



# **Empowering teachers, parents and communities to achieve Excellence and Equity in Education**

## **A Governance Review**

The governance review seeks views on how education in Scotland is run, including who should take decisions in relation to the education of children and young people, and how funding can be made fairer. It also asks about the support teachers and practitioners need to do their jobs well and how this can be improved.

A copy of the consultation document can be found on the Scottish Government website at <http://www.gov.scot/EducationGovernanceReviewConsultation>.

The following response was submitted on behalf of Orkney Islands Council on 5 January 2017.

The consultation closed on 6 January 2017.

## **Respondent Information Form**

### **Question 1**

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

#### **The Scottish Government**

The Scottish Government is well placed to take an overarching view of the partners and partnerships required for successful delivery of education. However it sometimes appears that the agenda for change (and any timeline to generate success) is limited to electoral cycles.

Scotland could benefit from an 'all-party' sign up to a long term strategy, accompanied by appropriate governance arrangements; this should include a transparent approach to 'holding education authorities to account' (as well as the other partners) for securing best value on behalf of the communities they serve, the quality of local provision and the implementation of nationally agreed policy.

At times policy development within government appears to be dis-jointed as different directorates take responsibility for key areas e.g. Early Learning and Childcare.

Ensuring national coherence continues to make sense at the point of implementation, and that policy has been tested against the diverse range of contexts that make up Scotland, is a real challenge for national government.

## **Local Authorities**

Local authorities are currently key partners in the delivery of education across Scotland. They are democratically accountable at a local/community level for the decisions they take. As a local authority Orkney Islands Council has as its core purpose the survival and sustainability of the community – including the isles – which places it in a unique position to support and sustain learning within the community.

The Council (which comprises 21 independent elected members representing the whole community) and the community in Orkney are synonymous.

The local authority is well placed to ensure the experience of learners is of a high quality. It is also able to monitor and support adaptations and changes to the curriculum to ensure it is 'fit for purpose' within the local context. Some national commentary has suggested that 'small schools are not able to make a suitable offer' to learners in terms of curriculum. Recent inspection of small schools in Orkney suggests that this is not the case in an authority area that is committed to ensuring learning in all schools is of the highest possible quality.

The local authority is also well placed to ensure school resourcing is responsive to need – in an island context this very evident as (for example) primary school rolls vary from 1 to 500.

The local authority provides a full range of 'background' services and functions – HR, Legal and Financial Services as well as school meals and school transport (procurement and contacts) for example.

## **Education Scotland**

Inspections by Education Scotland (HMIE) provide a high quality evaluation of the work of schools and other services. The newer models (which provide a 'summary report' and 'record of inspection') meet the needs of schools and communities as well as providing constructive starting points for further and future development.

The newest model of inspection for early learning and childcare introduces a significant additional burden (workload and bureaucracy) for schools. With appropriate national governance, a more efficient and effective use of the resources of Education Scotland and The Care Inspectorate could be achieved.

In the past, publications that collect and collate findings across a period of inspection provided very helpful advice/information/data on 'what works' (and why). When used in conjunction with other research data (international studies for example) a compelling case for change and development can be built. The availability of this type of quality information (firmly rooted in the culture and context of growing up in Scotland) for education leaders to shape a learning experience that is relevant to the children and young people in their setting continues to be important.

Education Scotland's ability to offer 'support at a local level' in an island context is currently limited. The time spent in schools and localities restricts their understanding of context and the 'journey' each school/setting is on. Where input has been most impactful there has been strong collaboration with the local authority team, long with evidence of an intelligence led approach.

### **The Care Inspectorate**

Inspections by the Care Inspectorate provide a high quality evaluation of the work of settings.

Officers within the Care Inspectorate (locally) provide a valued contribution to the development of services – for example through membership of the Childcare and Young Peoples Partnership (a partnership that takes a community planning approach to children's services in Orkney).

The new model of inspection for early learning and childcare introduces a significant additional burden (workload and bureaucracy) for schools. With appropriate national governance, a more efficient and effective use of the resources of Education Scotland and The Care Inspectorate could be achieved.

The online environment is challenging to navigate and annual proforma have not made a positive contribution to reducing workload or bureaucracy.

### **The Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC)**

It is not immediately obvious that the SSSC makes any direct contribution to education of children and young people in Orkney.

### **The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA)**

The SQA is a significant contributor to the overall shape of the experience of learners. There is a strong relationship between 'teachers' (who are markers and moderators) and the SQA – however the implementation of the new framework of (national) qualifications has not been without its problems and the secondary teachers would regard the SQA as the biggest contributor to teacher workload in recent years. The change made to accommodate the feedback from classrooms is appreciated, but many staff believe that more could and should be done.

### **The General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS)**

The programme for newly qualified teachers is supported by the local authority – this involves direct input for probationers, supporters and mentors. The supply of teachers in shortage areas remains a problem for recruitment in Orkney.

### **The Scottish College for Educational Leadership (SCEL)**

School leadership is recognised as being critical to success of any school. Ensuring a quality progression pathway (through SCEL) has been a welcome addition to the national support available. Ensuring that the needs of island communities are taken

into account (i.e. recognising the role of head teacher as community leader) will help ensure a continuing supply of new head teachers in Orkney. The model appears to be 'right' and while a number of local practitioners have already benefitted from the work of SCEL, it is too early to conclude that it is effective.

### **Initial Teacher Education (ITE)**

Orkney schools and local authority work with a number of partner institutions to support ITE, including the University of Highlands and Islands (UHI) to provide post graduate training to local students. These partnerships have been productive, opening up a range of pathways into the profession.

## **Question 2**

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

As noted, the Accounts Commission found that some schools have achieved better attainment results than their levels of deprivation would indicate, this would suggest that there is a lack of clarity about what does in fact make a difference. Maybe what is needed will be different in different parts of Scotland (depending on context and culture) so ensuring local (community) flexibility needs to be a priority.

For an Islands setting, the impact of rurality on educational success and life-long learning is not recognised (or well understood) in national policy.

Further work on 'island proofing' should be carried out to ensure national policy has considered the whole of Scotland and its characteristic diversity.

## **Question 3**

### **Should the above key principles (below) underpin our approach to reform? Are there other principles which should be applied?**

The principles are sound, however they would benefit from some exemplification as currently they serve simply as a theoretical construct which is difficult to find fault with.

The principles should be extended to recognise that the 'landscape' of support extends beyond 'school' and 'education services' and clearly place learning in the socio-economic context of community.

The principles should also reflect the 'the wider context of children's services (systems, culture and practice)' that is seeking to change children's lives and ensure that every child gets the right help at the right time in the right way.

From an 'Orkney' perspective, the principles also need to be applicable to supporting and sustaining island life (i.e. they are island proofed).

## Question 4

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

It would be over simplistic to assume change, as opposed to application, of governance arrangements is required. For example using the same governance arrangements, 'ring fencing' of budgets has, in the past, made more focused spend on learners possible.

It would also not be accurate to portray a legal division between school and local authority responsibilities. In Orkney, head teachers are appointed as (and expected to perform the duties of) officers of the Council. They are regarded as part of the Children's Services Workforce (as set out in the GTCS description of the professional action appropriate for a head teacher) and take on roles and responsibilities beyond their own school and across schools. Schools are resourced to ensure this can be achieved within their role and remit as well as working week.

There is an expectation that head teachers are 'leaders of learning' within their school and that each teacher is a 'leader of learning' within their classroom.

A perceived barrier to teachers/head teachers ensuring that decisions about children's learning and school life are taken at school/community level is national requirements/directives that do not feel relevant to the context of the school and/or its community. Work at by the local authority, a local level, is frequently focused on supporting schools to make sense of (for example) Curriculum for Excellence, How Good is Our School in the context in which they operate.

## Question 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 head teachers and decisions which cannot currently be made at school level.**

Head teachers in Orkney would like to be able to focus on the children's learning and tasks that relate to that. It is important therefore that schools continue to 'do what they do' (and do well) – for example schools in Orkney are expected to prioritise their actions to ensure that, in particular, children and young people: - get the best start in life; become successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens.

Schools are also working as part of the 'children's services team' (as well as the wider community) to ensure that Orkney is a place where, as children and young people grow up, they get the right help, at the right time, in the right way.

Head Teachers in Orkney want to be able to lead effective teaching and learning. They are currently responsible for school development and improvement planning, establishing and setting priorities relevant to learners and community, ensuring actions are resourced and recording and reporting the impact or difference made by this activity to children and young people.

Locally head teachers believe that some of the administrative tasks that they undertake currently should be passed back to the local authority however they believe that some things e.g. building maintenance for minor works could be undertaken in a timelier manner by the head teacher if they could bring in a contractor.

Head teachers in Orkney are fully responsible for the staff appointments made within their schools; this is within the context of local authority policy. They have said that they want to continue with the advice and help of the authority's Human Resources team. Head teachers would like more choice and ability to appoint, recruit and decide on school staffing allowing continuity and new life to schools however to do so would mean moving away from the idea that staff are appointed to the local authority, which would not help recruitment to our 'hard to fill' posts.

The Additional Support Needs agenda is a concern for schools as there is a continuing expectation that the local authority will provide targeted additional support and resources where and when needed across and within clusters of schools. Orkney maybe unique in so far as that while in other local authorities additional support provision has been reduced, in Orkney this has continued to be a priority and the number of hours of additional support allocated to schools has grown over the last number of years.

## **Question 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?**

There is a strong focus in Orkney on working with communities, employers, the college and other to support and develop learning. In particular as learners enter the last three years of their school education (S4, 5 and 6), they are entitled to experience a Senior Phase where they can continue to develop the four capacities and also achieve qualifications. The educational resources across Orkney can be regarded as one 'learning campus' in order to facilitate the provision of what will be available under the 'Orkney Offer' – a blend of academic, vocational and other experiences to be combined to ensure the best outcome possible for each young person based on the following principles:

- The Orkney Offer should build on each learner's prior experience and create a link to a sustained and positive destination.

- The Orkney Offer (which is the sum of the experience in S4, 5 and 6) should be based on a 'personalised pathway' that recognises the needs and context of the young person.
- The Orkney Offer should capitalise on the collective resources the community has (and not be limited to 'school') in order to provide the skilled workforce required locally. Inter-schools working e.g. meetings of parents and networking opportunities.

The local authority is currently pivotal in supporting this work and, within and island context, the value of this role needs to be recognised.

Schools work hard and successfully engage children and parents in the life and work of the school. In recent school inspections, these particular attributes have been the focus for positive comment. Through the development of family learning, schools should be supported to continue this aspect of their work, including reaching out to reluctant parents (those who are 'hard to reach' and those who simply prefer to entrust education process to the local school – the local government benchmarking framework suggest that community confidence in Orkneys schools is significant higher than the national average).

Good communication systems between school and home e.g. emails, texts and social media really engage people. However while universal access to internet services cannot be assumed, there is still a place for letters and posters etc. too.

Parent Council's report that it is difficult to recruit parents. They also report that their role is not easy to explain however not all of the Parent Council members would want any more responsibility.

## **Question 7**

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

Orkney has significant experience of service delivery in remote and rural areas.

Currently there are two 'active' partner providers; this has reduced from three and will reduce further to one early in 2017. At the same time the local authority is developing new partnerships with Child-minders as part of the extension of provision for early learning and childcare.

On the remoter islands there are specific issues relating to available workforce for a number of roles and functions. Consequently it is not immediate apparent that there is a strong evidence base to support the notion that community led provision will deliver the required continuity and flexibility of provisions for early learning and childcare in the remoter areas of Orkney.

The smallest provisions are (in effect) significantly subsidised and underwritten by the local authority. Any change that depletes the capacity of the local authority to support provision in these most vulnerable areas carries a significant risk.

## **Question 8**

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

The current contractual arrangements with teachers ensure that time is set aside for collaborative (collegiate) professional learning. Locally a number of initiatives involving groups of different sizes have explored the power and potential of this type of learning. Large numbers of teachers have been involved in 'whole school/whole authority' approaches to assessment; groups of staff working at the same age have been involved in cluster arrangements and mixed groups have worked as part of development groups with a specific agenda in mind.

These have been most effective when they are 'elective'. Consequently the underpinning process of professional review is vital to ensuring staff are able to participate in groups that meet the learning needs of the individual, the team and the school.

Good use has also been made (by some) of widely dispersed collaborative groups through the use of 'virtual' environments. Increasingly these are offering high quality and bespoke opportunities. Ensuring that staff have access to the relevant tools (including computers) to access these will be essential. Careful linking of this agenda to the Digital Learning and Teaching Strategy will be critical at national, local authority and school/community level.

## **Question 9**

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

Schools currently have a range of partnership arrangements – working on curriculum and transition with secondary and associate primary clusters, collaborating across schools through linked schools, working with colleagues through Teacher Learning Communities and other clustering arrangements.

'Time' is the only limiting factor to these arrangements.

With a pupil population of around 3000 the 22 schools in Orkney form a de facto cluster. The very real challenge of delivering a wide range services to remote island communities is currently only limited by the available resources. Currently these resources can be targeted to most effectively meet the needs of learners, schools and communities. To further devolve functions/resources carries a potential risk of

either increasing cost or reducing service (as aggregation and targeting across settings may longer be possible).

Schools also have effective relationships/partnerships with their communities and head teachers nurture to good effect the synergy between school and 'place' (community).

## **Question 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.**

'Strategic' and back office services and functions are currently delivered effectively at local authority level and regional level.

Collaboration across local authorities (at 'service development officer' in the northern area) during the development phase of Curriculum for Excellence, the sharing of resources, exemplars and practice provides a very helpful platform for the current phase of work.

The more recent development of the Northern Alliance of north of Scotland and northern isles local authorities has created a new impetus for collaborative working – between directors, heads of service, quality improvement officers and head teachers.

## **Question 11**

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

Orkney is one of the (7) participants in the 'Northern Alliance'. This is a professional collaboration involving directors, heads of service, head teachers and teachers in a variety of projects of common interest. The success and 'added value' of this partnership is coming from the sharing of skills and experience as well as tasks across a number of themes where there is common interest.

Regional or cluster responses which match the level of collaboration to the issue or problem can yield extra-ordinary outcomes. Where there is mismatch, or an over dominant partner, the outcome can be an inappropriate 'one-size fits all' solution, which is less impactful than each area finding its own solution. Consequently the remit and governance of these systems needs to be carefully constructed.

'Regional' and other partnership working that arises from 'need' and/or is co-constructed by participants is likely to be the most effective. Formalising and mandating structures runs the risk of being counter-productive (introducing barriers that did not previously exist). Introducing a new tier of (remote) bureaucracy may/will inevitably create its own problems. Some things are better done at a local level and/or where the context is familiar – there is an inherent dissonance between a

policy that wants to 'empower communities' yet move the power away to a more regional structure.

## **Question 12**

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

There is a clear, unambiguous and indeed statutory (Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000) role for the national government in setting priorities for education.

Having independent bodies with the expertise and capacity to scrutinise and challenge how all partners respond is helpful and, as mentioned previously, can create an evidence base to support the development of practice in any context. For schools and education authorities this scrutiny function is shared between Audit Scotland, Education Scotland and the Care Inspectorate. Some of this activity appears to be unnecessarily overlapping and a simpler and more streamlined approach would have the prospect of delivering best value for children, young people, families and practitioners.

To meet the needs of as relatively small population, the continuation/development of national functions provides a pragmatic solution in a number of areas.

The national exam body (SQA) should provide best value. As mentioned earlier the introduction of the new exam system has not been without difficulty, although given the size and scope of the change, to presume it could be achieved with ease would not be sensible. The planned changes to reduce workload (for staff and pupils) is welcome, however the action has had a long lead in time which suggests a higher level of independent scrutiny of such bodies would be an advantage.

National terms and conditions for teachers and the role of the SNCT has appositive impact on the availability of skilled professionals, as does the concept of professionalisation as exemplified by the work of GTCS.

The diversity that is characteristic of Scotland's identity (including the island groups) also needs to be celebrated and requires more localised approaches.

Support functions need to be close to practice and at the same time well informed (able to horizon scan). This function is currently shared between Education Scotland and local authorities. Ways to strengthen the localised support using regionalised collaborations (e.g. the Northern Alliance) are currently being explored and building on this early success would appear to make sense.

## **Question 13**

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

Teaching Scotland's Future (2011) provided a robust framework for thinking about teacher education and professional learning. Its key weakness was not to take full account of the context of learners within communities where other professionals and practitioners are creating learning opportunities.

An update and review of the core ideas within the context of children's services and community empowerment would be timely and may serve to assist with making inroads to what is now a long-term problem of teacher recruitment (if the role of other practitioners in the learning process can be acknowledged and valued).

## **Question 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?**

The principles are sound, however in practice, delivering on them may be challenging.

There are specific concerns within Orkney around devolved budgets in small school settings as formulas don't really work in small locations. Small school head teachers do not have the capacity to deal with more business issues.

Current arrangements to facilitate 'carry forward' of underspend (to target higher cost development priorities) work well in larger schools.

Medium and long term planning would be better supported if budgets were predictable over a 3-5 year period.

## **Question 15**

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

There is little room for flexibility within the financial planning for schools and increasingly funding needs to be pre-committed to non-negotiable costs (maintenance, energy, sickness cover/supply).

While head teachers in Orkney would welcome bigger (un-committed) DSM budgets, there is little appetite for more administration to be devolved to schools.

It is also clear that some funding (for example school transport, additional support needs, and recruitment, legal) needs to continue to be administered at local authority level, if the processes are to be effective, efficient and provide good value for money.

## **Question 16**

### **How could the accountability arrangements for education be improved?**

The current landscape is relatively 'cluttered' and there are opportunities to streamline. This should include re-examining the alignment with, for example, children's services, community learning and development and early learning and childcare.

For children, families and communities, those accountable should be accessible and visible. In terms of (school) education this means the role of head teacher must remain central in the process. While routes to ministers and (for example) Additional Support Needs Tribunals should never be obscure, accountability and problem solving at a local level ultimately strengthens provision using the resources in the community.

## **Question 17**

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

Not at this time, other than to comment that if any of the feedback provided generates additional questions or queries, we would be happy to assist to ensure that the island voice is appropriately represented as part of the consultative process. It is important that children, young people, families and the communities that make up Orkney are not disadvantaged by the outcomes of this review.