

Response ID ANON-NXJH-82HS-W

Submitted to **Empowering teachers, parents and communities to achieve excellence and equity in education: A Governance Review**
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About You

What is your name?

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Are you responding as an individual or an organisation?

Organisation

What is your organisation?

Organisation:

Prospect (Education & Children's Services) – A professional organisation representing staff in education and children's services across all of the UK.

The Scottish Government would like your permission to publish your consultation response. Please indicate your publishing preference:

Publish response with name

We will share your response internally with other Scottish Government policy teams who may be addressing the issues you discuss. They may wish to contact you again in the future, but we require your permission to do so. Are you content for Scottish Government to contact you again in relation to this consultation exercise?

Yes

Page One

1 What are the strengths of the current governance arrangements of Scottish education?

What are the strengths of the current governance arrangements of Scottish education?:

The comprehensive education system in Scotland, where the vast majority of children attend schools managed by the local authorities is a major strength. Local management and accountability helps ensure equality of opportunity regardless of race, religion or economic background. There are currently a number of positive developments in Scottish Education such as Curriculum for Excellence, GIRFEC, Developing the Young Workforce, Closing the Attainment Gap and the school building programme. Local authorities have a key role to play in taking these developments forward. Any diminution of the centrality of local authorities in the management and organisation of educational provision would be regrettable and, potentially, damaging to the government's own plans. Local authorities should remain the cornerstone of provision of public schools.

2 What are the barriers within the current governance arrangements to achieving the vision of excellence and equity for all?

What are the barriers within the current governance arrangements to achieving the vision of excellence and equity for all?:

We have identified the following as potential barriers to achieving the Government's vision:

- Recruitment and retention of high quality teaching and senior staff, particularly in remote and rural areas, remains a barrier to achieving the vision of excellence and equity for all.
- The availability of quality early learning provision and support for parents are also barriers to achieving this vision.
- The current system of parents being able to make out-of-zone placing requests to non-catchment area schools can severely affect the demographics within a school community. This can impact on public perception and can stigmatise certain schools. The law regarding school placing requests should be reviewed to make it easier for local authorities to refuse out-of-zone placing requests to non-catchment area schools.
- The stated intention by the Scottish Government to create standardised tests is a significant barrier to progress. Previous governments have tried similar initiatives which have invariably resulted in distortion to curricular provision, stress for staff, pupils and parents, added avoidable work burdens and - ultimately - have failed to achieve the desired outcomes.

3 Should the key principles below underpin our approach to reform?

Latest revision of this document: <https://library.prospect.org.uk/id/2017/00006>

This revision: <https://library.prospect.org.uk/id/2017/00006/2017-01-04>

Yes

Are there other principles which should be applied?:

We agree with the key principles described in the consultation document.

The concept of 'school' in the review appears outdated. Little thought seems to be given to the provision of services to children from a wide variety of partners with a lack of focus on integrated services and GIRFEC. There needs to be a greater recognition that, in the modern era, schools do not exist in isolation but as part of a much wider network of support agencies who all play a key role in improving outcomes for children and young people. Integrated working must feature far more prominently in this review to ensure there is a clear recognition of the fact that schools alone cannot be expected to achieve the vision of excellence and equity for all. There needs to be greater awareness of the challenges to meet comprehensive and flexible provision, through different institutions working collaboratively, both formally and informally.

The move to place more responsibility in the hands of individual school leaders while simultaneously removing the guidance, advice and support of a local authority framework adds considerable unnecessary pressure to the system. No account seems to have been taken of the possible consequences of malfunction in this model and, equally, no account seems to have been taken of examples of malfunction of similar initiatives in the English educational system. This comment also applies to Q4.

4 What changes to governance arrangements are required to support decisions about children's learning and school life being taken at school level?

What changes to governance arrangements are required to support decisions about children's learning and school life being taken at school level?:

There needs to be a clear recognition that schools are part of a wider partnership which delivers outcomes for children and young people. Schools are part of local authorities and cannot operate in isolation. All areas across Scotland are different therefore a 'one size fits all' approach is not appropriate. Close management and scrutiny has to be localised in order to fully understand the contexts in which schools operate. Any attempt to change school governance arrangements in isolation from the governance of partner providers could result in negative impacts for children and young people, particularly the more vulnerable. Support in general is an aspect that has been overlooked throughout the proposed changes for implementation, yet all stakeholders in the educational community require regular, often targeted, support and advice. Over the last 20+ years the need for support has reduced significantly, often to the detriment of improvement and attainment. See also Q8.

5 What services and support should be delivered by schools? What responsibilities should be devolved to teachers and head teachers to enable this? You may wish to provide examples of decisions currently taken by teachers or headteachers and decisions which cannot currently be made at school level.

What services and support should be delivered by schools? :

The Scottish Government has rightly identified the need to enhance early learning and child care provision. There is an opportunity to ensure Best Value if this provision could be enhanced through greater involvement of local authority primary schools in the provision of early learning, nurture groups and support for vulnerable families.

Many decisions are already taken at school level through Devolved School Management and schemes of delegation. In some authorities, some 90% of the education budget is already devolved to schools, who must operate within financial regulations and national conditions of service and salaries. Any move to allow schools to deviate from nationally agreed conditions would be strongly opposed.

6 How can children, parents, communities, employers, colleges, universities and others play a stronger role in school life? What actions should be taken to support this?

How can children, parents, communities, employers, colleges, universities and others play a stronger role in school life? What actions should be taken to support this?:

Collaborative working is welcomed but there needs to be an overarching, enabling structure such as the local authority to assist and advise with regard to policy, planning, resourcing, securing improvement and ensuring Best Value.

Professional development provision needs to be better focused on self-identified needs by establishments and professionals in the system. Customised professional training and staff development is vitally important, but this has been the single most neglected aspect of the quality improvement agenda over recent years.

7 How can the governance arrangements support more community-led early learning and childcare provision particularly in remote and rural areas?

How can the governance arrangements support more community-led early learning and childcare provision particularly in remote and rural areas?:

Very importantly, the need to view provision in remote and rural areas as presenting a different set of challenges to that of more populous and urban areas needs to take full account of the additional funding challenges presented. Early learning and childcare provision should be more closely aligned with local primary schools to ensure continuity and progression in children's learning takes place in a coherent and well planned manner.

8 How can effective collaboration amongst teachers and practitioners be further encouraged and incentivised?

How can effective collaboration amongst teachers and practitioners be further encouraged and incentivised?:

We are aware that the Scottish Government has been under financial constraints in recent years. The prevailing economic climate has seen a reduction in support for teachers. Closing the attainment gap is an admirable objective for the government but only a positive emphasis on training and staff development can enable teachers fully to address this. In order to tackle this attainment gap Scottish education practitioners need advice about developing the curriculum, improving pedagogy and explicit guidance on reducing the link between poverty and attainment. Practitioners need research based advice and support on what

works; and high quality professional development on how to put this evidence into practice. Improving teacher effectiveness will lead to improved educational outcomes for children and young people. Providing sufficient funding for local authorities to further improve the quality of learning and teaching will result in improved outcomes for children and young people. Local authority school improvement and development professionals should have a key role to play in advancing pedagogical change aimed at raising attainment and reducing the link between poverty and attainment. These professionals can facilitate and coordinate collaboration.

9 What services and support functions could be provided more effectively through clusters of schools working together with partners?

What services and support functions could be provided more effectively through clusters of schools working together with partners?:

Effective cluster working already exists informally across the country, for example exchange of good practice, transition arrangements and area support for learning provision. Formalising clusters could lead to some efficiencies for example, admin functions, educational development services, quality improvement, and staff development provision. However, much good work already takes place without the need to make arrangements more formal. A flexible approach to collaboration is likely to be most successful.

10 What services or functions are best delivered at a regional level? This may include functions or services currently delivered at a local or a national level.

What services or functions are best delivered at a regional level?:

The regional structures which existed pre-1996 (taking the divisions of Strathclyde as separate entities) provided largely workable management models for the delivery of education in terms of economies of scale. These regions were led by well qualified experienced teams, of sufficient size, based on school population. A return to such a model could provide efficiencies in terms of shared functions such as: finance, legal, HR, educational psychology, EAL services, property, ICT, procurement, management information systems, staff development and quality improvement.

11 What factors should be considered when establishing new educational regions?

What factors should be considered when establishing new educational regions?:

In order to justify any change, establishing new educational regions should result in clear educational benefits for children and young people. A major strength of the Scottish educational system has been its rigour and its intelligent use of a wide alliance of expert support for schools and their communities. Crucial to that has been a system where national government oversaw policy and key strategies, while local authorities carried out the fundamental tasks associated with the delivery of quality education. More than 10 years ago, the Westminster government began to make changes in English schools which began a very damaging dismantling process of local authority control of schools in their area. This was the start of a process that has led directly to the present very worrying position in England, with local education authorities now virtually stripped of all control. Our hope is that the Scottish Government is mindful of this precedent and that it will continue to recognise the vital role local authorities play in assuring quality provision of education. Confident, well-managed schools that are funded, supported and challenged by high calibre experienced local authority officers is the best way forward. We would suggest that this model, which was demonstratively successful, and only abandoned in 1996 by the decision of the government of the day (arguably based on political rather than educational criteria) is the best available.

12 What services or support functions should be delivered at a national level?

What services or support functions should be delivered at a national level?:

This review presents an opportunity to review and streamline the various national organisations which currently play a role in Scottish education. National government should be responsible for policy and schools should operate, as part of a wider local partnership, within national policy. The government should review the effectiveness of Education Scotland with a view to separating the scrutiny and support functions. Support, development and quality improvement should be the responsibility of local authorities or education regions, with access to appropriate national support and advice. The government should also review the roles of other scrutiny agencies with a view to streamlining these and reducing the burden of scrutiny on schools and partner agencies. External scrutiny should be run in parallel with local education authorities/regions to ensure a continued focus on improvement across the country.

13 How should governance support teacher education and professional learning in order to build the professional capacity we need?

How should governance support teacher education and professional learning in order to build the professional capacity we need?:

We value the free education system for the purpose of acquiring qualifications to enable the development of capable individuals. Professional learning in order to build capacity should be delivered in a more coherent manner than at present and, in that regard, the government should take the opportunity to review the roles of the GTC, SCEL, the universities and other professional learning providers and to restore the function of support to local (or regional) authority, thus maintaining the well-established 'critical friend' model which school, managers, staff and parent bodies have appreciated in the past.

14 Should the funding formula for schools be guided by the principles that it should support excellence and equity, be fair, simple, transparent, predictable and deliver value for money? Should other principles be used to inform the design of the formula?

Should the funding formula for schools be guided by the principles that it should support excellence and equity, be fair, simple, transparent, predictable and deliver value for money? Should other principles be used to inform the design of the formula?:

We agree with the above principles but underpinning these should be the realisation that demographics differ from catchment area to catchment area as does the level of 'challenge' within the communities individual school serve. The funding formula should reflect this. Free meal entitlement should not be used as a benchmark for determining school funding. Instead more sophisticated means of allocating funding, based on research evidence, should be developed.

While it would be acceptable to see funding raised by increased Council Tax income being 'ring fenced' and placed in a 'school attainment' cost centre we would oppose any system which disadvantaged authorities who have fewer children living in very deprived areas through any additional Council Tax raised being off-set by a reduction in the Scottish Government's block grant to local authorities. This latter possibility could potentially increase the attainment gap rather than close it

in some of the 'less deprived' authorities. The ability of local authorities to support and challenge schools within their Council area should not be diminished by changes in government funding.

15 What further controls over funding should be devolved to school level?

What further controls over funding should be devolved to school level?:

It is unclear what advantages there would be for headteachers beyond the current DSM system. We have doubts over the ability of schools to embrace the changes envisaged. Currently all authorities have different delegation schemes and policies which would be very difficult to disaggregate and harmonise. The 2012 DSM guidelines are thought to be good as they stand. The outcomes of this review could lead to more school based bureaucracy with negative impacts on headteachers' ability to manage learning & teaching and secure improvement. This would be very worrying due to the potential negative impacts on children and young people. Schools will still require central support.

16 How could the accountability arrangements for education be improved?

How could the accountability arrangements for education be improved?:

The present system of inspection and scrutiny should be streamlined, refocussing inspection to ensure national standards are a matter for review at a local level. The extra workload and stress to schools and headteachers caused by Education Scotland inspections needs to be addressed. Scotland would do well to look closely at the system of education in Finland, a country with a population of 5.4 million people that is comparable with Scotland. International comparisons of school performance show Finland to be amongst the highest performing systems in the world, and - according to a study by the Smithsonian Institution - showed that their attainment gap was the smallest in the world. There, compulsory schooling begins at the age of seven, with only a broadly-outlined national curriculum. It has no school inspections and no formal exams until the age of 16 and all pupils are educated in their local comprehensive. According to Pasi Sahlberg, Finland's most eminent educationist, "The freedom to teach without the constraints of standardised curricula and the pressure of standardised testing; strong leadership from principals who know the classroom from years of experience as teachers; a professional culture of collaboration; and support from homes unchallenged by poverty" have been the main factors in its status as a world class system. Teachers at all stages have to be educated at least to Master's level and are thoroughly immersed in educational theory. They teach only four lessons daily, with two hours a week devoted to "professional development" – and their professional autonomy is sacrosanct. Recruitment and retention rates are highly satisfactory, unlike all of the systems in the UK. Even though Scotland has been established as performing best of the education systems in the UK, it does not compare favourably to the Finnish model, which indicates that there is considerable room for improvement, but also provides a model that could be a good basis for that improvement.

17 Is there anything else you would like to add regarding the governance of education in Scotland?

Is there anything else you would like to add regarding the governance of education in Scotland?:

It needs to be borne in mind that the fundamental structure of Scottish education is robust and while, over time, change and improvement are, and always will be necessary, education provision in Scotland remains a key strength. We therefore question the need for radical change in governance unless it can be clearly demonstrated that change will bring more positive benefits for children and young people. We have significant concerns over the implications of a presumption that decisions about children's learning and school life should be taken at school level; extending to schools responsibilities that currently sit with local authorities, and allocating more resources directly to head teachers. This could lead to increased bureaucracy in schools, deflect attention from the schools' core business of learning and teaching and lead to huge uncertainties over areas such as staffing, finance and legal matters.

Evaluation

Please help us improve our consultations by answering the questions below. (Responses to the evaluation will not be published.)

Matrix 1 - How satisfied were you with this consultation?:

Please enter comments here.:

Matrix 1 - How would you rate your satisfaction with using this platform (Citizen Space) to respond to this consultation?:

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