

**SKILLS DEVELOPMENT SCOTLAND**

**AN OVERVIEW OF THE POLICY AND DELIVERY  
EVIDENCE BASE**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## 1 Background and objectives

Scottish Government Employability and Skills Division commissioned the Moray House School of Education at the University of Edinburgh to review a selection of evaluations, policy reviews and other relevant documents in order to inform the development of policy outcomes and measures for government, as well as potential delivery from Skills Development Scotland (SDS). The objectives of the review are:

- To identify what is working well and what could be improved in current programmes, policy and delivery within the current remit and service delivery ambit of SDS.
- To provide a comprehensive overview of the evidence base relating to these areas of policy and delivery, identifying common or recurring themes across different areas of activity where appropriate.
- To identify gaps in the evidence base where further research may be beneficial.

## 2 Methodology

Scottish Government and SDS identified a selection of key studies across three areas: information, advice and guidance; skills interventions; and employer engagement. The review was conducted in two stages. In Stage 1, each document was reviewed by a research team member and analysed with respect to the objectives listed above, and cross-cutting issues and conclusions in the three areas were provisionally identified. This aspect of the work is reported in Section Two of this report. In Stage 2, a more rigorous analysis of crosscutting themes was conducted by the full team, who then drew on their own knowledge of the policy fields, as well as the key documents, to identify the overarching themes reported on in Section Three.

## 3 Key Findings

### 3.1 *What is working well*

A number of initiatives have been evaluated as working effectively. These include a range of current programmes that have been successful in enabling ‘at risk’ groups, such as school leavers with few educational qualifications or adults with limited literacy skills, to increase their self-confidence and skills. These ‘soft’ skills have then enabled them to move onto further education, training or employment. In addition, by offering a diversity of provision, including access to more vocationally oriented courses, current programmes have helped school-leavers, particularly those who are ‘at risk’, to overcome some of the complex barriers they face in accessing education, employment and training. Finally, programmes designed to prepare participants with skills for the workplace were positively evaluated by both trainees and employers, particularly those participating in Skillseekers and Modern Apprenticeships. So the current programmes do give policy levers to the SG to provide some of the necessary skills for employment and thus have an impact on the supply side of the employment equation. However, these programmes remain largely focused on the supply side. They do

not typically aim to stimulate demand for skills from employers or to improve the utilisation of skills in the workplace and elsewhere. A change of emphasis is needed to meet new policy priorities.

### ***3.2 Where is there scope for improvement?***

There were also areas that were felt not to be working so well. Although some programmes are engaging with ‘at risk’ groups and ‘hard to reach’ employers other programmes are not proactively seeking to include these groups. One reason for this is the tension between the economic and social imperatives driving these programmes: a tension that needs to be addressed by the Scottish Government. A related reason is the evaluation of programme outcomes on the basis of numbers, diverting attention from the more resource-intensive needs of clients who are ‘at risk’ and need extra support. There is also an issue about those who are not in employment, particularly those on ‘incapacity benefit’, who are not yet fully included in the currently available programmes. Seven overarching themes emerged relating to areas for improvement, and are discussed in Section 3. These are:

- The cluttered landscape of initiatives, which risks confusing learners and employers
- Coordinating the delivery of services, maintaining an appropriate balance between national standards and local flexibility
- Tensions between meeting labour market needs and the needs of individuals
- Skills development, social inclusion and equality
- Skills utilisation and demand, including the need to support employers to improve their utilisation of skills or raise the level or quality of skills that they demand
- Parity of esteem between academic and vocational learning, the achievement of which requires recognition of different types of knowledge, skills and opportunities for personal growth that may be derived from different types of learning.

### ***3.3 Key messages from the review***

Seven key messages for Skills Development Scotland and the Scottish Government are identified in Section 4:

- To build on the identified strengths of existing programmes
- To develop a strategy to reflect the new policy emphasis on utilisation of, and demand for, skills
- To clarify priorities among the individual, social and economic imperatives driving the services and programmes of SDS
- To ensure that programmes engage with ‘at risk’ groups, ‘hard to reach’ employers, and clients who may have more resource-intensive needs, including those who are not in employment
- To develop a more co-ordinated, coherent and transparent range of services for individuals and employers, and strengthen links with other guidance and support services, including the DWP and Jobcentre Plus
- To promote parity of esteem between academic and vocational learning by collecting and disseminating information on the different types of benefits that flow from different learning pathways, including their labour market returns
- To address gaps in the evidence base, in particular the need for both in-depth qualitative studies of the impact of programmes and regular data sources that are not programme-specific, and for data on the pathways followed by young people beyond compulsory education.

## SECTION ONE INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background and objectives

Skills Development Scotland (SDS) was created in April 2008 from a merger of Careers Scotland, the Scottish University for Industry and the skills and learning functions of Highlands and Islands Enterprise and Scottish Enterprise. The creation of the new organisation provides an opportunity to exploit synergies and to provide more streamlined services to individuals and employers. It also provides an opportunity to review existing strengths and weaknesses, to identify priorities for development and to consider how activities may be better focused on the Scottish Government's Skills Strategy outlined in *Skills for Scotland*.<sup>1</sup> The Scottish Government (SG) has set up internal projects to inform delivery of services, products and activities for SDS. These include a project to develop initial ideas for future service delivery options in key SDS areas of business, and a project to develop partnership working with key organisations that will help establish a more cohesive system for skills development and skills utilisation for the people of Scotland.

Scottish Government Employability and Skills Division commissioned the Moray House School of Education at the University of Edinburgh to review a selection of evaluations, policy reviews and other relevant documents to inform the development of policy outcomes and measures for government, as well as potential delivery from SDS. The objectives of the review of documents are:

- To identify what is working well and what could be improved in current programmes, policy and delivery within the current remit and service delivery ambit of SDS.
- To provide a comprehensive overview of the evidence base relating to these areas of policy and delivery, identifying common or recurring themes across different areas of activity where appropriate.
- To identify gaps in the evidence base where further research may be beneficial.

The review covered a selection of key studies, provided by Scottish Government and SDS, ranging across three areas: Information, Advice and Guidance; Skills Interventions; and Employer Engagement. These documents are included in the references.

The review was conducted in two stages. In stage 1, each of the source documents was reviewed and analysed with respect to the objectives listed above, and cross-cutting issues and conclusions were provisionally identified within each of the three areas. This aspect of the work is reported on in section two. In stage 2, a more rigorous analysis of cross-cutting themes was conducted, initially within each area, and subsequently across all documents. Members of the team then drew on their own knowledge of the policy fields as well as the key documents to identify the overarching themes reported on in section 3.

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<sup>1</sup> The Scottish Government (2007b) *Skills for Scotland*.

## 1.2 Policy context

The *Operating Plan 2008-09* describes the vision of SDS as follows:

*Skills Development Scotland will be a catalyst for real and positive change in Scotland's skills performance. We will help individuals to realise their full potential, we will help employers be more successful through skills development, and we will work in meaningful partnership to enhance Scotland's sustainable economic development.*<sup>2</sup>

As this vision statement indicates, the two main customer groups for SDS are individuals and employers. The new organisation aims to support the *Government Economic Strategy*, and specifically the Government's Purpose to create 'a more successful country, with opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish, through increasing sustainable economic growth'.<sup>3</sup> The strategy lists the government's five Strategic Objectives, including the 'Smarter' objective to 'expand opportunities for Scots to succeed from nurture through to life long learning ensuring higher and more widely shared achievements', and five strategic priorities headed by learning, skills and well-being. The goal of increased sustainable economic growth is reflected in the skills strategy, *Skills for Scotland* (Scottish Government, 2007b), which lists priorities for action under three headings: individual development, economic pull and cohesive structures. The Operating Plan outlines SDS' planned services for individuals and employers in relation to individual development and economic pull respectively. Cohesive structures are encouraged, among other things, by merging agencies involved in skills provision and information, advice and guidance in a single learner-focused body, SDS.

Many of the documents reviewed below pre-date *Skills for Scotland* or relate to policies and programmes initiated under previous governments such as *A Curriculum for Excellence*, *More Choices More Chances*, the Scottish Adult Literacy and Numeracy strategy and Modern Apprenticeships. The administration which took office in 2007 has retained and supported many of these programmes. It is therefore still appropriate to review these programmes to ascertain what is working well, and what is working less well, and to identify the issues that are raised in their development and delivery. However, in doing so it is important to take account of new policy emphases and directions introduced by the current government.

The main policy changes since May 2007 have not been in the programmes and structures themselves but in the strategic purposes which they are expected to serve. The government's focus has shifted from programme delivery to performance and outcomes. This is expressed through the 15 National Outcomes, of which the one most directly relevant to skills development is: 'We are better educated, more skilled and more successful, renowned for our research and innovation'.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Skills Development Scotland (2008) *Operating Plan 2008-09: Our contribution to delivering Skills for Scotland*, p.7.

<sup>3</sup> The Scottish Government (2007a) *The Government Economic Strategy*, p.1.

<sup>4</sup> Other relevant National Outcomes include: 'We realise our full economic potential with more and better employment opportunities for our people'; 'Our young people are successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens'; 'We have tackled the significant inequalities in Scottish society'; and 'We have improved the life chances for children, young people and families at risk'.

*Skills for Scotland* signals a further shift in the focus of policy, from an almost exclusive concern with the supply of skills to an increased concern with skill utilisation and demand. There is increased policy interest in the contribution of skills to productivity, value-added and the quality of employment. This new emphasis leads to a re-focusing of priorities for specific programmes. For example, *Skills for Scotland* gives new emphasis to vocational learning and employability skills within *A Curriculum for Excellence*, to economic development over social inclusion in Modern Apprenticeships, and to employer engagement in a more clearly focused Scottish role for Sector Skills Councils.

*Skills for Scotland* also emphasises the need for a cohesive, responsive and transparent learning system, with opportunities for all learners, parity of esteem for vocational and academic learning, well-designed and well-signalled progression pathways and clear lines of responsibility and accountability. This emphasis is reflected in the creation of SDS itself, and the expectation that it should develop more integrated patterns of service delivery, not only across functional areas but also across local, regional and national levels.

## SECTION TWO FINDINGS FROM THE REVIEWED DOCUMENTS

This section reviews the key studies provided by Scottish Government and SDS, under the three areas of: Information, Advice and Guidance; Skills Interventions; and Employer Engagement. For each of these sub-sections what is working well and not so well is identified and then the general themes and issues that arise are summarised.

### 2.1 Information, Advice and Guidance

The documents considered in this section included reviews of the entire sector, such as the Duffner Report (Career Service Review Committee, 2001) and Watts' (2005) review of Careers Scotland; evaluations of specific guidance interventions (e.g. Granville and Campbell-Jack, 2007; Segal Quince Wicksteed (SQW) with TNS, 2005); policy documents concerned with young people who have not yet entered the labour market, including the findings of the Spielhofer *et al.* (2006) evaluation of Determined to Succeed; and academic papers on broader issues of career guidance (Howieson and Semple, 2006) and of motivation to learn (St Clair, 2006).

*What, according to the findings of these reports, is working well?*

- Careers Scotland is, according to Watts (2005) 'probably the largest publicly funded organisational structure in the world that is dedicated to career planning support.'<sup>5</sup> Notable achievements include the **integration of services for young people about to leave education and for adults**, and the **introduction of differentiated service delivery models** (Fairweather *et al.*, 2006). The relationship of Careers Scotland with Scottish Enterprise/ Highlands and Islands Enterprise has heightened awareness of the **contribution of careers guidance to economic development**.
- Positive messages emerge from all the evaluations examined. For example, SQW with TNS (2005), reporting on the all age guidance projects, found that **clients felt well supported** and that **awareness of Careers Scotland services was being raised**; and in their evaluation of the Scottish University for Industry, branded as Learndirect Scotland (LDS), SQW with FMR Research Ltd (2007) reported that services were highly regarded and seen to represent good **value for money**, in the context of the contribution to the longer-term economic and social goals of Scotland.
- Several of the documents confirm the complexity and multiplicity of barriers both to entering employment and to re-engaging with post-compulsory education for some young people and adults. For example, SQW with FMR Research Ltd (2007) found prospective learners facing barriers of childcare and the inconvenient timing or location of learning opportunities. This study reported, however, that despite these barriers, many of the participating learners reported **increased confidence following their contact with LDS**. In their scoping study into learning entitlement for young care leavers and young people not in education, employment of training, York

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<sup>5</sup> Watts, A.G. (2005) *Progress and potential: a review benchmarked against the OECD Career Guidance Policy Review*. OECD. p. 5.



Consulting (2006a) identify an array of complex barriers for these young learners: financial concerns, such as the threat of homelessness, cost of transport or fear of loss of benefits; personal and circumstantial problems, including motivation, fear of failure, health problems, parental responsibilities and problems with behaviour management; and institutional constraints, such as lack of suitable courses. Spielhofer *et al.* (2006) in their evaluation of Determined to Succeed also demonstrate the need for provision for ‘at risk’ groups to be flexible and diverse, involving a range of organisations with different professional skills and expertise. Understanding the barriers and acknowledging the **need for a range of different approaches** to supporting those who face them, seems to be an important step towards removing them. The evidence confirms that there is no simple ‘one size fits all’ solution awaiting discovery.

### *Where is there scope for improvement?*

- The **impact of differentiated service delivery models of careers guidance needs to be monitored**, particularly in the light of the findings (DTZ, 2008) about the value of one-to-one contact with careers advisors, especially for young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds.
- The learner tracking survey of LDS (Accent Scotland, 2007) identified **areas for service improvement** in the level of detail they provide about courses; the information provided about funding for learning; and the skills and training of advisors. But more in depth case study data would have provided a better understanding of the factors that influence adults’ take-up of information, advice and guidance services, and of learning opportunities.
- Some tensions arise from the **lack of a common approach, in terms both of training and of perceptions of clients’ need, within the workforce** providing information, advice and guidance. Watts (2005) suggests there is a need for “continuation of healthy dialogue between those concerned with business modernisation and those concerned with professional standards.”<sup>6</sup>
- From the perspective of those providing services, **resource allocation** remains a problem, especially for supporting clients who are hard to reach. There is more work to be done in developing effective approaches and strategies for identifying, monitoring and making provision for *More Choices, More Chances* groups before and after leaving school (Spielhofer *et al.*, 2006).
- Studies of learner (or prospective learner) perspectives, including Granville and Campbell-Jack (2007) and Accent Scotland (2007), identify learners’ personal financial concerns or their confusion about, for example, loss of benefits or transport costs, as important barriers to employment and further education and training. **Clearer information and/or personal support appears necessary.**
- Challenges persist in the **relationships** between Careers Scotland and other guidance providers and in the need to work in tandem with the Department for Work and Pensions (Career Service Review, 2001; Howieson and Semple, 2006).

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<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, p.38

## *General themes and issues relating to information, advice and guidance*

- Tension between ensuring a careers service which is consistently delivered throughout Scotland, and retaining sufficient local flexibility to support individuals' needs, making use of a range of appropriate support services where necessary
- The need for proactivity in identifying clients who may be hard to reach
- The complexity of barriers to employment.

## **2.2 Skills interventions**

The documents in this section fall into two broad groups:

- A number centred on programmes designed to prepare participants with skills for the workplace, including evaluations of Get Ready for Work (Smart Consultancy and Eddy Adams Consultants, 2006a; 2006b), Skills for Work (Spielhofer and Walker, 2008), Modern Apprenticeships and Skillseekers (Cambridge Policy Consultants, 2006); and Individual Learning Accounts (Gallacher *et al.*, 2007; BMRB Social Research, 2008). This group also includes a review of the complex field of employment related education and skills programmes funded through the Department for Work and Pensions, the Scottish Executive, Scottish Enterprise National / Highlands and Islands Enterprise, the Scottish Funding Council and the European Social Fund (York Consulting, 2007b); and a policy statement (Scottish Government, 2008) on training for work from the Working Together Group, which includes representatives from SDS, Jobcentre Plus and the Scottish Government Workforce Plus team;
- Others centred on programmes for literacy, numeracy and Community Learning and Development (CLD).

### *What, according to the findings of these reports, is working well?*

In the studies relating to preparation for the workplace, positive outcomes were reported for all programmes. In particular,

- Skills for Work was seen to be **raising the status of vocational learning** and strengthening school pupils' attitudes and skills relevant to employment, motivation to learn and ability to work with adults (Spielhofer *et al.*, 2008);
- Skillseekers and Modern Apprenticeships were **highly regarded by both trainees and participating employers** (Cambridge Policy Consultants, 2006); and
- Individual Learning Accounts were being welcomed by participants and other stakeholders as **opportunities to gain qualifications, skills and knowledge and to help find employment or change of career** (Gallacher *et al.*, 2007; BMRB, 2008).

In the studies relating to literacy, numeracy and CLD:

- Students participating in literacy and numeracy provision report that the learning and teaching that they experience are of **high quality** with an over 90% satisfaction rate in respect of the learning environment, the quality of the tuition, and the social environment reported by Tett *et al.* (2006). Real progress was also reported by students in their **skills development** as a result of help from ALN Partnerships (Progressive, 2008).

- Learners and practitioners report that **increased self-confidence and skills** are the most common outcome of participation and lead to positive changes in personal, family, education and working lives.
- The **generic success factors** identified by practitioners, particularly those working with young people (Hall *et al.*, 2008), were: providing an accurate assessment of learners' needs; developing trusting personal relationships; regular monitoring of the small steps of individual progress.

### *Where is there scope for improvement?*

In the studies relating to preparation for the workplace:

- The evaluation of the Skills for Work pilot (Spielhofer and Walker, 2008) revealed a **need for closer partnerships between schools and colleges**, particularly with regard to selection of students, making links between Skills for Work courses and the rest of the curriculum and on quality assurance and improvement.
- Smart Consultancy and Eddy Adams Consultants (2006a; 2006b) note tensions around whether Get Ready for Work is a **supply or demand side intervention**, and whether it is an appropriate programme for those, particularly young people with additional support needs, who are unlikely to achieve rapid entry to the labour market.
- Cambridge Policy Consultants (2006) found that many stakeholders in Skillseekers and Modern Apprenticeships were confused over the roles and responsibilities of the organisations involved - Scottish Enterprise, Careers Scotland and the Sector Skills Councils - pointing to a **need for more joined-up working and better communication**.
- The **highly gendered nature of participation, and the under-representation of ethnic minority groups and disabled people**, in Skillseekers and Modern Apprenticeships give cause for concern (Cambridge Policy Consultants, 2006).
- **Changes** to the Individual Learning Accounts programme, including the forthcoming withdrawal of the ILA100 scheme (which attracted predominantly full-time workers) make it harder to assess its impact in terms of widening participation in adult learning and encouraging individuals to invest in their own learning. **(MR TO INSERT SOURCE)**
- Gallacher *et al.* (2007) draw attention to the **need to ensure that the ILA scheme addresses the needs of learners** with disabilities, mental health needs, learning difficulties and English language needs, and also highlight confusion about bureaucratic application procedures.
- The paper from the Scottish Government Working Together Group (2008) demonstrates the **challenges of trying to adapt the Training for Work programme** both to fit the needs of Scottish Government policy and also to fit in with the UK-wide Job Centre Plus programme.

In the studies relating to literacy, numeracy and CLD:

- There is **insufficient guidance and support to enable participants to progress** on to further learning and few clear pathways from CLD provision into more formal opportunities (CLD, 2006; Tett *et al.*, 2006).
- There are **few opportunities available for developing the capacity of the workforce** especially the volunteer tutors and part-time staff (Tett *et al.*, 2006; York Consulting, 2006b).

- Few providers have robust management information systems in place so it is **difficult to track participants over time** in order to assess change in skills, knowledge and understanding (York Consulting, 2006b).
- There is little knowledge of effective **strategies for attracting ‘hard to reach’ learners** (Hall *et al.*, 2006; York Consulting, 2006b) and there appears to be little communication about effective strategies between providers.

### *General themes and issues relating to skills interventions*

- Coverage and inclusiveness of programmes, particularly in attracting ‘hard to reach’ learners or learners with disabilities and learning difficulties
- The need to maintain national standards, and yet to leave room for local flexibility - both to reflect the local economy and labour market, and to meet the needs of individual clients
- Tensions between supply and demand perspectives
- The difficulties of maintaining an appropriate balance between stability and improvement of programmes: stable programmes are more understood by all stakeholders, but changes and adjustments may be necessary to improve them
- Tensions between encouraging maximum participation and demonstrating value for public money
- In general, the evaluations present a fragmented picture, and there is no overview of all options open to learners. There are gaps in the evaluation of learner needs, and learners’ views are not always included
- There is little comparative analysis, information on non-participants in programmes, or longitudinal tracking.

## **2.3 Employer Engagement**

The documents in this sub-section can be split into two main areas: reports that examine attempts made in schools to develop vocational learning; and reports which examine attitudes of employers and attempts at encouraging employers to train their workforce.

### *What, according to the findings of these reports, is working well?*

- There is some evidence from *Improving Enterprise in Education* (HMIE, 2008) that some **pupils are benefiting from more vocationally oriented courses**. However, this study lacks quantitative evidence and contextual information to back up the claims.
- The evaluation of Business Learning Account (BLA) pilots (Hirst *et al.*, 2006) showed positive outcomes especially in relation to **the role of the local delivery agent and the flexible learning opportunities** provided.
- In their literature review on attitudes to vocational learning, Edward *et al.* (2008) noted that some pupils **benefited from more vocationally oriented courses and also from an opportunity to change their place of learning from school to college**. However, the goal of parity of esteem between vocational and academic programmes

appeared very difficult to achieve. Higher achieving children, generally from more socially advantaged backgrounds, tended to opt for predominantly academic programmes of study.

- The SME survey, *Enterprise in Education* (TNS System Three, 2005) noted a generally **positive attitude to providing work experience for pupils** and there seemed to be evidence to suggest that businesses not already involved may be willing to become involved.
- The use of the same survey by *Skills in Scotland 2006* (Futureskills Scotland, 2007) over a period of time allows for **tracking of trends** and it also **identifies skills that are currently in demand by employers**.

### *Where is there scope for improvement?*

- **Establishing baseline measures** against which the impact of a particular strategy can be measured has often been neglected, so that outcomes of the particular intervention are uncertain (York Consulting, 2007a; Hirst *et al.*, 2006). In addition, there is a general problem in teasing out which of a range of initiatives is having the strongest effect (York Consulting, 2007a; HMIE, 2008). Furthermore, developing an appropriate measure with which to gauge impact of an initiative can be problematic (York Consulting, 2007a).
- Often, evaluations provide a snapshot of activity at a particular time, without a follow up, and so **lack a longitudinal perspective**.
- There have been **challenges in engaging with ‘hard to reach’ businesses**, in the context of the evaluation of BLA pilots (Hirst *et al.*, 2006) it referred to those companies that traditionally did not engage in training their workforce in order to improve their workforce development. However, the assumption that training is going to improve business has not been systematically tested, and there is some evidence (Green, 2005) that learning at work may be more effective for some groups and in some contexts.
- Whilst there is evidence from *Determined to Succeed, Phase 2* (York Consulting, 2007a) evaluation and HMIE (2008) reports of the benefits of vocational learning, the evidence presented is relatively weak and decontextualised. There is **little evidence from any of the reports that vocational learning is gaining parity of esteem** with academic learning.
- Pressures of achieving targets (related to performance culture) tend to lead to the **exclusion of hard to reach groups**. In some cases, such as the Business Learning Accounts pilot (Hirst *et al.*, 2006), the pilot was aimed at this group but failed to reach them.
- The reports that evaluated enterprise in education based on what happened in schools did **not include the employer perspective** (HMIE, 2008; York Consulting, 2007a).
- The case study report (Futureskills Scotland, 2005) examining employers’ views of school leavers’ preparedness for work identifies **a lack of understanding of work and a lack of core skills as problematic areas**.

### *General themes and issues relating to employer engagement*

- Setting target numbers and the pressures to reach these targets tend to lead to hard to reach groups being excluded from some initiatives.

- The lack of contextualisation in the reports in relation to macro factors and specific contexts, such as the geographical area within which a school or workplace is situated, makes it difficult to know whether a particular measure is limited to a particular location or when certain labour market conditions are having an impact.
- Uptake of vocational learning has been fairly limited and there is evidence that more academic children avoid vocational courses.
- Links between schools and employers are limited mainly to engagement with work experience placements.
- School leavers entering the workplace without further education or training are less well prepared for work, in terms of their attitudes towards work and the workplace, than those who have continued in further training or education and then entered the labour market.
- Where skills have been identified as lacking these are mainly in relation to the ‘soft skills’ of communication and self-confidence.

## SECTION THREE      OVERARCHING THEMES

In this section seven themes are explored in order to provide an overview of the evidence base that has been examined. In order to do this, the authors have drawn on both the source documents provided by Scottish Government and SDS and on their own knowledge of the policy fields.

### 3.1      The cluttered landscape of initiatives

The documents reviewed cover a relatively limited range of national initiatives, rather than providing a comprehensive listing of schemes and routes designed to help clients upgrade their skills and enter employment. They clearly demonstrate, however, how difficult it is for individuals and employers to discover and consider all the options open to them.

The attempt by York Consulting (2007b) to review employment related education and skills programmes demonstrates the complexity of programmes. Although this review was commissioned to establish whether provision was cost-effective, sufficiently flexible and adequately funded, rather than to consider the users' or employers' perspectives on the plethora of programmes, the authors note that:

*The large numbers of economically inactive who do not access mainstream support suggest that there may be a significant number of people who face barriers to accessing programmes, although ... this could be due to reasons around the design of programmes rather than funding per se.<sup>7</sup>*

Arrangements for funding learning add an additional layer of potential confusion, as Granville and Campbell-Jack's (2007) evaluation of methods of disseminating information about this demonstrates. Their focus groups with potential learners identified some important barriers to learning, including lack of a central, transparent source of information, advice and guidance; confusion over fragmented and alternative sources of information; concern over loss of other benefits; previous bad advice on available funding; and red tape and a fear of officialdom. Instead these prospective learners wanted a clear channel or point of access for information, preferably face-to-face; more proactivity on the part of providers; a telephone helpline and a publicity campaign to raise awareness of advice on funding.

If learners and prospective trainees are confused by the choices, there is also some evidence that employers may be confused too. The evaluation of Modern Apprenticeships and Skillseekers (Cambridge Policy Consultants, 2006) found that 30% of non-participating employers had not even heard of Modern Apprenticeships, and that typically organisations participated in only one programme, despite potential synergies if they participated in several.

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<sup>7</sup> York Consulting (2007b) Review of employment-related educations and skills programmes: phase one and two. (Unpublished – ongoing policy review) p.81.

### **3.2 Coordinating the delivery of services**

The cluttered landscape of initiatives is one aspect of the need for more cohesive structures, as signalled in *Skills for Scotland*. The creation of SDS is itself an expression of this policy commitment. SDS is expected to exploit synergies among the skills functions which it brings together, and to provide better coordinated, more streamlined services to individuals and employers.

It has positive precedents on which to build. Careers Scotland is praised (Watts, 2005) for bringing together its services for adults and young people, and in the Highlands and Islands area it has gained experience in linking with economic development functions. However, the documents reveal continuing concerns about links with other providers of information, advice and guidance, and about the extent to which different guidance professionals share common values, perceptions and priorities. And they reveal similar concerns about the extent to which different training programmes have clear and complementary missions, so that they together provide a comprehensive and coherent range of opportunities to meet client needs.

There are different dimensions to this problem. One issue raised in several of the documents, including Howieson and Semple (2006) and Smart Consultancy and Eddy Adams Consultants (2006a; 2006b), concerns the balance between national standards and local flexibility. National standards may underpin transparency, equity, accountability and consistency, and provide a better basis for coordinating with other national services; local flexibility allows providers to tailor services to meet local and individual needs, and it may facilitate partnership working. The documents suggest that this balance may vary across different types of service, with the arguments for flexibility typically strongest in the services which cater for the least advantaged young people and adults.

A second issue concerns the coordination of services provided by SDS with those provided by other organisations, such as other guidance and support services and especially the DWP and Jobcentre Plus. The priorities of the Scottish Government differ in important respects from those of the UK government, and it is therefore a challenge to coordinate the services of bodies which have Scottish, GB and UK remits. Improved coordination will be particularly important in the light of the proposed reform of Incapacity Benefit (DWP, 2008) that suggests that both Jobcentre Plus and Scottish agencies should be providing a range of training programmes to enable everyone to engage actively in seeking employment.

### **3.3 Tensions between meeting labour market needs and the needs of individuals**

A recurrent theme in the documents relating to information, advice and guidance and in evaluations of initiatives is the tension between demand and supply perspectives. Is the paramount consideration to meet the current needs of the Scottish labour market, or to equip individuals with the skills and training opportunities which will enable them to follow the careers of their choice? Professionals trained in client-centred approaches in the careers service appear to tend towards the latter approach, while others may be more concerned with achieving short-term labour market outcomes, especially if the initiative is under pressure to demonstrate outcomes that are “value for money”. There are references to tensions between professional groups and lack of clarity about their roles and purposes in several reports, including the Get Ready for Work evaluations and the DTZ (2008) document, *Demonstrating Impact*. Howieson and Semple (2006) also draw attention to the pressure to justify Careers



Scotland activities in terms of their contribution to the economy; to the diversity of backgrounds and training of those offering guidance in organisations other than Careers Scotland; and to the widening gap between the professional discipline of careers guidance in Scotland and in other parts of the UK. Maintaining – and ensuring continuing debate about – standards of professionalism about information, advice and guidance are complicated by these circumstances.

Do the documents reviewed provide sufficient evidence that the needs of individuals are being met by the Scottish system, both in terms of advice and guidance and in terms of training opportunities? Despite the positive findings of many of the evaluations of individual initiatives, including raising the status of vocational learning through the Skills for Work programme and the opportunity to gain qualifications, employment and career change through Individual Learning Accounts, we cannot be sure. In some cases, it is simply too soon to tell. The evaluation of Skills for Work (Spielhofer and Walker, 2008), for example, makes excellent use of qualitative data collected from participants to analyse the impact of the pilot on these young people, but the full value of the opportunities they have been given and the impact on their future careers (and ultimately, the Scottish economy) will only become clear over the next five to ten years, as they complete their schooling and further or higher education and take their places in the workforce. In other cases, there is a dearth of participants' views, or an understandable emphasis on the intended outcomes of the programme, rather than the hopes and intentions of the participants. The views of those who chose not to participate might also have been more fully exploited as a means of shedding light on the value of the programmes.

### **3.4 Skills development, social inclusion and equality**

The Scottish Government wishes to promote equity as well as efficiency in the labour market, and it is recognised that whilst Scotland has a high employment rate overall, with participation at almost 80% of the working age population, this varies greatly by geographical region and social group. For example, whilst unemployment rates overall have dropped, the number of men who are economically inactive has risen and economic inactivity is now four times higher than it was in the 1970s (Faggio, 2006). This is mainly because Incapacity Benefit claimants, the majority of whom are older men in areas of industrial decline, are often wary about participating in employment-focused programmes for fear of jeopardising their existing benefits package. For school leavers the recent OECD report on school education in Scotland (OECD, 2007) drew attention to low levels of participation in post-school vocational training, higher education and the labour market in areas where poverty is concentrated. Raising the level of skills right across the Scottish population is therefore a means of increasing social cohesion and driving forward the economy. The Futureskills Scotland surveys reported considerable differences between sectors in relation to skills gaps, opportunities for training and access to training. A further need may therefore be to target those with the lowest skills and limited training opportunities in specific sectors of industry.

A criticism which has been levelled at employment and training programmes provided by both GB and Scottish agencies is that they have primarily been concerned with moving people into work, and have paid less attention to the quality of jobs obtained (Roulstone and Barnes, 2005). In addition, they have tended to measure the success of programmes for individuals shortly after the end of the course, and have been much less concerned with the long-term sustainability of employment. There is now a far greater focus on skills

development and job sustainability, so that people do not get caught in a revolving door of a training programme followed by a low paid and insecure entry level job, followed by further training or economic inactivity.

Increasingly stringent equality legislation also has implications for skills development programmes. The public sector duties, which relate to gender, disability and race, place a duty on organisations to demonstrate that they are making progress towards greater equality. In relation to disability, it is clear from the reports reviewed (see, for example, Cambridge Policy Consultants, 2006), that bodies such as Scottish Enterprise and Highland and Islands Enterprise have very low participation rates of disabled people on their training programmes, and, in line with legislative requirements, they are committed to improving their performance in this area. Similarly, Edward *et al.* (2008) highlighted very low participation rates of young women on the Modern Apprenticeship programmes, where there are at least four times as many young men. There is a legal requirement on the responsible public sector bodies to demonstrate year-on-year improvements in their Gender Equality Annual Reports. Although it is clearly difficult to encourage young men and women into non-traditional areas of work for their gender, it is important to encourage providers to continue to send out positive messages, such as underlining opportunities for boys in the care sector and for girls in trades such as plumbing.

Overall, the economic and social imperatives driving these programmes are difficult to reconcile. There is a suggestion in some of the reports reviewed (York Consulting, 2005; Smart Consultancy and Eddy Adams Consultants, 2006a, 2006b) that young people with additional support needs are perhaps not best served by participation in the Skillseekers programmes, and that the Lifeskills and Get Ready for Work programmes should be located within a social development rather than an employment and skills development framework. However, Scottish Government strategies for groups such as people with learning disabilities and mental health difficulties, the hardest groups to include in the labour market, advocate the use of mainstream rather than special training programmes wherever possible. This clearly results in difficulties for programme providers, who are simultaneously trying to make their programmes inclusive, whilst at the same time seeking to achieve improved outcomes, almost always measured in terms of entry to employment and further education or training, rather than distance travelled. Whilst these tensions are not easily resolved, it is important that they are at least explicitly recognised by Scottish Government and Skills Development Scotland. There is a danger that funding incentives may encourage training providers to engage in covert selection of candidates closest to the labour market, whilst those at a greater distance experience a cooling out process.

### **3.5 Skills utilisation and demand**

Most of the documents reviewed above were either published under previous administrations or refer to the programmes and policies of previous administrations. While there has been substantial continuity in many aspects of policy and delivery there have been important changes in emphasis. One of these changes is an increased focus on skills utilisation and demand, and it is perhaps not surprising that this issue receives little attention in the documents reviewed, most of which reflect earlier policy priorities. A partial exception is *Skills in Scotland 2006* (Futureskills Scotland, 2007). The overwhelming emphasis of service provision described in these documents (e.g. Cambridge Policy Consultants, 2006; Spielhofer and Walker, 2008; York Consulting, 2007a) is on the supply and acquisition of skills, not on

the demand for skills or their utilisation. Some of the documents discuss tensions between supply and demand, for example in relation to Modern Apprenticeships, Get Ready for Work and other training programmes (see above). However the issue in these cases is the provision of skills to meet existing demands, not on considering how these demands might be stimulated, nor on encouraging the better utilisation of skills when they have been acquired. This imbalance is most conspicuous in the documents relating to employer engagement, which deal primarily with the supply of skills to the labour market and measures by which schools can enhance that supply, secondarily with efforts to stimulate investment in skills by employers, and hardly at all with measures to support employers to improve their utilisation of skills or raise the level or quality of skills that they demand. To the extent that this sample of documents is a fair indication of the activities and concerns of the fore-runners of SDS, we conclude that an urgent challenge for the new organisation is to develop a strategy for promoting skill utilisation and demand, working especially (but not only) with employers.

### 3.6 Parity of esteem

In its Lifelong Skills Strategy, the Scottish Government states its commitment to:

*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.*<sup>8</sup>

The Skills for Work programme is one of the initiatives aimed at the development of vocational skills amongst school-aged pupils. It is deliberately targeted at pupils across the ability range, not just those who are less academically able. Howieson and Raffe (2007) note that, whilst Skills for Work appears to have recruited more high-attaining young people than anticipated, parity of esteem has not been achieved and recruits to Skills for Work have been concentrated in the middle and lower-part of the attainment range, rather than proportionately across the whole age range. Spielhofer and Walker (2008) also note that there is:

*Some evidence that higher ability students were less likely to choose SfW courses if it meant replacing a Standard Grade – this was both a result of school and parental pressures and expectations to achieve eight Standard Grades...The alternative approach of expecting students to complete a SfW course on top of their eight Standard Grades further strengthens the perception that they are not equivalent, and that they are just of additional, rather than equal, value.*<sup>9</sup>

Since there is a very strong association between attainment and social class, this suggests that middle class children, with encouragement from their parents, are tending to focus on obtaining eight Standard grades in academic subjects, with a vocational subject as an optional extra. These parents are likely to be driven by economic rationalism in encouraging their children to focus on the attainment of high grades in academic subjects, since these are still the passport to the most prestigious courses and universities, and parents are well aware of the graduate earning premium which still accrues. If a greater degree of parity of esteem is to

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<sup>8</sup> Scottish Government (2007b) *Skills for Scotland*, p. 5

<sup>9</sup> Spielhofer, T. and Walker, M. (2008) *Evaluation of Skills for Work pilot courses*. Edinburgh: Scottish Government, p.89.

be accorded to academic and vocational qualifications, then an information and awareness raising campaign needs to be targeted at young people and parents pointing out the benefits of vocational routes. Vocational pathways which already have high status, such as some Modern Apprenticeships, have a role to play here. This campaign needs to be underpinned by research, investigating the economic premia attached to degree courses from different universities and in different subject areas, and to courses undertaken in further education colleges and other locations. The social benefits of different types of learning should, of course, also be recognised. The dissemination of findings from such research might lead to a better understanding of the different economic and social benefits of different types of courses undertaken in diverse institutions and settings.

### **3.7 Gaps in the evidence base**

Most of the evaluation reports reviewed for this study have commented on the limitations of the available data. Many have used monitoring data, but these have typically been programme-specific, have provided no information on non-participants and often limited information on the views of participants mostly derived from structured questionnaires. This means that the findings are limited in four respects:

- Firstly the absence of more in-depth, qualitative data on the views of participants, potential participants or stakeholders has meant that the evaluations only provide a partial picture of the impact of particular initiatives on those that are most effected by them.
- Secondly it has not been possible to compare the outcomes of policy change or new initiatives due to the absence of baseline data.
- Thirdly there has often been little longitudinal information about the subsequent outcomes or destinations of participants, or the information available has covered too short a time period and has often been based on the pilot stage of initiatives.
- Finally there has been little comparative evidence of the impact of different pedagogies, curricula and programme designs on the learning of participants in the different programmes and this would also require in depth, qualitative work.

As a result, the documents reviewed contain few rigorous analyses of the impact of interventions on skill acquisition, labour market destinations or other outcomes. Where they have attempted to measure programme 'effects', or to assess costs per outcome or qualification achieved, the methodology has sometimes been questionable. Moreover, insufficient attention has sometimes been given to clarifying terms, for example, what is meant by the term 'enterprise in education'. Keep *et al.* (2006) highlight the difficulties in evaluating initiatives in such circumstances.

This review has focused on evaluation reports and policy documents, rather than on their source data bases, so we cannot make confident recommendations about the action required. However, our review points to a need for both more in-depth qualitative studies of the impact of programmes on their target audience and better regular data sources that are not programme-specific and which therefore provide baseline data as well as information on non-participants. In particular, we suggest there is a need for better data to support an overview of the different pathways followed by young people at the end of compulsory education, with details of the backgrounds and characteristics of young people following each pathway and of the destinations to which they lead.

## SECTION FOUR                    KEY MESSAGES FROM THE REVIEW

We can identify seven key messages for SDS and the Scottish Government from this review.

First, it is important to **build on the strengths of existing programmes and initiatives** that have been evaluated as working effectively. These include programmes that have enabled ‘at risk’ groups, such as school leavers with few educational qualifications or adults with limited literacy, to increase their self-confidence and skills and programmes designed to prepare participants with skills for the workplace, particularly Skillseekers and Modern Apprenticeships. In general, current programmes do give policy levers to the Scottish Government to provide some of the necessary skills for employment and thus have an impact on the supply side of the employment equation.

However, these programmes remain largely focused on the supply side. They do not typically aim to stimulate demand for skills from employers or to improve the utilisation of skills in the workplace and elsewhere. A second message is the **need for a strategy to reflect the new policy emphasis on utilisation of, and demand for, skills.**

A third message is the **need to clarify priorities among the individual, social and economic imperatives driving the services and programmes of SDS.**

A fourth, related message is that **programmes should engage with ‘at risk’ groups and ‘hard to reach’ employers.** Some programmes do this successfully but others fail to proactively include these groups partly because the evaluation of programme outcomes on the basis of numbers, diverts attention from the more resource-intensive needs of clients who require extra support. There is also a need to focus on those who are not in employment, particularly those on ‘incapacity benefit’, who are not included in the currently available programmes.

Fifth, SDS brings a range of formerly separate organisations together and so is in a good position to **develop a more coordinated and transparent range of services for individuals and employers.** This will address the problem reported by potential participants and employers of difficulties in engaging with the variety of programmes and understanding the roles and responsibilities of different organisations. SDS will also need to develop more effective links with other guidance and support services, especially the DWP and Jobcentre Plus.

Sixth, we suggest that the goal of precise parity of esteem between academic and vocational learning may be misguided, since this is a competition which academic qualifications are always likely to win. However, an important task for SDS is to **collect and disseminate information on the different types of benefits that flow from different learning pathways, including their labour market returns.**

Finally, SDS and the Scottish Government will need to **address gaps in the evidence base,** in particular the need for both in-depth qualitative studies of the impact of programmes and regular data sources that are not programme-specific and which therefore provide baseline data as well as information on non-participants, and for data on the pathways followed by young people beyond compulsory education.

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