



## TERTIARY EDUCATION FUTURES

### ROUNDTABLE 3: BROADER PROVIDERS

**Date & Time:** Wednesday 30 June 2021, 15:30 to 17:00

**Co-Chairs:** Professor Anne Anderson FRSE & Dr Sandro Carnicelli (Young Academy of Scotland)

#### *The role of non-traditional providers within the tertiary sector*

- For context, a representative from the Scottish Credit Qualifications Framework (SCQF) spoke to the wide range of qualifications that exist in Scotland but which are not necessarily widely known nor often considered in conversations about tertiary education. For example, SCQF recognises **1,100 programmes outwith university degree programmes and Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) qualifications**, ranging from those offered by the police service to city guilds to employers to Microsoft and beyond. This pool of qualifications is **growing on a month-by-month basis**, with work currently underway to recognise veterans' and asylum seekers' qualifications, as one example. Additionally, 93% of qualifications at SCQF level 6 are not Highers and 23% at level 11 are not degree programmes.
- Participants were asked whether they fall under the definition of "tertiary education" and to give brief accounts of their specific educational offerings. There was broad agreement that **traditional definitions of tertiary education are too restrictive**. Some preferred not to use the term at all and instead believed their offerings are more in line with the concept of lifelong learning, given the rate of change characterising their particular sector which necessitates near constant upskilling (e.g. the "greening" of certain industries).
- The providers discussed **the respective motivations** of their learners. For example, within the military, education is closely tied to pay and promotion; meanwhile, there can be considerable resistance to education within prison settings, at least initially. Within industry, access to continuing training and education can either be voluntary or a requisite of the job. **Non-traditional providers can succeed at reaching individuals that have not thrived in more conventional educational settings**. For example, some individuals benefit from the structured environment of the military and are then able to apply this discipline to their studies. Similarly, the prison service education system first endeavours to build up individuals' self-worth and confidence so they are more likely to regard education as a viable option for them and be better positioned to benefit from it.
- There was a view that the **role and function of colleges has become so expansive that they in some cases straddle the boundary between traditional and non-traditional providers** with their emphasis on upskilling, reskilling, transition training, and other priorities.

#### *Strengths of non-traditional providers*

- The traditional **timelines** that tertiary education tends to follow (e.g. completing a module or degree over the course of several months or years) are **increasingly at odds with the**

**rapid pace of change** that has come to characterise many sectors. Both employers and employees are wanting more flexible provision, work-based training, and **microcredentials**. While the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) report made mention of microcredentials, there is more work to be done in Scotland in establishing the appropriate funding and regulatory structures to make them a successful complement to traditional tertiary pathways. SCQF has examined the role of colleges as key enablers in this transformation.<sup>1</sup>

- There was discussion around the growing importance of **competencies** as a measure of employee capability. Competencies are a more complex combination of knowledge, skills, and behaviours. Professional qualifications and certifications, offered by professional bodies and associations, are becoming an increasingly valued means of demonstrating competencies. These can range from mastery of a specific software right up through to chartered status among certain professions. There was also reference to **moving beyond just assuring competence to striving towards excellence** in order to drive up standards and make Scotland more competitive on an international stage. The SFC report somewhat echoed this point by mentioning the growing importance of world skills and aligning Scotland's skills with exemplary international benchmarks.
- **Non-traditional providers can have clearer and more established inroads into industry than universities and colleges**, which can in turn make their credentials more attractive to employers who value their currency and agility. For example, one representative from a global certification body for digital marketing shared that their organisation meets with leading global brands every six months to discuss and plan for skills and competency needs. This **direct involvement of industry in setting educational curricula and priorities was predicted to increase over the coming decades**. However, there remain challenges in involving small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and non-industry (e.g. public sector, third sector) perspectives in this type of skills planning as their relationships with education providers are perhaps less clear cut and they are also less able to articulate their future skills needs.

### *Lifelong learning*

- As was the case with the second roundtable (focusing on tertiary staff), there was **strong recognition of the role of lifelong learning** in meeting skills needs as well as empowering individuals. However, while a representative from Skills Development Scotland (SDS) described a clear appetite for lifelong learning across the nation, it is **unclear whether the necessary infrastructure is in place to allow for it to be fully realised**. This includes a lack of cohesion between the different segments of the system and a lack of – or in some cases, inappropriately directed - funding.
- There was acknowledgement that **informal lifelong learning** can often be dismissed or undervalued. However, it is likely to become more relevant as people live longer and retirement in the traditional sense becomes increasingly replaced by various forms of informal learning. There must be systems in place to account for this type of learning and ensure it is appropriately valued, particularly as potentially transferable skills. There can also be an inherent gendered or ageist element to this issue, with those hobbies and activities that are most often pursued by women and/or by older individuals not being seen as worthwhile forms of education or personal development. However, they are nonetheless important contributors to health and wellbeing, financial stability, reskilling, and other positive outcomes among these groups.

### *Collaboration*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://scqf.org.uk/media/eumcksg2/micro-credentials-report-final-190321.pdf>

- **There was resounding agreement that greater and more effective collaboration between industry, the tertiary sector, and other key players is crucial.** Not only would this ensure the tertiary sector is meeting the needs of industry in practice, it would also facilitate greater innovation to tackle challenges such as climate change and poverty. Successful collaboration allows for an exchange of knowledge, skills, and experience that is not possible when the flow of information and individuals is unidirectional (i.e. the tertiary sector provides industry with graduates without there being a feedback mechanism in place for industry to help influence this process and vice versa). As it stands, **restrictive funding streams can engender and perpetuate competition between different providers that should in theory be working towards common aims** (as an example, the Flexible Workforce Development Fund has ringfenced funding for colleges while other providers are unable to access this same funding).
- The **Michelin Scotland Innovation Parc (MSIP)**<sup>2</sup> was lauded as a good case study of successful partnership working between the tertiary sector, government, and industry in order to meet emerging skills needs and drive innovation. The project has involved the repurposing of a retired Michelin factory site in Dundee into a cutting-edge site for advanced manufacturing and technology geared towards addressing the climate emergency while contributing to the Scottish economy. One facet of this project is a Skills Academy that is jointly delivered by Dundee and Angus College, Abertay University, the University of Dundee, and the University of St Andrews.<sup>3</sup>
- There was discussion around the **important role of community learning and development partnerships** and how the provision of accessible, local lifelong learning opportunities can be used to address disadvantage and improve outcomes. They also highlight the importance of **intermediaries** (e.g. third sector organisations) in identifying education needs and gaps in different contexts and communicating these to wider tertiary providers.

### *Resourcing*

- Participants noted a **disconnect between the growing prominence of national initiatives around skills and the corresponding funding** that is available to them.
- It was suggested that, to date, Scotland has not taken full advantage of **foundation and graduate apprenticeships** – despite these schemes being highly beneficial to both the graduate and the employer. For example, apprenticeships are much more accessible to a wide range of the population than traditional degree programmes and can provide entry into many different professions. There could be **scope to revisit the allocation of apprenticeship funding in Scotland**, particularly in the context of how the UK apprenticeship levy is applied domestically. Within some sectors such as hospitality and tourism, there can be particularly little accessible funding for such apprenticeship opportunities.

### *Future trends*

- There could be potential to use **virtual/augmented reality** to provide safe yet realistic environments in which skills can be explored and developed. This could help make skills acquisition less location-specific and open up new modes of delivery.
- The need to **anticipate the trajectory of future skills demands – rather than playing catch up after said changes have become apparent** - was seen as critical. The energy efficiency sector was cited as a successful example of government working alongside industry and

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.dundee.ac.uk/stories/exciting-collaboration-underway-university-dundee-and-michelin-scotland-innovation-parc>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.scottishconstructionnow.com/article/in-pictures-first-look-at-msip-skills-academy-at-former-michelin-dundee-site>

education providers to identify likely skills needs from the outset of any policymaking. The Climate Emergency Skills Action Plan<sup>4</sup> was also referenced as a promising policy development that demonstrates this holistic and proactive approach to skills planning that might be replicated across other sectors experiencing significant and rapid transformation.

- **Adaptable and behaviour-centred meta-skills** such as innovative thinking and emotional intelligence will become increasingly vital and may in some cases begin to displace the value of “pre-packaged knowledge” (to use a participant’s phrasing) from an employer perspective.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/news-events/2020/december/new-plan-places-net-zero-skills-at-centre-of-economic-recovery/>