

By 2025, Scotland will be regarded as a world-leading learning nation:

Scenarios for the future

**global
learning
society**

**local
learning
society**

**market-driven
learning
society**

**divided
learning
society**

There are accompanying publications to this paper which can be found at <http://www.ggis.org.uk> or <http://www.scotlandfutureforum.org>.

We suggest that you approach the four papers in the order listed below:

- 1** *By 2025, Scotland will be regarded as a world-leading learning nation: **Key questions and provocations***
- 2** *By 2025, Scotland will be regarded as a world-leading learning nation: **Toolkit – Using these scenarios within your organisation***
- 3** *By 2025, Scotland will be regarded as a world-leading learning nation: **Scenarios for the future***
- 4** *By 2025, Scotland will be regarded as a world-leading learning nation: **Data workbook***

A compilation report of project events and individual event papers are also available on the websites.



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Foreword

In September 2011, at a gathering of business, government and education leaders, the Goodison Group in Scotland and Scotland's Futures Forum challenged themselves to consider the proposition *'By 2025, Scotland will be regarded as a world-leading learning nation'*.

There is no doubt that we are living in times of great uncertainty with an ever-increasing pace of change. Internationally, Scotland has historically been characterised as a centre of learning, innovation and science, and Scots as global citizens. However, arguably, that is no longer the case. With globalisation and an increasingly fast pace of change in 21st century life we must ensure our values and our organisations are responsive.

The Goodison Group in Scotland and Scotland's Futures Forum embarked on this project with the purpose of stimulating policy debate but also to encourage a cultural shift in our overall approach to learning. Through a robust scenario planning process, four very different world-views have emerged which we believe are challenging and provoking, and packed with interesting views and assumptions – all based on an extensive evidence and research gathering phase of the project.

The scenarios to emerge are not predictions and are not party political in any sense, however, the four very different notions of what a learning society could look like in 2025 should serve to challenge our modes of thinking about learning, our education system and the ways in which we develop skills and business practices.

The publication of the scenarios is not the end of the work but the beginning. Both the Goodison Group in Scotland and Scotland's Futures Forum are keen to help those interested in using the materials, perhaps to engage with wider stakeholders; perhaps to construct different scenarios using different critical drivers of change; perhaps to use the scenarios to challenge their own organisation's conventional thinking.

The future is, as ever, unknown, but our aspirations for the future must act as a mirror to challenge our actions in the shorter term. Only by so doing will we have the chance of being agile and prepared enough to enable Scotland as a learning society, fit and competitive for the years ahead.

We hope you find the scenarios and the accompanying materials useful, engaging and challenging.

The Rt Hon Tricia Marwick MSP, Chair, Scotland's Futures Forum
Sir Andrew Cubie, CBE, Chair, The Goodison Group in Scotland

February 2013

Methodology

This 18-month project led by the Goodison Group in Scotland and Scotland's Futures Forum involved three distinct phases: phase one – desk research, evidence (driver) and expert opinion collection; phase two – scenario planning process; phase three – scenario testing and listing some provocations.

Phase one: Evidence collecting

This phase involved desk research and a series of seminars, roundtable discussions, workshops, talks and futures events engaging those with an interest in the future of learning and skills. Each event concentrated on what the project proposition could mean from different perspectives and explored some of the barriers and opportunities that would have to be addressed in the coming years. The 350 people who attended these events became, in effect, the project community over the life of the project, and included:

- > those involved in early years work
- > the Unreasonable Learners Network
- > those interested in educational entrepreneurship
- > young people, with Young Scot
- > international perspectives of learning, from Canada, USA, Finland, Sweden and Singapore
- > teachers and education leaders
- > business leaders
- > representatives from the voluntary sector
- > parents
- > higher education representatives
- > those regarded as being far from the jobs market
- > the college sector.

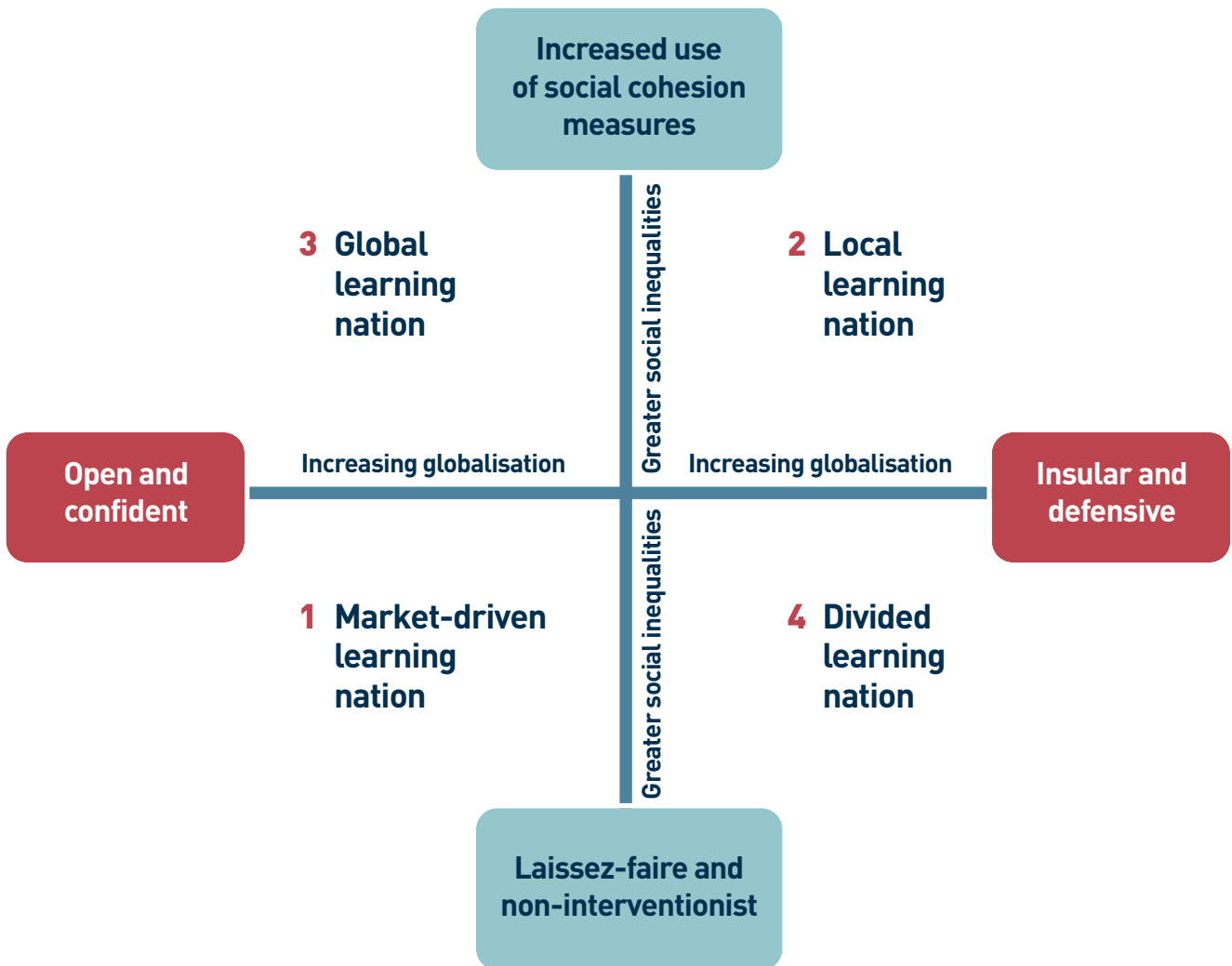
Phase two: Scenario planning

The evidence, views and research collected in phase one informed a project data workbook which became a central resource for those who constructed the scenario architecture during a two-day workshop.

The scenario methodology employed in this project was an 'exploratory' process rather than a 'normative' process (more of a visioning approach) and was based upon critical drivers of change identified from phase one. Therefore, the assumptions and variables, and the relative uncertainty of possible outcomes, relate to known systems and factors. While this approach is limiting to a degree, the final scenario narratives usefully highlight the different relationships and paths which need to be understood and acted upon in the short and medium term if any of the scenarios described are to be realised or avoided. The purpose of using this approach is to help policy-makers, educationalists and business people interested in skills, learning and education to test their own current strategic assumptions.

Scenario architecture

The two axes agreed upon to frame the scenario spaces and generate multiple (four) scenario stories were **'globalisation'** and **'inequalities and social justice'**. These were not only identified as highly important drivers of change within the current system, but also allowed for a creative interpretation of other drivers of change and their possible outcomes in thinking about different notions of a 'learning society' in 2025.



The full range of drivers of change identified and included within the scenario narratives were as follows:

Driver	Possible outcomes	Possible outcomes
TECHNOLOGY		
Individualist / divisive use	Technology changes (the rules of) the game	Collaborative / team use, widening access
Enables support for learning	Technology changes (the rules of) the game	Wide and shallow learning
Enriches learning experience	Technology changes (the rules of) the game	Increased isolation, lack of depth
Atomistic and unstructured adoption of technologies	Technology changes (the rules of) the game	Development of technology is outwith national planning and control
RESOURCES		
Reliance on globalised supply of resources	Instability and insecurity of resources	Self-sufficiency, enforced protectionism and localised resilience
Public learning & public interest ensuring best use of resources	Instability and insecurity of resources	Laissez-faire attitude (free-for-all access) to resources
Core learning around problem-solving and solution producing skills	Instability and insecurity of resources	Do nothing! (Inaction)
Increased military conflict over resources	Instability and insecurity of resources	Collaborative peaceful sharing
INEQUALITIES		
Low educational attainment	Greater social inequalities	Higher learning outcomes – increased equality
Increased use of social cohesion measures	Greater social inequalities Greater social inequalities	Accepting of greater competition and civil unrest
GLOBALISATION		
Open and confident	Increasing globalisation	Insular and defensive
Export what we are good at in learning	Increasing globalisation	Local learning services for local communities by local people
GOVERNMENT FINANCE		
Embrace change in culture to free up resources and promote diversity	Continuing pressure on government finance	Central control of what and how we spend
Innovating public services	Continuing pressure on government finance	Increasing taxes
AGEING		
Burdensome and inability to engage	People living longer	Good health and enjoyable lives
Cost unsustainable, inequalities and uncertainty	People living longer	Healthy enjoyable lives
WORK		
Live to work	Changing nature of work	Work to live
Closed minds, de-skilled, de-humanised	Changing nature of work	Flexible, capable, adaptive, ready to learn population
Individualistic, flexible and resilient working life	Changing nature of work	Working within organisations and networks
LEARNING PROVIDERS		
Greater variety of options and routes of learning	Providers of learning more diffuse and diverse	Narrow learning opportunities available
Greater individual satisfaction in learning	Providers of learning more diffuse and diverse	Greater complexity & bad choices by learners
CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE		
Greater influence over destiny	Constitutional change	Less influence over destiny
Increase in powers – providing opportunities for change	Constitutional change	Increase in powers – with less opportunities for change
ETHICS		
Libertarian society	Increasing ethical awareness	More tensions and division in society
21ST CENTURY LIFE		
Dynamic, creative and confident	Increasing complexity of life	Society of inertia / paralysis / isolation
Social and policy efforts focused on nurturing 21st century core skills for all	Increasing complexity of life	Two-tier society (those who can navigate and those who cannot)

Phase three: Testing and forming provocations

Over several months we have used the scenarios below to engage with the project community and with business leaders, educationalists, young people and stakeholders to test the storylines for internal and external consistency. The four scenarios should be regarded as a set and we have sought to ensure equal and consistent treatment of the evidence and drivers within each. We are not commending one scenario as a final destination for Scotland in 2025. However, we have used the four storylines to discuss with the project community what elements they like and dislike in each, what they find plausible and identify key questions for action in the coming years.

Other outputs

The following additional items are associated with this document:

Key questions and provocations paper

A short paper identifying key questions and provocations emerging from this testing period. The questions are intended to prompt thinking within the Scottish Government, the Scottish education sector and the business community in Scotland.

Data workbook

A data workbook that contains the research, views, drivers of change and assumptions which underpinned the process and the final emerging scenarios.

Toolkit – Using these scenarios within your organisation

Scenarios themselves do not provide answers on what the future will look like, but they are useful in prompting questions about what we are currently planning for, and why. Scenarios only provide snap-shots of possible futures, so it is important that they are used and revisited when individual organisations consider their own strategic planning assumptions. The scenarios contained in this paper should be seen as a useful resource for those interested in education, skills and learning. To that end, the accompanying toolkit enables individual organisations to engage with the scenarios from their own perspectives.

How to engage with the scenarios

Scenario planning is a management tool that has been used by companies and governments for many years. Scenarios do not predict the future. Rather, they are useful to describe stories and world-views of possible futures and should be used to reappraise and test our current planning assumptions.

Please see the accompanying toolkit on how to use these scenarios within your organisation.

Questions to consider

- Which do you consider most represents a world-leading learning society?
- What do you like about each of the worlds described?
- What do you dislike about each of the worlds described?
- Which of the scenarios seem(s) most plausible?
- Which of these scenarios, if any, do you think the government is planning for now?
- Which of these scenarios do you think the current education system in Scotland is designed to lead to or achieve?
- What actions are required by i) government; ii) the education sector and iii) the business community to achieve or avoid any of the scenario world-views?






1



**Market-driven
learning
society**



**In this world, the market
is the driver, and the
universities are the winners.
Scotland has embraced
globalisation, but it's
everyone for themselves.**

Backstory

Everything is driven by market forces, with the government taking a laissez faire approach. A number of universities have gone to the wall, and the college sector has effectively disappeared, turning into a network of vocational learning centres staffed by itinerant tutors. The attempts in the early part of the century to allow easy progression between school, college and university have foundered, and the three distinct sectors are poorly linked. Globalisation is of prime importance with Scotland an attractive destination for multinationals given its comparatively low cost of living and wage structure. SMEs are struggling to recruit staff, since school leavers believe they will have better prospects and greater job security with the big firms, even if that might mean moving to another country. Many of the multinationals have an established system of workplace learning opportunities, growing their own talent, while SMEs find it difficult to release staff. Scotland's remaining universities are now private companies, answerable to shareholders, and have a high international reputation for the quality of their distance learning courses. They are competing against other countries' institutions which have set up Scottish campuses. Resources for state schools are tight, and budget constraints make it difficult for head teachers to plan ahead. There are no targeted national investment preventative initiatives and consequently no early years education. Roughly a third of pupils go on to vocational training and a third into work, with a third not in education, employment or training. Funding for part-time adult learners has virtually disappeared, and childcare, travel costs and dependant's allowances have been axed for full-time adult learners. Private schools have much better resources, particularly in ICT, and promote pupils' future employability, with an emphasis on emotional intelligence and transferable skills. Vocational education is steered by employers in the absence of a national strategy. The interest in lifelong learning is primarily vocational.



Key features of this world

Self-reliance. A global perspective which emphasises competitiveness. A population which is comfortable with personal technology: silver surfers are the norm. An acceptance of portfolio careers with regular retraining. Weight is given to general employability skills, with employers driving specific skills training. An interest in sustainability among young people, underpinned by education.

Today in 2025, Scotland is a global player through its universities and there is a bright future for Scottish higher education.

Admittedly, there are now fewer higher education institutions, falling from 19 in 2015 to eight last year. But that is the impact of market forces.

By 2016, it became clear that government could no longer afford to underwrite universities' core funding – and the sensible institutions were aggressively pursuing other financial sources.

This is not just true of higher education. The government of today is much more amenable to advice from the business sector since market forces dictate funding, and therefore decision making. Those higher education institutions which failed to meet the demands of the market have gone to the wall, but the eight we have now are world class.

The Universities Fiscal Autonomy Act of 2020 enabled institutions to become wholly private companies, run for profit which is returned to shareholders. Consultancy work is particularly lucrative as are international student fees.

Some of the incomers have extremely prestigious brands: for example, Harvard@Edinburgh, here since 2022, is taking advantage of the attractions of the Scottish capital and the lower cost of living here.

There has been an argument for universities all adopting Scottish branding to market themselves internationally, but now that there is no Scottish Funding Council disbursing grants or a Universities Scotland representing principals, there is no forum in which they meet. One university chief executive has said that with each institution responsible for its own marketing, nobody will collaborate for fear of losing out to a rival.

As well as offering distance learning courses, the Scottish universities are prominent in setting up campuses overseas to reinforce themselves as global brands. The reverse is also true, with institutions from other countries setting up in Scotland although the Scottish universities have been less than welcoming. Institutions are sensitive to the needs of the private sector, and put a particular emphasis on problem-solving and entrepreneurship.

1

Market-driven learning society

The further education sector proved less nimble in coping with the demands of the market but the network of vocational learning centres which replaced it in 2020 is continuing to perform well.

A recent innovation which should allow an even more rapid response has been to reduce educational staff contracts from a year to six months. All are now itinerant technical specialists. Many of the staff have considerable expertise in entrepreneurship, running their own businesses alongside teaching. But they find difficulty in fostering similar attitudes in their students who have a fear of failure and increasingly want jobs in large companies even though these firms' commitment to Scotland is unpredictable.

The vocational learning centres are finding a new clientele among older people, anxious for retraining at a time when there is a need for greater technical expertise and to work longer.

Some companies sponsor their older employees, some individuals pay for themselves, and there is some uptake of government study loans. Older learners interested in lifelong learning for personal interests are in the minority; most see learning as a way of enhancing their job opportunities.

Blended learning, a mixture of face-to-face classes and online courses, is working well now that most older people are familiar with technology.

There is now an excellent system of private schools across the country, geared up to meet the needs of premium investors. Branding is an important recruitment tool, and there is a trend for celebrities and television personalities to lend their name to a school. This is known as the 'sitka spruce phenomenon' referring to the controversial investments made in forestry in the 20th century. These schools use state-of-the-art mobile technology on a par with that in the universities. There are partnerships with major IT multinationals who want to contribute to developing the learning process with their technology.

A key element of teacher education is ensuring that staff are as adept in understanding and using technology and social media as their pupils, since there is now wifi access in virtually every home. The cost of tablets has continued to plummet over the past decade, and most households have several. Scotland is a signatory to the 2019 version of the UNESCO ICT Competency Framework for Teachers which argues that teachers must be able to help students become collaborative, problem-solving creative learners through using ICT, and hence effective global citizens. But some educationists claim that in practice, the programme is skewed towards economic growth rather than other goals such as personal development and promoting democracy.

1

Market-driven learning society

An American-inspired 'preparation for work' scheme has been launched in all schools. It teaches pupils about the role of work, covering career counselling, the psychology of the workplace, and an element of hands-on experience. But a leading educator has commented: "Although it is possible to learn from the successes of different countries, there is a danger of latching on to one or two interesting new ideas or policies, in isolation from creating a vision for society as a whole."

Both the elite schools and higher education institutions are adept at buying in courses by external expertise to complement courses by on-site staff.

The elite schools also forge Comenius partnerships with schools in other European countries, which help pupils' language learning, improve their ICT skills and foster intercultural awareness. When these pupils go to university, they are particularly receptive to the Erasmus European student exchange schemes. The Comenius links also stimulate teachers to develop new and collaborative teaching approaches. The state schools' links with Europe are limited and while pupils are interested in global opportunities, they expect to be able to work among English speakers.

Mandarin is now taught in most secondary schools and a growing number of primary schools, and many employ native Chinese speakers as either teachers or language assistants.

The private schools increasingly promote personal qualities, habits, attitudes and skills such as emotional intelligence and self-confidence on the grounds that these are the qualities employers want, and will enable school leavers to adapt to any organisational culture. They are keen to present themselves as 'thinking classrooms', pointing out that knowledge has a 'half-life' of a year: people forget 50 per cent after one year, 75 per cent after two years and so on. They argue that they are encouraging higher order thinking skills, nurturing pupils' ability to build up specialist knowledge which will allow them to move forward and venture into the unknown.

Pupils from the private schools are generally known for their strong interpersonal skills and seeing themselves as global citizens.

A recent survey of what is important to pupils revealed the necessity to be personally independent is a key theme. "You have to make your own living and not rely on others," one pupil responded.

There are also ongoing concerns about global warming and sustainability, but pupils are heartened by the new generation of eco-cars, and already proactively supporting education's 21st century four R's: 'Redesign, Reduce, Reuse, Recycle'

1

Market-driven learning society

The numbers going into higher education from state schools fell below 10 per cent this year. There have been complaints over the past decade about the decrease in resources for state education, as a result of the spiralling costs of dealing with crime, healthcare and environmental problems. One group of state school educationists has been particularly vociferous about the lack of funds for preventative initiatives and early years intervention, arguing that this is exacerbating marginalisation and social tension.

In rough round figures, a third of state school pupils go on to vocational training, a third into work, and a third are not in education, employment or training

Head teachers faced by continuing budget cuts are demanding that the legislation on devolved school management be reformed, and that the government deliver its pledge on stable three-year budgets aligned with school improvement plans. Many are involving their parent council in budget and improvement planning, taking account of the views of the pupils and wider community including local employers and the local authority.

SMEs, which used to form the backbone of Scottish business, are facing recruitment problems as a result of the proliferation of multinationals, which offer better salaries and perks such as health insurance.

Ten years ago, Chambers of Commerce attempted to launch an initiative through which large companies would mentor SMEs to spread best practice. But the multinationals showed little interest and larger Scottish companies felt too pressurised to assist.

Since 2018, the government has taken a back seat in vocational training for young people aged 16–24, believing that employers are best placed to determine the level and quality of participation in skills training in the workplace.

Employers are also leading the development of the adult workforce rather than relying on educational providers. Companies are using apprenticeships to fill their skills gaps. The past decade has seen a massive departure of employees through retirement, prompting firms to proactively grow their own talent. Employers see schools as delivering critical thinking and knowledge management skills while they then develop the skills specific to their industry.

1

Market-driven
learning
society

From the Prospectus of the Glen Affric (Scotland) University

About Us

Founded in 2020, we are proud to be part of the global Wakabayashi Whisky Inc campus brand with a distinctive Scottish flavour. Come and try our FREE open access MOOC (massive open online course) and find out whether higher education is for you through our fun, stimulating but intellectually rigorous and objective assessments. Enrol for a degree within six weeks of completing a MOOC and you are entitled to a 2% fee discount!

We have a student population of more than 100,000 drawn from over 120 different countries. Around 6,000 study at our purpose-built Cumbernauld campus in the heart of scenic Lanarkshire. We pride ourselves on offering excellent learning resources, including the very latest digital technology and online access to some of the best university libraries in the world.

Wifi is available throughout all university buildings and student accommodation for a minimal charge.

Relevant Teaching and Research

We offer thoroughly relevant teaching and research designed to meet the needs of employers across the globe. And we are committed to an entrepreneurial ethos, making us the ideal university for those students who want to set up their own businesses. Our caring guidance staff will look after you throughout your academic journey, and if you feel you haven't made the right choice of course, there's no problem – you can switch to any other course on the syllabus with only a small 5% charge to cover administration costs.

Employment Opportunities

With our emphasis on relevance to employers and our dedication to entrepreneurship, we have an enviable employment rate. More than 94% of our graduates find employment or go on to a higher degree within six months of graduation. And talent scouts for Wakabayashi Whisky Inc are always checking our student assessments!

Alumni and Giving

We have a growing community of alumni across the globe. We are immensely proud of their achievements and grateful that their generosity makes them want to 'give something back'. It is open to relatives and friends to mark their own pride in our graduates' success by making a donation in their name. That support helps us achieve our ambitions as an international centre of learning and research.

Student Fees for 2025/26

Undergraduate Arts-based Programmes	£20,000
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Undergraduate Science-based Programmes	£23,000
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Postgraduate Arts-based Programmes	£20,000
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Postgraduate Science-based Programmes	£23,000
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Graduate Business School MSc Programmes	£20,500
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Graduate Business School MBA Programmes	£23,500
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Remember our 2% Early Bird Discount!



Anna is leaving her state school in Cumbernauld, aged 16. The facilities were not particularly good and the teachers not particularly motivated. She does not have higher education entrance qualifications, but that was never an aspiration. A university degree is too expensive to be feasible.

Her father Tom works in the bottling hall of a nearby distillery and her mother Nicola works in a supermarket. They both feel very lucky to have kept hold of their jobs when their respective workplaces were taken over by multinationals.

The firm owning Tom's distillery is threatened by a hostile bid and Tom fears that this time he will lose his job. For that reason, both parents want Anna to enter the job market as soon as possible. Her older brother took a part-time course in airport services and ground handling at the local vocational learning centre, which led to a job at Prestwick Airport. Anna has never been sure what she wants to do, but she goes along to the vocational learning centre, where she finds places are still available on the stonemasonry course. It doesn't require previous qualifications, and is part time, so she can work in a shop as well.

The person she speaks to at the learning centre says this is a particularly good year to do the course as they are expecting a master craftsman from Florence for six months. He says Anna is likely to be extremely employable as a lot of companies are setting up prestige headquarters in Scotland, and the trend is for buildings which look traditional and classical, using local sandstone and granite.


He admits the learning centre's ICT infrastructure is obsolescent, but points out that this should not be a problem for Anna since her course is so hands-on.



2



Local
learning
society



In this world,
what matters is equality
and social justice. People
think local rather than
international.

Backstory

A static population, focused inwardly on finding its own solutions. There is disillusion with central government, and a reliance on a reformed system of local government to set policy and spending priorities. Higher taxation of the wealthy is accepted, but there has been a tightening up of benefits to those capable of work. Lifelong learning is promoted to enhance individuals' contribution to society, both economic and social, with personal fulfilment considered as important as development to improve job opportunities. Employers are encouraged to support employees' part-time study. There is an asset-based approach to learning rather than a linear approach, with learners taking whatever classes are appropriate for their needs and abilities, regardless of age. Educational institutions have been reconfigured to create cross-sectoral learning hubs from nursery to SCQF Level 8 (HND). These make considerable use of teleconferencing and distance learning, and offer 'hybrid' classes which combine online learning with less frequent in-person class meetings. Peer learning and intergenerational learning are particularly valued, and people who are housebound for a variety of reasons are encouraged to participate in virtual networks. Universities offer undergraduate and postgraduate degrees but have strong links with the learning hubs both through distance learning and face-to-face teaching. No region tries to do everything: resources are shared on a reciprocal basis. Business education, supported by local SMEs, is an important part of the curriculum. Many educators take a year out to work in industry and commerce, with business people also able to work within the learning hubs. The latest update to the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation shows the differences between the most and less deprived areas are continuing to lessen.



Key features of this world

Commitment to equality, widespread participation in democratic processes. Education is a wider responsibility than teachers' alone. Proactive involvement in sustainability. The need to work productively for longer, supported by sabbaticals and retraining opportunities. Incentives for part-time adult learners. Collaborative working and learning are prized, as are higher order and transferable skills. Greater interest in the local Scottish scene with less note taken of the rest of the world.

Today in 2025, there are fewer people entering and leaving Scotland than in the early years of the century. This means it is essential to make the most of talents, with everyone expected to contribute to the economy or society in some way. Lifelong learning has been an educational mantra for decades but at last it is a cornerstone of policy. Since the needs of the future are unknown, it is important to concentrate on high level skills, and teach people how to learn and to enjoy learning as a lifelong concept.

There is a strong focus on early years, both because of a belief in equality and the desire to encourage and enable parents to work.

'Big government' has long been discredited as out of touch with the needs of local communities, but the failures of the traditional regional approach have also had to be overcome. Arising from the year-on-year crippling budgetary constraints on Scottish local authorities, starting as far back as 2012, and the loss of public confidence in council decision-making resulting in the local government reorganisation in 2017, there has been a growing reliance on local wisdom councils to set policy and spending priorities, with considerable success.

Teaching is viewed as the responsibility of all, and not simply the preserve of qualified experts. The importance of local communities has led to the creation of cross-sectoral learning hubs from nursery to diploma level.

Communities have expanded on the innovative Swedish 'Children's University' model which aimed to combat youngsters' lack of interest in natural sciences and technology through professors spending time with parents and children. Charismatic academics from all disciplines are invited to make face-to-face and online presentations in the learning hubs.

Community education, until 2019 a discrete strand of education, is firmly embedded within the learning hubs. Its ethos of encouraging participation in democratic processes has permeated the hubs' approach to learning.

The easy availability of a range of expertise is leading to learners who have the skills to access information and to retain it, who have learnt how to learn and want to learn, and can change, adapt and transfer skills. They also have a strong sense of responsibility to their community and a desire to help improve it. Individuals' personalised learning record, which travels with them through their learning, includes not only what they have learnt through the hub but also covers extracurricular activities and experiences.

Communication, teamwork and people skills are considered an essential part of the curriculum. There is also an emphasis on personal responsibility, with learners expected to acquire decision-making skills and be financially aware.

A Central Belt study for the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation shows the percentage of school leavers with one or more awards at SCQF level 6 (Highers) or better has risen to 69 per cent in the most deprived datazones, compared to 87 per cent in the least deprived. The proportion of school leavers entering positive destinations is now almost identical, at 85 per cent and 90 per cent. Increasing economic activity by a growing number of people is leading to a drop in 'negative spend', public expenditure to correct existing problems, with a year-on-year reduction in healthcare and policing deficit spending.

There is a good support system for people with learning difficulties, but a growing intolerance of those who are simply disinclined to learn or work.

The benefits system was completely overhauled in 2022: the principal winners were disabled people, those with caring responsibilities and pensioners. Employers are liable for statutory redundancy payments, but unemployment benefit is reduced monthly if the individual fails to take up work or training options.

In an influential presentation to parliament, leading educator Mari Clark says: "We need teachers who are responsive to the needs of children, not just following programmes of study culminating in exams, and who are ambitious for all their pupils".

Sustainability is a key concern and there is strong encouragement for individuals to use green forms of transport and to use natural resources as responsibly as possible.

Communities are keen to use facilities more effectively: the learning hubs include the use of public buildings and business premises. These are open 24/7 to allow people to learn at a time and pace that suits them.

People can also study at home: the hubs are underpinned by technology, known as 'flipping the classroom', with learners downloading lectures and communicating online with educators and other students. Young and old are able to combine study, work, family and community in a way that suits their individual circumstances and preferences, so that learning becomes part of life and not a precursor to life.

Resources are maximised through distance learning. If one community does not have a particular expertise, there are reciprocal arrangements by which it can be accessed remotely from another community. Modern languages is one area to suffer, however, with learners having to work independently with no support from language teachers apart from in Gaelic. Conversely, British Sign Language has been taught as a minority language in mainstream education for the past ten years.

Both public and private bodies are expected to donate any spare capacity broadband free for general use: this is not a legal obligation but it would be considered civically irresponsible not to comply.

There are fewer disciplines taught and researched at higher education level for financial reasons.

Hubs focus on subjects of relevance to their area and the country in general, such as healthcare, social justice, forestry, marine renewables, and Gaelic language and culture. World-class science has been largely abandoned as too expensive and unnecessarily competitive.

Employers are seen as key to tackling youth unemployment, and to narrowing the gap between education and the world of work by providing part-time job opportunities. They are closely involved with the curriculum at all levels, and many offer placements at various stages of learning. These are set up with the active participation of the learning hub, to ensure that the placements are relevant and provide learners with new skills. The expertise which was housed in the former further education colleges is seen as particularly crucial. The former colleges were seen as the catalyst for the learning hubs when they were established, having links to schools, universities, business and communities. Learning hubs receive core funding from central government, but management is entirely devolved. Hubs are encouraged to set up social enterprises, using the surplus for their own priorities.

There are financial incentives for employers to encourage employees to study part-time.

Employees retain their salary while improving their skills, while employers see the immediate application of these skills in the workplace. It is common for learning hub educators to take a year out to work in business, and vice versa.

The Lifelong Learning Charter, jointly funded by local authorities, local business and government, entitles workers to a three-year sabbatical in their 40s. This aims to prevent burn-out and to foster a learning habit which will make it easier for people to retrain as they get older. Everybody understands that retraining is cheaper than redundancy. While in the early years of the century many people took early retirement, this is no longer financially viable for most. It is not unusual to work beyond the state retirement age of 67. But it is also the norm for older people to help with childcare. And elderly people who would otherwise be isolated are 'adopted' by youngsters following vetting procedures, with the young people visiting them, going shopping for them and involving them in community events.

Entrepreneurship is promoted within the education system, in terms of SMEs.

There is little desire to set up anything larger, since SMEs meet the communities' needs, and in any event, there is no easy means to seek inward investment.

Around 80 per cent of all businesses are family run, which rely heavily for their own successful development on tailor-made material developed by the learning hubs. There is widespread use of online courses from the Glasgow Cowcaddens Learning Hub which has a long tradition of teaching and research in family businesses.

Some people are critical of society now having less of an international outlook. They claim that it is focusing on finding its own solutions without seeing whether relevant examples exist elsewhere, and that what is happening in Scotland is also less exposed to challenge. It is certainly true that most Scots displaying an entrepreneurial spirit and global outlook have preferred to leave Scotland for what they regard as more 'favourable conditions'.





Extract from the transcript of the Wisdom Council at Lochaber Learning Hub, 8/9 April 2025.

Attending: **Angus, janitorial staff; Chris, learner; Eileen, employer; Gordon, educator; Morag, catering staff; Stuart, parent.**

Gordon: I think it's good to recognise how much we've improved things, having a single place of learning for your whole journey. Think how traumatic it used to be for kids to have to move from primary school to secondary school, especially at such a sensitive age.

Morag: It was awful. I didn't know half the people in my class in the big school.

Stuart: And everyone going through the same year at the same time was crazy. How can you think all eight year-olds or all 13 year-olds are at the same level? At least now they can study at whatever stage suits them. There was a university-level educator talking to the wee ones last week, and a ten year-old really put him on the spot. That kid'll be fast-tracking before you know it.

Angus: Sorry, am I missing the point here? Are we not supposed to be talking about the changes we want to see in the future?

(laughter)

Eileen: Quite right, Angus. Otherwise they'll just spend the two days patting themselves on the back.

Angus: Well, I think we should do away with exams.

Gordon: Why do you say that, Angus?

Angus: They upset a lot of the kids. I see them coming in on an exam day, shaking like wee leaves, some of them. And then there's show-offs that know they're going to do well and upset the others even more. I don't see why we have to have exams.

Gordon: It's a form of assessment, and it's just one form, Angus. It's all part of getting a qualification.

Angus: I don't see what that's for, either.

Gordon: If you'll excuse the pun, it's a tried and tested...

Stuart: Sorry, Gordon, but I think Angus is making a good point. We've got away from the idea that teachers know everything. Education comes from everywhere, from the home as much as the learning

hub, if not more so. It's been years since we started putting extracurricular achievements on the personalised learning record. Maybe we need to get away from the idea of exams and qualifications.

Gordon: But qualifications are important in the jobs market, aren't they, Eileen?

Eileen: Frankly, I put more weight on personal recommendations, or how a learner does when they're on a placement with us. Some of the unemployed people we get coming in with no qualifications at all turn out to be just what we're looking for. You can't tell.

Gordon: Qualifications are important if you're looking for a job elsewhere in the country.

Morag: But is that right? Maybe the employers in other places are the same as Eileen? And how many look for a job someplace else?

Gordon: I don't have the figures off the top of my head...

Angus: Only a handful, I'd say. Chris, are you thinking of going outside for a job?

Chris: No, I'm on the renewable energy course, and there's plenty of jobs here with that. I'll have two placements, and I'm hoping I'll get a job offer from one of them.

Angus: What about your girl, Stuart? Will she be moving outside?

Stuart: I wouldn't think so. All her friends and family are here.

Angus: So the majority have to suffer for the benefit of a tiny minority, is that it? That's not very fair.

Gordon: It's a really interesting point. I'd like to say how much I appreciate being able to take two days out to reflect on how we do things. Otherwise there's a danger that we just keep going along the same old track. Can we maybe leave this question for the moment and come back to it?...



Anna is 13 and learning a variety of subjects in the Lochaber Learning Hub. Classes are based on ability and aptitude rather than age. As well as the core skills of communication, maths, citizenship, and entrepreneurship, she is learning physics, chemistry, aikido in martial arts and the clarsach in Scottish musical tradition. Her father Tom worked in a distillery until the multinational which owned it pulled out of Scotland, and no other buyer could be found. He was on the basic citizen's income for a number of months, which was enough for their needs, but is now retraining in engineering for renewable energy in the learning hub as there are increasing job opportunities in this area locally.

Since it is a priority subject, the local authority is paying his fees. He has encouraged Anna to take physics and chemistry as a good grounding for the course. Anna's mother Nicola works in a supermarket and is studying Italian in preparation for a family holiday in Italy. There are no language teachers in the learning hub, but it is possible to study a broad range of modern languages and the classics through innovative online courses. These can be accessed at any time in the hub's dedicated language suite, and Nicola often goes in on a Sunday or very early in the morning before work. Now in her 40s, she is looking forward to her three-year sabbatical under the Lifelong Learning Charter. She loves cooking and plans to investigate creating ready meals using organic seasonal produce.


Anna's older brother did particularly well in his entrepreneurship classes, and the family assumed he would set up his own business with support from the local Chamber of Commerce. But instead he has decided to become a learning mentor to help combat youth unemployment.



3



Global
learning
society



In this world, the government is leading the way to a learning society, teaching is a highly regarded profession and education is a key export.

Backstory

Government has taken a firm lead in promoting lifelong learning as a means of boosting economic growth and reducing costly inequalities in society. Policy is based on strong educational research. There has been a decade of targeted funding going to early years education and deprived areas. The further education college network has close links with the school sector and is fostering entrepreneurship. Significant resources are raised through Scotland being a net exporter of education and research, boosted by an international reputation for excellence. There are fears of a potential brain drain with young Scots' propensity to work abroad, but hopes of this being balanced by inward migration. There are also fears that the increasing use of technology to deliver courses can lead to social isolation. And some people have misgivings about Scotland exporting its educational values, arguing that this is a new form of colonialism.



Key features of this world

Outward looking, taking and building on best practice wherever it is found. Educational aspirations raised from early years: schooling 'defeats destiny'. Creative use of technology in education. Entrepreneurs-in-residence encourage enterprise in schools and promote links between education and business. While education is a key economic driver, its social and cultural benefits are also valued. There is an increasing emphasis on informal learning, with learners setting their own goals. International understanding, ICT and language skills are key competences.

Today in 2025, we are seeing signs of a return on the ten-year investment targeted towards early years initiatives and schools in less affluent areas. This has been central to government's desire to create a learning society, and follows the successful Finnish model of the best schools being based in the most challenging areas. It is now nine years since programmes in parenting skills, entrepreneurship and raising educational aspirations became an integral part of the primary curriculum. The 2020 reformed Curriculum for Excellence, which drew heavily on the report of the international advisory panel, is bedding in.

Some critics say teachers are in danger of suffering from innovation fatigue but the latest figures show a rise in standards across the board, particularly in maths, science and basic skills, with the most significant improvement over the past five years in schools in socially deprived areas.

A survey of first and second year pupils in these schools suggests that 73 per cent expect to continue their education beyond the school leaving age. This appears to be the result of expanding opportunities for informal learning, and indicates a desire for lifelong learning is taking root.

Already there are encouraging signs that this will free up government resources by, for example, reducing crime and improving healthcare.

School education is seen as a means to 'defeat destiny', combatting the culture of earlier decades when an individual's background played a major part in their success. In 2017, the difference between how youngsters from different backgrounds performed was much greater than in many other countries, but Scotland is now heading towards the top third of countries. The government sees this as justifying its decision to make education its key budget priority: it argues that a learning society promotes social cohesion and wealth creation. Within the education system, it has targeted various strategic areas for additional support, notably engineering for renewable energy, information technology and microbiology. These have raised considerable sums through patents and royalties, funds which are ring-fenced for investment in education.

Drawing on internationally admired developments in Singapore, the government has invested heavily in educational research. In the words of one leading policy maker: "We can't make good evidence-based policy decisions without having the evidence there to work from".

The ‘Inspiring Teachers’ programme, launched in 2019, which established teaching as a Masters level profession, is now completely embedded.

It was singled out for praise in the recent OECD report which stated: “Scottish educators are aware of learning developments in other countries, reflect on their own practice, and define their professionalism in terms of how successfully their students learn. They are valued members of society and teaching attracts talented, motivated individuals.”

The OECD commented that creative use of technology is the norm, with competence in ICT a core component of a teaching post. “Mobile technology has reduced the emphasis on classroom-based learning, and there is a trend towards centres of excellence in different subjects, which then share their expertise online.”

Many courses are available free across the world under the brand ‘The Caledonian Academy’, unashamedly borrowing the model of the 20 year-old Khan Academy whose mission is to “provide a high quality education to anyone, anywhere”.

Within the schools, there is an appreciation that different people have different lifelong learning styles, and that all of these should be considered if more people are to be learners. There was a major series of symposia two years ago, celebrating the 80th birthday of American learning guru Professor Howard Gardner, who identified nine ‘intelligences’, ranging from linguistic (enjoying reading and writing) and logical-mathematical (interested in concepts and numbers) to visual (learning best through pictures and images) and interpersonal (learning best with others around them). Innovative technology and teachers who travel between a number of schools means pupils have the chance of the education most appropriate to them. There are hands-on sessions, projects, and outplacements at colleges and with employers.

Collaboration is the watchword, across classes, schools, authorities, the country and the world. This also allows schools to offer as wide a curriculum as possible, including vocational subjects. Adult learners are a common sight in schools, whether picking up basic skills or accessing more specialist learning. There is a well-established system of accrediting experiential learning, ensuring they have the most appropriate learning opportunities. Teachers welcome the adults’ presence since it has a positive impact on youngsters’ behaviour, even though adults predominantly use video calling and IT facilities rather than attending face-to-face classes. Schools all employ ‘personal learning coaches’ who do not teach but can create an online programme from the vast array on offer, tailored to the individual learner’s interests.

There is an underlying disquiet, however, among many educationists over the growing reliance on technology, which they fear will lead to learners being isolated. They warn of the danger in neglecting the social contact and peer encouragement dimension of the learning process.

Learning is an essential support for economic development, creating people with requisite skills who can reassess their direction as their personal needs, technology, and work requirements change. But there is an explicit acceptance that not all learning is undertaken for economic reasons, and different purposes need to be equally valued.

Learning also underpins the vibrancy of communities and culture at a time when people are living longer and the population is increasingly diverse.

Scotland is now cited as an international model of best practice in early years language learning with its successful immersion courses. Recognising the value of a second language and following a series of research projects which revealed inconsistencies in learning across the country, a new integrated and compulsory system to support this – covering early years, primary and secondary school – was introduced in 2020. The pupils involved show a particular facility in learning other languages which the government sees as enhancing Scotland's global links. Mandarin and Arabic are rapidly growing in popularity.

Partnerships between schools in Scotland and other countries have led to individual pupils being 'twinned' with pupils elsewhere, keeping in touch through social media. Strong friendships have developed and there is an increasing trend for young people to go to work abroad, raising fears of a brain drain. It is not yet clear whether this is a long term problem or whether the young people will return after a short period. A number of pundits see this outward migration as healthy and argue that it is balanced by Scotland's openness to inward migration.

The further education college network is forging increasingly strong links with school pupils whose early creative thinking is being nurtured. This appears to be a promising avenue to entrepreneurship, and the college network is best placed to promote this, drawing on its close links with employers.

Many schools have entrepreneurs-in-residence, sponsored by local businesses. Their ability to think imaginatively beyond existing constraints is seen as a means of encouraging the education system to keep improving.

Every university is now a member of a global grouping ranging from the Worldwide Universities Network to Universitas 21. But there is also global recognition of their own brand, launched three years ago, Scotland's Universities. They recently beat Caltech to build a \$100 million space simulator, which will be used to test commercial craft to the Moon. Scotland's Universities says collaboration is crucial to attract major international funds for research projects and equipment, with institutions all benefiting from the promotion of Scottish higher education abroad. There is increasingly fierce international competition over courses, including emerging world universities challenging the developed world. But the Scottish universities' reputation for quality ensures that although many countries now teach courses in English, Scottish qualifications are particularly sought-after. The ongoing global economic downturn has reduced the earlier movement of international students, but many national governments, and many individuals, are signing up for online courses from Scotland. Scotland's Universities says this is now a major revenue raiser, and praises the support it receives from government departments. There is agreement that the profits will continue to be split equally between government and universities.

Following the recommendations of the education committee, the government has agreed a 10 per cent increase in the budget of the Scottish Educational Research Association to support local innovations which fall within the government's strategic framework.

It has also agreed the policies will continue to be piloted in at least four different communities before they are assessed for national adoption, and educational tools developed in the global marketplace will be trialled across the country as well.

The government actively seeks to influence the skills levels needed by companies to boost the economy. It is careful to take account of different sectors and to cover both the product market and competitive strategy.

There are strong feelings of social isolation among students. Student satisfaction surveys reveal a sizeable minority of students who feel isolated by the dominance of the virtual classroom, despite the avowed concern with student support.

They are encouraged to form their own online support networks, including students outwith Scotland, but many say this simply adds to their feelings of isolation. They say what they value most about a campus is the face-to-face support from tutors.

The Times of India

Saturday 17 May 2025

Learning Lessons From Scotland

It is Professor Jennifer Anderson's first visit to Kolkata. But the vice-principal for internationalisation at the University of Aberdeen in Scotland is already well known to the students she is meeting through her online induction courses.

"I'm not here just for Aberdeen, but to represent Scottish higher education," she stresses. "The key to what we do is collaboration, so that we can offer the widest range and highest quality courses possible."

Professor Anderson says that given Scotland's small size (its 5.5 million population is less than that of Kolkata), the universities got together to agree on national centres of excellence, along with teaching and research pools bringing together expertise from a number of institutions.

The strategy has paid off, with seven of Scotland's 16 universities in the top 200 world rankings, attracting leading researchers from all over the world.

Pioneering research feeds into the teaching and is one of the major

attractions of Scottish degrees. Scottish education is now bigger in India and China than it is in Scotland. Undergraduate study is by distance learning, with Scotland in the vanguard of the latest technological innovations. Postgraduates usually spend at least a semester in a Scottish university, and the country is noted for the warm welcome it gives incoming students.

"Our international students have full access to our national careers guidance service," Professor Anderson says. "We see careers guidance as an important means of enhancing social mobility. It's also important to say that we don't just look at education in terms of jobs, but in terms of its social and cultural value."

As long ago as 2007, an OECD country review highly praised Scottish education and noted how strong it was in comparison with other countries. But Professor Anderson says there was a crisis of confidence among educators until government reforms promoted traditional values of learning for all and made teaching a more attractive profession.

"We're now exporting these values around the globe in what we see as a win-win situation," she says. "It's earning us money but it's also earning us friendship, and ideas of global citizenship promote global stability."

Anna's sliding door



Anna has just started primary school in a tough part of Glasgow where her favourite activity is the creative thinking chatathons. She has already caught the eye of the further education college network which is monitoring how youngsters think. The colleges' close links with employers give them an important role in promoting entrepreneurship and they are particularly interested in the remarkable creative thinking abilities of primary age children.

Anna is unaware of the network's interest, but her parents know all about the project and are very proud of her. Anna's father, Tom, works in the bottling hall of a local distillery. The company is paying for him to study at the local college on two afternoons a week, and the vocational qualification he gains will lead to promotion. Her mother, Nicola, worked in a supermarket where she started going to classes in local history offered free by Glasgow University. She took several other classes, and the lecturers, spotting her enthusiasm, encouraged her to consider studying for a degree.

She was visited by a university mentor, who lived in the same area, and found there was sponsorship available for degrees in teaching.

There is particular interest in training and hiring teachers with life experience, since it is felt that they bring a broader perspective to their teaching practice than students who have come straight from school. Nicola is now midway through a Masters course, with a job guaranteed when she qualifies. All the universities profess a strong commitment to student support, but Nicola feels she gains most support from her fellow students rather than staff. She is the first in the family to go into higher education and is determined that Anna will also go to university. But Tom is convinced Anna will be an entrepreneur, especially as the further education project aims to foster the children's creative spark as they get older.

Nicola's Masters dissertation involves comparing early years initiatives in Scotland, the Netherlands and Korea, and she is able to draw on first-hand information from Dutch and Korean students in her group. She says higher education will give Anna an international outlook. But Tom argues that she will have just as many global opportunities if she becomes an entrepreneur. Anna's elder brother, who is musically talented, didn't want to do anything except join a band when he left school. He said he could return to study whenever he liked. But his parents insisted that he discuss this with a careers guidance counsellor. As a result, he is using his learning voucher for a course at the Centre of Excellence in Creative and Cultural Industries at the University of the West of Scotland.

He is enthused by the state-of-the-art music labs but is showing little interest in the business management modules. At school, he was 'twinned' with a pupil in Ghana with whom he remains in close touch, and is keen to go there to find out more about West African music.

4

Divided
learning
society

In this world,
the learning society
is divided and people
accept that as the way
things are and will be.

Backstory

Rising crime and social unrest has led to the creation of 'gated communities' where wealth is concentrated. The areas outside face spiralling deprivation, housing the 'precariat', people with poor or transitory job prospects. There is a chaotic spiral of growing mental health issues, often resulting from substance abuse, causing or exacerbating other life problems and perpetuating social problems. The government is struggling to contain these problems both practically and financially and is responsive rather than proactive. There is little investment in early years education or adult learning. People increasingly see their immediate community, whether rich or poor, as a key source of support. Growing discontent over the past decade with poor school standards and facilities has led to the proliferation of private schools serving the gated communities. These use state-of-the-art technology as standard, but there is a digital divide with poor access to up-to-date technology in deprived areas. There is no long-term government strategy for education, leading to low morale in the profession and a reluctance to innovate. But a growing number of educationists are getting involved in a movement promoting informal learning within local communities as a means of empowerment.

Key features of this world

An acceptance of a high degree of entrenched inequality. High educational aspirations among the well-off compared to minimal aspirations in deprived communities. Disparity in career opportunities and life expectancy. Narrow, inward focus in both communities. Self-reliance and dependence on local help rather than having expectations of the state.

Today in 2025, Scotland is divided between well-off so-called 'gated communities' and deprived areas. There is a general acceptance of a certain level of inequality and social injustice. There is low dependence on the state, with both types of community embracing the ethos of 'looking after their own'.

The deprived areas are dominated by the 'precariat', a term which took off about 15 years ago to describe those without job security or prospect of regular work.

Because of the rise in social unrest over the past decade, with increasing alcohol and drug abuse, the government budget priorities are in policing, the prison system and healthcare, and there is little available investment in early years education. There are widespread fears that the costs of these priority areas are unsustainable, especially as the education budget has suffered year-on-year real-terms cuts since 2020. The deprived areas have the poorest life expectancy in developed Europe at 72, while the gated communities are above the European average at 86. The latest OECD report reveals that Scottish schools are continuing their downward trajectory, outperformed by the majority of European countries, North America and Asia.

A study has estimated the cost of the lack of early years investment, claiming that intervention would reduce budget pressures, but its findings have had no impact on policy.

The study warns that almost 10 per cent of children now have a clinically diagnosed mental health disorder, and calculates that the costs of managing their mental health, alcoholism, drug abuse, possible criminality and lack of earnings as an adult will total £90,577 compared with £9,602 for a child with 'no problems'.

The deprived areas have high levels of unemployment and crime, and low levels of educational attainment. Around a quarter of the adult population are prescribed drugs for anxiety and depression. There are indications that in both the deprived areas and the gated communities, older people are particularly fearful of crime and feel socially isolated.

The gated communities, which started to be established in 2018, have a 'cycle of affluence', with high educational attainment leading to low unemployment levels, low levels of drug and alcohol abuse, low crime rates and high life expectancy. They have set up their own private kindergartens, and 80 per cent of their schools are private. There is a considerable 'demonisation' of the deprived communities by the gated communities as being the source of the country's problems and cost against their taxes.

There is a well-developed system of parents' councils in the gated communities, scrutinising standards and promoting innovation. Parents' councils in deprived areas have less impact: parental involvement is less consistent because of work and domestic responsibilities or indifference.

Support for pupils with learning difficulties is well resourced in the gated communities, fostering the abilities of those who would otherwise struggle with formal education. But pressure on state school funding means the main emphasis is on a narrow core curriculum, with dwindling resources for learning support. Many pupils lack core skills. The opportunities for adult and community education are also declining. Since the rise of the gated communities, there has been some concern among academics about what they describe as the polarisation of society, and a number of universities have set up outreach centres in deprived areas, offering a limited range of courses. Research into these outreach centres indicates that they have little impact, and that there must be 'targeted, integrated and holistic support and intervention at community level'.

Further education colleges are predominantly based in deprived areas, although several offering high-level specialist technical training have been established in gated communities.

The colleges have a strong reputation for 'rescuing' those who have performed poorly at school, but they are frustrated by Byzantine fee criteria which often lead to students dropping out for financial reasons.

Many employers dispute the relevance of college qualifications and prefer to carry out training in-house. An innovative dual credit scheme, based on best practice from abroad, was introduced in 2018, allowing vulnerable students from 'challenged' areas to take college and school courses simultaneously, based at college with support from a school teacher. But it was abandoned a few years later because of lack of resources.

The qualifications gained by the pupils in the gated communities are still considered essential for getting good jobs, even though a research study finds that they subsequently often have to supplement their qualifications with additional learning and skills development throughout their work and everyday lives. Conversely, the study finds that pupils from the precariat have virtually no chance of getting jobs with their qualifications.

4

Divided learning society

In the gated communities, some 90 per cent of parents of primary school pupils say they expect their child to go to university, compared to 10 per cent of parents in deprived areas. But there are signs of a decline in mobility because of the cost of higher education. Pupils generally plan to stay at home while studying. They are currently expected to leave university with £45,000 of debt and many remain living with their parents after graduation. Because of the financial pressures, there is a growing interest in distance learning degrees and a number of companies which support continuing professional development are prepared to sponsor new recruits through relevant fast-track study. Virtual networked learning is an important part of on-the-job training.

The combined debt of a graduate couple makes the pursuit of well-paid jobs a priority, and there is a continuing decline in young people's involvement in voluntary and community work.

Because the precariat have to grab job opportunities as and when they come up, they have little sense of free time to spare. There is little interest in lifelong learning, since qualifications have no obvious benefit.

There is a deep digital divide. Internet access is standard within the gated communities, and schools expect pupils to have the latest tablets. But only half the families in the deprived areas have access to or use sophisticated technology required for the acquisition of learning and employment.

Surveys show this is the lowest level of access in Europe. This and financial pressures are a barrier to the innovative use of technology in state schools which continue to rely on traditional face-to-face classroom teaching. The schools have ICT suites which are always over-subscribed even though they are far from state-of-the-art. There were hopes around five years ago that these suites could be used to help adult learners wanting to enter or retrain for the jobs market, but potential learners have shown little interest, and in any case there are not enough staff to introduce them to using the technology.

Schools and teachers are judged on pupil progression and exam results, and there is no encouragement for teachers to try to develop the curriculum

Critics claim this is undermining any creative autonomy in the profession. Because teaching quality is defined so narrowly, there is little incentive for schools to develop close collaborative links with their communities or beyond. Some teachers in the deprived areas try to be creative with their meagre resources, and are committed to trying to improve their pupils' life chances through education. But a report from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation says that equality of educational opportunity cannot rely solely on better delivery of the school curriculum for disadvantaged groups, but must address multiple aspects of disadvantaged children's lives.

4

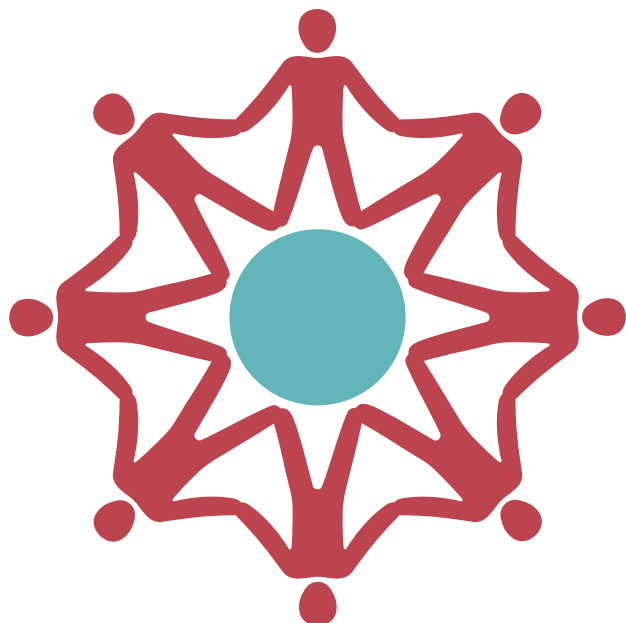
Divided learning society

It is a common complaint among teachers in state schools that they are responsible for class control rather than teaching. Although teachers have more job security than many employees, morale in the profession is low. Peer learning has been abandoned as taking too much time and effort for the benefit it achieves.

There is no long-term strategy for education, so educational management is characterised by short-termism, and without a strategy management focuses only on each individual part, not how the parts link together.

This creates a dysfunctional educational system which militates against a holistic learning environment for pupils. There is no government encouragement in this direction, and only a few teachers are determined and committed enough to promote international links. Such links exist at university level but predominantly in research rather than teaching. Private schools organise international trips and exchanges, but these are financially impossible for the state sector.

But an innovative trend is developing in a number of deprived areas for educationists to help local people empower themselves through informal learning circles. This is a development of the Ragged Project of 15 years ago, itself inspired by the philanthropic Ragged Schools of the 19th century. The educationists run free classes in pubs and cafés on a range of topics which are increasingly proposed by the participants themselves. Peer and intergenerational learning are key elements. The educationists enjoy working with motivated volunteers rather than pupil conscripts and hope the adults' growing enthusiasm will help raise pupils' aspirations.



ROSEHEARTY NEWS

Wednesday 26 March 2025

New Factory For Rosehearty

By a staff reporter

There was a mixed response today for the news that a cold storage plant, IceCo, is to open in town. The plant, which has state-of-the-art fish handling systems, is to be built on the site of Rosehearty High School.

Headteacher Ms Susan Fraser said: "I can't believe this. There's been no consultation at all. It will destroy our community."

But Councillor Graham Knox, speaking after the council meeting which unanimously approved the move, said: "This is a vote of confidence in Rosehearty. It's a wake-up call to all those who think all the investment goes to gated communities." Councillor Knox said the fabric of the school had deteriorated so much that it required significant investment to bring it up to standard.

"But with falling rolls and pupil numbers now down to 200, we can't possibly justify that expense."

Demolition of the school will begin next month, with teachers expected to get six months' redundancy pay and other staff three months' pay.

"We've got our lives here," Ms Fraser said. "I don't know where we can go. And I don't know what the parents are going to do. The nearest school's 20 miles away."

Councillor Knox accused her of selfishness and short-sightedness. The IceCo venture would bring job opportunities in terms of demolition and construction, and there would be further opportunities when the plant opened.

"Surely the point of education is to teach people to be flexible and make the most of whatever turns up," he said. "The days of a job for life have gone, unless you're in a gated community."

He suggested that parents could make arrangements to transfer the pupils by minibuses to neighbouring schools. But Ms Fraser said that given the pressure on state school budgets, she did not see how the Rosehearty pupils could all be accommodated nearby.

"We can't even have distance learning classes because not enough families have computers and we can't depend on having broadband," she said.

A dinner lady, who refused to give her name, said most of the staff at the school were female while most of the workers who would be hired on the IceCo project would be male.

"At least we use our pay packets for the benefit of our families," she said. "With the men, it will all go on drink, drugs and gambling."

4

Divided
learning
society

Anna's sliding door



Anna is a first year secondary pupil in Rosehearty, one of the deprived areas. She has been on Ritalin since she was six, for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), in common with around half of her classmates. Twenty years ago, fewer than 10 per cent of under 14s were on ADHD drugs, but Scotland has now followed England's lead in the extensive use of Ritalin. Anna's mother, Nicola, a single parent, suffers from depression: she should be on medication, but as an adult, she has to pay for prescriptions, and has given up the pills as too costly.

Nicola works in a supermarket and also as a school dinner lady. Her shifts mean that she frequently has to leave Anna at home by herself, but Anna seems happy enough to be left with sweets in front of the TV. Nicola's parents live close by, but they both have chronic health problems, and Nicola is afraid that looking after Anna would be too much of a strain for them. Nicola walked out on her partner, Tom, because of his drug-taking. The town has serious alcohol and drug problems and associated crime, but little is done to seriously address them. The cottage hospital has a small and very under-resourced addictions unit. Nicola has an older son who was in constant trouble for truanting and claimed he was bullied. He left school at 16 and went to live with his father. Nicola is no longer in receipt of child benefit for him and has no idea how he is supporting himself: she fears he is involved in the drugs scene. With the local school about to be demolished, Nicola doesn't know what she will do. There is mutual support among the women in the community, but she needs paid employment. She has not thought about what Anna might do when she grows up.

What next?

There will be some things in each of the scenarios which readers will like, and some they will dislike; there are both positives and negatives in each notion of a learning society. You may now wish to look to the toolkit which accompanies this paper; it will help you decide how best to further engage with the scenarios to test your organisation's own strategic assumptions.

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About the Goodison Group in Scotland

The Goodison Group in Scotland (GGiS) was formed in 2005 by its Chair Sir Andrew Cubie CBE and Brian Stevens. The establishment of GGiS was inspired by the work of the Goodison Group, set up in England by Sir Nicholas Goodison and Brian Stevens as a programme of FEEdS Consultancy Ltd.

GGiS has continued to operate long after the original Goodison Group ceased to operate in England in 2006. In August 2011 GGiS moved into a new phase, constituted as a company limited by guarantee with charitable status, registered as GGiS (Network) Ltd.

Our vision:

Lifelong learning within a community that treasures the capacity to learn should be the normal expectation of every individual.

Our aim:

To influence debate and practice in business, government and education on the changing nature of learning in the 21st century.

Our purpose:

To bring together experienced people from the worlds of business, government and education to focus on particular themes to do with learning, skills and productivity.

Our objective:

To act as a premier learning network for its members to come together to explore the changing nature of learning in a spirit of open inquiry and to produce high quality research, events and briefings on different aspects of learning suitable in 21st century Scotland.

Our work is guided by five long-term aspirations for learning:

- > Every individual citizen should have the opportunity to learn at every age, and should expect to do so.
- > The treasure of learning throughout life should be part and parcel of every community in the country.
- > The advancement of every individual citizen, through both formal and informal learning, should be the test of all policies and practices.
- > There should be constructive debate about lifelong learning between business, government and education and a means of sustaining it.
- > The countries of the United Kingdom should make sure that they learn policies and practices from each other.

Who are we?

GGiS has an active, growing network of over 130 individuals and organisations from a range of backgrounds, including business, public service, education and the third sector.

GGiS Board of Directors

- > Sir Andrew Cubie (Chair)
- > Mark Batho
- > Dugdale Bradley
- > Professor Graham Donaldson
- > Brian Stevens (Company Secretary)

About Scotland's Futures Forum

Scotland's Futures Forum was created by the Scottish Parliament to help its Members, along with policy makers, businesses, academics, and the wider community of Scotland, look beyond immediate horizons, to some of the challenges and opportunities we will face in the future.

Looking beyond the four-year electoral cycle and away from party politics, the Forum seeks to stimulate public debate in Scotland, bringing fresh perspectives, ideas and creativity on how we might prepare for the future now.

SFF Board of Directors

- > The Rt Hon Tricia Marwick MSP, Presiding Officer to the Scottish Parliament
- > John Park MSP (2009 – 2012)
- > Aileen McLeod MSP
- > Alex Johnstone MSP
- > Lady Susan Rice, Managing Director, Lloyds Banking Group, Scotland
- > Anne Douglas, Prospect National Secretary for Scotland and Chairperson of the Scottish Union Learning Board
- > Sir Andrew Cubie CBE, Chair of the Goodison Group in Scotland
- > Professor Sir Ian Diamond, Principal and Vice Chancellor of Aberdeen University

Paul Grice, SFF Company Secretary and Chief Executive, Scottish Parliament

Donald Jarvie, Head of Business, Scotland's Futures Forum

Supporters

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“The Royal Bank of Scotland are again pleased to support the work of the Goodison Group in Scotland. We believe that it is vital for all parties involved in Lifelong Learning to engage in debate to ensure we optimise our Learning activities. Only by working together can we create the environment where we can all compete.”

LLOYDS
BANKING
GROUP



“Lloyds Banking Group recognises the important contribution the Goodison Group in Scotland continues to make in the field of lifelong learning and we are very pleased to play our part in assisting their work. As employment patterns change and both individuals and businesses need to become more flexible and more adaptable, the need for access to education and training throughout life increases. The Goodison Group in Scotland is making a significant contribution in this arena.”



Supported by BP.

This project has been undertaken in a genuine spirit of open inquiry as a think-piece, designed to stimulate debate and allow individuals and organisations to question their strategic approaches around learning, skills and education.

For more information regarding this project contact either info@ggis.org.uk or event@scotlandfutureforum.org

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