



TERTIARY EDUCATION FUTURES

ROUNDTABLES 4 + 5: COLLABORATION

Date & Time: Wednesday 1 December 2021, 10:30 to 12:00; Thursday 2 December 2021, 10:00 to 11:30

Co-Chairs: Professor Anne Anderson FRSE, Dr Sandro Carnicelli (Young Academy of Scotland) and Dr Alice König (Young Academy of Scotland)

Context:

Roundtable 4: Inter-institutional collaboration

The fourth roundtable, focusing on inter-institutional collaboration, took place on Wednesday, 1 December and was co-chaired by Anne Anderson and Sandro Carnicelli.

Key themes:

Question 1. Collaboration among tertiary education providers and broader stakeholders is generally accepted as being a good thing. Can participants help unpick the value of collaboration and, whether some forms of collaboration are more valuable than others?

- There was a general consensus that valuable collaboration is that which places the **needs of the user at the centre**.
 - o This includes **enabling smoother transitions** through:
 - o better advice and guidance (including that which encourages students to explore other, potentially more suitable institutions rather than focusing exclusively on institutional self-promotion; this also includes honouring articulation agreements where they exist but also offering more all-encompassing careers advice based on what is best for the learner);
 - o more effective curriculum mapping to aid articulation (looking to successes in fields such as engineering and digital media) and promote lateral as well as horizontal progression through the system; and
 - o sharing best practice around social and pastoral support.
 - o All of the above should include an element of **co-creation** with learners.
- As part of a learner-centred approach, **how do we stimulate as well as respond to demand** in order to encourage individuals to be lifelong learners that continually engage with the system?

- Future skills needs and delivery mechanisms (e.g. the rise of microcredentials) will increasingly necessitate new forms of collaboration

Question 2. What are the conditions and 'success' factors that underpin collaboration; and what are the barriers that hinder collaboration? How can barriers to collaboration be overcome?

- **Ingredients for successful collaboration** include:
 - o A clear purpose and/or objective
 - o Genuine commitment to the cause
 - o 'Classroom-based' rather than 'paper-based' collaboration (i.e. physically-based rather than just a theoretical partnership, such as when colleges do physical schools outreach)
 - o Regular communication and dedicated time
 - o Defined outcome agreements with a reliable mechanism for evaluation
 - o Scotland has particular strengths that naturally facilitate collaboration and is well-placed to build off of these, namely:
 - A single tertiary funding body
 - A generally successful approach to regional working and outcome agreements
 - A greater 'culture of collaboration' than the other UK nations
- **Potential barriers** include:
 - o The fact that collaboration is often seen as an 'add-on' (with its attendant resource and time implications) rather than mainstreamed across all system thinking
 - o Challenges to continuity due to funding constraints and the departure of collaboration 'champions'
 - o Lack of consensus on the appropriate scale of collaboration and a potential lack of sensitivity towards local contexts – should regional models always be scaled up or do they in fact function better when left in situ?
 - o The system remains unnecessarily cluttered and difficult to navigate, particularly at SCQF level 7; this makes it difficult to know who to approach and where collaboration would add value
 - o Still a question of how impact can and should be evaluated
 - o Funding often does not facilitate collaboration (still fosters competition for students and resources, rather than a "step on, step off" model)

Question 3. What are the respective roles of culture, structure, and leadership in supporting and sustaining collaboration?

- Leadership is important in initiating and sustaining commitment to collaboration; currently, we **still rely heavily on persuasive personalities to deliver collaboration** rather than having collaboration be integrated across all activities
- There is a need to overcome the **prevailing culture of competition** that stymies successful collaboration
- There remains a variable understanding of what **constitutes the tertiary system and how the different players interact** (for example, colleges do considerable work with schools, yet this facet of their remit is often underrecognised)

Question 4. Looking to the future, is there a need to improve and strengthen collaboration between tertiary education providers and broader stakeholders in Scotland; if so, in what ways, and how can this be supported, and by whom?

- Collaborators should be encouraged to regularly and effectively **exchange information**. This can foster a better understanding of what different institutions can offer, helping

- students to understand the pathway that is right for them, rather than adhering to the traditional “school to university” pathway that is often promoted by default
- We cannot expect leaders to be naturally adept at collaboration – as such, should we consider offering **collaborative leadership training** as a matter of course?
 - We often refer to collaboration as being “win-win” but there is a **need to be transparent about what each player potentially stands to lose** in collaborative arrangements
 - There is need for **better, more strategic engagement with industry** and reconciling collaboration with the **place-based agenda**
 - There is scope to re-examine the **funding model** to see how we can fund the whole of the education system to facilitate greater collaboration, not just focusing on 15-24 (example given of care industry, in which you get a certain allowance that can be put towards different services at the user’s discretion – how might a similar model work within education wherein the individual holds the financial leverage rather than the institutions?)

Context:

Roundtable 5: institutional-industry collaboration

The fifth roundtable, focusing on institutional-industry collaboration, took place on Wednesday, 2 December and was co-chaired by Anne Anderson and Alice König.

Key themes:

Question 1. Collaboration among tertiary education providers and broader stakeholders is generally accepted as being a good thing. Can participants help unpick the value of collaboration and, whether some forms of collaboration are more valuable than others?

- From a learner perspective, collaboration was seen as being useful in allowing them to develop **practical, cross-sectoral skills that will give them an advantage when it comes to entering the job market**
- Collaboration can also bridge the gap between industry needs and tertiary curricula, outputs, etc.
- It was argued that all collaboration should inherently be focused on addressing disadvantage, improving access to and participation in education, and providing societal benefit – as one participant put it, collaboration should be an “act of solidarity” with the local community that is sustained over the long term
 - o However, challenges in how to **reconcile these moral aims with the commercial and/or economic drivers that tend to prompt collaboration**
 - For example, universities/colleges may genuinely want to improve the prospects of those in their community (and, in doing so, benefit their own enrolment figures) but since these benefits are unlikely to become apparent in the short-term, it becomes more difficult for them to economically justify

Question 2. What are the conditions and ‘success’ factors that underpin collaboration; and what are the barriers that hinder collaboration? How can barriers to collaboration be overcome?

- **Ingredients for successful collaboration** include:
 - o Having a mission-based approach

- Being honest about the fact that participating bodies will expect to gain something from the arrangement and ensuring that benefits are reciprocal – collaboration will inevitably become difficult or impossible to achieve if partners do not gain some tangible benefit, even if these are secondary to the initial aims of the collaboration
- Democratic leadership, transparency, integrity, and honesty
- As one participant put it, collaborations succeed when they follow a “fiefdom” model and are self-contained
- **Potential barriers** include:
 - Industry representatives need to be the ‘right’ ones; for example, when businesses nominate sales managers to facilitate and sustain collaborations, this can engender feelings of mistrust among the other partners (i.e. they feel they are being “sold on an idea” or that the industry partner’s intentions are founded on self-interest)
 - Difficulties in forging links with SMEs – larger industries tend to dominate tertiary-industry partnerships
 - Institutions wanting to ‘look better in their own right’ and enhance their own performance or perceptions can be a disincentive
 - Collaborative thinking is not valued (e.g. when making hiring or promotion decisions)
 - This arguably originates in the school system, where individual results and performance form the ultimate marker of achievement
 - Can be difficult for collaborative thinking to trickle upwards due to ego and reticence to stray from the status quo
 - A cluttered tertiary landscape that makes it harder to know who to approach and where collaboration would add value
 - Collaboration can also run up against the learner’s best interests – in some cases, it is not in their best interests to keep funneling them through the system rather than indicating appropriate “stepping off” points; however, collaboration can serve to encourage learners to remain in the system longer than they otherwise would have
 - Risk-averse attitudes continue to prevail; this can be particularly detrimental when it comes to scaling up innovations

Question 3. What are the respective roles of culture, structure, and leadership in supporting and sustaining collaboration?

- It was observed that collaboration should not try to involve multiple parties for the sake of it – not every organisation will be equally well-placed or inclined to contribute and so it is more about **identifying the key, motivated players and ensuring those involved are seen as equal partners**, regardless of the institution or region’s size or population
- The tertiary sector could perhaps look to **replicate collaborative models** that exist in other sectors (e.g. school education)
 - As an example, some Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs) function very well in sharing best practice and delivering better outcomes for pupils
- The issue of vested interests can be circumvented by bringing in **independent advisory panels** (comprising key opinion leaders and critical friends, for example)
 - These can also be useful in providing constructive criticism and challenging entrenched assumptions
- When it comes to innovation, collaborations should **identify the players required at each stage of the process** to ensure that promising innovations land well when they are scaled up (e.g. technical expertise is required to translate service innovations into useable solutions)

Question 4. Looking to the future, is there a need to improve and strengthen collaboration between tertiary education providers and broader stakeholders in Scotland; if so, in what ways, and how can this be supported, and by whom?

- **Collaboration needs to be mainstreamed** in the way we educate, learn, and the way we are held accountable; in other words, it needs to be programmed across everything, not something that is regarded as an add-on
- Need for a **cross-disciplinary mapping exercise** that indicates where relevant industry and academic expertise are located across Scotland to facilitate collaborative working; oftentimes, collaboration relies on existing familiarities as prospective contacts are hard to identify and locate