

Empowering teachers, parents and communities to achieve Excellence and Equity in Education A Governance Review

RESPONDENT INFORMATION FORM

Please Note this form **must** be returned with your response.

Are you responding as an individual or an organisation?

- Individual
 Organisation

Full name or organisation's name

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ABOUT THE SCOTTISH OUT OF SCHOOL CARE NETWORK

The Scottish Out of School Care Network is the national charitable organisation (Scottish Charity No: SC020520) supporting the development of high quality registered out of school care, which includes after school, holiday and breakfast clubs, across Scotland. All of our work is underpinned by our commitment to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Currently there are 1007 out of school care services in Scotland, for 726 this is their main service. There are also 593 breakfast clubs and 603 holiday services (Care Inspectorate, 2016) with over 50,000 children registered making this the second largest childcare sector in Scotland.

QUESTIONS

Question 1

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

Undoubtedly the fact that education is fully funded through national government, with a national curriculum, and that there is a national body such as GTCS overseeing the registration and professionalism of the workforce. Teachers have nationally standardised qualifications, pay, conditions, and promotion routes.

It is also embedded within democratically elected national and local governments in Scotland which are responsible through legislation for providing free and accessible to all education and overseeing the quality, staff recruitment and training, and the maintenance or building of the school estate, including Early Learning and Childcare provision.

The existence of an external inspector agency, Education Scotland, charged with ensuring that support is provided to ensure the quality of the curriculum delivery can also be viewed positively, although the fact that the same agency is also responsible for inspection against standards, can be viewed both positively or negatively, given there may be conflicting roles and interests.

It is a strength that parents can be involved through parent teacher councils and many schools will also have mechanisms in place to ensure children's views are acted on via UNCRC rights respecting schools, although this could be extended and built on so all schools do this.

A particular strength in terms of the 1000+ out of school care services (registered childcare in breakfast clubs, afterschool services and holiday clubs for school age children), is the provision of access to school premises for over a half of these services, with many at either a free let or low cost. This is usually enabled through local authority-wide policy support for out of school care, but often head teachers support the use of this school space and resources as a community resource for their pupils. We know of only one area where a few head teachers are ultimately responsible for the out of school care provision in their school, via their management of the ELC, and that is in quite rural areas where it makes sense to all combine services under one roof/ linked management structure.

Question 2

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

There is really not much in the current arrangements which is a barrier to excellence and equity, the barriers to this often lie elsewhere, often in poverty and disadvantage, and through policies not developed in Scotland, such as the UK government austerity agenda which hurts the poorest the most.

In our view, the barriers between national and local government, or related external agencies with a role in education in Scotland, are perhaps not in structural arrangements but in policy and financial processes.

As an example, national government in Scotland has the right and exercises it in determining new policies, such as the expansion of ELC to 600 hours now and to 1140 hours by 2020. There has also been a revision of the curriculum and inspection frameworks and indeed changes in the roles and responsibilities of associated agencies. Again, we welcome, for example, a commitment to masters' level qualifications and specific headship qualifications being developed as educating the workforce is a major way to ensure excellence and equity.

New education policies, such as the examples above, require considerable financial commitment across a range of resources, whilst setting specific targets on teacher numbers or ratios requires forward planning and investment in their education, recruitment and ongoing professional development.

Without going into the complexity of all of the different agencies/colleges' etc. need for increased investment and support as part of this infrastructure, the main and largest budget for education is allocated to local authorities in Scotland.

Because in the early days of the current Scottish Government in power there was a decision made to have a concordat, with single outcome agreements with local authorities, this budget, like many others, is not ring-fenced and therefore does not require stringent accountability.

The governance structure is not at fault here, but the policy processes and financial accountability mechanisms possibly are. If a central government makes a commitment to increase x no of teachers and, crucially, provides the funding to support that, then the body receiving that funding should be accountable on how it was used. Of course we know it is not that simple, there may be a shortage in rural or island areas of suitable qualified staff etc., or in some areas a significant number of staff reach retirement age at roughly the same time.

Turning specifically to our area of interest, out of school care, the closest development where again we see a mismatch between national policy and local delivery is in actually using the considerable financial investment by national government to expand ELC, where local authorities have yet to account for a large underspend of ELC resources. Again this is not structural, but about policy and processes. To be fair to local authorities, change is incremental and does not happen all at once; no matter how many targets might be set, the processes of creating new or extended premises,

employing additional staff, informing parents or developing new partner provider arrangements do take time and require investment in staff within the local authority infrastructure.

In terms of out of school care, with local authority control over the use of school premises and the costs of doing so, and without national government control over this either, it really is a “postcode lottery” for services in terms of whether they gain access to space, resources and grounds in schools, and if they then have to pay very high fees to do so.

Nevertheless, devolving this decision and budget to the individual head teacher would make this even more of a challenge for community services like out of school care as then one individual would have complete control. There would be no need however to change the school governance structure to allow head teachers to support and help set up out of school childcare services as this can be done now.

Question 3

Should the above key principles underpin our approach to reform? Are there other principles which should be applied?

The key principles are good but could also be applied within any governance context including the existing current arrangements.

The term “best value” must always be looked at within the context of the application of this principle: it is going to cost more per child to provide say a healthy lunch using fresh local produce, than mass produced products like the infamous “turkey twizzlers”, or to employ an unqualified catering assistant on the minimum wage, rather than a trained cook, but in both cases the “best value” is not the lower cost but the better nutrition for the children.

Question 4

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

If we consider a high-performing education system such as Finland, there, masters level graduate trained teacher and head teachers (who must also take headship qualifications, as do FE college leaders), have nearly full autonomy in terms of their teaching practice and collegiate sharing and supporting of each other, including time for research and further study. They also have back up resources like free hot midday meals for children and a range of health and social or psychological support professionals where a child is identified as needing extra support. Children do not take part in any national testing until they are aged 16, but teachers use their own methods of tracking their progress. Therefore in terms of autonomy we would say this relates to teaching and learning (whilst still following the national curriculum): teachers should be free to develop their own methods and resources within that, while being properly supported to do so.

In terms of school estate and whole budget management, first this is a great deal of extra work, and second, not every Head Teacher would have the knowledge and skills to do this, without then appointing a financial administrator, to whom they may soon be as beholden to, as the local authority education department, for the go ahead on spending decisions. Head Teachers in Scotland

already manage their schools and staff team, perhaps also the ELC team, and are also responsible for inspection reporting, as well as other responsibilities. Some also have devolved budgets, but they do not have the additional workload of ensuring their staff are recruited, paid and in a pension fund, nor do they have to produce and adhere to a business plan to allocate resources to every area of expense required, providing locum coverage and external quality support.

Most will also be involved at some level with the parent's council, and their local community and out of school care service where there is one. Most really have a great deal of official and unofficial power within their own school community already and it is doubtful that as learning professionals they want to spend even more time managing budgets and resources.

Question 5

What services and support should be delivered by schools? What responsibilities should be devolved to teachers and headteachers 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.

In terms of out of school care services it is our understanding that it is the local authority which decides whether a school can also be used for a breakfast club, after school and holiday childcare clubs or playschemes. It is also our understanding that local authorities and the out of school care services involved would always consult with the head teacher, and we know of no examples where a service was imposed unwillingly on a school, although we have heard many stories over the years of how obstructive a head teacher can be about the use of "their premises" – although we believe this is now improving, with many more teachers aware of the needs of children for school age play, care and learning provided by out of school care.

We also know of one (quite past example) where a small rural school's head teacher wanted an out of school service set up in her school to help retain pupils, and she was willing to manage this herself, however, this was blocked by the local authority involved.

There is a difference between the regulated and registered childcare provided in out of school care, morning, afternoon or all day, and school "clubs" or summer play services with parents involved, which are not regulated or registered, and head teachers can and are able to set such clubs up with partners in the community.

At SOSCN we would be very wary of a conflating of the two types of services and in principle would be happy to see head teachers involved in out of school care but we must also learn lessons from the extended schools initiative in England, where afterschool care is now barely regulated, staff do not have to have any qualifications at all, and the staff child ratio can be 1:30.

A room full of playing children of different ages, stages, needs and requiring freedom to go outside, choose activities, is quite different from 30 children in a more controlled classroom space, with a teaching professional – yet the extension of schools to allow a mixing up of after school childcare and activities has led to this almost deregulation of services. This is not something we would want to see in Scotland.

In terms of other aspects of governance of schools, we would actually like the primary users of schools, children, to have much more of a say, not just within their own school, but for local authorities to involve them in planning decisions about their community and school resources, especially outdoor play and break time places, dining halls, indeed classrooms and teacher recruitment. However, we should also recognise that the parents and children who do have a say are likely to be the less disadvantaged and this could lead to further marginalisation of some families. So, there has to be careful consideration of how this is done.

We know also it is frustrating for many out of school care services in schools that they cannot access and use the kitchens as this is contracted out to another agency; again this may be also true of catering, cleaning and janitorial staff. Therefore it must be doubly frustrating for a head teacher not to have some control over these aspects of school life.

However, instead of placing the work on to the head teacher's shoulders, of engaging individually with such contractual external agencies themselves, perhaps local authorities could and should negotiate terms which include the head teacher and other professional users of the school space as having access to and a real say in directing the priorities of on-site contractors.

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?

We have already commented on children's involvement above.

Given our experience where parents often have to be the management committee of the voluntary sector out of school care service, we believe parents already have enough of a say via parent councils. We do not want to go near the slippery slope of parent boards of governors – the free schools model in England - which is not inclusive but divisive and certainly does not support equity.

Certainly where there are out of school care services and holiday and breakfast clubs in a school this works well as a source of community involvement. We recommend using GIRFEC as the way in which Head Teachers and pastoral care or class teachers join up with the lead practitioners of ELC and Out of School Care discuss the wellbeing needs of children in their joint care on a general basis, and of course, where they are involved in delivering specific support.

Those who train teachers and ELC practitioners already have a role in supervising placements and, given the importance of professional development for all, for setting topics and tasks in courses which would also benefit the school and community e.g. a task to research with children the best use of school grounds.

Much of this can already be happening in schools. Bearing in mind privacy, data protection and child protection, it is informative to follow some schools on twitter as they set out highlights of their activities and why e.g. Playful learning maths etc.

We think better communication of the many positive collaborations of the school and the above listed range of organisations is likely needed as many schools already engage well in such practice.

Question 7

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

We are wondering about the thinking behind this question? When we talk about community led ELC it is usually voluntary/third sector playgroups which also provide ELC - i.e. not private providers like independent nurseries or childminders. Does this question suggest the head teacher could be for example, the named manager of a community led ELC in their school; in which case surely the school itself should contain the ELC? Many community led parent committee services have parent committees because they "have to" would perhaps prefer the option of a different model.

Or would this be an example of the type of case we discussed where a head teacher wanted to keep her small rural school open so therefore was willing to bring in and support an out of school care service? Perhaps this has also happened with ELC in other areas?

We see no reason why a head teacher should not be enabled to do this as long as issues about management and resources are well resolved in advance. In fact in such areas where there are trained and qualified out of school care staff they could expand into ELC if given the space to do so during the day. However, once again it does not require the whole overall system of school governance to change but for local authorities to review the amount of input and say both the head teacher and community should have here. Again and for contracts with outside catering, cleaning etc. to give the learning professionals in the school some control over these resources.

Question 8

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

Reducing both their workloads in order to free up time to collaborate with others. Enable access to communication resources for remoter areas – e.g. Skype meetings/ chats etc. The whole teaching and childcare sector is very attuned to the value of collaboration between a range of professionals around children via GIRFEC in general, and in particular cases where everyone works together to support a child or family.

Shared training and inservice days where possible as often the out of school care provides the childcare to cover in service days.

At entry level to both ELC. Out of School Care and Teacher Training, ensure placements and visits, talks and information and common core subjects are taught across all linked professions here, and all should have sideways and upwards career progression routes.

Question 9

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

Placements and probationary training, continuing professional development, perhaps shared specific experts in particular fields of study.

Many out of school care services operate over a cluster of school sites, or bring the clusters together for a shared holiday club.

We already mentioned that contracting out of services to other agencies or partners should not mean as it seems to do at the moment, then being denied access to kitchens, or prioritising urgent tasks.

Does not the local authority perform some of such functions e.g. bulk buying etc. printing resources, already?

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.

None. Adding an additional layer here creates another structural governance problem and would be an endless source of wrangling about the sharing of powers, budgets, responsibilities.

For the very small council areas it does make a lot of sense to partner with neighbouring larger authorities for some sharing of functions but this should be left up to them to work out.

Question 11

What factors should be considered when establishing new educational regions?

None, they should not be established, this is another layer of governance and costs.

Question 12

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

Those that are currently provided.

Question 13

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

The ITE and post graduate opportunities have all been recently updated in Scotland, the GTCS plays an important role too, while The role of Education Scotland could be made clearer in terms of its support functions as well as regulatory functions. The recent cutting down of the voluminous website is a good start in this respect.

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?

Good enough principles, however predictable, we would hope is in terms of feeling safe to plan ahead knowing your budgets will cover both usual costs as well as any unpredictable events for a school. E.g. A school has recently enrolled a number of refugees, who are very welcome and settling in well, however, they are providing language and pastoral care support to this extra number of pupils, which, of course, requires additional resources.

In terms of transparency this is also where it is better that the local authority education budget accounts for this extra spending rather than the individual school.

We have made comments on value for money elsewhere – in of course it not being the lowest cost or price, however, again, we would say should be accountable to spending categories, rather than value for money – how can we actually measure the long term effects of good quality learning in just such terms?

Question 15

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

The existing levels of devolved funding should be enough and up to local schools and authorities to work out between them.

Question 16

How could the accountability arrangements for education be improved?

Ring fencing budgets but within fairly flexible parameters of budget categories and time for planning and unavoidable delays too.

Question 17

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

We do not think it is in much need of changing, not structurally, but in processes, perhaps more clarity and communication about respective agencies and their roles as well as communication across them and tighter control of finance linked to policy outcomes sought.