



West of Scotland Colleges' Partnership



European and External Relations Committee inquiry - EU 2020 Strategy

Follow-up to meeting of 23 February 2010: additional information requested of the West of Scotland Colleges' Partnership

Introduction

The West of Scotland Colleges' Partnership (WoSCoP) participated in the round-table discussion of the EU 2020 Strategy that took place at the committee's meeting of 23 February 2010. During the discussion, members of the committee asked that WoSCoP provide some further information on the following points:

1. a thematic (as opposed to geographic) approach to the EU 2020 Strategy raised by the Convener;
2. policy areas that would benefit from more coherent collaboration between the EU and Member States raised by Rhona Brankin;
3. and pragmatic examples of inventiveness and knowledge transfer raised by Rhona Brankin.

The following paragraphs address each of these in turn.

Thematic approach

The clearest illustration of this arises from 2010 being the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion. Given the sheer depth and entrenched nature of poverty and social exclusion that exists, across all 27 Member States, and the range of ways in which it is manifest, WoSCoP contends that a European decade for combating poverty and social exclusion would be a more coherent and realistic response to this issue. This could be implemented, practically, by the EU making combating poverty and social exclusion a transversal or cross-cutting theme for the EU 2020 Strategy and the myriad of European funding programmes in a similar way that Lisbon ear-marking and environmental impact assessments were applied in European Cohesion Policy and other programmes. Furthermore, it is and has been, for some time, clear that there are a number of common socio-economic issues which confront all Member States and WoSCoP suggests that a more holistic policy approach aligned to integrated programming could generate more efficient, effective and focused responses to issues as diverse as corporate social responsibility, obesity and healthier living, reducing early school-leaving, active citizenship and individual and community enterprise. This list of themes is not intended to be prescriptive or exhaustive but, simply, illustrative. To be fair, some efforts at adopting such an approach have taken place, over recent years, within the EU's education and training programmes through the identification of annual programme priorities. However, this approach taken in isolation means that any potential synergies with other programmes, policies and priorities of other European Commission Directorates-General only occurs by chance, if at all.

Policy areas that would benefit from a more coherent collaboration between the EU and Member States

In essence, WoSCoP's comment on this issue was a plea for the EU 2020 Strategy to pay genuine heed to the diversity of the EU's Member States and regions. It is an observation that the conformist dynamic of the Lisbon Strategy placed the European Commission in an inspectorial role with regard to the strategy's implementation in Member States and regions. This not only reinforced a one size fits all approach to the strategy and associated programmes but also embedded a (power) relationship and bureaucratic structure between the Commission and its respective national and regional interlocutors in which the latter were subservient. Furthermore this operational approach offered, at best, extremely limited scope for intelligence gathered at the level of individual projects to be harvested and used to influence the development of the strategy and associated programmes. WoSCoP is firmly of the view that one of Scotland's strengths, in the context of the Lisbon and EU 2020 Strategies, is that almost the entire cast of relevant Scottish stakeholders has developed a capacity for partnership working that promotes dialogue and debate at policy and programme levels and encourages creativity and innovation in the use of funding and resources. This partnership model to policy evolution and programme implementation is one that WoSCoP would like the European Commission to embrace and apply in the EU 2020 Strategy as it would promote the identification of value in an (ongoing) evaluation of the strategy.

College sector examples of practical knowledge transfer

Scotland's Colleges has developed a pan-Scotland resource for knowledge transfer. Examples of interesting and effective practice of college activity to address this and the wider employer engagement agenda may be found at the dedicated website, *Scotland's Colleges Mean Business*:

www.scotlandscollegesmeanbusiness.com

This website contains case studies and resources that demonstrate that knowledge transfer need not be confined to scientific and technological research.

Final observations

In tracking the EU 2020 Strategy's evolution, WoSCoP is heartened to learn that the European Council of 25 – 26 March is likely to be asked to endorse a strategy with aims and targets to increase the European rate of employment, increase investment in research and development, increase the proportion of 30 to 34 year olds with higher education qualifications, reduce poverty and reduce Europe's carbon emissions. WoSCoP, also, remains hopeful that further measures to promote fairness and equity that have been suggested by a range of respondents to the Commission's consultation will emerge in the final strategy.

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