



Empowering Teachers, Parents and Communities to Achieve Excellence and Equity in Education

The UNISON Scotland Response to the Scottish Government January 2017

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

The consultation papers seeks views on *“how we can further empower our teachers, practitioners, parents schools and early learning and childcare settings starting with a presumption that decisions about individual children’s learning and school life should be taken at school level”*

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. The key issue for school education is not governance but budget cuts. Schools have had £300million¹ in cuts over the last five years with more to come. UNISON believes that it is through investment in schools and the development of education teams that well will drive attainment and close the attainment gap. Changing structures just focuses attention internally on the organization itself rather than on the actual the delivery of services.

UNISON welcomes 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 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 Curve² and Improving Schools in Scotland³ which could help achieve these aims. We would therefore welcome discussion and implementation of the recommendations in these reports. Neither of these recommended reviewing governance structures. 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 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

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

² Shifting the Curve Naomi Eisenstadt January 2016 <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0049/00492430.pdf>

³ OECD Improving schools in Scotland 2015 <http://www.oecd.org/edu/school/improving-schools-in-scotland.htm>

- 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 report calls for a “strengthened middle operating through collaborative networks among schools and across local authorities.” These proposals seem to be offering the opposite increasing centralisation and putting 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 the 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 their staff. 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.

While expanding high quality early years’ services and supporting children in schools will help mitigate the impact of poverty tackling the attainment gap requires tackling poverty itself. This will require substantial investment in public services and use of all of our tax powers to redistribute wealth more fairly so that we can deliver for those from poorer backgrounds not just those who are well informed and well connected enough to work the system.

The key recommendations in *Shifting the Curve*

- 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 a proposal to set up regional boards and to push work down to school is driven by cuts rather than expectations that these are the right changes to deliver improvements. The regionalisation of college governance and the centralisation of Scottish police and fire services are not examples that we believe schools should follow. Audit Scotland’s recent report on further education reiterates previous statements about the lack of robust data on any savings made. Cutting funding and leaving the remaining staff to get on with it as best they can is not “efficiencies” or “savings”.

Using regional boards to introduce shared services is a high risk strategy. Local authorities already offer economies of scale and we have organisations like Scotland Excel to support local authority procurement. UNISON Scotland recognises that all public sector organisations should

take up opportunities to work more efficiently and effectively. We believe that improved cooperation between public service is essential, but this does not require setting up new regional bodies, vast call centres or bringing in the private sector. They are in fact extremely costly and have high upfront costs. The investment ratio is 2:1. Often costs are pushed to another department. The internal customer has to change to fit in to a top down system if there are any savings to be made centrally. This often lead to end users running 2 systems so they can have records that suits their needs, The National Audit Office report indicates that, so far, projects have taken five years to break even.

The Western Australian government had to abandon their shared services programme after finding themselves millions over budget.

Learning from Australian experience:

- Initial costs of shared services are underestimated because implicit costs
- and externalities are often not included.
- Introduction of shared services is complex and costly and requires detailed research.
- While some cost savings can be achieved, targets are rarely met.
- Savings are mainly from job losses.
- There are job losses in regional areas which affect the viability of rural communities

Blame is often thrown at the staff themselves for unwillingness to work across organisational boundaries. The reality is that public service delivery is complex and one size fits all solutions do not work. At a time when public services are facing substantial budget cuts we cannot afford to waste money on schemes that have failed elsewhere.

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 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 England initially attracted by the carrot of keeping the 10% of funding that sat with local authorities had to buy in services from the local authority or an alternative provider. That 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 or taking staff out of national pay agreements 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/or to meet the needs once they are identified. The waiting time for assessment by a speech therapist or educational 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.

Democratic accountability is vital and it is through elections and contact with those elected that citizens can hold service providers accountable. Keeping control of education in local authorities is a vital part of that accountability. We already have some of the biggest councils in Europe we should be working to strengthen those links not adding extra layers above them. Our experience of ALEOs, Police and Fire and further education reforms indicate that a few councillors on these boards does not provide the same level of accountability as direct delivery by local authorities under the control of elected councillors. Board members are legally bound to put the needs of the organisation first not the communities which they serve.

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.

The consultation lays out principles for funding none of which is particularly controversial: though getting a funding strategy that is simple given the complexity of defining need will be extremely difficult. "Needs based formula" sound easy but definitions of need are extremely complex as is ensuring that data is up to date enough to be a useful indicator. There is also the key issue of those who live in poverty in an area of relative wealth. It is very difficult to capture their needs in an overarching funding formula. Most importantly though is that funding is at a minimum adequate to the task. UNISON would therefore recommend that adequacy should be a key principle of any funding formula.

The consultation raises the issue of "community led childcare". It is hard to comment on this fully without any clearer vision of what this means. UNISON is concerned that the government is looking for a low cost options and that third sector provision will mean low pay for childcare staff. Childcare should be provided free at the point of use by the public sector. The current system is patchy, complex and expensive. Parents in Scotland pay 27% of their household income on childcare, compared to the OECD average of 12%. We need a radical overhaul of childcare provision to ensure that it provides what families actually want: a safe nurturing environment for their children doesn't cost the earth.

It's not just the high cost of childcare which creates a barrier for women trying to return to work. The system is patchy and hard to navigate. Places are hard find. Until you know what specific childcare is available then it's impossible to say what hours you will be able to work and vice versa. This is hard for those hoping to negotiate changing working patterns returning to their job and almost impossible for those trying to find new work.

There is no one place to go to find out what's available: local authorities don't even have to keep a list of what childcare is available, what it costs or monitor what demand for care is in their areas. As we move forward with childcare expansion a key aim should be avoiding the problems in adult care where delivery is through a complex web of public, private and third sector providers. It's complex for users and has led to a race to the bottom for staff wages and conditions and a poor service for many users.

Public delivery is the most cost effective way forward: money won't be lost to profit, and is where we will be best able to ensure a coordinated and comprehensive service. Public delivery also makes it easier to ensure that the workforce is properly paid and well qualified. Public delivery also gives better protection to childcare workers who need all the same rights and opportunities, for example flexible working, as other workers. Good terms and conditions are how you attract and keep skilled workers.

Evidence suggests that having well qualified staff, particularly staff with a degree level qualification working in a nursery is key to good outcomes for the children. Since 2011 managers and lead practitioners of a day care of children's service in order to register with the SSSC have to have or be working towards a level 9 qualification. The Education Scotland Report Making the difference: the impact of staff qualifications children's learning in the early years (2011) shows that of the nursery centres they had inspected: 27% of local authority centres, 28% of private centres and 13% of voluntary centres had one member of staff with a BA in Childhood Practice. In local authority centres 87% had access to a teacher, 39% of private sector nurseries and 32% in the voluntary sector. Those who are able to access nursery services in the public sector have substantially more access to staff with degree level qualifications.

The childcare workforce is not well paid. The knowledge and skills required, as with much work traditionally done by women, are not widely recognised or rewarded in the market. This needs to be challenged. Pay must reflect the skills, knowledge and reflective practice required to do the job. There is a substantial pay gap between the sectors. A brief survey of vacancies showed that the public sector is offering jobs at approx £11 per hour while the range in the private and voluntary sector was £7 to a high of £8.50. Where jobs were offered with an annual salary the public sector range was £19 to £23,000 a rate more in line with that being offered for managers in the private sector where some posts offered a £16,000 to manage a nursery. Only public delivery paid for via taxation can support appropriate wages for the skills required to deliver high quality childcare.

UNISON believes that these plans will not drive improvement in education. If the Scottish government does decide to move ahead with them then they must ensure that the staffing issues are resolved before not after the changes. People need to know who their employer is. There need to be clear management lines and accountabilities for staff. How they will transfer to a new employer if that is the case. If there is to be no change of employer then the lines of management budgets and accountability also need to be properly set out clearly to avoid turf wars and conflict in general.

While teachers have national terms and conditions that is not the case for the rest of the staff. There are substantial differences in their roles and responsibilities across Scottish authorities. Harmonisation of terms and conditions is complex and costly and needs to be done properly. It cannot be treated as an afterthought.

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

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