



Inclusive Learner Pathways

Alan Sherry is Principal of Glasgow Kelvin College. The college was formed in 2013 as a consequence of the merger of John Wheatley College, North Glasgow College, and Stow College. The college is based in North East Glasgow. Circa forty-six per cent of its learners live in most deprived data zones. Over 40,000 residents in the communities which the college serves have few or no qualifications. The college portfolio of programmes ranges from adult literacy courses to degree level provision.

Inclusive Learning Pathways

In my view, there were two key design principles of the proposed lifelong learning approach in *Healthy, Wealthy, and Wise*. Lifelong learning is *inclusive*, and it *enables progression*. As the report goes on to say adult learning is at the heart of the inclusive growth agenda.

Dirk Van Damme, Head of CERI at OECD, contends that society needs diverse systems of learning, skills development and innovation¹. Furthermore, Jeff Selingo contends that “workers will likely consume this lifelong learning in short spurts when they need it rather than in lengthy blocks of time as they do now”². In addition, Georgia Tech’s *The Deliberate Innovation Lifetime Education* report in April 2018 concluded that institutions will require to “provide educational opportunities that serve individuals needs throughout their entire career....”³.

In order to make this a reality it is essential that all adults have the opportunity to participate in a non-linear form of post-compulsory education not only those who have already benefited from Higher Education. Inclusive Learning Pathways require to be available to all learners based on the development of both vocational and transferable skills which prepare individuals both for employment and citizenship.

¹ Keynote speech Eurashe Conference, Tallin 2018 available at www.eurasha

² Insider Higher *HigherEducation in World Where Graduates Never Graduate*, Dellarocas, www.insidehighered.com/digital-learning/views/2018/08/01/role-university-world-where-students-never-graduate-opinion August 2018

³ <http://www.provost.gatech.edu/commission-creating-next-education> 2018



To meet these challenges as learning professionals we must consider how we address delivering effective 21st Century Lifelong Learning in a way that meets the needs of individuals, society and the economy.

The challenges we face

In Scotland, the challenges facing adult learning in the 21st century are multi – dimensional. It ranges from engaging learners who have few skills and a poor schooling experience, through to employees who need to acquire new skills to sustain employment, particularly as digitalisation reshapes our workplaces. This is happening at a time of rapid demographic change. As the 16- 24-year-old cohort in Scotland declines by 9% over the next decade⁴, those aged 65-74 years will increase by approximately 17%⁵.

The combination of technological and demographic change poses a series of complex challenges for both schools and post compulsory education providers. Lifelong learning will need to become a reality if societies are to ensure inclusive economic growth for the benefit of all. The nature of the learner journey will be substantially different from that which has underpinned existing approaches to the nature and provision of post- school education.

Current approaches are not enough

In May 2018, the Scottish Government published '*The 15-24 Learner Journey Review*⁶. The report was intended to establish the Scotland's ambition for a world class education and skills system. However, it also created the sense that there was an end point to learning at 24 years. The Review focussed on linear progress from school to post- compulsory education. It sought to enable seamless learner journeys with the recognition of prior attainment as a means to create efficiencies by reducing the time spent acquiring degrees.

In addition, the Review focussed on the importance of creating parity of esteem between vocational and traditional qualifications based on the Foundation and Modern Apprenticeship frameworks. Again, the emphasis was on young people in the 16 -24-year-old cohort. In both

⁴ www.gov.uk/national-records-of-scotland

⁵ *ibid*

⁶ www.gov.scot/publications/2018/054774



areas, the report reinforced the notion of linear, hierarchical progression with an implicit assumption that skills acquisition was linked prolonged periods of study.

The Scottish Government failed to consider the role of Lifelong Learning in supporting inclusive articulation and progression pathways. Nor did it place sufficient emphasis on the meta-cognitive skills needed by 21st century learners. In essence these are thinking about thinking skills which promote an understanding of how a task is performed spanning multiple and divergent subject areas. Learners who develop these skills 'monitor their behaviour in terms of goals and self-reflect on their increasing effectiveness. This enhances their self-satisfaction and motivation to improve their methods of learning.'⁷

To address the multitude of challenges and to support inclusive economic growth there is a need to create diverse systems of lifelong learning which develop key meta-cognitive skills, vocational skills and citizenship skills. Current approaches outlined in Government policy are not enough.

A community-based approach

At Glasgow Kelvin College we have sought to develop a curriculum offer which addresses the needs of the communities and stakeholders which we serve within the existing statutory and financial frameworks for Scottish colleges providing the skills for life, learning and work⁷

The John Wheatley Learning Network⁸ has forty-four community learning centres which are predominantly based in North East Glasgow. These centres are operated by partners with College supplied digital infrastructure to enable local residents to access its resources. Currently there are 8,000 users of Learning Network Services developing a range of digital and meta skills.

The College operates a Wider Access programme whereby it provides tutor support to requests from the community for the structured learning programmes. It adopts a Freirean approach to the design of these programmes seeking to develop the skills identified as needed by individuals for both the world of work and active citizenship. Where appropriate Scottish Qualification Authority units are used. If there is no such relevant qualification the College will

⁷ Zimmerman, BJ (2010) *Becoming a self-Regulated Learner: An Overview*, Theory into Practice 41

⁸ Curriculum for excellence, www.education.gov.scot



deploy its Community Achievement Award framework which operates within the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework at levels 4-7.

Our community-based approach is focussed on creating a positive learning environment which is designed to build the confidence and skills needed for Lifelong Learning. Accrediting achievement in a manner which highlights progress and celebrates success supports the transition to further study, with guaranteed articulation to college-based programmes, or employment.

Project-based learning and co-creation

Project based learning is central to the delivery of the totality of the College's provision. Using this methodology teaching staff co-create with students learning activities which are based on the skills required by individuals for both the world of work and active citizenship. The approach enables 'chunks' of learning to be delivered at a pace appropriate for each learner and to build on the skills which they have previously developed working collaborative with peers to produce a specific outcome.

The flexibility of this approach supports adult returners to use a variety of modes of attendance to accommodate their personal circumstances (such as caring responsibilities, work or ill-health). Structuring curriculum provision in this manner is intended to enable learners to study when they can rather than following a fixed timetable to suit the institution and to encourage teaching staff to utilise a wider range of pedagogically methods. In this way the College seeks to enable learners to progress successfully to employment or further study.

This approach is similar to the one which the Commission on Creating the Next in Education advocates should be adopted by The Georgia Institute of Technology. Therefore the challenges in providing effective Lifelong Learning opportunities are similar no matter the level of study.

Workforce challenges

As *Healthy, Wealthy and Wise* acknowledges, working in news ways presents challenges for the adult learning workforce.



The College ethos is focussed on developing effective partnerships within the communities which we serve and to 'bending' resources to meet the needs of partners in order to assist them in meeting their priorities. All staff, not only senior managers, are required to work collaborative within cross-curricular teams, with learners and stakeholders. As part of its strategic planning process the College produces annually a Context Statement⁹ which provides all staff with a comprehensive overview of its operation environment. This document is designed to assist in ensuring that curriculum provision reflects the operational context.

To support our teaching staff, the College has a Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy¹⁰. This document is consulted on annually and provides a framework which is intended to promote a learning environment which supports the individual to develop skills which meet current needs and the transferable skills required in the 21st century. It encourages staff to use a blended learning approach promoting the importance of ensuring that learners experience and engage with a range of activities which support meta-cognitive skills development.

Greater emphasis is now being placed by the College on professional learning activities which develops the pedagogical skills of staff rather than greater subject knowledge.

But it is not just front-line staff who need skills developments. As the world changes rapidly, leaders and managers need to update their skills and knowledge too. An understanding and the ability to work collegiately both internally and externally is now an essential skill for all leading educational organisations. As a commitment to making best use of public funding by sharing resources in order to create the maximum benefit for the communities and stakeholders which we serve. The previous emphasis on command and control management approaches are no long appropriate in the 21st Century.

Summary

The focus by governments on linear progression has resulted in a failure to invest in post school provision which in turn has undermined attempts to promote inclusive growth. Furthermore, the emphasis on subject knowledge transfer as the main output of education

⁹ www.glasgowkelvin.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Context-Statement-2018-20.pdf

¹⁰ Learning Teaching and Assessment Strategy, www.glasgowkelvin.ac.uk



fails to take account the pace of change brought about by digitalisation. Furthermore, it is evident that the existing structures for adult education does not provide an appropriate means of ensuring that all have the opportunity to develop the skills for the 21st century.

To meet the challenges we face there is a need to focus on creating an inclusive learning framework which supports non-linear progression, which places the learner at the centre and develops the meta-cognitive skills required for Lifelong Learning. Partnership working with stakeholders to co-create appropriate learning episodes will require a re-thinking of how attainment is accredited and how learning is delivered. However systemic change can only be achieved if staff have effective pedagogical skills in order to create effective and engaging learning activities which meet the needs of learners, society and the economy.

The need for Lifelong Learning is critical as digitisation transforms both the economy and society. In order to meet these radical changes post-school learning environments will require to support non-linear learning journeys, using subject based learning to develop the meta-cognitive skills which will enable individuals to thrive in a rapidly changing world.

The co-creation of learning episodes designed to meet the needs of learners, of employers and society will replace the current approach to provision of post-school learning as prolonged periods of study are no longer viable for individuals seeking to maintain sustainable employment.

As currently this is not the case, consideration requires to be given to developing post-school learning environments which support non-linear learning journeys, develop the skills required for life-long learning, provide appropriate accreditation for work-based learning and learning episodes based not institutional efficiencies but the needs of individuals. Glasgow Kelvin College is taking steps to put this into place within the current structure of post-compulsory education in Scotland however more radical change is required to create an inclusive education system fit for the 21st Century.