

Positive Destinations for school leavers

Report by Kenneth Lawrie, Chief Executive

1 Purpose of Report

The aim of this report is to inform Council of the progress made by the Council and its' partners and current action being taken to address the issue of improving Positive Destinations for school leavers.

2. Background

Biannually each year Skills Development Scotland (SDS) publishes its report on school leavers. Those being tracked in September of each year are those who left school in June of the same year, or the previous Christmas. These same ex pupils are the tracked again in March of the following year in a follow up survey.

This biannual snapshot of pupils' first, and subsequent, destinations , involves every school, the council's regeneration section, and all local SDS front line staff; making or attempting to make contact with every former pupil (around 1000 pupils leave in each cohort) by phone, or in person, with evidence being gathered about their employment or learning situation during the assessment period. The exercise last about one month each time it is undertaken. Following review, the data is published nationally by Skills Development Scotland.

3. Performance

Midlothian has improved its performance on positive destinations by 3.8 % in the past year to a figure of 89.2%. The cumulative improvement since the economic downturn of 2008/9 has been 10.8%.. This five year figure is the largest improvement in this period of any council area in Scotland.

However, despite this improvement Midlothian still ranks 30th out of 32 council areas in Scotland. This should be set in the context that five other councils now share figures within the one percentage point. Midlothian, having been well behind all other councils has caught up significantly, but further progress still requires to be made to reach an acceptable level of positive outcomes for school leavers.

Further details of the improvement and the associated performance tables can be found in appendix 1 to this report. The key issue that appears in the figures is the lower than Scottish average progression by pupils from Midlothian schools to Further and Higher education courses. This emphasises the need for the Council to continue to focus on improving educational attainment in Midlothian schools. This is the only aspect of positive destinations where Midlothian falls below the Scottish average. With regard to employment, training, activity agreements and volunteering Midlothian performs above the Scottish average.

4. Council actions 13/14

The last report to Council on positive destinations in June 2013 indicated a series of actions that were being taken. This report updates on progress of these actions as follows.

Short term

1. **Activity across the partnership to ensure that information on this year's group of school leavers who are at risk of negative destinations is robust.**
 - a. All Midlothian Schools have received information sessions regarding the 16+ Data Hub. Administrative staff have been trained in each school. Midlothian did its first upload to the Hub in December 2013. Midlothian will now generate reports for the 16+ Forums and the other key meetings looking at the Opportunities for All agenda.
 - b. Fliers will be circulated in school before Easter to highlight the need to have a 'Plan B' and listing all the organisations that can offer assistance to young people seeking a positive destination.
 - c. A 'Transition Fair' for young people with additional support needs and their parents was held in October 2013. This was well attended and supported by a range of post school providers.
2. **Links with Further Education Colleges to be strengthened to increase accessibility for young people.**
 - a. The remaining Opportunities for All Grant from Scottish Government is being used to fund an additional Rural Skills Vocational learning programme at Newbattle Abbey College starting in January 2014 and also to secure some additional post school courses from the Princes Trust.
 - b. A series of meetings have taken place with Borders College, most recently in December 2013 and Midlothian is making better links with this college in 2014/15. This offers a choice for young people in terms of location and course choice. Meetings continue with Edinburgh College to ensure stronger links are formed and allow better uptake of courses as a result.
3. **The implementation of the new "vocational academies" on offer from the Queen Margaret University / Edinburgh College partnership**

Midlothian is expanding the use of Sector Academies, where pupils commence a further education and employer based learning provision before leaving school. Staff from Queen Margaret University attended the OfA Management Board meeting in December 2013 to update on which Academies were available and these will be rolled out to all Midlothian secondary schools. Academies are in place in health and care, facilities management in the NHS, and hospitality and tourism.
4. **Delivering the council's own commitment to offering work placements for young people.**

A Progress Report was produced for Council Voluntary Work Placement Programme from September to December 2013. It highlights that since September there have been 48 requests for placements and 22 young people matched to date. Referrals have come from a variety of agencies and self referrals and have contributed to positive destinations, with other placements being offered at graduate level or to students as part of course arrangements.
5. **Ensure that posts identified through the current 'MiFuture' recruitment process at entry level are offered as potential training places to participants in council training programmes who meet basic entry requirements.**

Agreement has been reached to implement this and develop traineeship entry level jobs within the council.

6. The Council Procurement Strategy to include provision for community benefit clauses targeted at securing training and development opportunities

The Newbattle High school contract management agency HubCo met with the regeneration section and agreed to re-consider the terms of their community benefits clause. The Council asked that specific local arrangements be put in place to ensure the local employability supply chain was utilised and the level of expectations was more fully specified on contractor and sub contractors. The procurement section of the council continues to develop community benefit expectations for use in revenue contracts. The recent council housing contract has been the subject of cross directorate discussions to agree the level of community benefit expectations included within the stages of the contracting process.

7. Increase the number of Modern Apprenticeships that can be funded by Skills Development Scotland in Midlothian Council

A total of 16 additional places have been applied for through SDS competitive bidding systems. Midlothian Council will run a series of Workshops in schools in early 2014 to highlight the admission requirements of Apprenticeships.

8. Establish a 25 place 'council only funded' post school vocational training programme to add to the Skills Development Scotland programmes currently operated by Midlothian

The programme will operate between February and May. Recruitment criteria and referral routes have been agreed. Employers are being sourced to offer placements.

9. Establish the national Youth Employment wages subsidy scheme.

The scheme has been launched and so far 22 young people out of the target 100 have been recruited by private employers, who benefit from a wages subsidy of 50% minimum wage for six months. This level of performance appears to be a national issue. Scottish Government has now changed the eligibility rules to allow public bodies to recruit, and work is underway in the council to offer young people a six month temporary post, where they meet the new criteria for full funding.

Medium term

10. Increase focus across all schools on the early identification of young people at risk of negative destinations. A hub for interagency pupil centred planning will be implemented in all secondary schools.

The Education service has set up a positive destinations review group, chaired by the Schools Group manager responsible for this field of work. At the initial meeting held in December 2013, each school provided a brief summary of the Positive Destinations (PD) data and the changes that had occurred in each of the PD categories

11. Active attendance policies that target these pupils and maintain their engagement will reduce the numbers of disengaged pupils who may have had months of inactivity before they leave school.

The principal psychologist has established a grouping of staff directly involved in supporting attendance. The evidence gathered so far is that there are approximately 130 pupils this year with attendance of less than 75% across the 6 secondary schools. These pupils have been tracked back three years, and in most cases were showing reduced patterns of attendance in second year. This evidence challenges the view that attendance issues are simply emerging later in secondary, and

discussions with schools and support services on early intervention are now underway.

12. Targeting the lowest academically performing 20% with a tailored programme of Level 3 courses, work experience and staged interventions.

A total of 488 pupils took part in the centrally coordinated vocational options programme. It is not yet clear whether these options were targeted by schools to the pupils in the lowest performing 20%. The schools self evaluation visits programme between February and May will seek to clarify whether the vocational programme is reaching these pupils

13. Redesign of the schools vocational programme. This will include the development of a coordinated menu of vocational options for all schools to offer links to the local labour market.

A programme of vocational options was prepared and circulated to all schools and 15 additional options, beyond those previously developed by schools were offered. An evaluation has been completed of the range of offers of vocational learning experiences made available to Midlothian schools.

5 Resource

There are no new or additional resource implications arising from this progress report.

6 Risk

The Community Planning Partnership has identified positive destinations as one of the three main priorities they wish to address. The challenge is to achieve additional progress within a very challenging labour market, fewer resources in key partners, and a shifting policy framework of overlapping UK and Scottish agency strategies.

The refocusing of Skills Development Scotland (SDS) on ICT based delivery may lead to greater focus on 'at risk' pupils, but this is being combined with reduced staffing resources at a local level.

The regionalisation of further education may carry the risk that a 'city college' will remain less engaged with non city areas. This needs to be carefully monitored and managed.

Scottish Government expects two strategies and action plans. 'Opportunities for all' targets 16-18 year olds, whilst 'youth employment' targets 16-24 year olds. The DWP now also has a set of UK Government introduced youth employment measures and programmes. There is a risk that overlapping policies make delivery agencies less clear what is expected of them. It will be important for the council and its partners to manage this effectively at a local level.

7 Single Midlothian Plan and Business Transformation

Themes addressed in this report:

- ☐ Community safety
- ☐ Adult health, care and housing
- ☒ Getting it right for every Midlothian child
- ☒ Improving opportunities in Midlothian

- ☒ Sustainable growth
☒ Business transformation and Best Value
☐ None of the above

8 Impact on Performance and Outcomes

The council and CPP have committed to tackling the positive destinations agenda and reducing youth unemployment.

The Scottish Government statement setting out 'Opportunities for All' recognises that local employability partnerships are best placed to understand and respond to challenges specific to their areas. Partnerships work hard to ensure that their provision is aligned to the needs of local labour markets and to reduce duplication between the supports they offer young people and that offered by national agencies such as Jobcentre Plus.

The Scottish Government has made Community Planning Partnerships key strategic partners in the allocation of European Social Funds to support employability and skills delivery. This has helped locally developed and locally led approaches to be implemented in different parts of Scotland.

9 Involving Communities and Other Stakeholders

The youth employment strategy has been developed with the CPP partners. Engagement with schools remains a challenge in terms of achieving collective approaches that enable external partners to deliver from a single programme to a variety of school settings in an equitable and consistent manner. Further work is required to establish a sufficiently flexible single system working with schools and post school agencies that is person rather than establishment centred. The role of parents as partners has not been adequately developed in this area of work, and further work is required to engage them constructively in the interests of their children.

10 Ensuring Equalities

The intention of a youth employment strategy is to reduce poverty and disadvantage, and in doing so to promote inclusion. The use of EQIA to assess the impact of the new strategy will ensure appropriate scrutiny of the extent to which the needs of protected characteristic groups have been taken into account.

11 Supporting Sustainable Development

The development of local employment and training access points reduces carbon footprint, the emphasis on local employer links similarly reduces travel to work times and promotes the development of sustainable local economic growth in line with the CPP theme "Sustainable Growth Midlothian".

12 Recommendations

The Council is recommended to:

- Note the progress that has been made by the council and its partners in improving positive school leaver destinations.

- Call for a further report on the evaluation of school actions to support positive destinations following the conclusion of the current evaluation visits programme commencing in February.

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