Keeping up? Scotland's Performance in Lifelong Learning

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Introduction

This note explores data on Scotland's performance in developing lifelong learning drawn from the MASON project, a research project from the EU Lifelong Learning Programme 2007-2013. The study allows Scottish performance on a set of composite indicators to be compared with that of other European regions. It will also be instructive to look at Scottish performance in the light of the development scenarios identified recently by Scottish Futures Forum in their work on Scotland 2025: A Learning Nation.

The MASON project

The MASON project has developed a series of composite indicators of factors closely related to the successful delivery of lifelong learning strategies. These indicators are available at national and sub-national level across EU countries, making it possible to identify variations in performance at regional level throughout the EU. The indicators used provide measures of both current 'position' and also of 'dynamic' position that is the direction of change over recent years (usually over 10 years but shorter for some indicators because of data availability). The indicators relate to 'individual' and 'structural' aspects of lifelong learning performance. The individual indicators relate to levels of education and participation in the information society; the structural indicators to socio-economic factors and aspects of science and technology.

The project then allocates regions of the EU to one of 4 quadrants in a model designed to provide a basis for policy action to boost performance, and provide for place-based action planning for lifelong learning. The quadrants are characterised as follows:

Quadrant 1: Coming up Individual aspect: + above average Structural aspect: - below average Policy focus: boost structural dynamic	Quadrant 2: Top performing Individual aspect: + above average Structural aspect: + above average Policy focus: maintain +ve dynamic on both
Quadrant 4: Falling behind Individual aspect: - below average Structural aspect: - below average Policy focus: develop +ve dynamic on both	Quadrant 3: Losing Momentum Individual aspect: - below average Structural aspect: + above average Policy focus: boost individual dynamic

Data is available at a number of levels.

Level	Population size	No. In Scotland	Description
NUTS1	3m and over	1	All Scotland
NUTS2	800k – 3m	4	Regions: E, NE, H&I,W
NUTS3	150k – 800k	21	LAs or groups of LAs

The composite indicators are developed as follows:

Individual	Structural
Education: 13 indicators Measures of: levels of qualification in population; participation in education and training; participation of 4 year olds in education; Proportion of pupils in primary & secondary ed.	**Socio-economic:** 4 indicators Measures of: Labour market – long-term unemployment and unemployment rate; Economy – GDP; Demography – Average annual population
Information society: 5 indicators Measures of: Broadband access Purchase of goods and services online; Never used computer Access and use of internet at home	**Science and Technology:** 5 indicators Measures of: Patent applications Research & Development expenditure People in research and development

Scottish results

Overall, taking performance on all individual and structural indicators together, Scotland's current position looks good. The MASON data (at NUTS2 Regional) level places 2 regions (E and H&I) in the best performing quadrant (quadrant 2) and 2 (NE and W) in the 'Coming Up' quadrant, (quadrant 1). However, if the specific aspects of performance are explored separately, some important differences and qualifications to this overall performance become apparent.

An attempt to summarise performance in these separate aspects is made in the table below.

Individual	Structural
Education *Current performance overall:* All regions quadrant 3 – Losing momentum *Current Position:* All regions above average E, NE, H&I among top performing *Dynamic position:* All regions below average E,NE,W among poorest performers	**Socio-economic** *Current overall performance:* Most areas quadrant 4 – falling behind *Current Position:* Small number of areas (NE, Inverness, Edinburgh) above average All others below average, some with poorest performers *Dynamic position:* All areas below average, among poorest performers
Information Society *Current overall performance:* All regions quadrant 2 – best performing *Current Position:* All regions above average with best performing *Dynamic position:* All regions above average with best performing	**Science and Technology** *Current overall performance:* All regions quadrant 1 – coming up *Current Position:* 1 region (W) above average All others below average, 1 (H&I) in poorest performers *Dynamic position:* All regions above average

Discussion

Despite all parts of Scotland sharing the same overall national policy framework, the table above highlights significant variation in regional performance, and especially so as the analysis moves to smaller areas.

The outstanding feature is the level of performance across Scotland on information society indicators, where all regions are in the best performing quadrant taking all measures into account, and are above average performers on current position, and direction of change (dynamic). This is the only aspect to achieve this consistency of high level performance.

Perhaps the most diverse set of performance ratings relates to the education indicators. Overall performance is consistently placed in quadrant 3, losing momentum, but this masks variation in current position and direction of change (dynamic). On current position, all of the regions in Scotland are performing above average, 3 of the 4 regions being placed with the best performers. This is in stark contrast to the dynamic measures on which all regions are below average and 1 is placed amongst the poorest performers. The data suggests therefore that whilst current attainment and participation in education in Scotland is relatively good, there is a risk, on current trends on these indicators, of losing this favourable position.

Even with the caveat just noted, Scotland performs well on the 'individual' indicators in the MASON project, but the contrast with performance on the 'structural' indicators is marked. On the socio-economic indicators taken together, measuring unemployment, GDP and population, overall all Scottish regions are in quadrant 4 (falling behind). Current position is slightly better: a small number of areas are performing above average (notably around the Moray Firth, Aberdeenshire, and Edinburgh and parts of the Lothians), but all other areas have below average performance, with a few areas in the west, amongst the poorest performers. The dynamic position, on direction of change, shows all areas are performing below average, with a number amongst the worst performers.

The Scottish position on indicators relating to science and technology is a little more encouraging. Overall, all regions of Scotland are placed on quadrant 1 (coming up). On current position, 1 region has above average performance, whilst the others are below average, one amongst the poorest performers. However on direction of change, all regions are performing above average.

Policy implications

Scottish performance clearly then has some strengths but also some weaknesses. A particular strength is in participation in the information society, supported by high levels of provision of broadband and internet access. Scotland is well placed too, relative to other parts of the EU, in current educational attainment and participation in learning. It would seem also, that regions are performing well in encouraging aspects of science and technology, even if starting, in some regions, from a below average level of current performance in this aspect.

But it is also clear that there are aspects of significant challenge. This is particularly so in relation to the socio-economic indicators where current performance and the direction of change, in almost all areas, relative to other EU regions, is below average. The direction of change in education performance is also largely below average. It is likely that socio-economic and education performance are connected: the analysis strongly suggests that these should be the areas of focus for policy-makers in Scotland and in Scotland's local administrations if the direction of travel on these aspects is not to both undermine those aspects of current performance where Scotland is strong, and undermine Scotland's competitive position within the EU, and probably elsewhere in the world. The relatively strong performance in direction of change with regard to science and technology should hold out promise that performance on aspects of socio-economic performance such as GDP may improve; nevertheless, unemployment indicators continue to demonstrate the need for a strong focus on improving skills and lifelong learning, and connecting learning with entry or re-entry to the labour market, especially for the young.

It is instructive to compare the profile of the 4 NUTS2 regions in Scotland on these indicators. The table below summarises the quadrant position for each region; the next table shows the relative performance on each set of indicators.

Region	Overall	Individual Education	Information Soc	Structural Socio-economic	Science & Tech
East	2	3	2	3*	1
North East	1	3	2	3	1
West	1	3	2	4	1
Highlands and I	2	3	2	4	1

Region	Education		Info Soc		Soc-ec		S & T	
	Current	Dynamic	Current	Dynamic	Current	Dynamic	Current	Dynamic
East	++	--	++	+++	-	---	-	+
N E	++	---	++	+++	++	--	-	+
West	+	--	++	+++	-	--	+	+
H & I	++	-	++	+++	-	--	--	+

Generally, the profiles of performance of the Scottish NUTS2 regions are similar to each other and to the national overview. The particular points of difference to note are the above average current position of the North East on socio-economic indicators and the above average current performance of the West on science and technology measures. But the table emphasises again the widely shared below average performance on direction of change on education and socio-economic indicators. It seems to be a particular challenge for all regions to work out how their above average performance on directions of change in the information society and science and technology indicators can be used to advantage to stimulate performance in those aspects where Scotland is losing momentum or falling behind. This would seem to suggest priority is given to harnessing the information society participation for learning, and developing innovation mechanisms to better capitalise on research and development activity.

The Scottish Futures Forum at the Scottish Parliament has recently published a series of scenarios identified in its programme on Scotland 2025 – a world leading learning nation, see www.scotlandfutureforum.org . Several of the scenarios recognise a high profile for ICT in future learning, whether as part of the curriculum for excellence which will be being bedded in to school education in the next few years, or as part of an acknowledgement that learning will change with more likelihood of learning away from formal learning settings.   Scenarios also give varying priority to developing effective links between education, learning and social and economic development, some leaving it as essentially market driven, whilst others see a lead role for government, central and local, in taking such developments forward.   There is yet to be a clearly articulated and widely shared approach to addressing these issues. Arguably, Scotland needs this if the risks apparent in the data put forward here are not to become a reality.

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