

# Let's talk about education

✘ Education Secretary Michael Russell today hosted the last of a series of discussion events on the Higher Education Green Paper, 'Building a Smarter Future'.

The discussion, held at the City of Glasgow College, concentrated on all issues facing higher education with a particular focus on student support and the cost of education to the individual. Secondary school pupils, student association members and representatives of the NUS, Youth Parliament and Young Scot were all present.

The Scottish Government has made clear through the Green Paper and its ongoing engagement on the issue that they want those in the sector, parents, students and unions to be a key part of the decision process.

Those in attendance had the opportunity to share their views and question Mr Russell directly on particular issues of interest to them.

Mr Russell said:

"It is crucial that we hear the views of students and possible future students before any decisions are made over the future of higher education in Scotland.

"Much of the debate so far has been focused on institutional funding but the eventual solution has to be more fundamental. We need to look at issues such as how people access education, the 'journey' they take through school or college to university, even the length of a degree. Crucially we must decide how we can properly support students while they study.

"Our tradition in Scotland is based on access determined by ability to learn, not ability to pay. We reject the socially divisive view that students and graduates should be forced to

take charge of their own education through tuition fees.

“However, there are difficulties facing every aspect of our national life at this time. We must consider how, in these most problematic of times, we can continue to properly support our universities and our students. Today is a major step in finding a sustainable system with the correct balance for sharing the costs of higher education fairly among all of those who benefit.”

Liam Burns, President of NUS Scotland, said:

“Too much of this debate has been dominated by looking at how we can get extra money into universities to maintain the status quo. First we need to look at whether the status quo is good enough in the first place. There are ways to potentially save large sums of money from the current system, that at the same time could actually improve the sector by improving access, creating a more flexible approach to degrees, or most crucially increasing the amount of money students have in their pockets.

“We are happy to be involved in the Green Paper process. As long as tuition fees are off the table we are happy to discuss how we can fund students, colleges and universities in the future. Our priorities are improving student support, ruling out tuition fees and maintaining graduate numbers in Scotland. We believe that this is absolutely possible without closing off opportunities to current or future generations and without raiding their pockets through tuition fees.”

Derek Couper, Chair of the Scottish Youth Parliament, said:

“We think it’s vital that young people are able to have their say on the issues that affect their lives. For the thousands of students in Scotland, and those who are planning to apply in the next few years, making sure that they can pursue their education without risking poverty and hardship is never far from their thoughts.

“The SYP believes tuition should remain free in further and higher education and tuition fees are not an option for a society which puts ability to learn above ability to pay. Current and future students have their own views on the different ways colleges and universities might be funded and we welcome the opportunity to share them.”

This was the last in a series of events following the publication of the Green Paper in December 2010 that have been held across Scotland during the past five weeks.

The Green Paper was launched by the Cabinet Secretary for Education in the Scottish Parliament on December 16 2010. So far this year we have held 3 public discussion events on the paper:

- \* January 18 – Sustainable Sector, Funding and Structures at Heriot-Watt University
- \* January 25 – Putting Learners at the Centre at the University of the West of Scotland
- \* February 1 – Maintaining Excellence at Aberdeen University

The closing date for written responses is Friday February 25, 2011.