



UNISON Scotland Response to the Scottish government consultation on Education Governance Fair Funding to achieve excellence and equity in education

Introduction

UNISON is the largest trade union in Scottish public services. Our members deliver services, pay taxes and also have a wider citizenship interest in how services are provided and paid for. Members have a unique perspective on public service delivery meaning they can make a valuable contribution to the policymaking process. Our members provide essential roles in schools and early years, these roles while often overlooked by policy makers are essential for the delivery of excellence and equity in education. UNISON Scotland welcomes the opportunity to respond to the consultation on Empowering Teachers, Parents and Communities to Achieve Excellence and Equity in Education

Response

UNISON believes that education, including early years and childcare, should be both comprehensive and delivered free at the point of use by local authorities. This route offers democratic local accountability and efficiency through economies of scale. It also ensures that education services are embedded in wider children's services. The key issue for school education is not structures but budget cuts. Schools have had £300million¹ in cuts over the last five years with more to come. The Scottish Parliament Information Centre report indicates that spending per pupil has been cut by £1141 per pupil since 2011². UNISON believes that it is investment in schools and the development of education teams that will drive attainment and close the attainment gap. Instead this year will focus attention on governance structures, funding routes and formulae. The experiences of our members of similar policies in the rest of the UK raise serious concerns about their introduction in Scotland.

Schools need adequate funding. Giving money direct to head teachers may give the appearance of more money for schools but that money has to pay for a wider range of services so it's not an increase in funding at all. However politicians may try to spin it. Our experience of changes in the rest of the UK shows that the economies of scale offered by the support/services provided by local government are lost and schools have increased demands placed on them. They then have to source and pay for those services from their own funds. This led to cuts in jobs and lower pay, cuts in hours and the wider terms and conditions of our members. The formal and informal links to wider children's services are also weaker making it harder to deal with the "whole child".

UNISON welcomed the Scottish government's commitment to close the attainment gap and the focus on both excellence and equity. The most recent PISA results show that Scotland's schools continue to slip down world rankings. In 2000 Scotland was sixth in the rankings for reading, we are now 23rd. We have gone from ninth in mathematics in 2003 to 24th and from tenth in science in 2006 to 19th. Within the UK Scotland has fallen from leading to behind England and Northern

¹ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/scotland/12132556/300-million-cut-to-Scotlands-schools-after-SNP-targets-councils.html>

² <http://www.scotsman.com/news/education/scottish-school-budgets-cut-by-1-2bn-since-2010-1-4490713>

Ireland in both reading and mathematics. Scotland does still have a high quality education system but other countries are making improvements at a better rate. Something does indeed need to be done. The question is what.

The government has already commissioned research in this area and there is much in both *Shifting the Curve*³ and *Improving Schools in Scotland*⁴ which could help achieve these aims. We would therefore welcome discussion and implementation of the recommendations in these reports rather than the current proposals. There needs to be improved levels of funding not a new route for the current insufficient funding. The OECD's wider indicators for good education governance start with "a focus on processes not structures". It is therefore surprising to see the government focus on reform of structures.

OECD five key components to good education governance:

- Focuses on processes not structures
- Is flexible and can adapt to change
- Works through building capacity stakeholder involvement and open dialogue
- Requires a whole system approach
- Harnesses evidence and research to inform policy

The OECD report on Scottish education points out successes and challenges in the Scottish education system and offers recommendations to drive continued improvement. The report points out that it is time "for a bold approach that moves beyond system management in a new dynamic nearer to teacher and learning" Instead we are seeing a continued focus on systems and governance.

The wider proposals are offering the opposite of increased local control. They increase centralisation and will put non-child-facing work into schools rather than taking some work away from schools to create capacity to build the collaborative networks and time to reflect and learn from others through that collaboration. It is also important to note that education is delivered by a whole team of people who also need space and time to develop and improve their practice. The government should be freeing up heads to focus on pupils and the learning and development of all their staff not adding more budgeting, human resources and procurement.

As things stand there is no spare capacity in schools, all staff are working long hours. There is no time for reflection far less personal development and collaborative exchange. Distancing schools from wider children's services will also make it harder to deliver wider support for children and/or their parents. This will make it harder to provide the support many children need to benefit from the education services offered in their school. Neither of the funding proposals in the consultation document offers a route to ensuring staff in schools will be better able to deliver for children.

When schools do have vacancies they are struggling to recruit teachers and there is an even bigger problem in recruiting and retaining head teachers. We see nothing in the proposals which will make the job more attractive. In England where heads already have a range of the responsibilities/powers proposed they too face a substantial recruitment crisis. According to

³ *Shifting the Curve* Naomi Eisenstadt January 2016 <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0049/00492430.pdf>

⁴ *OECD Improving schools in Scotland* 2015 <http://www.oecd.org/edu/school/improving-schools-in-scotland.htm>

the Guardian⁵ one in four schools could be affected by a lack of heads, deputy heads and assistant heads by 2022. The report states that schools spend up to £200m on recruitment and yet many still fail to find the right quality of candidate for these vital leadership roles. At a time when public services are facing substantial budget cuts we cannot afford to waste money on schemes that have failed elsewhere.

UNISON believes that the key recommendations in *Shifting the Curve* offer a much better route forward than dumping more responsibilities onto schools

The key proposals are:

- Ensure childcare commitments focus on quality to improve outcomes
- Be bold on local tax reform
- Build more social housing
- Carry out a comprehensive review of the policies and services relevant to the life chances of older children and young adults with particular emphasis on young people from poorer backgrounds.

Ms Eisenstadt also points out that

“It’s very difficult to deliver services that are under constant strain”

We cannot separate improving the delivery of services from providing adequate funding for those services. Our recent survey of our members in schools reveals the impact of cuts: shortages of staff and resources and staff working long hours to try and keep up standards. The PISA results show that this is having an impact on the quality of education.

Our concern is that these proposals to push work down to school are driven by budget cuts rather than expectations that these are the right changes to deliver improvements. Using the Scottish government’s full tax powers to increase the overall Scottish budget and delivering a new local tax (or taxes) to enable local authorities to fund their priorities would be a much more effective route to improving education and closing the attainment gap than the current proposals.

Current education structures provide democratic accountability through local government. Parent councils and parent forums also exist to give parents a voice in their children’s schools. Local authorities also provide a balance allowing economies of scale for HR services, purchasing and provide clear links to specialist support. Where there are difficulties for head teachers accessing the support they need the issues are about staff shortages and budget cuts not the structures involved.

Our members working in administrative and clerical roles are also telling us that they are struggling to cope with their workloads. Devolved school management means that head teachers already have substantial powers over the delivery of education in their schools. Additional “powers” for head teachers will mean additional work not just for themselves but for the wider teams. The long hours and additional workload are already creating a problem recruiting head teachers. Head teachers could be given complete control over staffing in their schools for example but unless they can make the current staff redundant and start from scratch then the reality is that they will only be able to make choices when people leave, which they currently can anyway. Heads in the rest of the UK, initially attracted by the carrot of keeping the

⁵ English schools shortage of heads by 2022 Guardian 11/11/2016
<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2016/nov/11/english-schools-shortage-of-19000-heads-by-2022-report>

10% of funding that sat with local authorities found out quickly that they when they had to buy in services from the local authority or an alternative provider the money goes very quickly.

Head teachers have to become procurement professionals sourcing materials, school meals and support such as educational psychologists. This can lead to reluctance by schools to take any pupils who may incur extra costs such as children with a additional support needs of challenging behaviour. Schools in England are now employing HR and business mangers because of the work involved in purchasing and staff recruitment. Savings to pay for this are being made through cutting other jobs and pushing down their wages. Support staff bear the brunt of the wage cuts.

Taking work back into local authorities allowing heads to focus on educational improvement rather than HR and procurement would do more to improve standards than dumping more of this work on them.

Decisions about individual children's education are already taken in schools. The difficulty is whether there is funding to deliver for children in a way that meets their individual needs. There also needs to be funding for specialists to identify more complex needs whether that is due to disability, mental health problems and to meet the needs once they are identified. The waiting time for assessment by a speech therapist or educations psychologist and the rationing of access to the ongoing support from these services is not down to lack of power for head teachers but a lack of adequate resources for those teams.

In order to drive improvement there needs to be more scope for education and professional development for all the staff working in education. The consultation document barely makes a mention of the wider staff teams that are so vital to the delivery of education both within schools and local authorities. A wider recognition and investment in these staff and the services they provide will support all children and is also crucial to closing the attainment gap. Cuts and closures of school libraries and technicians, for example, are already impacting on children's learning. The better-off are more likely to have the contacts or the purchasing power to ensure their children get access to a wide range of opportunities, one to one support and educationally enhancing activities. It is unequal access to these resources that fuels the attainment gap.

UNISON supports the fair funding principles in the consultation. The issue is how those principles are achieved. No one suggests that school funding shouldn't be "fair". The debate is about an agreed definition of fairness and how it can be delivered. "Needs based formulae" sound great but definitions of need are extremely complex and hard to agree as is ensuring that data is up to date enough to be a useful indicator. There is also the key issue of supporting those who live in poverty but in a geographical area of relative wealth. It is very difficult to capture their needs in an overarching funding formula. Most importantly funding has to be adequate to the task. UNISON would therefore recommend that adequacy should be a key principle of any funding regime.

Question 1

(a) What are the advantages of the current system of funding schools?

The advantages of the current system are that it combines local democratic accountability with economies of scale which provide value for money. The arguments that the current system is a problem because of the different distribution of resources across local authorities are more indicative of issues round the relative sizes of current local authorities than problems with the current school funding mechanisms. The Scottish government has also highlighted the different spending per pupil rates across local authorities as an issue but as Audit Scotland⁶ point out

⁶ Audit Scotland School Education Report 2014

there are substantially higher costs in terms of transport, loss of economies of scale due to smaller numbers of pupils in individual schools and the extra maintenance costs involved in high numbers of smaller primary schools. Recruiting supply staff is also more expensive in rural areas.

It is true that even across rural/ urban and mixed authorities there are variations in per pupil spend. This is an average which varies because of the number of and proportions of promoted staff, experienced staff and the decisions round the make-up of the different staff groups in the authority. Some of the variation is, of course, based on local decision making which is the point of local democratic control.

Per pupil average spend is also a very blunt tool. Some schools will have a bigger proportion of children who need more help as do some authorities. In schools pupils will have very different needs and some will be taking up much more of a school's resources than others. Getting it Right for Every Child doesn't mean making everything the same for everyone.

Keeping the current funding regimes ensures that education services can be properly linked to wider children's services in an authority. UNISON therefore believes that the current funding mechanism offers the right balance between economies of scale for financial efficiency and local decisions making to ensure that local priorities and needs can be met.

(b) What are the disadvantages of the current system of funding schools?

UNISON believes that the current issues with school funding is not the funding system but the high level of cuts to school budgets which have led to substantial cuts in school staff. This is while pupil numbers and education support needs are increasing. There are 6707 more pupils since 2010 in Scottish schools, but there 1841 less support staff and 1389 less teachers. This report confirms the enormous stress this puts on support staff.

- 54 per cent of support staff say budgets have been cut
- 40 per cent carry out unpaid work to meet workloads
- 60 per cent say morale is low
- 80 per cent say workloads are heavier
- And services like school libraries, lunch clubs and music tuition is being cut or is closing.

Question 3

How can funding for schools be best targeted to support excellence and equity for all?

Currently schools deliver what they can manage based on the budget they are allocated. What we need to do is look at the costs of delivering the kind of service that would Get it Right for Every Child and deliver that budget. When a child has additional support needs identified there should also be a process to ensure that there is funding to meet that need rather than just spreading the resources in the school more thinly.

Question 4

(a) What elements of school spending should headteachers be responsible for managing and why?

(b) What elements of school spending should headteachers not be responsible for managing and why?

(c) What elements of school spending are not suitable for inclusion in a standardised, Scotland-wide approach and why?

UNISON believes that what schools need is improved funding levels not a complex redistribution of the current inadequate funding.

Question 5

(a) What would be the advantages of an approach where the current system of funding schools is largely retained, but with a greater proportion of funding allocated directly to:

- 1. Schools;**
- 2. Clusters; or**
- 3. Regional Improvement Collaboratives?**

(b) What would be the disadvantages of an approach where the current system of funding schools is largely retained, but with a greater proportion of funding allocated directly to:

- 1. Schools;**
- 2. Clusters; or**
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Question 6

The Scottish Government's education governance reforms will empower headteachers to make more decisions about resources at their school.

What support will headteachers require to enable them to fulfil these responsibilities effectively?

If the Scottish government moves forward with either of the current plans then it is not just heads that will require additional support. It is clear from the changes in schools in the rest of the UK since the 1980s that all the extra responsibilities will bring additional administration and finance work and so the whole school administration and clerical teams will need extra training and resources in also to meet those demands. Schools are employing business managers and procurement specialists to undertake work that was previously provided by local authorities.

Head teachers will need a range of support and training key areas will be

- Procurement
- Human Resources
- Employment Law
- Budgeting

Head teachers will also need support and training in procuring specialist services for example education psychologists, music and sports tuition, children's mental health services, services for children with disabilities, adaption to the physical environment to accommodate children with disabilities.

Question 7

What factors should be taken into account in devising accountability and reporting measures to support greater responsibility for funding decisions at school level?

Question 8

Do you have any other comments about fair funding for school

Conclusion

UNISON believes that education, including early years and childcare, should be comprehensive and delivered free at the point of use via local authorities. This route offers democratic local accountability and efficiency through economies of scale. UNISON believes that it is through

investment in education and the development of education teams that we will drive attainment and close the attainment gap. UNISON is concerned that these proposals will take the focus internally onto structures rather and away from supporting children. A Scottish school child takes 5 years to get through secondary school the same length of time as a parliamentary term. There is no time to waste.

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