

Cross-Party Group on Skills

Monday, 23 May 2022 (1000-1100)

Minute

Present

MSPs

Pam Gosal MSP
Stephen Kerr MSP
Michael Marra MSP
Kaukab Stewart MSP
Clare Adamson MSP

Invited guests

Professor Naeem Ramzan, University of the West of Scotland
Jennifer Tempany, Forth Valley College
Aileen Hamilton, SSERC

Non-MSP Group Members

Joanne Buchan, Colleges Scotland
Tom Hall, Colleges Scotland
Susannah Lane, Universities Scotland
Aimee Logan, Universities Scotland
Geoff Campbell, Nithcree Training
Lauren Pennycook, CITB
Robert Bruce, Enginuity
Alison McLure, Institute of Physics
Anne Galbraith, SECTT
Chic Brodie, Caledonian Strategy (Scotland) Ltd
Simon Williams, NHS Education for Scotland
Jim Metcalfe, College Development Network
Sarah Hillyear, Robert Gordon University
Nathan Tyler, West College Scotland
Wendy Burton, STUC
Dr Liz Barron Majerik, Lantra Scotland
Keith Robson, Open University
Stuart McDowall, City of Glasgow College
Stuart McKenna, Scottish Training Federation
Aileen Ponton, SCQF Partnership
Derek Young, Institute of Physics

Apologies

Andy Witty, Colleges Scotland
Ian Rogers, Scottish Decorators
Kirsty Conlon, Universities Scotland
Olivia Carson, CIPD
Kerri Haynes, SSERC
Donella Beaton, Robert Gordon University
William Hardie, Robert Gordon University
Ishabel Bremner, EDAS
Christine Powell, Essentials Plus
Shona Matthews, Chartered Banker Institute
Paul Little, City of Glasgow College
Rachel Cook, Federation of Small Businesses
Ian McCulloch, ITC Training Academy
Alison McLure, Institute of Physics

Welcome and Apologies

The group's Convener, Pam Gosal MSP, opened the meeting. Apologies were also noted.

Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 25 March 2022 were approved.

Presentations

The topic for the meeting was STEM and presentations were heard from:

Professor Naeem Ramzan, University of the West of Scotland
Jennifer Tempany, Forth Valley College
Aileen Hamilton, SSERC.

Discussion

Professor Naeem Ramzan provided an overview of Knowledge Exchange Partnerships (KTPs) that the University of the West of Scotland (UWS) has been taking forward in STEM areas. It was noted that UWS is the top ranked institution for KTPs in Scotland and ranked top five in the UK. Professor Ramzan stated that the majority of companies they are working with are small and medium sized enterprises to collaborate on finding solutions to problems the businesses have.

Professor Ramzan said that the benefits of KTPs were that companies were seeing their annual profits increase, jobs created, and staff trained, with 90% improved business performance. For the university, KPTs produce three new research projects and two research papers.

Examples of KTPs include working in the area of artificial intelligence projects with companies such as Code Play, Lumen and Modo.

Jennifer Tempany gave a presentation on Fuel Change – a social enterprise which aims to inspire and upskills the next generation to tackle climate change. The 16-week programme sets young people with a challenge set by industry to develop and ideas and innovative outputs to solve the problem. She said that the programme is not about creating climate experts but about developing skills including meta skills.

Jennifer noted that since its launch in 2020, there has been over 700 participants, over 70 organisations (large and small) and over 90 mentors. She said that phase two is being launched in August 2022 which will include an accredited unit at SCQF Level 6, which equates to 90 hours of learning, and an option to undertake a project unit, offering all schools 32 hours of core learning for S1-S4 with resources for teachers and lecturers to use themselves. The benefits were noted as supporting schools and colleges with sustainability outcomes, the availability off-the-shelf resources, as well as finding the next generation of talent.

Aileen Hamilton highlighted the work that SSERC do including the provision of professional learning and advisory services as well as STEM engagement and specifically STEM Ambassadors. They work across the whole of the UK with employers and with agencies such as Skills Development Scotland, Education Scotland and Developing the Young Workforce to maximise employer engagement.

Aileen said that there are currently 37,000 STEM Ambassadors across the UK with 5,000 in Scotland. The ambassadors are aged 17 and over – from students to those on a career break, retired individuals, and people with a passion for STEM. Aileen noted that their three STEM hubs were merged into one in April 2021 which has allowed them to ensure consistency of their offer. The ambassadors connect with practitioners to undertake activities with schools and participate in various STEM weeks throughout the year, with over 300 volunteering recorded for Maths week in Scotland. In 2021/22 20 thousand volunteering hours were recorded with around 640 primary schools and 270 secondary schools.

A question and answer followed. Stuart McDowall asked what the biggest areas of demand for STEM to which Professor Ramzan stated that in KTPs it is artificial intelligence and machine learning, and how companies can automate based on the data they have.

Following on from that, Stephen Kerr MSP asked how much collaboration is already going on with the National Manufacturing Institute and also if there are any plans for schools to engage in the upcoming rocket launch in Scotland. Jennifer Tempany stated that the college sector is very well connected through the work of ESP across the sector, and are working on a number of projects. Aileen Hamilton noted that SSERC is already promoting space events and highlighted the Space Supplies Summit coming to Glasgow to encourage companies to focus their business in this growing market and upskill the workforce, and STEM Ambassadors will be involved in this and said it will be engaging with schools on this.

Pam Gosal MSP asked how we encourage businesses to engage in these big events. Professor Ramzan noted that UWS holds regular business gatherings and is able to promote these.

Close

With no other business to conduct, the meeting was brought to a close. It was noted that the next meeting would be held after the summer recess.