (Futureskill, 2006). Looking generally at workforce development, it has been shown that access to workplace learning is most likely to be offered to the following groups:

- Younger workers
- Women, except those under 24
- Those with higher qualifications
- Those employed in the public sector. Employees in services industries, agriculture and fishing are least likely to receive training
- Those in larger workplace

In relation to formal education both in further and higher education institutions, some progress has been made in relation to widening participation, however, this is unevenly spread with elite institution still having a disproportionate number of students from socially advantaged backgrounds.

Table 3: Type of institutions attended by students from different backgrounds

Deprivation quintile	1st quintile (Least deprived)	2 nd quintile	3 rd quintile	4 th quintile	5 th quintile
FE Colleges	20%	18%	21.3%	20.5%	20.3%
New Universities	27%	20.8%	18.8%	17.5%	15.9%
Old Universities	29.9%	21.8%	20.2%	14.9%	13.1%
Ancient Universities	38.8%	22.3%	16.7%	13.1%	9%

Source: Raab and Small, *Widening Access to Higher Education In Scotland; evidence for change from 1996/97 to 2000/01*, updated by SFC to include 2003-04 data

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) is currently working on developing an Equality Measurement Framework, including indicators to measure ten central and valuable freedoms. Three aspects of education are to be measured: inequality of outcome, inequality of autonomy and inequality of process. The overview of the statistics above shows that there has been some progress in the area of lifelong learning, and Scotland has a relatively well qualified workforce but that challenges remain. Using the three aspects of the equality measurement framework,

the data suggests that all of these aspects are likely to require further initiatives to develop greater equality in outcome, autonomy and process.

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Some key questions/challenges that appear to emerge from these data:

- Do tensions arise between inclusion and economic development which focuses on growing a high skill society, and if so, how can these be addressed?
- Should Scotland also grow its 'middle level' of skills by upskilling those with no/limited qualifications to promote a more equal society and decrease the polarisation in the labour market?
- To what extent do learners in different social positions enjoy autonomy in deciding what learning they should undertake?
- How can the Scottish Government deal with the tensions between employment policy which is a reserved matter and its own aims in relation to workforce development?
- How can the Scottish Government develop robust indicators to measure the ambitious priorities set out in the Skills Strategy which also address social justice goals?
- What impact is the current economic climate likely to have on the SG's ability to achieve the aims of the Skills Strategy and how might it affect equitable access to lifelong learning?