

THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR AND THE MORE CHOICES, MORE CHANCES (MCMC) AGENDA

PINS SEMINAR REPORT

"Forget sub groups, think individuals!"

Dr. Ian Finlay, University of Strathclyde

"It's wrong to characterise young people as having no aspirations. They have aspirations, even if they have disengaged from learning. Research and experience tells us that it is in our relationships with young people and through personal recognition that we then support them into independence and adulthood".

Dr. Richard Williams, Chief Executive Rathbone UK

ABOUT THE PINS SEMINAR

Every young person is entitled to support to move into a positive and sustained destination. This entitlement is also part of the senior phase of Curriculum for Excellence. To maximise opportunities for all young people, policy in this area identifies that schools must work with partners, including voluntary sector agencies.

PINS members work with many of the young people who are risk of becoming disengaged from learning or employment. In March 2010 we held a PINS seminar that addressed the voluntary sector's connection to the agenda.

The agenda which has become known as **More Choices More Chances** aims to ensure that:

- Curriculum for Excellence provides opportunities to young people **under 16** that are tailored to individual need, with flexibility and support for all.
- Every young person has a clear pathway from school into learning **post 16**.
- Learning is a **financially viable option**.
- The right **support is available** to find out about, engage with and sustain learning and employment.
- There is **joint action between learning providers** and support agencies to ensure the infrastructure is in place to meet the needs of vulnerable young people.

But how are we doing in practice?

Our speakers on the day provided information and encouragement to reflect on some key questions:

- What is the current policy, where are we in terms of delivery, and how is the voluntary sector's role envisaged?
- For those young people most in need how effective are we (in the voluntary sector and in our partnerships) at identifying needs early and defining and delivering appropriate and consistent interventions?
- As voluntary sector providers what is our involvement in delivering every young person's entitlement to move into a positive and sustained destination?
- As voluntary sector providers what is our involvement in implementation of 16+ Learning Choices?
- What is next for the voluntary sector's engagement with this agenda?

This report presents the key messages from speakers and from delegates. This PINS seminar was delivered with the support of Skills Development Scotland.

KEY MESSAGES FROM THE SEMINAR SPEAKERS

Our speakers identified a number of themes and challenges which the voluntary sector and others involved in meeting the needs of vulnerable and excluded young people must consider in its work on the More Choices, More Chances agenda. These are captured in this report under 7 headings.

1 THE POLICY CONTEXT MATTERS

The policy context is creative and constructive but the challenge is to ensure it is transformational. We must question what does not work. Policy should support us to work in the best interests of vulnerable and marginalised children and young people.

2 THE ECONOMY MATTERS; VULNERABLE YOUNG PEOPLE SUFFER MORE IN A RECESSION

Changes in labour market conditions over the last 50 years have impacted on young people, particularly those from disadvantaged communities. The economic downturn compounds the challenges faced by young people.

3 CLARITY OF PURPOSE AND OUTCOMES

The voluntary sector needs to be clear about what it sees its role as and must be better at describing the approaches which characterise its work. Providers must be able to describe and evidence outcomes. At the same time, while being distinct, voluntary sector agencies need to locate themselves in a community of organisations with a shared purpose.

The sector should support partners to understand its commitment to long-term engagement, a focus on individual and personal social contexts and efforts to embed interventions in strong relationships.

4 LEARN FROM THE RESEARCH AND BUILD ON WHAT WE KNOW

There are several consistent messages from research:

- Young people have aspiration; although they are often characterised as non-aspirational.
- Disengagement from learning happens at an early age. This is less to do with curriculum and more to do with the experience of school and their relationships within school.
- Every child needs a significant adult or adults who care for them and who are there for them.
- Every child needs to be noticed, loved and cared for.
- There is a need to move away from pathologising individuals to focusing on the context of their life experience.



5 A FOCUS ON SKILLS


It is important to question the conflation of “skills and qualifications”. A focus on skills development should be our shared focus.

6 WE NEED TO IMPROVE INFORMATION SHARING

Children and young people with poor educational experiences are more likely not to enter a positive and sustained destination post school. Poor experience of school is also often underpinned by problematic family life and poverty. It is possible to identify most of these pupils earlier than S4. Information sharing is essential if we are to identify, track and support young people.

7 FUNDING MATTERS

While the context is one of partnerships and mutual interests in supporting young people there is no equity in funding for the voluntary sector who are still dependent on statutory partners seeing the need or being convinced of such a need.





KEY MESSAGES FROM SEMINAR DELEGATES

The imperative to deliver Curriculum for Excellence and in particular 16+ Learning Choices commitments is a prime opportunity to embed effective partnerships between statutory and voluntary sector service providers.

Delegates at the seminar recognised that delivery on these key areas is driving some Local Authorities to increase engagement with the sector.

To ensure that we improve partnerships and outcomes for vulnerable and excluded young people delegates identified a number of areas which require attention. These are captured in this report under 10 headings.

1 A SENSE OF URGENCY AND A SHARED VISION

Radical thinking and approaches are needed if Scotland is to engage with issues and prevent another generation from the experience of worklessness.

Across sectors, and with Government, we need to understand what employment will look like in the immediate and longer term, asking: are we preparing young people with the skills needed?

2 QUESTIONING HOW WE DO THINGS

There must be space to question how we have done things to date. While Curriculum for Excellence is aspirational we need to work together to make it transformational: to do this the purpose and experience of school must change.


Diversity of provision is the key to success; some of this diversity will need to come from the voluntary sector.

As one delegate stated: *“There is a problem if we simply try to improve what doesn’t work.”*

3 IMPROVING INFORMATION AND PARTNERSHIPS

Every Local Authority needs to take stock about who they have informed and involved in their current approaches to supporting every young person to move into a positive and sustained destination; ensuring that every relevant local partner is part of their delivery of 16+ Learning Choices.

The 16+ Learning Network will benefit from direct engagement with the voluntary sector. Scottish Government must be clearer and promote the necessity for Local Authorities to engage with national and local voluntary sector providers on this agenda.



4 VALUING THE SECTOR

Delegates believe that voluntary sector provision is still not well enough understood or valued by statutory sector providers. Unless such a shift takes place delivery on 16+ Learning Choices commitments will be undermined.

There is a sense that some destinations are valued above others; with a concern that voluntary sector provision may be perceived by some colleagues in the statutory sector as of less value.

The voluntary sector's value lies in being "in it for the long term". This requires individualised, respect-based relationships. Consequently this means investing in those people and relationships.

5 MAKING THE CONNECTIONS WITH CURRICULUM FOR EXCELLENCE AND GIRFEC

Secondary schools need to improve their understanding of the MCMC agenda and locate the work explicitly in the context of delivery of the senior phase of Curriculum for Excellence.

Work with vulnerable and excluded young people at the age of 15 or 16 must retain the characteristics and ethos of **Getting it Right for Every Child**.

Delegates posed this question: who is making these connections explicit and what more can and should be done to do so?

6 CONNECTING THE SENIOR PHASE WITH EARLY INTERVENTION AND PREVENTION

Delegates identified that for many vulnerable and excluded young people education and other services can fail to intervene early enough or with enough coordination and focus on what makes a difference. With this in mind all providers must ensure strong and coherent links across the child's life.

7 EVALUATING OUTCOMES

Delegates recognised the importance of identifying and evidencing outcomes in work which seeks to get young people into a positive and sustained destination. More so, the evaluation 'playing field' needs to be fair and equal; delegates recognised that hard questions need to be asked of all providers and that where work evaluates well resources should follow.

8 PROFILING PARTNERSHIPS THAT WORK

Statutory:Voluntary partnerships that deliver and sustain young people in positive destinations should be captured and widely disseminated, evidencing that the effort which partnerships require of providers results in better outcomes for young people.

9 CHAMPIONING THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR: RECOGNITION, EQUITY AND FAIRNESS

Beyond the discussion about delivering the senior phase of Curriculum for Excellence delegates expressed concerns about the funding environment for the voluntary sector. There is unease that Government has not adequately considered the impact of budget cuts on voluntary sector provision; and that Local Authorities may fail to protect crucial voluntary sector services when their own are under threat. In a post-Concordat environment the Government must support and champion the sector.

System change is needed to release funding from statutory services into the voluntary sector. One delegate phrased this as the need for “a shift in the direction of funding”. Other delegates identified the need for resources to more effectively follow the young person; questioning the automatic entitlement to funding which can characterise some statutory sector providers’ approaches to this work.

For delegates, voluntary sector resourcing must be guided by recognition of worth, equity and fairness.

10 CHAMPIONING AND ENGAGING THE YOUNG PERSON

For many children and young people there is a history of rejection and a view of them as “the problem”. Too often formal responses to neglect, maltreatment, ill-health, trauma and abuse have in themselves been blaming and damaging.


One delegate stated: *“Young people must be seen as individuals and not as a homogenous group.”*

The voluntary sector prides itself on its commitment to equality and to advocacy. Delegates identified a need for responses which ensure the young person is at the heart of discussions and decisions. In this sense all efforts to engage the young person in a positive and sustained destination should be inclusive of them and their needs.



THANKS

Thanks to the delegates and speakers at the PINS seminar, particularly thanks to:

- **Dr. Richard Williams:** Chief Executive of Rathbone UK
 - **Dr. Ian Finlay:** Director of Research at the Department of Educational and Professional Studies at the University of Strathclyde
 - **Rosie Whelan:** More Choices, More Chances Team Leader, Enterprise and Employability for Young People Division, Scottish Government
 - **Bryan Campbell:** Learning and Teaching Scotland's Development Officer for More Choices More Chances
 - **Vivienne Brown:** Head of Education and Qualifications, Skills Development Scotland
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PINS - FIND OUT MORE AND GET INVOLVED

The voluntary sector is a diverse alliance of agencies that impact on all aspects of Scottish life. The sector has a particular interest in improving outcomes for some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children, young people and families in Scotland.

When it comes to education too many children and young people are left behind as others achieve. In the context of a commitment to making all children and young people successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors strong partnerships are needed between formal and informal sectors to address vulnerability and exclusion.

The **Pupil Inclusion Network Scotland** brings together voluntary sector agencies and statutory sector colleagues who share a commitment to improving educational outcomes for all children. Over the past four years the Network has grown and through the PINS on-line resource and a series of seminars and workshops a body of knowledge has been built which captures what we need to do, in partnership, to make a difference.

PINS has a website at www.pinscotland.org and meets through a programme of seminars and workshops of interest to Network members. Membership of the Network is free and registration is via the PINS homepage.

PINS is supported by the Scottish Government and managed jointly by the Scottish Government (Learning Directorate) and voluntary sector agencies. On a day to day basis the Network is facilitated by the TASC Agency.

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