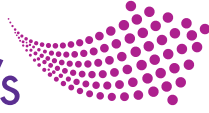




The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Scotland's
Futures Forum
Fòram Alba air Thoiseach



Goodison Group
in Scotland

INFLUENCING LEARNING

Scotland's Futures Forum / Goodison Group in Scotland Forum Debate

Wednesday 15 June 2016
The Scottish Parliament



Background

The Goodison Group in Scotland has been asked to contribute to Scotland's Futures Forum's new programme, The cultural base and strength of a civilised country. To kick off the programme this seminar focused on the questions, ***What are our aspirations for formal/informal education? What will formal/informal education look like in 2030? How can/should a highly equitable, high quality education system be developed to contribute to the vision of a civilised, cultured society in 2030? What, if any, values, behaviours and conditions need to be in place?***

A wide ranging debate explored this in more detail following two formal presentations.

Presentations

Professor Michael Osborne, Director of Research and Chair of Adult & Lifelong Learning, University of Glasgow

Professor Michael Osborne considered how the concept of *Learning Cities* might contribute to the notion of a cultural society.

Learning Cities place learning at the heart of their strategies. They recognise that lifelong learning can be more effective than economic levers alone in driving forward development, and aim to build communities that are inclusive, healthy, smart and resilient. Under a framework developed by UNESCO, Learning Cities are characterised by the social, economic and environmental benefits they bring to their communities, and are underpinned by three fundamental building blocks: political will, participation from key stakeholders, and resources.

Using 'big data', the University of Glasgow is undertaking an Integrated Multi-Media Data Project to assess the extent to which Glasgow is operating as a *Learning City* as defined by the 42 indicators put forward by UNESCO. Early findings suggest that older people are generally less engaged in learning than young people but that within that older cohort, there is a subset of people who are extremely active in learning, and that is, in part, driven by factors such as access to public transport. Further work in the area of learning cities is also being progressed by the PASCAL Observatory through the PASCAL Learning Cities Network¹.

Professor Osborne concluded that a civilised society can be characterised as one that offers learning opportunities over the course of citizen's lifetime, provides learning within a range of formal and informal institutions, and promotes learning as desirable end in itself rather than a mandatory activity.

Toni Andrews, Co-Design Officer, Young Scot

Over the last three years, Young Scot, along with Children in Scotland and the Scottish Youth Parliament, have taken forward the *Leaders of Learning* project to explore how young people experience learning, and to understand how and what they would choose to learn if left in charge of their own learning.

As part of the project, Young Scot worked with pupils at Kyle Academy using a co-design methodology (including a pupil-led survey) to look at the area of digital literacy. From the survey, it emerged that pupils viewed digital learning as a key life skill that enables young people to make informed decisions and to be an active citizen on-line. In addition, the findings highlighted the untapped potential to involve pupils in developing their own digital learning opportunities. Following the survey, the school are now drafting a strategy to promote 'Digital Leadership' amongst staff and pupils, and within the wider community. The strategy will focus on the ethos of learning, rather than specific actions, the drafting process is already influencing culture change throughout the school.

Toni Andrews suggested that adopting a co-design process (as Young Scot did with the *Leaders of Learning* project) is the only way to fully understand what the learning needs are of a particular group and that such a process is essential to support Scotland's vision for a civilised and cultural society.

¹ <http://lcn.pascalobservatory.org>

Discussion

The following themes were explored in more detail in the discussion:

Learning Cities as a concept

The term, *Learning Cities*, is not intended to rule out rural areas or small towns, or to be prescriptive. The concept of a Learning City simply makes a statement that a particular place values learning. Each place can determine its own focus, deciding whether to target those not normally engaged in learning or those who are already engaged in learning. For example, in Germany, some learning regions concentrate on the Accreditation of Prior Learning, while others focus on culture.

It was agreed that '*Learning Places*' might be a more inclusive term than *Learning Cities*, although it was recognised that whatever the size of the community, basic literacy and numeracy skills are required, as well as the opportunities to learn, if a wide range of people are to engage with the concept.

Concerns were also raised about whether the current focus in Scotland on qualifications and employability detracts from the notion of a *Learning City*.

Engagement from learners and stakeholders

A critical mass is required to generate support for a *Learning City*, including political buy-in to leverage resources. However, citing UNESCO's efforts to get the world's mega-cities on board, Professor Osborne argued that some cities are simply too large to engage with and lack the social cohesion required to establish a *Learning City*.

It was suggested that whether working with a school or across a city, it is the process of engagement that is important rather than the size of the group you are trying to engage.

There was general agreement that the process had to be both top-down and bottom-up, through engaging stakeholders from the formal and informal learning sectors, while recognising that culture change needs to be championed at the top and then embedded. If the culture change is not fully embedded, there is a danger that the emphasis on learning is likely to shift once the person at the top moves on. Toni Andrews illustrated how having the support of the Head and Deputy Head on the Young Scot project was essential to encouraging a cultural change amongst teachers, some of whom had initially been resistant to the project.

Resources

In a world where both the formal and informal learning sectors are working with diminishing resources, how do we encourage the concept of *Learning cities*? Does the idea provide an opportunity to think differently about both the learning process and how resources are deployed? For example could co-locating learning places, such as situating libraries next to primary schools, play a part?

The example of Dumfries' Learning Town project was cited in this context, given its plan to further integrate educational opportunities by establishing a 'learning hub' that offers advisory services and educational activities for both senior pupils and the wider community.

Questions were raised about how much the state should invest in education and how much the individual should contribute. It was noted that elsewhere in the world, for example, in Germany and France, there are levies on employers to fund personal learning. It was suggested that the idea of providing individuals with a certain amount of credit over their lifetime to pursue their own learning should be resurrected and explored in more detail to encourage true lifelong learning.

The role of libraries

Public libraries can, and have, played a major role in driving forward Learning Cities regardless of how well resourced they are. In Vancouver and Victoria, British Columbia, the library service was at the forefront of establishing a Learning City until their resources started to decline. Learning Cities in Australia have also been championed by libraries in a number of cities such as Townsville in Queensland, and are strong – this work is an aspect of the re-positioning of the role of libraries in many cities.

Young Scot believes that libraries can play a vital role in encouraging more young people to engage with learning and will work with local partners to understand how young people can see libraries as a valid experience².

The role of technology

Digital literacy offers the potential to both engage more people in learning and to make learning more cost effective. The school children involved in the *Leaders of Learning* project suggested a number of ways efficiencies could be gained through better use of technology. For example, Skype could be used to learn about other languages and cultures (instead of overseas trips), and school trips could be recorded by video to share highlights and discuss reflections.

In addition, internet sites, such as crowd-funding, offer the potential to raise funds for particular educational projects as illustrated by the project, *Classics for All*, which has crowd-funded to introduce Latin into more schools.

The rise of digital literacy also highlights the need to review of teacher-training programmes to ensure the use of technology in schools for ‘engagement without distraction’ and to encourage a blurring of pedagogical practices, recognising that pupils are often more advanced in their learning in this area than teachers. An example was shared where this had happened recently during a ‘learning day’ at a school in Argyll and Bute, where pupils had delivered an IT lesson to their teachers.

Next steps

This seminar was the first in a series planned by Scotland’s Futures Forum and the Goodison Group in Scotland to explore Scotland’s aspiration to be a civilised, cultural society by 2030 from different perspectives. **The next seminar will take place on Wednesday 7 September where under the theme, *Changing Demographics*, the topic of intergenerational learning will be explored.**

² *Ambition & Opportunity: A Strategy for Public Libraries in Scotland 2015-2020*, published by the Carnegie Trust and the Scottish Libraries and Information Council in 2015, offers an interesting insight into how Scottish libraries might contribute to Scotland’s aspirations to be a civilised society. The report can be read in full here.

(<http://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/carnegieuktrust/wp-content/uploads/sites/64/2016/02/pub14550114161.pdf>)

