

Raising The Standard For Youth Employment

Every year around 2,500 young people leave school in Edinburgh with hundreds more in East Lothian and Midlothian.

And while the majority move on to a job, training, or further or higher education a significant number find themselves without a 'positive destination'.

Tackling this problem and its wider consequences is something Sandy Begbie is determined to do over the next three years – and he is heading a partnership approach that promises to build on recent successes.

Sandy, Chief People Officer at Standard Life, is already well-versed in the issue through his company's whole-hearted support for The Edinburgh Guarantee – a highly successful collaboration between the private, public and third sectors – which has already seen the numbers of school leavers finding a positive destination rise from 83% in 2011 to 93% last year.

Involvement in the scheme has also contributed to a major change in the age profile of Standard Life's workforce. Since 2010 the proportion of under-25s has increased from 0.5% to 5.5%.

Now, as Chair of the Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) initiative for Edinburgh, Midlothian and East Lothian, he intends to make even greater inroads. This is being led by the Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce who will use its considerable reach and influence to help deliver the initiative under a cross-sector advisory board chaired by Sandy.

The scheme is part of the Scottish Government's seven year plan to reduce youth unemployment by 40 per cent, ensuring more school leavers find positive work while helping businesses tap into a pool of talented young people.

Sandy said: "We need to break down the barriers to employment for young people, especially those who are traditionally 'hard to reach'. We need to build greater and better engagement between business and education – secondary and further education – and we need to create greater understanding of what each does and what support and help each can offer.

"I worked with Sue Bruce, then Chief Executive at City of Edinburgh Council, on The Edinburgh Guarantee in 2011. At that time, Edinburgh had a poor record on youth unemployment compared to other local authority areas in Scotland. A lot of great work has been done to improve that picture but more can be done.

"Edinburgh has an unusual labour market. We have a lot of very well paid people working in high quality jobs in the financial sector, law and the professions and in some other knowledge and qualification driven sectors. We also have a big service industry, which is often less well paid. But we have a small middle market, where people earn the kind of average to slightly above average salaries. In comparison, Glasgow has a much smaller number of highly paid jobs but a much more balanced middle.

"In the Lothians there are areas in which people do pretty well and pockets where there is far less opportunity.

"So we need to work hard to ensure we are tapping into the 50% plus of young people who leave school each year who aren't going on to further or higher education to ensure they get into gainful employment.

"We have seen some great initiatives such as The Edinburgh Guarantee make a real difference. The DYW initiative can build on that and ultimately our aim must be to eradicate youth unemployment."

Sandy maintains there are a number of tactics which can be used to help make progress.

"We can document and map the current landscape of initiatives and infrastructure in

Edinburgh and the Lothians that works in this area. There are more than 130 different initiatives or programmes on the go around youth employment, all receiving funding, all needing and using resources, all delivering good work according to their own objectives. But we need to know where there is an overlap, where there are gaps, where we might use resources better and work smarter and more efficiently.

"We need to create better and more engagement between business and education – secondary and further education and also primary schools. We need to do more to develop skills and we need to do more to ensure business better understands what our educators are doing; what is possible and what business can do to support them. Schools are there to educate our young people not to make young people, work ready but equally, we need schools and colleges to fully understand what businesses need and are looking for in school leavers.

"Finally, to ensure we are sustainable and that we look to the future, we need to start engaging with primary schools and working with younger children."

A team has been put in place to help deliver the objectives of the DYW initiative and Sandy is hopeful the involvement of Edinburgh Chamber will be a positive factor. "Involving SMEs in this will be vital and Edinburgh Chamber, with over 1,000 SME members, is well placed to help us do that. We need to show SMEs that attracting and finding skilled and talented young people creates a win for all of us."

For further information call **0131 221 2999** or e-mail dyw@edinburghchamber.co.uk

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