EDUCATION AND CULTURE COMMITTEE

AGENDA

6th Meeting, 2016 (Session 4)

Tuesday 23 February 2016

The Committee will meet at 10.00 am in the Robert Burns Room (CR1).

1. **School spending including the educational attainment gap:** The Committee will take evidence from—

   Councillor Stephanie Primrose, Education, Children and Young People Spokesperson, and Robert Nicol, Chief Officer - Children and Young People, COSLA;


   Councillor Gary Robinson, Leader, Shetland Islands Council;

   Councillor Malcolm Cunning, and Ian Robertson, Assistant Director of Education, Glasgow City Council.

2. **School spending including the educational attainment gap, student support and the Scottish Funding Council:** The Committee will take evidence from—

   Angela Constance, Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, Bill Stitt, Local Government Finance Team, and Fiona Robertson, Director of Learning, Scottish Government;

   Graeme Logan, Strategic Director for School Years, Education Scotland.
The papers for this meeting are as follows—

**Agenda items 1 and 2**

- Written Submissions EC/S4/16/6/1
- Note of informal discussion EC/S4/16/6/2
- PRIVATE PAPER EC/S4/16/6/3 (P)
- PRIVATE PAPER EC/S4/16/6/4 (P)
Education and Culture Committee

6th Meeting, 2016 (Session 4), Tuesday, 23rd February 2016

School spending including the educational attainment gap

Clerk’s note

In the last two years, the Committee’s scrutiny of Scottish Government draft budgets has focused on the issue of school spending. Further information on the Committee’s scrutiny of the Draft Budget for 2016-17 is available here.

In addition, the Committee has undertaken work on the educational attainment gap. Further information is available here.

The Committee will conclude both of these pieces of work by taking oral evidence from local authority representatives and then from the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning.

The following written submissions have been provided to inform the Committee’s scrutiny—

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The Scottish Government’s National Improvement Framework, which will also be relevant to the Committee’s discussions, is available here.

Time permitting, the Committee may also discuss with the Cabinet Secretary the key issues arising from its recent evidence session on student support and its work on the Scottish Funding Council.

Clerk to the Committee
18 February 2016
Agenda items 1 and 2

Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning
Angela Constance MSP

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Mr Stewart Maxwell MSP
Convener
Education and Culture Committee
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
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16th February 2016

Dear Stewart,

Thank you for your email of 26 January providing advance sight of the Education and Culture Committee’s Report on the Draft Budget 2016/17, now published.

The Committee is to be commended for its comprehensive and inclusive approach to engaging with stakeholders in its evidence taking throughout the year and for its focus in this report on school spending and attainment. The Scottish Government is firm in its resolve to deliver a world class education system which meets the needs of our young people. A central plank of that work is the introduction of the National Improvement Framework, with a standardised assessment, to develop a robust evidence base to show how children are progressing; an approach endorsed by the OECD in its report Improving Scotland’s Schools: An OECD Perspective, published in December.

Please find attached the Scottish Government’s response to the questions that you raise in your report. As requested, I have responded in advance of the Finance Committee’s report to help inform the Education and Culture Committee’s approach to taking oral evidence later this month. This response is in addition to that provided from the five bodies you have written to, including Education Scotland.

ANGELA CONSTANCE
Pupil Teacher Ratios

Q: Could the Scottish Government explain the reasons behind having a different PTR ratio in each local authority?

The diversity is historical and reflects a range of factors including different geographical circumstances, changes in demographics over time, sizes of schools and teacher employment decisions made by individual local authorities. All 32 local authorities committed in 2015 to ensuring that the PTR in their area did not worsen compared to its level in 2014, as well as maintaining teacher numbers. The Government’s policy since 2012-13 has been that PTRs should not rise from one year to the next.

Q: Does the Scottish Government have any discretion in the imposition of grant reductions for failing to maintain ratios, for example is there discretion, flexibility, tapering of penalties or even a reasonableness test that is applied?

The Deputy First Minister wrote to local authorities on 5 February 2015 offering an additional £10 million (on top of the £41 million included in the settlement since 2011 specifically to support the maintenance of teacher employment levels) in return for a commitment to ensure that teacher numbers and PTRs did not worsen compared to 2014 levels and that places were provided for probationer teachers under the Teacher Induction Scheme. The letter clearly stated that provision of this funding is conditional upon delivery of the commitment and all 32 local authorities accepted the terms of the agreement as set out in the letter.

Delivery of the commitment was measured through the Teacher Pupil Census published on 9 December. The Scottish Government took a reasonable position in that although it was entitled to recover the share of £41 million from those authorities which failed to deliver it chose instead to distribute the additional £10 million only to those authorities which had successfully delivered.

Q: We note this is a target as opposed to an outcome driven measure. Could the Scottish Government indicate the linkage between the ratios and educational outcomes in individual local authorities?

There is clear evidence that the most important in-school element in a child’s educational attainment is the quality of teaching and leadership. The number and quality of our teachers is therefore an important factor in delivering improved outcomes. The 2007 McKinsey Report on the World’s Best performing Education Systems noted that the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers. That is why the Scottish Government is investing in both the number and the quality of our teachers and school leadership.

The First Minister is on record as having said “I have made it very clear in my short tenure to date as First Minister that I want to prioritise raising attainment and closing the attainment gap. I hope we can all unite behind that. Let me make it very clear that I do not believe that reducing teacher numbers is the best way to achieve that.” [FMQs 8 January 2015]

Recruitment, Retention, Pay and Conditions of Teachers

Q: Can the Scottish Government describe the efforts that have been made to improve the accuracy of teacher workforce planning over recent years and what effect that has had?
Teaching is a controlled subject with intake targets set by the Scottish Funding Council on the basis of advice from Scottish Ministers building upon advice from the Teacher Workforce Planning Advisory Group.

The Scottish Government leads the annual teacher workforce planning exercise, but works in partnership with local authorities, ADES, COSLA, the teacher education universities, the teacher unions and professional associations, the GTCS and Education Scotland. The exercise is based on a statistical model but is also informed by other evidence relating to teacher supply and demand. The objective each year is that the Teacher Workforce Planning Advisory Group agrees unanimously what advice should go to Scottish Ministers in relation to student teacher intake targets for the following academic year. In recent years this advice has been unanimous and accepted by Scottish Ministers who then provide guidance to the Scottish Funding Council.

Subject-specific student teacher intake targets were first set for academic year 2014/15, and subsequently for 2015/16 and 2016/17. Before then, collective targets were set for groups of subjects. This has highlighted the shortfall in student teacher recruitment to subjects such as computing, physics and technological education which tended to be masked under the previous arrangements.

**Q:** *Can the Scottish Government explain what measures it has taken to track the employment that teacher graduates secure both after graduation and on completion of their probationary year?*

The vast majority of teacher graduates join the teacher induction scheme to gain the benefits offered under the scheme including a reduced teaching workload compared with fully registered teachers, and the allocation of an experienced teacher to mentor each probationer.

The teacher census, which is conducted annually, records teachers in schools based on their unique GTCS registration number. By comparing one year’s data with the following year it is possible to identify both leavers from, and returners to, the teaching workforce. For example, the 2015 census indicated that 86% of 2014/15 probationers were in teaching posts at the time of the census in September 2015.

**Q:** *Can the Scottish Government indicate how we move to a more stable and sustainable workforce planning system in all parts of the country and what role the Scottish Government will undertake?*

The teacher workforce planning process is a partnership process which is led by the Scottish Government. Intake targets for initial teacher education in each of the last four years have been agreed with key delivery partners including COSLA, local authorities, the GTCS, the universities and professional associations. The Scottish Government recognises that there is always scope to refine and improve the workforce planning process and the newly established Strategic Board for Teacher Education has been asked to review the current arrangements with a view to recommending any improvements by the end of June 2016.

**Sharing and Integrating Services across Local Authorities and Schools**

**Q:** *Could the Scottish Government indicate what progress has been made in relation to the reforming of public services involving the sharing of local authority education services since we reported on the 2015-16 budget?*
The Scottish Government is in favour of closer service integration and believes further progress could be made.

There have been examples of shared services notably Stirling and Clackmannanshire Councils agreed in June 2014 to deliver Education and Social Services together in partnership although that agreement was recently discontinued. A number of authorities have also worked together to provide an education management information shared service in Scotland through the SEEMIS Group LLP and discussions are continuing around improved systems to better co-ordinate the provision of supply teachers. There are also a number of cross-cutting educational services such as the GLOW network.

These developments are welcome but there is more that could be done both to improve outcomes for children and to secure financial savings. ADES have been encouraging authorities to develop regional partnerships to support improvement and local authorities and schools are very regularly working across boundaries through the Scottish Attainment Challenge which is providing opportunities for virtual and in person collaboration.

Q: Does the Scottish Government agree with COSLA and councillors opinion that little financial benefit could accrue from sharing of services and if not what more could the Government do to encourage this?

The Scottish Government made clear in its response to the Christie Commission that it is wholly in favour of closer service integration where this will demonstrably improve outcomes for local people and ensure longer term financial sustainability.

The Scottish Government continues to encourage public sector bodies throughout Scotland to increase the pace and extent of reform by working together at local level to proactively develop new integrated service delivery proposals based on local need. With the right leadership and commitment from partners, much can be achieved by aligning resources and by holding one another to account for delivery.

Q: Does the Scottish Government see any potential benefits from increases in distance learning and if so what could the Government do to encourage this?

The Scottish Government recognises that distance learning can help open access to particular subjects by connecting learners and teachers across geographical areas; particularly where there is a shortage of teachers for specific subjects.

The Scottish Government continues to invest in Glow, the national digital learning platform. Glow includes web-conferencing and broadcasting services. Glow Meet (powered by Adobe Connect web conferencing software) allows teachers, pupils and partners to facilitate online meetings using webcams and microphones, giving users the opportunity to have online conversations as well as share documents. All Glow users are able to schedule and manage their own Glow Meets. There is also Glow TV, a series of nationally scheduled web-conferencing events, centrally organised by Education Scotland and partner organisations.

A range of other online collaboration tools are also available in Glow, allowing teachers and learners in schools to communicate and learn with each other. These services include Microsoft Office 365, Blogs and Wikis. There are also a range of online resources and apps, covering a wide range of curriculum areas which can be used by schools to support their local education provision. There is scope for local authorities and schools to have additional apps to be made available through Glow. Glow services are freely available to all learners and teachers in Scotland and are accessible from any web-enabled device.

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www.scotland.gov.uk
Q: What are the views of the Scottish Government in relation to the suggestion by COSLA that local authorities’ focus should be on local democracy and local connections?

Ensuring that people have their voice heard in shaping their local community is at the heart of the Scottish Government’s approach to public service reform. By working closely with communities, and with each other, local partners are better able to promote services which are effective in meeting people’s needs, wants and aspirations.

The Scottish Government is committed to further empowering communities in line with the subsidiarity principle that people who live and work in Scotland are best-placed to make decisions about issues that matter to them. For example, the Fairer Scotland conversation allows people to say how they want public services to respond and support them in changing their own lives and their communities for the better.

Protected Budgets and Implications for Other Council Services

Q: The Scottish Government is seeking to protect teacher numbers and education budgets are being protected by local authorities. Given this, what impact does the Scottish Government consider it is having on other local authority services which support children?

The Scottish Government has treated local government very fairly despite the cuts to the Scottish Budget from the UK Government. The funding proposal for 2016-17 delivers a strong but challenging financial settlement for local government which will be strengthened by joint working to improve outcomes for local people through health and social care integration and by improving educational outcomes.

The proposal makes provision for a return to a national agreement to maintain the pupil teacher ratio at 2015-16 levels, and secure places for all probationers who require one under the teacher induction scheme supported by a continued funding package of £88 million, made up of £51 million to maintain teacher numbers and £37 million to support the teacher induction scheme. This funding package should minimise the adverse impact on other children’s services.

Q: Does the Scottish Government consider local authority education budgets require to be maintained across the country at a minimum of current levels? What impact does the Scottish Government consider reductions would have on educational attainment?

Against the backdrop of the toughest public expenditure conditions we have yet faced this Government has delivered a strong but challenging financial settlement for local government. Our funding package for local government focuses on delivery of our shared priorities to deliver sustainable economic growth, protect front-line services and support the most vulnerable within society. As part of the settlement we have put forward education as a priority. We do not believe that cutting the numbers of teachers will benefit children’s learning. Our commitment is that local authorities should collectively maintain the pupil teacher ratio at 13:7 and provide a place on the teacher induction scheme to every probationer who needs one. Schools from 21 Local Authorities with the highest concentration of pupils living in deprived communities are currently benefitting from the first year of funding from the additional 4 year £100m Attainment Scotland Fund.

Within that settlement it is for local authorities to determine how their funds are distributed across the range of services they provide to meet local priorities and deliver on our shared commitments.
Attainment Issues

Q: Can the Scottish Government indicate what Government spending has the greatest impact on closing the attainment gap?

All spending on education has an impact on improving educational outcomes for children and young people, including those from the most deprived backgrounds. Local authorities, supported by the Scottish Government, invest some £4.8 billion in education every year.

The Scottish Government recognises that authorities and schools are making progress on tackling the gap but that there is a need to further accelerate improvements. That is why the funding from the Scottish Attainment Challenge is targeted at those communities and schools who were facing the greatest challenges – those with the highest concentration of children living in our most deprived communities. The focus has been on Primary Schools as it is known how important early preventative work is in improving children’s longer term outcomes. Authorities and schools are putting in place approaches they know will make a difference, based on local knowledge and evidence of what works.

There is a substantial body of evidence of what works to reduce the gap, which is available on the Education Scotland national hub for the Scottish Attainment Challenge. This draws on research from bodies such as the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, the Education Endowment Foundation and Education Scotland’s own experience from school inspections in Scotland. These point to interventions which focus on literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing, together with family engagement and teacher professional development as being the most effective and these are the approaches which are being funded through the Challenge.

The Scottish Government recognises that schools cannot close the attainment gap alone. That is why £329m has been invested over two years to expand free early learning and childcare and extend this entitlement to more than a quarter of two year olds who will benefit most, and together with local authorities, NHS and other partners, invested over £274m in the Early Years Change Fund to transform early years services and embed prevention including more targeted support for vulnerable parents.

Q: Can the Scottish Government indicate how it intends to evaluate and monitor outcomes achieved as a result of funding from the attainment Scotland fund.

The Scottish Government will carry out a full evaluation of the Attainment Scotland Fund, together with participating authorities and schools. The evaluation will aim to:

- Assess the impact of the Attainment Scotland Fund in improving attainment and reducing the attainment gap between pupils from the most and least deprived areas.
- Assess the extent to which the further aims of the Attainment Scotland Fund have been met: promote schools’ capacity for data-based self-evaluation, encourage collaboration between schools and Local Authorities, and promote learning on what works to reduce the attainment gap.
- Identify what did and did not work well in the process of implementing the Attainment Scotland Fund.
- Provide learning and increase the Scottish evidence base of what works to increase attainment, especially of pupils from the most deprived areas.

The evaluation will be both formative and summative which means that its findings will be used to:
Give feedback to schools, Local Authorities, the Scottish Government and Education Scotland on what is and is not working well during the 4 years of the Fund, to enable them to further improve initiatives and the working of the fund.

Inform directions of the latter two years of the programme and of future policies aimed at raising attainment and reducing the attainment gap.

Data and information will be collected at school, local authority and national level to evaluate the success of the fund, with biennial reports published.

Q: Can the Scottish Government indicate what actions it has taken to help disadvantaged children with educational needs?

The First Minister launched the Scottish Attainment Challenge in February 2015 to bring a greater sense of urgency and priority to closing the poverty related attainment gap. The Challenge focuses and accelerates targeted improvements in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing building on the range of initiatives and programmes already in place to raise attainment and reduce inequity for children across Scotland.

In addition to the Challenge, there are a range of Scottish Government activities already underway which contribute to closing the gap:

- Curriculum for Excellence provides a coherent, flexible and enriched curriculum from 3 to 18. It reflects the skills children need to succeed in the 21st century, with young people developing as successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens.
- Literacy and numeracy hubs established across Scotland to facilitate sharing of best practice.
- Implementation of Teaching Scotland’s Future and the Scottish College for Educational Leadership.
- Developing the Young Workforce - highlighted by stakeholders and partners (Scottish Youth Parliament and Renfrewshire Council) as an initiative which will have a positive impact on attainment.
- The School Improvement Partnership Programme, the Early Years Collaborative and the Raising Attainment for All Programme encourage collaboration and continuous self-improvement.
- ‘Insight’ – the Senior Phase Benchmarking Tool, helps local authorities and secondary schools analyse strengths and areas for improvement.
- Provision of accessible information for parents and carers through a refreshed Parentzone website: and working with schools and the third sector to explore effective links and share ideas.
- The £1.5m Access to Education fund has helped to reduce barriers to learning experienced by pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- The extension of the Education Maintenance Allowance scheme to benefit even more young people and supports them to stay on in post-16 learning.

The National Improvement Framework for Scottish Education, published in January 2015, sets out the Scottish Government’s vision and priorities for our children’s progress in learning. The Framework will be key in driving work to continually improve Scottish education and close the poverty-related attainment gap, delivering both excellence and equity.
**School Closure Policies**

*Q: Can the Scottish Government indicate how they are monitoring the overall impact of school closure legislation and the impact found to date?*

The principal purpose of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 (the 2010 Act) is to provide strong, accountable statutory consultation practices and procedures that local authorities must apply to their handling of all proposals for school closures and other major changes to schools. These consultation processes are expected to be robust, open, transparent and fair - and seen to be so. They are also expected to be consistent across Scotland.

The 2010 Act makes special arrangements in regard to rural schools, establishing procedural presumption against closure of rural schools. This requires education authorities to follow a more detailed set of procedures in formulating a rural school closure proposal and in consulting on and reaching a decision as to whether to implement a rural school closure proposal.

The intention of the 2010 Act is not to make closure of rural schools more difficult, as sometimes contended, but to ensure that in making a closure proposal, education authorities have considered fully the impact of its proposal on the community and are able to present the case for closure in clear, understandable terms to those who will be affected by it.

The 2010 Act was amended by the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 with most amendments coming into force on 1 August 2014. The final part of those amendments relating to the new School Closure Review Panels came into force on 30 March 2015.

These amendments were informed by the findings and recommendations of the Commission for the Delivery of Rural Education, which was established in August 2011 by the Scottish Government and COSLA. Its remit was to examine both how the delivery of rural education could maximise the attainment, achievement and life chances of young people in rural areas, and the link between rural education and rural communities. As part of its work, the Commission was also asked to review the 2010 Act and its application.

It is also worth noting that the approach set out in the legislation has considerable support across all sides of the Parliament with both the 2010 Act and the subsequent 2014 amendments being approved unanimously.

In terms of monitoring the impact of the legislation, there have been 161 school closure proposals made by education authorities under the 2010 Act and of these, 50 were called-in by Scottish Ministers for further investigation and determination. Following consideration of these 50 proposals, consent has been given to close 35 schools, with 13 school closures refused and 2 remitted back to the education authority to reconsider. However, of the 13 where consent was refused, 4 were overturned by the Court of Session following a judicial review of the Scottish Ministers’ decision to refuse consent brought forward by Western Isles Council. As a consequence, this means that almost 95% of proposed school closures brought forward by education authorities under the requirements of the 2010 Act have been implemented.

Although it is often contended that the 2010 Act “prevents” local authorities from closing schools, the evidence provided by these statistics paints a very different picture, with the vast majority of closure proposals being implemented. The Scottish Government is also
aware that, going forward, local authorities across all parts of Scotland are planning to bring forward some 30 or more closure proposals over the next 18 months.

Q: Can the Scottish Government clarify the balance that requires to be given between educational benefit and financial considerations when school closures are being considered?

The 2010 Act reflects the Scottish Ministers’ view that educational benefits should be at the heart of any proposal to make a significant change to schools and, where a closure is proposed, it should be for positive educational reasons. Consequently, the 2010 Act specifies that the local authority must, for all consultations, prepare an Educational Benefits Statement and publish it within the proposal paper. However, it is recognised that the impact of a closure proposal on a range of educational factors will rarely only give rise to benefits – any proposal is likely to involve both pros and cons. The Educational Benefits Statement is the place for the education authority to explore and set out that balance.

While the Educational Benefits Statement provides the local authority with the opportunity to set out the educational case for the proposal, the proposal paper itself is where the authority can and should set out all the other contextual and relevant evidence and information around, and in support of, the proposal.

As part of its review of the 2010 Act, the Commission on the Delivery of Rural education noted that the interpretation (at that time) of the legislation did not allow education authorities to acknowledge the financial climate on their decision making. It concluded that it was not sustainable or transparent for financial factors to be hidden from closure proposals. The Commission’s subsequent recommendation was that school closure proposals should be accompanied by transparent, accurate and consistent financial information which rigorously evidences any financial argument that is deployed.

This recommendation was accepted by the Scottish Government and as part of the amendments introduced through the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 is a new requirement that all school closure proposals must include information about the financial implications of it. In addition, new statutory guidance to accompany the amended 2010 Act strongly recommends that education authorities base their financial information on a template which was developed for this purpose by COSLA in close collaboration with local authorities.

The consequence of this change means that an education authority’s case for closure is now predicated on not only the educational benefits to be achieved but also on any relevant financial and budgetary considerations. This represents a significant shift in scope of application of the original 2010 Act. While the educational benefits to be derived remain at the heart of the proposal, clear financial information will help to underpin further the education authority’s case for closure along with all other relevant information, such as the condition and suitability of the existing school buildings, changing patterns of demand of school places and issues around travel and transport arrangements to the new school. On the other hand, a closure proposal based solely on financial considerations and with no demonstrable educational benefits would not comply with the requirements and obligations of the 2010 Act.
Briefing for Education Committee on 2016/17 Budget

Introduction

1. This briefing is intended to assist the Committee in advance of the evidence session on the 2016/17 education budget on 23 February. This briefing should be read alongside the information which COSLA circulated to members on the overall local government settlement.

General Key Points

2. The following are the general key points which we would wish to emphasise:

- **Budgets for 2016/17 have still to be set by some authorities:** Local authorities are still in the process of setting budgets for 2016/17 with some councils not meeting to agree budgets until March. The full position with respect to local authorities’ education budgets for 2016/17 is still unclear.

- **A cash cut will mean real pain for education:** However, while the exact financial position with respect to education remains unclear, we can safely say that the removal of £350 million from the local government settlement (3.5% cash cut and 5.2% real terms cut) will not help local authorities maintain service levels in education and children’s services. While we expect all local authorities to continue to offer some protection to education compared to other services, as the largest component of an authority’s budget, education will be forced to face some financial pain. As we have said before, this pain will again be felt disproportionately by those parts of the budget which are unprotected, but with the added problem that this will come after years of cumulative savings. The scope for further savings is, therefore, much reduced, reducing further local government’s financial flexibility.

- **The most vulnerable could be hardest hit:** The impact of cutting budgets and reduced council financial flexibility will go beyond unprotected parts of education budgets. Scottish Government are all too aware that you cannot cut core funding while at the same time taking steps to enforce the protection of the largest component of a council’s largest budget and not create major financial problems elsewhere, including to services which are designed to support the most vulnerable. Councils will do what they can to manage this problem locally, but we should be under no illusion
that this is a budget designed to support the most vulnerable in society.

- **2016/17 was never going to be an easy year but this cut goes beyond planning assumptions:** This cash cut comes on top of existing financial pressures which local authorities were already facing for next financial year. COSLA highlighted to the Committee in December that councils were looking to save £270 million at an absolute minimum in 2016/17 even before the outcome of the spending review was known.

- **Scottish Government is making councils do more while giving them less money:** Councils will also face, albeit on a slightly smaller scale, growing financial pressures as a result of new legislative duties. We have already highlighted that there is no new money to help fund expected increased demand for Gaelic medium education as a result of the Education Bill, but it also unclear whether Government will meet the full costs of both the introduction of new national assessments and school clothing grants. The proposal to set a statutory 25 hour school week will also add millions in costs to certain local authorities, with no evidenced educational benefit.

- **Not all budgets are made equally:** It should also be noted that while local government budget has been cut, the Scottish Government’s own draft spending plans propose the central learning budget increases from £191.3 to £201.5 million - an increase in cash terms of around 5.3% and a real terms gain of 3.6%. We can take from this that Scottish Government are happy protecting their own spending priorities while reducing local government’s ability to do the same.

- **There will be a human cost to Government’s decision:** When existing financial pressures are combined with the cash cut in the local government settlement, the result is that thousands of non-teaching staff across local government will face losing their jobs.

**Teacher Numbers**
3. This briefing does not attempt to repeat the issues that COSLA has made before about Scottish Government’s teacher number commitment. The Committee will be well aware from previous evidence where COSLA stands on this issue. Instead we wish to focus on the new commitment which Scottish Government has enforced on local authorities:
- **New target, same problem, greater sanctions**: The new commitment will mean that local authorities will collectively have to maintain the national pupil/teacher ratio (PTR) at 13.7. Any council that fails to ensure its local ratio is maintained risks larger scale financial sanctions than in previous years.

- **It’s not an improvement from last year**: On paper a national pupil/teacher ratio does provide councils with more flexibility than an absolute teacher number target. A commitment with a national pupil/teacher ratio will help councils that have declining school rolls, but which last year had to maintain teacher numbers as a result of Government’s target. However, with school rolls expected to rise further this means that any flexibility afforded to local government nationally is extremely limited. Taking this into account we expect that the maintenance of the national pupil teacher ratio could hinge on a very small number of teachers nationwide.

- **There are very high stakes attached to the counting of an arbitrary number of teachers on one random day in September**: With such a slim margin for success or failure, and with the financial stakes so high, it is both worrying and perplexing that so much reliance is placed on the pupil and teacher census in September. To base a policy with no proven educational benefit but with a huge financial risk to individual councils, on the number of teachers counted on one day out of the whole year is of significant concern. It is worth pointing out that the census was not designed to have such high stakes attached to its output. The work associated with the management of census day and the requirement on councils to respond to Government’s own monitoring in the run up to September is placing a disproportionate demand on officer time in authorities. This is time which would be better spent on more fruitful pursuits which are evidenced to deliver better educational outcomes.

- **Getting it wrong by a handful of teachers could cost councils millions**: What makes the new iteration of Government’s commitment so unacceptable, and which raises further the financial stakes for authorities, is the draconian nature of the sanctions that have been attached to it. Scottish Government have said that if the national PTR increases from 13.7, they will take steps to recover from any council which allows its local PTR to rise, a share of the £88 million which is being provided for the teacher and probationer commitments in 2016-17. This £88 million is made up of £51 million which was included in the settlement to support past teacher pay
settlements and £37 million to operate the probationary teacher scheme. It is the first time that Scottish Government has included money for funding the teacher probationer scheme within the teacher sanction. The Government has not stated how they would recover this money, but there is a big risk that if their actions could undermine one of the central pillars of teacher training.

- **Big cuts and greater sanctions – a double whammy against local government and local democracy.** The financial risk for individual councils is now increased from 2015/16, through a combination of budget cuts and increased sanction. Any council that allows its PTR to change, even if it remains below the national average, now risks a massively disproportionate sanction. This will be on top of the already discussed reduction in core local government funding of £350 million in 2016/17. Taking all of this into account this is not a budget to strengthen local government or local decision making.

**Conclusion**
4. We will be happy to assist the Committee on these points and more on 23 September.

**COSLA**
15 February 2015
Local Government Settlement 2016/17

COSLA position
COSLA welcomes the opportunity to provide evidence on the local government settlement 2016/17. The evidence below sets out the COSLA position and this will be issued to all Parliamentary Committees that are considering the 2016/17 budget. COSLA will also issue this evidence as a briefing to all MSPs.

As the Committee may be aware, COSLA is of the view that the 2016/17 local government settlement proposed by the Scottish Government is totally unacceptable. As such, COSLA, as the national body representing its member councils, has rejected the proposed settlement and will not be recommending it for acceptance to its member councils.

Whilst COSLA wholly rejects the settlement, we recognise that for a variety of reasons, ranging from concern about the possibility of sanctions to the need to settle budgets locally, individual councils may believe they have little option but to set a budget within the confines of the proposal put forward by Scottish Government. However, COSLA is in a different position and represents the collective national reaction to the set of proposals put forward in this budget. While individual councils must be driven by practicalities of setting their individual budget and funding their services, COSLA is required to look at strategic issues, such as the autonomy of local councils and the effect on local democracy that arises from this settlement.

When the settlement was debated by COSLA Leaders at the end of January a motion was proposed and agreed by a significant majority and the full motion is set out below for the Committee’s consideration. The motion sets out the clear view of Leaders and whilst it speaks for itself, this Committee evidence highlights some additional key points raised by COSLA Leaders.

COSLA agreed motion on the 2016/17 local government settlement
The offer of settlement from Scottish Government remains undeliverable without an unacceptable level of cuts to services and staffing, which we are simply unwilling to inflict on our communities. Accordingly, COSLA cannot accept and will not recommend it to member Councils as they consider their own position.

In support of this motion, we assert that local decision-making leads to better outcomes for our citizens and communities; that the focus of central and local government should be not on inputs but on securing better
outcomes; and that Scottish Government should be endeavouring to 
empower local democracy not subvert it.

Accordingly, for Scottish Government:
- to slash council budgets by £350m;
- to try to force councils to freeze council tax for a 9th successive 
  year;
- to seek to coerce councils to maintain an arbitrary number of 
  teachers irrespective of local circumstances; and
- to threaten councils with cumulative sanctions of £408M (including 
  £250M not paid to councils but to health boards) on top of their 
  budget cut, should councils act in a way deemed by Scottish 
  Government to be inconsistent with its demands,

is wholly misguided. In pursuing such a course and in focusing on inputs 
Scottish Government threatens grievous injury to better outcomes for 
citizens and communities. Further, the strictures and sanctions which 
Scottish Government seeks to impose on councils are legally 
questionable, grossly infringe locally democratic decision-making and are 
antipathetic to the partnership between local government and Scottish 
Government which must become one of parity of esteem.

Leaders censure Scottish Government for its direct approach to Council 
Chief Executives regarding the terms of the local government settlement. 
This is a matter within the exclusive compass of politicians, local and 
national.

Level of cut
The cut to the local government revenue settlement is £350m. In percentage 
terms this equates to a 3.5% cash cut and 5.2% real terms cut. In 
recent weeks, the Scottish Government has conveyed a public message 
that the £350m cut is in fact only 2% of total local government spend.

COSLA is absolutely dismayed that the Scottish Government is belittling the 
size of the cut and the impact it will have. There has always been a 
clear understanding between COSLA and Scottish Government as to 
how the movement in the settlement is described, this being the increase 
or decrease in revenue grant. However, this year, Government has 
chosen to move away from that and instead introduced a new narrative. 
The Scottish Parliament’s own research unit, SPICE, has even drawn 
this distinction in a public report (SPICE Report: Local Government 
Funding: Draft Budget 2016/17 and provisional allocations to local 
authorities 21 January 2016) and an excerpt from this report is attached 
as an appendix to this evidence submission. This is unacceptable as it
gives a confused message to the public who are facing the real impact of these cuts in their communities.

In terms of the level of revenue cut local government has received, COSLA believes that different policy choices could have been made by the Scottish Government or the Government could have chosen to raise more money directly by using its own financial levers or by allowing local government the freedom to alter its tax base. That none of these things happened are policy choices by Government in Scotland, not inevitable outcomes of the UK Chancellor’s budget. Indeed, by the Government’s own figures, Scotland received a £65m cash increase in funding in 2016/17 compared to 2015/16.

What is additionally frustrating is that COSLA produced a list of ways in which the impact of the cuts to local government could be mitigated. These ranged from increased flexibility within the budget or new approaches as to how services are delivered. COSLA is particularly disappointed that despite offering these proposals to mitigate the cut, none of these were seriously discussed or activated by the Scottish Government.

**Commitments**

As a condition of the settlement, Local Government is expected to commit to deliver on three specific elements:

- Maintain the Council Tax Freeze;
- Maintain a pupil teacher ratio nationally at a value of 13.7 (the same level as 2015);
- Pay the Living Wage to all social care workers by 1st October 2016.

If any council does not deliver on any of the three elements outlined above, the Deputy First Minister has confirmed that they will be subject to a financial penalty. The penalty being the council’s proportionate share of £408m. The £408m consists of £70m for the Council tax freeze, £88m for Teachers and £250m for Health & Social Care, which should be noted is not included in the local government settlement, but in the Health budget.

The commitments contained in the settlement and the accompanying sanctions leave very little flexibility for councils in operating their budget. Education and social care make up the significant part of local government expenditure and, if these areas are centrally protected, the remaining services are faced with a disproportionate cut. The inclusion of commitments and sanctions is therefore considered to be a clear infringement and subversion of local government’s democratic accountability.
Council tax freeze
The Committee will undoubtedly be aware that COSLA does not support the council tax freeze and made it clear to Scottish Government that, in our view, it significantly erodes local flexibility, democracy and accountability. In an environment of reduced central government grant, it is even more imperative that local councils have the ability to respond locally to deliver the services communities need.

The calls for an ending to the council tax freeze have been made elsewhere across Scotland. Not least the Commission for Local Tax Reform recognised that there is a growing perception that this policy cannot go on indefinitely and that it acts as a barrier to local choice and autonomy. The Scottish Government says it prefers to wait until a replacement local taxation is in place before removing the council tax freeze. Given it is unlikely that a replacement will be in place for a number of years yet, this implies that the council tax freeze will continue for more years to come (it will already be in its 9th year for 2016/17). This is simply unsustainable and we cannot afford to wait until a new tax is in place if we want to continue to protect services and not lose these forever.

Teacher numbers
The second commitment relates to the maintenance of a pupil/teacher ratio (PTR) at a national level. Whilst there has been movement away from an arbitrary teacher number figure, COSLA continues to have significant concerns over this input measure which has no direct link to improved educational attainment. As COSLA has pointed out before, there is no evidence which links improved educational attainment to a particular ratio or number of teachers. This does not mean we do not recognise the central position that teachers play in learning, just that changes of the scale we have seen in teacher workforce are not evidenced to have any impact on attainment.

On paper a pupil/teacher ratio does provide councils with more flexibility than an absolute teacher number target. A commitment with a national pupil/teacher ratio will help councils that have declining school roll, but which last year had to maintain teacher numbers as a result of Government’s target. However, with national school rolls expected to rise further this means that any flexibility afforded to local government nationally is extremely limited. Taking this into account we expect that the maintenance of the national pupil teacher ratio could hinge on a very small number of teachers nationwide.

With such a slim margin for success or failure, and with the financial stakes so high, it is worrying and perplexing that so much reliance is made of the pupil and teacher census in September. To base a policy with no proven educational benefit but with a huge financial risk to individual councils,
on the number of teachers counted on one day in September is of significant concern.

The issues that we have discussed above are not new and have been made before by COSLA. What makes the new iteration of Government’s commitment so unacceptable, and which raises further the financial stakes for authorities, is the draconian nature of the sanctions that have been attached to it. Scottish Government have said that if the national PTR increases from 13.7, they will take steps to recover from any council which allows its local PTR to rise, a share of the £88 million which is being provided for the teacher and probationer commitments in 2016-17. This £88 million is made up of £51 million which was included in the settlement to support past teacher pay settlements and £37 million to operate the probationary teacher scheme. It is the first time that Scottish Government has included money for funding the teacher probationer scheme within the teacher sanction. The Government has not stated how they would recover this money, but there is a big risk that this could undermine one of the central pillars of teacher training. The financial risk for individual councils is considerable. Any council that allows its PTR to change, even if it remains below the national average, now risks a massively disproportionate sanction. This will be on top of the already discussed reduction in core local government funding of £350 million in 2016/17.

Health and social care

COSLA very much welcomes the Government’s investment of £250m in health and social care with the definition of health extending beyond the NHS. However one of the greatest frustrations has been the lack of clarity around the £250m and the resulting confusion caused. Despite the budget being announced in December, it unnecessarily took until 28 January for the Scottish Government to set out its intentions around these monies. In that period of time, despite the expectation being that this would create flexibility for local government and ease the £350m budget reduction, it instead resulted in increased conditions for local government. These conditions include how the £250m money is to be used which has resulted in effective ring-fencing of health and social care budgets. COSLA cannot understate the difficulties this has created at a local level for councils in preparing their budgets at a time when difficult decisions are required to be taken.

One of the stipulations for being able to access the £250m for Health & Social Care is that councils deliver the living wage for all social care workers from 1st October 2016. We have a number of concerns around this.

- Scottish Government has assumed that private and third sector providers will meet a share of the costs. However, no discussions have taken place between Scottish Government and private or third
sector providers. It is highly questionable as to whether private and third sector providers will be in a position to deliver this.

- COSLA has not been privy to the Scottish Government calculation of this cost and therefore has been unable to undertake any due diligence on the costings. COSLA is therefore concerned that there is a risk that the true costs of this policy have not been accounted for.

The additional £250m that was announced by John Swinney for Health & Social Care is not included in the local government settlement. This money is in the Health budget and distributed to Integrated Joint Boards. This raises a number of concerns for local government, not least the governance arrangements for this funding, the assurance that this money will be baselined and how any local government sanction can be applied to another part of the public sector.

Sanctions

As highlighted in the motion agreed by COSLA Leaders, there is grave concern around the principle and level of sanctions included in the local government settlement. At a principled level the notion and inclusion of sanctions grossly infringe locally democratic decision-making and are antipathetic to the partnership between local government and Scottish Government which must become one of parity of esteem. As part of 2016/17 settlement discussions with Government, COSLA repeatedly set out this position and called for a sanction free settlement. Unfortunately however, rather than removing or reducing the level of sanctions, the Government increased sanctions to £408m. COSLA also has significant concerns around the proportionality of the sanctions which leave individual councils very little room for local decision making.

Existing pressures

In addition to the £350m cut to the local government revenue budget in 2016/17, local government has a number of real pressures within the budget that need to be met. It is fully recognised that other parts of the public sector are grappling with these pressures too but that does not mitigate the necessity for local government to deal with them.

Whilst individual councils will have their own local pressures there are some significant common pressures that the whole of local government needs to accommodate within their 2016/17 budgets. These are summarised below which show that as an absolute minimum local government is looking to find a further £270m worth of savings targets in 2016/17.

- 1% Pay-Award – minimum of £50m (it should be noted that the impact of the living wage increase to £8.25 has not been factored into this cost)
- Pensions - £220m (this is made up of the introduction of single tier pensions costing £125m, cost of auto-enrolment being £47m, and teachers pensions increase for revaluation being £48m)

Impact
It will be for individual councils to meet the significant challenge of setting a budget within the constraints of the 2016/17 settlement and at this time we will not know the full impact of these decisions. What member councils have been highlighting however is that there will inevitably be a reduction in the services councils can provide and alongside this significant job losses. Recognising that councils will simply have no alternative but to make these unpalatable choices, COSLA Leaders have repeatedly reiterated their concern to Scottish Government about the real impact this will have on local economies and communities. Of particular concern is the impact that this will have on the most vulnerable in our society as it is these individuals and families that are the most reliant on the services local government provides. This is simply unacceptable and we call on the Scottish Government to revise its proposed settlement to local government.

Capital budget
The Draft Budget shows a fall by more than 30% in 2016-17 in the capital allocation. This is due to a number of reprofiling and other changes in both 2015-16 and 2016-17. There is a commitment by Scottish Government to maintain local government’s percentage share (26.02%) of the total Scottish Capital DEL (excluding financial transactions) from 2015-16. On top of this, the government is also committed to ensure that the new schools programme remains fully funded. However, £150m has been removed from the local government capital budget for 2016/17 and been reprofiled. However no clarity has been given as to how or when the reprofiled monies will be paid to councils. This uncertainty makes it very difficult for councils to plan their capital projects going forward, given that this settlement only covers one year.

Looking ahead
Given that this is only a one year budget, and there will be a further spending review for the next 3 years, COSLA cannot stress enough the real difficulties facing local government and therefore it is imperative that local government has a genuine negotiating seat at those discussions going forward. The Government has stated that this budget is the start of a reform agenda. COSLA is signed up to this but has emphasised that we must approach reform by identifying where the greatest advantages lie, what the business case for reform is, how it will be managed and what the governance arrangements after reform will look
like. COSLA believes this can and is being done but we are absolutely sure that no significant reform is going to occur in a timescale that allows any council to include the outcome of such reform in the budget that it is approving in the next couple of weeks for 2016/17.
LOCAL GOVERNMENT BUDGET 2016-17

The presentation of local government in the 2016-17 Draft Budget has changed. Rather than its own portfolio chapter, local government is now included within the “Social Justice, Communities and Pensioners’ Rights” portfolio.

The total allocation to local government in 2016-17 will be £10,152.3m. This is a substantial reduction on the 2015-16 allocation of £10,756.7m, although some of this is due to reprofiling and other changes made to capital aspects of the budget. Table 1 and Figure 1 below set out the level 3 breakdown of the local government settlement, as presented in the Draft Budget (and so not recalculated for reprofiling and other changes), in cash and real terms. Table 2 on page 6 adjusts the budget for these changes.

### Table 1 – Local Government – level 3 breakdown £m

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2015-16 (cash)</th>
<th>2016-17 (cash)</th>
<th>Cash change</th>
<th>Cash change %</th>
<th>2016-17 (real, 2015-16 prices)</th>
<th>Real change</th>
<th>Real change %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General Revenue Grant</td>
<td>7,004.0</td>
<td>6,685.9</td>
<td>-318.1</td>
<td>-4.5%</td>
<td>6,574.1</td>
<td>-429.9</td>
<td>-6.1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-Domestic Rates</td>
<td>2,799.5</td>
<td>2,768.5</td>
<td>-31.0</td>
<td>-1.1%</td>
<td>2,722.2</td>
<td>-77.3</td>
<td>-2.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for Capital</td>
<td>716.2</td>
<td>480.6</td>
<td>-235.6</td>
<td>-32.9%</td>
<td>472.6</td>
<td>-243.6</td>
<td>-34.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific Resource Grants</td>
<td>91.9</td>
<td>91.0</td>
<td>-0.9</td>
<td>-1.0%</td>
<td>89.5</td>
<td>-2.4</td>
<td>-2.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific Capital Grants</td>
<td>145.1</td>
<td>126.3</td>
<td>-18.8</td>
<td>-13.0%</td>
<td>124.2</td>
<td>-20.9</td>
<td>-14.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Local Government</td>
<td>10,756.7</td>
<td>10,152.3</td>
<td>-604.4</td>
<td>-5.6%</td>
<td>9,982.6</td>
<td>-774.1</td>
<td>-7.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>of which:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RDEL</td>
<td>7,095.9</td>
<td>6,776.9</td>
<td>-319.0</td>
<td>-4.5%</td>
<td>6,663.6</td>
<td>-432.3</td>
<td>-6.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDEL</td>
<td>861.3</td>
<td>606.9</td>
<td>-254.4</td>
<td>-29.5%</td>
<td>596.8</td>
<td>-264.5</td>
<td>-30.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AME</td>
<td>2,799.5</td>
<td>2,768.0</td>
<td>-31.5</td>
<td>-1.1%</td>
<td>2,721.7</td>
<td>-77.8</td>
<td>-2.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRG+NDRI</td>
<td>9803.50</td>
<td>9454.40</td>
<td>-349.1</td>
<td>-3.6%</td>
<td>9296.34</td>
<td>-507.16</td>
<td>-5.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** both the capital allocations and “Total Local Government” are affected by reprofiling and other changes. Table 2 below adjusts these budgets for these changes.

### REAL TERMS CHANGE IN GENERAL RESOURCE GRANT + NDRI
The Scottish Government guarantees the combined general resource grant and distributable non-domestic rate income figure, approved by Parliament, to each local authority. If non-domestic rate income is lower than forecast, this is compensated for by an increase in general revenue grant and vice versa.

Therefore, to calculate Local Government’s revenue settlement, the combined general resource grant + NDRI figure is used. **Table 1 above shows that the combined GRG+NDRI falls by £507 million, or 5.2%, in real terms. In cash terms this is a reduction of £349 million, or 3.6%.** This calculation is not affected by the reprofiling of capital, as it only concerns revenue budgets.

**SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT FIGURE –2% REDUCTION**

The Scottish Government has regularly cited a figure of a 2% reduction in “councils’ budgets” during Parliamentary proceedings (see for example, First Ministers Questions, 14 January 2016). The Government has confirmed (Scottish Government 2016) that there are two parts to this method of calculating the reduction in the local government settlement:

First, the Government uses a figure of £320m for the cash reduction in the local government revenue budget. This is the £350m cash reduction in GRG+NDRI (rounded from £349.1m – see table 1 above) reduced by £30m through an extra £30m from the Children and Young People Act that was added to the overall revenue figures in Local Government Finance Circular 7/2015, but is not in the Draft Budget.

This £320m is then compared to local government’s “total estimated expenditure” in 2016-17, which the Government states will be £15,800 million, giving a figure of 2% (i.e. £320m as a percentage of £15,800m). In addition to government grant, this figure includes estimated income from the council tax and from fees and charges. The most recently available outturn figure for “total gross revenue expenditure” by local government (Scottish Government 2015b) is £15,300 million in 2013-14. It appears that the estimated figure of £15,800 million has been derived from this outturn figure.
Nurture groups – a briefing from the Nurture Group Network (NGN)

Summary

- Nurture groups break the link between deprivation and educational attainment
- Scotland has made significant strides with nurture provision in schools but more action is required to increase the number of nurture groups; ensure the quality of provision; and guarantee their sustainability
- Independent research demonstrates that nurture groups have a significant impact on children’s educational attainment, attendance rates, and in improved behaviours and wellbeing

What is a nurture group?

- Nurture groups are educational psychologist-designed, teacher-led interventions that provide an educational bridge to permanent reintegration into mainstream classrooms for troubled and disengaged children, replacing ‘missing or distorted’ early nurturing experiences by immersing children in accepting and warm environments that help to develop positive relationships with nurture group staff and their peers.
- The nurturing approach is rooted in attachment theory, an area of psychology that explains the need all people have to form secure and happy relationships with others in the formative years of their lives, and draws on recent developments in neuroscience and the growing evidence-base of brain plasticity.
- Nurture groups are an excellent ‘sharp end’ intervention, allowing teachers dedicated time and a framework through which to work with individuals, unpicking particular issues and working to address them. They allow teachers to identify if the pupil’s needs can be met in school or if another course of action is necessary. In some cases this could mean a safeguarding referral or recommendation for an assessment for SEN support. Thus, nurture groups present a crucial intervention in seeking to improve outcomes for children and young people’s mental health and wellbeing.

How does a nurture group work?

- Nurture groups offer an in-school, short-term, focussed intervention strategy which addresses barriers to learning arising from social, emotional and/or behavioural difficulties (SEBD). Nurture groups are, on average, provided five times a week for two and a half hours a day per child, and are the only intensive psychosocial intervention
available full-time while allowing students to remain a part of their mainstream class. Nurture group placements are either short or medium-term, with the average pupil returning fully to their mainstream class between two and four terms. Both part-time and full-time nurture groups have been found to work well. Nurture groups are effective in both primary and secondary school settings.

- A nurture group is a small group of 6 to 10 children or young people supported by two trained adults. Teaching staff trained in the theory and practice of nurture groups create an attractive, safe, structured environment, usually within the context of a mainstream educational setting. A number of areas and resources are designed to bridge the gap between home and school, with soft furnishings, kitchen and dining facilities. By sharing the nurture group environment with other students, pupils not only practice social skills fundamental to reintegration into mainstream classes, but any inappropriate attachment between themselves and nurture group staff is prevented. The goal of nurture group is not to usurp the parent-child relationship, but to create a positive attachment to the school. The two adults are always present in the room, and their positive interactions serve as a model for co-operation.

- Nurture group staff engage intensely with each student, within a daily routine that is explicit and predictable. Activities undertaken include emotional literacy sessions, news-sharing, group activities, curriculum tasks and nurture breakfast.

- Children are selected according to their individual holistic profile of needs and identified using the Boxall Profile, a resource that gives practitioners an accurate understanding of children’s social, emotional and behavioural functioning. Social and developmental targets for each student in a nurture group are devised on the basis of the Boxall Profile.

- The founding principles of nurture groups are that children's learning is understood developmentally; that the classroom offers a safe base; that the importance of nurture for the development of wellbeing is understood; that language is a vital means of communication; all behaviour is communication; and that the importance of transition in children's lives is recognised.

Who is a nurture child?

Children that could be helped by a nurturing approach are known as ‘nurture children’. These are troubled and disengaged children who, for whatever reason, have lacked the essential attachment experiences in their childhood so far. They may function several years below their chronological age and have considerable SEBD. In a survey of 100 NGN-accredited nurture groups, the majority of children have experienced significant trauma such as separation from family, exposure to family conflict, abuse, divorce, illness and hospitalisation, death of a
loved one, parental drug exposure, and maternal depression – 19% of pupils in primary school nurture groups and 42% in secondary school have a diagnosed psychiatric disorder; most commonly ADHD.  

Outcomes for nurture groups

Attainment (relevant HMIE quality indicator: 1.1, improvements in performance)

An independent peer review has shown that children attending nurture groups have shown significant gains in academic attainment as measured by the total scores on their baseline assessment. This includes improvements in metacognition skills and language and literacy skills.

Attendance (relevant HMIE quality indicator: 1.2, fulfilment of statutory duties; 2.1, learner’s experiences)

Nurture groups significantly reduce exclusions and improve attendance rates.

Attachment to teachers, school and community (relevant HMIE quality indicators: 2.1, learner’s experiences; 2.2, school’s success in engaging parents, carers and families; 3.1, the engagement of staff in the life and work of the school; 4.1, the school’s success in working with and engaging the local community)

Nurture groups help develop affective bonds between teachers and students, result in an increased nurturing ethos at school and result in positive attachments to the community.

Long-term mental health improvements (relevant HMIE quality indicator: 2.1, learner’s experiences)

Students with SEBD are significantly more likely to improve in social and emotional functioning by attending nurture group provision than remaining in their mainstream classroom, gains that were maintained.

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9 Walker, L.C. (2010). The impact of nurture group interventions: parental involvement and perceptions (Unpublished PhD thesis), University of Sheffield, United Kingdom
over time.\textsuperscript{10} One study found that children’s Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) scores in the abnormal or borderline category improved by 29% to normal levels after three terms of nurture group provision compared to only 10% in the control group.\textsuperscript{11}

Nurture groups promote good mental health as they help children feel valued, build confidence and self-esteem, teach children how to make good relationships with adults and each other, develop communication skills, provide opportunities for social learning and facilitate learning through quality play experiences\textsuperscript{12}.

\section*{Costs and funding}

The evidence from across the UK, as illustrated in a survey conducted by NGN, shows that nurture groups usually cost less than £10,000 for schools to establish. The most popular option in terms of funding for nurture group provision is annually via the Pupil Premium. In terms of the popularity of different funding sources, the pupil premium is followed by Local Education Authority funding (LEAs), and then by individual school funding streams, Government funding or a combination of these different sources.\textsuperscript{13}

\section*{Nurture groups in the UK and national policy}

\subsection*{Scotland}

There are 321 nurture groups in Scotland. This is a ratio of 1 nurture group for every 8.3 schools, the best ratio in the UK. Of the 10 local authorities with the most nurture provision in the UK, three are Scotland-based: Glasgow, Angus and West Lothian. These local authorities all have centralised management of nurture groups and a ratio of no more than one nurture group for every four schools.

In the UK, 190 nurture groups are fully funded by local authorities and the majority of these are in Scotland.

Nurture groups are recognised by Education Scotland as being one approach to developing positive relationships and behaviour\textsuperscript{14}. The use of nurture as an intervention that has a positive impact on reducing the

\textsuperscript{10} O’Connor, Tina and John Colwell (2002). The effectiveness and rationale of the ‘nurture group’ approach to helping children with emotional and behavioural difficulties remain within mainstream education. British Journal of Special Education, Volume 29, Issue 2


\textsuperscript{13} Nurture Group Network (2014) ‘Nurture group funding survey’.

\textsuperscript{14} \url{http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/inclusionandequalities/relationshipsandbehaviour/approaches/nurture/index.asp}
attainment gap is cited in a Joseph Rowntree Report on ‘Closing the Attainment Gap in Scottish Education’ (2014)\(^\text{15}\). The use of nurture groups to promote a range of positive outcomes in terms of social, emotional, behavioural and educational functioning of children has been recognised in a Scottish government paper on ‘What Works to Reduce Crime? A Summary of the Evidence’ (2014)\(^\text{16}\).

Northern Ireland

There are 35 nurture groups in Northern Ireland. This is a ratio of 1 nurture group for every 45.2 schools.

As part of the Northern Ireland Executive’s ‘Delivering Social Change’ framework aimed at tackling poverty and improving children and young people’s health, wellbeing and life opportunities, a fund was established for delivering ‘Social Change Signature Programmes’. One of these six signature programmes involves the establishment of ‘Nurture Units’ and is being taken forward jointly by the Department for Social Development and the Department of Education, with £3million initial funding. As a result of the Signature Programme funding of nurture units, 20 have been newly established and a further 10 are being continued via funding from the Department of Social Development and, latterly, the Department of Education. The programme is being evaluated by a team at Queen’s University Belfast (QUB) who have been commissioned by the Department for Education in Northern Ireland to produce a report analysing the impact of the nurture units.

England

There are 1707 nurture groups in England. This is a ratio of 1 nurture group for every 14.3 schools.

Ofsted recommended nurture groups as an effective way of utilising the pupil premium to increase achievement in social, emotional and behavioural skills and with reading and writing abilities\(^\text{17}\). The Department for Education has acknowledged there is evidence to support well-established nurture groups addressing emerging SEBD in its report on ‘Mental Health and Behaviour in Schools’ (2014)\(^\text{18}\).

Wales

There are 144 nurture groups in Wales. This is a ratio of 1 nurture group for every 11.8 schools.

The Welsh Government published Nurture Groups: A handbook for schools’ (2010)\(^\text{19}\), which provides an overview to primary and secondary schools on how to set up a nurture group, run a nurture group, and how nurture groups work in practice. The Welsh government has included nurture groups as a practical solution to tackle the impact of poverty on educational attainment in the catalogue ‘Interventions that really work: third and private sector resources for schools tackling deprivation’ (2015)\(^\text{20}\).

Estyn has described nurture groups as a multi-agency strategy that can engage the families of vulnerable new learners and create a welcoming environment where children can learn with their families (2014)\(^\text{21}\).

**About the Nurture Group Network (NGN)**

NGN is a charity that aims to break cycles of low achievement and tackle social exclusion by ensuring that every disadvantaged or disengaged child has access to a nurturing intervention to equip them with the skills and resilience they need to make the most of learning and school. NGN does this by supporting the development of nurturing interventions in schools through training, resources and support; making the case for nurture in schools with policymakers and politicians; and has an ongoing research and evaluation programme to monitor evidence of outcomes. For further information please visit: [http://www.nurturegroups.org/](http://www.nurturegroups.org/)


\(^{21}\) [Tackling deprivation and raising standards-pupil deprivation](http://www.nurturegroups.org/)
The purpose of this document is to consider the challenges facing Scotland as it attempts to “Close the Gap” in educational attainment of young people as a consequence of social and economic disadvantage. It is brief, as requested, but is a distillation of experience and research evidence, and asks the fundamental question: are we ready to meet the educational and political challenges inherent in closing the gap? It draws on the recent OECD report on Scottish schooling and on 2 generations of educational research; considers lessons to be learned from the Finnish system; offers some suggestions for short- and long-term goals; and looks critically at the proposals for National Standardised Testing. Finally, it suggests some creative ways forward, using our own home-grown talent.

The OECD report, Improving Schools in Scotland (2015) stated that “there is much to be positive about” in Scottish education. Everyone’s Future: Lessons from 50 years of Scottish comprehensive schooling (2015) is similarly positive about our achievements, while pointing to underachievement as a consequence of disadvantage as an enduring challenge. This short paper attempts to build on that positivity and tries to offer some suggestions for ways forward.

Preamble
There are very few people who have a genuine interest in Scottish education who would disagree with the Scottish Government’s stated aim of closing the attainment gap which exists between young people from advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds. The greater goal is to create a fairer, more just society. The question to be addressed is can schooling contribute to the achievement of this goal (Boyd, 2015).

First, we need to clarify our terminology and the concepts which underpin it. Second, we need to be clear on the nature of the gap and the range of its causes. Third, we need to acknowledge that this gap is not peculiar to
Scotland and has been around for some time. It has been documented since the very first school effectiveness studies were published in the US in the 1960s and in Michael Rutter’s seminal British work “15000 Hours” in 1979. This suggests that there are deep-seated issues to be addressed and it is unlikely that there are any quick fixes or short-term solutions. Finally, we need to build on the successes of our education system, acknowledged in the recent OECD report *Improving Schools in Scotland* (2015) but also to be prepared to make radical and evidence-based changes where required. It is at this final stage that the apparent consensus around closing the gap may come under serious strain.

Nor can closing the gap be purely an educational goal. Poverty is real and its effects on educational underachievement are significant. Employment, housing, health and social services all have a key role to play. It may be necessary to have long-term and short-term goals, so that the pupils currently in the system benefit, while at the same time the structures and practices which promote greater equality are put in place. We are looking here at generational, sustainable change, and we need to build a secure consensus and try to find creative solutions to problems which will arise along the way.

Michael Fullan, an influential writer on educational change at school and at system level, talks of the “implementation dip” which, he argues, always happens sooner or later. The temptation is to give up or change course; instead, he suggests, we should recognise it for what it is, review processes and improve the plan. Courage is required but I, and many others, remain optimistic that Scottish education can rise to the challenge.

**Clarifying terminology and concepts**

The Scottish Government needs to be clear about which gap it wants to close. Is the “attainment” gap or the “achievement” gap? The word attainment, when used in an educational context, normally refers to those outcomes of schooling which can be measured by tests or examinations. However, Education Scotland recently acknowledged that there was too great an emphasis on attainment in its inspection process, and signalled that it would be looking at wider achievement. Achievement, in Scottish terms, can be linked to Curriculum for Excellence’s four capacities of *successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens*? If the emphasis is on attainment, then it is only the first of the four capacities which appears to matter.

So, if the four capacities are to be seen as being of equal importance, then attainment is too narrow a concept; we need to focus on achievement.

We should be asking, is Scottish schooling ensuring that all children achieve their potential in all of the four capacities, irrespective of where they live and what school they go to? If the emphasis is only on test scores and exam results, there is a real danger that we end up *widening* the gap since more advantaged children currently do better in these forms of assessment and are likely to benefit disproportionately from any initiatives introduced simply to improve attainment.
If we wish to be able to say to what extent every pupil has achieved the goals of becoming a successful learner, confident individual, effective contributor and responsible citizen, then it is clear that traditional tests and pencil-and-paper exams, are inadequate. They may be necessary, but they are not sufficient. There are ways of assessing and recording wider achievement in these areas but it will require a fundamental shift in emphasis and approach. Change will also need to involve all of the stakeholders in education, not least employers, further and higher education and parents. This may seem a tall order but it can be done, as Finland has shown (Sahlberg 2010).

“Wider achievement” is a concept which has been discussed but never seriously pursued at a policy level. Essentially, it starts from the premise that young people’s achievements may go far beyond what they do at school. In Scotland we have a well-respected Youth Work sector which enables many young people to engage in activities out of school; in their community, in national and local organisations and in a variety of contexts which allow them to develop skills which contribute to the 4 capacities of Curriculum for Excellence, and which might make them more employable. The challenge is how to “capture” such experiences and to collect them in a format which employers, further and higher education institutions can use. To date, these “end-users” have shown little interest in doing so. Universities, for example, require potential students merely to achieve success in exams and make little use of any kind of wider achievements. Similarly, employers may say in public that they want young people who are creative, problem-solvers, team players…but still insist on a certain number of Highers.

So, is our aim to educate the whole child or only the part which the system can measure through exams? The OECD has reminded us that national assessment should be aligned with educational goals (Synergies for Better Learning, 2013), that the aim of tests should be to improve learning and that tests should not distort the learning process.

Closing the Gap: challenges

That a gap still exists between the educational achievement of young people from socially disadvantaged areas and those from more advantaged areas of Scotland in the 21st century is scandalous. If we accept that, at birth, all have the potential to become successful learners, then our education system should have as its central tenet equality of opportunity.

The huge body of research into school effectiveness and school improvement, in the UK and internationally, is unanimous in pointing to issues of social and economic inequality which cumulatively lead to the gap in educational achievement which is observable even before children participate formally in the education system. Thus, social change has to accompany educational change. Other countries, notably in Northern Europe, have addressed these issues and Finland is the best example of radical, long term education reform aimed at creating a fair and just society.
But, much as we might admire what Finland has achieved, are we ready in Scotland to take the steps they took to promote greater equality? For example, it recognised that the existence of private schools exacerbates inequality and contributes to the gap. While, in Scotland, only some 5% of pupils attend such schools, the percentage rises to around 25% in secondary schools in Edinburgh. Undoubtedly, this is a challenging issue politically. On the one hand, some have argued that charging fees for education should not be part of a fairer, more equal Scotland; on the other, given that only 5% of children attend private schools, some might say that the focus should be on the other 96%. Finland made it illegal to charge fees for education; are we prepared to do the same?

Within our state comprehensive schools, there are practices which can be seen to exacerbate the gap also; practices which have no basis in research evidence. For example, ‘setting’ by attainment (i.e. putting children into classes based on test scores) results in an over representation of disadvantaged pupils in so-called bottom sets. Is this acceptable, when there is no research evidence to support the practice (Boyd et al 2008)? Headteachers, when asked why they use setting, almost always cite the pressure they feel to improve exam results. This is yet another instance of the over-emphasis on “attainment” having a negative impact on how learning is organised in schools. The practice of setting has no place in Scottish schools.

The quality of teaching in Scottish schools is high and is admired internationally. However, the deployment of teachers to schools is often random; it takes place at local authority level and there is no attempt, nationally, to place the best teachers in the most disadvantaged schools. Surely pupils from the most disadvantaged backgrounds need to have the best teachers if we really want to close the gap?

Finally, the shibboleth of parental choice has to be challenged. Introduced by Mrs Thatcher as part of her onslaught on comprehensive schools and local authorities, it, exacerbates inequality. The exodus of young people from schools in the south of Glasgow to East Renfrewshire, denudes local schools of their talent. If education is a social good, then the comprehensive ideal should trump the so-called ‘right’ of parental choice and young people should be educated in their local schools. At the recent conference in Edinburgh to launch the book *Everyone’s Future*, Professor Tony Gallagher of Queen’s University, Belfast, spoke of initiatives currently taking place in Northern Ireland which seek to promote a community approach to schooling in which all parents see the success of every child as being as important as that of their own. Thus everyone has a stake in the quality of education in every school in their community. This concept sits well with the growing focus on the cluster or family of schools in Scotland.

**Long-term and short-term goals**

Scottish education has a proud history. Its early commitment to universal literacy and its commitment to comprehensive (omnibus) schools, have
earned it respect across the world. More recently, Curriculum for Excellence has received praise from Professor Jerome Bruner and from the authors of the OECD report (op cit).

However, even those of us who are career-long proponents of the Scottish education system know that the commitment required to make our society fairer and more just is considerable. It might be helpful, therefore, to look at short- and long-term goals.

**Short term goals**

1. Invest in early years.  
   Every year in Scotland children are born into families which can be identified as vulnerable. Appoint a support worker to each family with the aim of supporting early childhood development – reading, talking, playing, nurturing – enabling the parent(s) to give the child the best possible start. This support would stay with the child at least until early primary, and beyond if necessary, and would work closely with parent, nursery staff and primary teachers.

2. Build on what we do well.  
   There are many schools and nurseries in areas of disadvantage which are making a significant difference. Kirkhill PS in Aberdeen (see appendix) is only one example where “an ethos of aspiration” is evident. Education Scotland should be able to identify these schools and pull together those policies and practices which set them apart from others. These schools should then be supported to take a leadership role to spread their success.

3. Identify ‘powerful pedagogies’.  
   Professor Dylan William, who has worked closely with schools in Scotland is one of the promoters of *Assessment is for Learning*, a powerful pedagogy which has made a real contribution to raising achievement, not least in the London Challenge. There are other successful pedagogies making a difference in Scottish schools, notably *Teaching for Understanding, Active Learning* and *Reciprocal Reading*. These, and others, are already achieving success in many schools. We need to fund more continuing professional development (CPD) and work to embed these approaches in our schools.

4. Make the *family* of schools the focus of educational improvement.  
   While the focus is often on the individual school, a better way of ensuring that the curriculum 3-18 is providing an educational experience for all children which is progressive and continuous, is to focus on the ‘cluster’ (or family) of schools as the unit. Thus the secondary, associated primaries, nurseries and ASN schools should be able, jointly, to manage budgets, staffing, CPD and self-evaluation. The role of the local authority, then, is not to impose policy but to support improvement.

5. Intelligent accountability.  
   Curriculum for Excellence started from the premise that we trust our education professionals to have the best interests of all of our young people at heart and, therefore, a commitment to closing the gap. Thus, the role of external agencies such as Education Scotland, should be
less about inspection and more about support. All the evidence on school improvement points to the fact that those who are to implement the changes must be committed to their success. Thus, it is important to take teachers and others working with children and young people with you in any Improvement Framework.

**Long-term goals**

1. Engage all the stakeholders and end-users in the process of closing the gap and promoting wider achievement. Parents, youth workers, employers and universities/colleges need to be part of the solution...and need to have the opportunity to discuss their role in closing the gap. In Finland, employers were 100% behind the comprehensive ideal and were adamant that schools should not lose sight of creativity as a goal rather than simply exam success. Parents of children in disadvantaged areas need to be supported to help their children (is no coincidence that adults in Finland take out more books from libraries, read more newspapers and own more books than in any other country), but all parents deserve to be part of the national conversation about the aims of schooling. Youth Work has a huge role to play in enabling young people to achieve success in all four of the capacities. End-users of the schooling process need to take more of an interest in what goes on and not simply concentrate on outcomes.

2. Review the system for National Assessment. It has changed piecemeal over the years and needs a radical overhaul. Trooping hundreds pupils into a hall, sitting them in serried ranks, in silence and asking them to write as fast as they can for 2 hours answering questions on pencil-and-paper tests is outmoded in the 21st century and does not even begin to give an indication of how well the pupils have done in becoming successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors or responsible citizens.

3. Tackle poverty, root and branch. Radical approaches to job creating, building of quality social housing within sustainable communities and having a joined-up approach to supporting vulnerable families must be the goal for the next generation and not just for the next Parliament. The eradication of poverty, nothing more nor less, is required of we really want to close the educational gap.

**National Standardised Testing**

In the current context, it is important to look critically at the contribution that National Standardised Testing can make to achieving the goal of closing the gap. In recent months, the Government has made National Testing in P1, P4, P7 and S3 a key element of its policy, arguing that it will bring about a “cultural shift” in Scottish education. It is important, therefore to look critically at the implications of such a policy.
It is difficult not to see National Standardised Testing as anything other than a retrograde step, out of sync with the vision of Curriculum for Excellence. It is notable that the last time such an approach was introduced was by a Conservative government led by Margaret Thatcher. In Scotland, Michael Forsyth was clearly unimpressed by the ability of teachers (in particular, primary school teachers) to assess pupils effectively. National Testing in the 1990s was born out of a lack of trust in the teaching profession and a narrow vision of what constituted success; Curriculum for Excellence is rooted in intelligent accountability and a broad vision of education. It is very difficult to accept that National Standardised Testing is anything other than an undermining of the professionalism of teachers.

A kinder view would be that there is misunderstanding at the heart of this policy. We know that civil servants, inspectors and politicians have a penchant for tests scores, quantitative data and benchmarking. These things seem solid, robust and, somehow, true. Other forms of assessment, teacher-led, qualitative, skills-based, seem woolly, fuzzy and lacking in comparability. But, we need to be clear; simply adding the word “standardised” to National Testing, does not make it robust. Standardised? – how? Against what set of norms? In the past such tests, applied to whole cohorts of a country’s children, have come under heavy criticism for their inherent class, culture and gender bias. But, even if all this bias can be eliminated, what would such tests tell us? Well, before we can answer that question, we would need to know if the tests are based on the actual curriculum the children are following or are they commercially produced, generic tests. If the latter, their ability to offer any insights into the children’s learning would be limited. If the former, the tests would need to be compiled for each of the 4 stages (P1, P4, P7 and S3) each year, trialled, tested and then published. This would be an enormous and time-consuming task… and the question must, to what end?

If the Scottish Government wants these tests to be diagnostic, to enable teachers to know how well individual pupils are doing in relation to the Curriculum for Excellence levels, there is a problem. National Standardised Testing will not give you that information because it operates at the system level, not at the individual level. Indeed, over the last 15 years, many Scottish schools have successfully implemented Assessment is for Learning in which assessment is diagnostic, formative and forward-looking. The amount of time and effort National Standardises Testing would require would be much better used in supporting all schools to improve their classroom practice and embed Assessment is for Learning in every school.

The First Minister has assured us that the data from these tests will only be published at the school, not the individual pupil, level and so will not be able to be converted into league tables. However, while the present government, rightly, does not produce league tables of Highers results, the national and local press continue to do so. This will happen with National Standardised Test scores too. The consequence will be teaching-to-the-test (as happens with all high-stakes tests) and the aim of closing the gap will be undermined.
National Standardised Testing is, at best, a distraction and, at worst, an approach which will undermine the Government’s aims. It may also lose the support of parents. The stress of such tests – especially at P1 – will, as it did in the 1990s, cause alarm among parents.

Finally, such tests are often focused on the so-called ‘basic skills’ of reading, writing and arithmetic/maths. While these skills are undoubtedly important, there are others which may have an equal claim in the 21st century. Queensland introduced the concept of ‘new basics’ and argued that thinking, both creative and critical, problem-solving and resilience are essential if young people are to be prepared to play a full part in their societies. We need to educate the whole child.

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The Goodison Group in Scotland
Forum Debate

2 Sept 2015

Equity and Scottish Education

1.0 Context

The Scottish Attainment Challenge was launched in February 2015 to improve educational attainment in Scotland’s most disadvantaged communities. The Challenge is underpinned by £100 million in funding over four years.

The Challenge was launched to respond to inequity in Scottish education. Although there is a similar spread in the abilities of Scottish children, outcomes vary significantly across the social spectrum. Children with additional support needs, low attendance and/or who are socially disadvantaged are least likely to reach their potential. Inequity exists across life courses and transitions; negatively impacting early years education, school attainment, post school life chances and health outcomes.

In early 2015 the Education and Culture Committee undertook work on the educational attainment gap. To date the focus of this work has been:

- The implications for schools, teachers, and pupils of the Commission for Developing Scotland’s Young Workforce (the ‘Wood report.’)
- How parents and guardians can work with schools to raise all pupils’ attainment, particularly those whose attainment is lowest
- The role of the third sector and the private sector in improving the attainment and achievement of all school pupils, particularly those whose attainment is lowest.

Later this year, the Committee will take evidence from the Scottish Government and local authorities on the outcomes achieved by their efforts to improve attainment. The Goodison Group in Scotland (GGiS) has been given the opportunity to contribute to this work and will meet the Committee later this year.

In line with our aims and objectives to influence thinking on future policy and practice, this GGiS discussion focused on equity in education and improving attainment by framing the session around the following challenge statement and questions:

- Education in Scotland is good however to be truly great it needs to be more equitable.
- If we look over the horizon to 2020, what would an equitable education look like?
- What policies, practices and initiatives are currently helping to achieve this vision of an equitable education?
- What are the challenges and barriers to implementing significant change to achieve this vision of an equitable education?
Our debate was informed by an excellent presentation from Craig Munro, Executive Director of Education and Children’s Services in Fife Council.

### 2.0 Risks/barriers to achieving educational equity

Both the Standards in School’s Act 2000 and the Wood report define educational equity as enabling young people to develop their personal potential to the full. The ability of Scotland’s children follows a normal distribution, however not all of our children are reaching their potential. Why not?

#### 2.1 Policy

Although equity in education is a critical part of the agenda, we need to make sure we focus on the challenge of ensuring our education system is relevant for the world all our children will live in, not just one element or concern. On paper we seem to have all the bits of the jigsaw however we need a compelling narrative to allow people to see one, aligned agenda. Nationally, we may be on the cusp of something special however if we do not demonstrate how the elements/work streams come together, there is a risk we will lose the progress we have made over the last few years.

#### 2.2 Austerity

The wider economic and social context within Scotland exacerbates inequity. The May 2015 OECD report ‘In It Together’, highlighted that the UK has the 6th greatest income inequity in the OECD. ‘Austerity’ is here to stay for the foreseeable future. UK public sector spending is being cut, putting increasing pressure on the delivery of public services.

Communities are also impacted by austerity. Children growing up in middle income communities are surrounded by role models who have completed further education and have successful careers. More often than not, they are supported by parents who take an interest in their education and apply a degree of pressure and expectation regarding their educational progress. Children growing up in deprived economic areas may lack role models to aspire to and their parents are often unable to provide the right support.

Children in low income families also have unequal access to educational opportunities e.g. they may not have access to technology at home to support their studies, they may not be able to participate in paid for extracurricular activities and their parents may be unable or unwilling to fund further education.

#### 2.3 Demographic change

Our population is ageing and child poverty is increasing. There is also a growing expectation of and reliance on our public sector. Changes to family composition can mean that the state is expected to provide for individuals that would once have been cared for by their families. There is a greater demand for public sector resources at a time when supply is being reduced.

#### 2.4 Politics

Education in Scotland is becoming increasingly politicised. Politicians make statements and promises that are often a distraction or focus on inputs rather than outcomes. Cutting class sizes is a good example. There is no empirical evidence that smaller classes automatically result in better educational outcomes; the quality of the teaching is a more significant variable than
the size of the class. However it is a popular policy that resonates with parents. The nature of the election cycle can also lead to short term thinking and policy boredom. Sound ideas are often not given enough time to bed down or are overtaken by new initiatives. The degree and pace of change in education is also impacting the relationship between teachers and the state.

2.5 Availability of opportunity

There were mixed views over whether there is a mismatch between educational and employer expectations of attainment and availability of opportunity. Decades of emphasis on the importance of attending university and achieving a degree may have resulted in an overqualified workforce without the necessary jobs to satisfy demand. However this did raise the question, are we clear about what we mean by attainment at each stage of progression?

From a school’s perspective, the implementation of the Curriculum for Excellence and the recommendations from Developing Scotland’s Young Force (Wood) and Teaching Scotland’s Future (Donaldson) have changed our understanding of desirable attainment and achievement. In addition to numeracy and literacy and success in qualifications, both wider achievement and employability skills are seen as important outcomes of school education. Local authorities and schools are looking at the extent to which the system can be flexible to the needs of industry.

This discussion again emphasised that it is not the direction of travel that is the issue but how quickly education can implement and deliver.

2.6 People factors

The professionalism of teachers, in essence their professional knowledge, technical skills and focus on pupils as individuals, has the greatest impact on educational attainment. Good teachers achieve good results for their pupils. Yet, teaching skills vary enormously and there is a shortage of good teachers. Many schools in areas of low income and child poverty find it difficult to attract and retain the best teachers, exacerbating low educational attainment. How do we match the best talent to the toughest challenges?

There is also emerging evidence that unconscious bias can impact educational outcomes. Knowing that a child is from a low income or problem family may unintentionally influence teacher behaviour. Teachers may expect - and crucially, accept - lower levels of attainment from this demographic than children from other backgrounds.

2.7 System complexity and scale

Education is delivered within and impacted by a complex system of stakeholders and providers. It is generally accepted that Scotland has an appropriate mix of policies to address the key challenges and to enable its national outcomes to be achieved. Collectively, Curriculum for Excellence, the focus on early years, and GIRFEC, together with Christie, Donaldson and Wood provide a coherent framework to tackle inequality in Scottish Society. There is, to a significant degree, a shared common purpose and consensus regarding outcomes. It is the implementation of policy that may present the biggest challenge nationally. One contributor suggested there was misalignment of National Government policy - down the different pillars of central government - with delivery on the ground, particularly to Education and Children’s Services in local Government.
Strategies can be fragmented and delivered on a project-by-project basis leading, at times, to what was described as “projectitus.” Each layer of the system may be structured differently and have different roles and responsibilities, which can make interaction and communication difficult. As an example, a Head Teacher may be simultaneously dealing with several projects that impact their school, each being managed in isolation by separate teams, tackling different components of the same problem.

### 2.8 Engaging parents, carers and the wider community

There were mixed views and experiences regarding schools working in partnership with parents/carers and the wider community. Some schools do this extremely well however the experience of some parents/grandparents was less positive. There is a huge opportunity to take advantage of ‘parent capital.’ One Forum member asked, which few changes/additions to primary school premises would make them more parent friendly? What would be the cost? How might these be funded, possibly from the National Lottery or through local partnerships? Could we draw a picture of half a dozen such changes to inspire communities to act and show them how funding might work?

We also need to understand how education can best collaborate with youth workers and agencies/organisations that support young people in areas where parent/carer aspirations for their children may be lower and engagement with schools is limited.

Putting the school at the heart of the community was a key policy in the mid 90’s with the implementation of full service community schools. However we seem to have moved on; perhaps another example of policy boredom?

### 3.0 Opportunities to improve educational attainment in Scotland

Despite the difficulties highlighted in this report, it is far from doom and gloom in the Scottish education system. There are already some great examples of policies, practices and initiatives that are demonstrably helping to achieve Scotland’s vision of an equitable education. Learning from these examples and extending best practice across the education system would go a long way to closing the attainment gap.

### 3.1 Evidence based approach

There is a large body of research outlining educational practices that deliver better outcomes. Unfortunately, the research is not as widely known as it should be across the broader educational ecosystem and it is inconsistently applied. We should challenge policy and practice more if the evidence – and our experience – does not support it. As an example, schools are encouraged to widen subject choice however recent research (Iannelli, 2015)1 suggests there is a link between widening subject matter choice within a school and inequalities in entering higher education.

However, whilst an evidence based approach is to be commended, some things cannot be quantified; we’re dealing with a human system not a clockwork one. We should also be wary of the creation of a culture that will only implement tried and tested ideas. We need to be able to create and innovate too.

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1. Iannelli, C & Klein, M 2015 'Subject choice and inequalities in access to higher education' University of Edinburgh.
3.2 Early Intervention

Whilst OECD evidence points to the ineffectiveness of separating young people out, a targeted approach to the delivery of education has been successful, for example improving literacy in Fife schools. These schools target resources to those that need it most i.e. delivering solutions which are universal (all pupils), focused (supporting the needs of specific pupil segments) and targeted (supporting the needs of individual children).

Action research focused on improving early literacy and communication within vulnerable families has also had impressive results. Improving parenting and attachment has been an essential component of this work.

3.3 Integration and engagement of all stakeholders

Experience tells us that taking a holistic approach to service delivery – integrating education and social work – may be difficult culturally and organisationally but can be effective if done well. There are already some excellent examples of close, collaborative working, integrating professional services to best effect.

We also need to trust and support schools and teachers more. If a child fails, schools are often blamed, yet schools are only one component of a complex educational and societal ecosystem. One forum member commented that we do not blame the local medical community for the poor health of the neighbourhood yet we often blithely apply the same simplistic thinking to educational attainment.

3.4 Global versus local

There is a natural tension between the national educational policy framework and system at a country level, and the local needs and variation to be found at a school/community level. National coherence and integration is important but we also need to enable local implementation and decision making. We need to devolve real decision-making to schools and teachers – whilst accepting that this is messy – and enable them to exercise freedom within a framework.

The key to successful integration is likely to be behavioural rather than structural. Strong communication, partnership and collaboration skills of all stakeholders are essential to enable the educational ecosystem to function at its best.

3.5 Embracing a more diverse and inclusive definition of attainment

Attainment in educational terms is often narrowly focused on the accumulation of qualifications and can lead to the creation of somewhat simplistic school league tables. It is vital that we adopt a more outcomes-focused approach: measuring what matters, benchmarking intelligently, and giving due weight to the child’s voice.

It is proposed that we should take a more rounded and balanced view of achievement by children and young people. We must recognise a more rounded view of a child’s development, including:

- The development of key skills like literacy and numeracy.
- The development of employability and life skills (e.g. communication & personal skills).
- Evidence of achievement that will equip young people for a wide range of opportunities and that will enable improved life chances.
• A holistic sense of the child’s wellbeing (including the child’s ambition, self-confidence, physical and mental health, safety, responsibility, etc).
• The child’s own perceptions.
We must also present a more rounded view of school performance, reflecting each child’s individual potential, including:
• Benchmarking against social context (to allow for differences in outcomes at a cohort level that are due to the school’s social context)
• Benchmarking against the prior attainment of each child (to avoid limiting our ambition for any child on account of their social context).

As a practical example, the Children’s University recognises a wide range of reflective learning activities in terms of educational attainment.

We should also value diversity in our schools. The 1984 publication, Education for Democracy summarises this perfectly. “Beware a narrow view of attainment in terms of qualifications; the middle class view is not the only way. Education systems often exclude parents – and children – who do not fit the mould.”

We also need to remember that attainment does not stop at the end of the formal education system. We need to consider learning throughout life and access to broader learning opportunities

### 3.6 Professionalism of the teaching community

The available data shows that the quality of teachers has the greatest impact on educational attainment. Good teachers deliver good results. We need to develop teachers and equip them to teach well at every stage of their training and onward career.

A strong, evidence based teacher training should be supplemented by an ongoing commitment to professional development. We need to give our teachers the space and time to reflect and practice. We should expect our teaching staff to be continuously learning from research and from colleagues and sharing best practice.

### 3.7 Engaging, involving and educating parents and carers

There are some great examples of schools working in partnership with parents, carers and the local community. As an example, some schools are teaching parents adult literacy alongside their children. Literacy improves in both parent and child as parents are more able to support their children.

### 3.8 Engaging end users meaningfully

Increasingly, schools are being asked to consider the services they offer from an end user perspective. There are some great examples of schools engaging with and listening to learners, both from within their schools and the wider community. Engagement enables schools to provide a greater service offering and customer experience. Meaningful engagement necessitates the devolvement of power – if you ask, you must listen and act.
4.0 Education delivery models

During the debate, we discussed the current model for delivering education in Scotland, as well as exploring a number of alternatives. A brief description of each and their relative merits is outlined below.

4.1 Status Quo

Retain the current education delivery model. This approach has the benefit of ensuring stability however it is unlikely to deliver further progress in closing the attainment gap, particularly against a background of austerity and reduced public spending.

4.2 Shared service/regional models

This model shares service provision on a regional basis, potentially reducing costs and enabling centres of excellence to be developed. This model is potentially enabled by technology and distance learning however it requires further clarity in respect of governance and leadership.

4.3 Maximum delegation

In this model, we see maximum funding and decision making devolved to individual schools/Head Teachers. It enables education to be delivered in a local context however it is unclear whether the most disadvantaged would be any better served or safeguarded.

4.4 Minimum delegation

A centralist/global approach to education delivery ensures that overall purpose and vision is protected however one size rarely fits all and this approach is swimming against history.

4.5 Trust

Educational trusts may result in savings and protect services; however the role of other stakeholders, including local authorities, would need to be clearly defined.

4.6 Outsource

To some extent, education is already outsourced by virtue of the private school sector. Should this be extended? Would the power and virtue of the market prevail? In reality, who would protect the most disadvantaged and is this really the Scottish way?

4.7 Cocktail

Is the most pragmatic approach to adopt elements of each delivery model or would this just result in a system that was too complex? Are we afraid of making a decision?

5.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

It was becoming clear from the discussion that we have a great opportunity - along with some challenges - to make further significant improvements to the equality in education agenda by 2020.
There was general consensus that educational and social policies are, in the main, sound with shared common purpose and outcomes. The issue and challenges lie with the implementation of these policies, particularly the lack of cohesion at both a national and local level. A lot of good and important work is taking place and there are examples of local authorities that can demonstrate significant improvements in educational practice and attainment.

However it was also recognised this is both a generational and cultural issue and there is a need to look beyond 2020, to a 2nd and 3rd Horizon. The Goodison Group in Scotland and Scotland’s Futures Forum are well placed to contribute to this type of future thinking.

In addition to developing thinking beyond 2020, there were a number of more immediate term enablers and ideas identified during the debate to be explored further and discussed with the Education and Culture Committee.

5.1 Strategic narrative

The need to develop a compelling narrative, which promotes one agenda in relation to the education of our children, the policies that provide the bedrock and explains how all the elements fit and work together.

5.2 Delivery models

Is there an opportunity to consider alternative education delivery models/structures that will not only provide a more equitable education, but will improve education across the board? Or is structural change to be avoided as it soaks up energy and can divert focus from learning and teaching? Collaborative mind-sets and behaviours can do much to overcome structural challenges.

5.3 Best people in hardest shifts

The challenges and implications of encouraging the best teachers to take the ‘toughest shifts. The national pay framework makes it difficult to incentivise teachers to work in schools with low attainment levels. Should we be able to differentiate remuneration so that we can attract the best teachers to those schools that need them most?

5.4 Leadership

Traditionally, teachers progress through a school’s organisational hierarchy, ultimately emerging as Head Teachers. As our schools become more complex organisations, increasingly crossing community boundaries, do we need to rethink the leadership of our schools? It is likely we will need fewer leaders who are capable of leading more complex organisations and/or a broader concept of distributed leadership. What is the right mix of skills and experience that they need to be equipped with? How will we recruit and develop them?

5.5 Building teacher professionalism

If the skills of teachers have the greatest impact on educational attainment, logically, we need to increase their professionalism and skills. To do this, we need to create the time and spaces to enable teachers to focus on continued professional development. We need to make it easy for teachers to access best practice research and share ideas e.g. through the creation of knowledge hubs.
5.6 Evidence based approach

It is not enough for teachers to be aware of best practice in education and evidence based research. We need to share evidence with all stakeholders across the educational ecosystem to ensure we make informed decisions at every stage of the educational process.

5.7 Engaging the wider community

What is our message in the best of language to parents to compel them to gain an interest in the prospects of their next generation? Have we truly exhausted the best ways of engagement and if not what can be done to bring about a change of culture? Whilst there are some examples of schools engaging parents and carers, this is not consistent and more could be done to engage communities, enabling them to fulfil a deeper commitment to the wellbeing of Scotland’s children and to have greater ownership of outcomes.

Other ideas mooted during the forum included educating parents and carers on the learning process and curriculum so that they helped – rather than hindered – their children’s education e.g. understanding how a child learns to read.

6.0 Finally, a note of caution

Equity is significant but it’s not the only issue. It is important that we don’t become so focused on equity that we neglect other areas of education. Can we simultaneously raise and level educational attainment? Initiatives that raise the bar may improve attainment for all but won’t necessarily close the gap. This prompts a further question of individualism versus collectivism; how much do we value diversity and how fair do we want to be? But perhaps that’s the topic for another Goodison debate ….
Agenda items 1 and 2

Goodison Group in Scotland

INFLUENCING LEARNING

The Goodison Group in Scotland
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Registered as GGiS (Network) Ltd
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Clerk’s note

In order to inform today’s evidence session with local authorities and the Cabinet Secretary, the Committee held an informal discussion on the educational attainment gap on Tuesday 26 January.

Two discussion groups were formed, each comprising a range of stakeholders and committee members. The main points made by group 1 are set out below. The main points made by group 2 are set out on page 4. A list of all participants is contained in the annexe, page 7.

Discussion group 1: key points

The main points that arose from this discussion have been grouped together under the following headings—

Clarifying the ambition

- There was support for the Scottish Government’s focus on addressing the attainment gap that persists between children from different socio-economic backgrounds. One participant said there is an ‘excellent policy framework’ in place;
- However, there was a unanimous agreement that the term ‘closing the attainment gap’ must be clarified by the Scottish Government as there is not one standard definition. There are various ways of measuring differences in attainment, which can appear from the early years right through to the senior phase. There are also different types of attainment gap e.g. in technological knowledge or in health and well-being;
- One contributor warned of the risk of defining ‘the gap’ by reference to the latest educational development; reacting to the findings of the most recent SSLN\(^1\) by suggesting standards were falling was described as a ‘ludicrous over-simplification’;
- The consensus view was that it is possible to narrow the gap to a considerable degree, given existing levels of inequality in Scotland (and assuming that clarity is provided on the overall aim);
- It was agreed it would be difficult to close the gap completely given individual differences between pupils. One participant said we should make sure there is no ‘opportunity gap’;
- There was no view on how long it would take or how much it might cost to close the gap.

\(^1\) Scottish surveys of literacy and numeracy.
Possible risks of focusing on the gap

- Participants – while agreeing with the aim of reducing inequality – warned of the danger of reducing this very complex problem to looking at various metrics; “therein lies madness”;
- There are multiple gaps and therefore, it was suggested, a need to have a more sophisticated dialogue about what we’re trying to do;
- It was suggested that focusing on learners with the greatest needs and making improvements for all pupils (by investing in approaches that raise overall quality) would deliver success; ‘closing the gap’, therefore, should not be the goal, it would be a by-product of wider improvement;
- One speaker considered that just seeking to close the gap would probably result in failure.

Wider achievement

- The discussion about the meaning of the term ‘attainment gap’ led to a related discussion about ‘achievement’ in school (which can be seen as progress made by pupils other than that recorded by exam attainment);
- There was a strong agreement that we need to focus much wider than exam results; it would be a “fundamental mistake” to see exam success as the only way forward. The ‘gap’ is also about wider achievement;
- It is possible to make absolute comparisons between pupils or schools, but the better approach may be to concentrate on the development of individual pupils;
- One contributor considered that work around the ‘gap’ should be more closely linked to the ‘four capacities’ of Curriculum for Excellence\(^2\), not all of which are measured by exam results.
- In response to the point that parents and employers place a real importance on exam results, it was suggested that the wider aims of Curriculum for Excellence could have been articulated better;
- One participant highlighted a lack of coverage or awareness in the media about pupils’ wider achievements, pointing out that their school was doing well but still had a gap in attainment;
- Another speaker cautioned that Scotland already has a world-class system (through the SCQF\(^3\)) for recognising other learning and cautioned against ‘reinventing the wheel’.

Parental factors

- It was noted that inequity is built into the education system as some teachers in disadvantaged areas are ‘up against it from the start’;
- In areas of high unemployment some people do not see education as being important. We need to make sure parents also appreciate the value of lifelong learning. Some felt that parental selection – where they can choose which

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\(^2\) “The purpose of the curriculum is encapsulated in the four capacities - to enable each child or young person to be a successful learner, a confident individual, a responsible citizen and an effective contributor.”

http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/learningandteaching/thecurriculum/whatiscurriculumforexcellence/thepurposeofthecurriculum/

\(^3\) Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework
schools to send their children to – makes things very difficult and that there
needs to be a better mix of pupils in schools;

- There was some discussion about putting the best teachers into areas of
greatest disadvantage. However, it was pointed out that teaching in difficult
areas is not for everybody – they need to know the area well and get a lot of
support.

**Specific approaches to improving attainment**

- One speaker considered that the greatest improvement in attainment would
result from focusing on what delivers the best results, namely, investment in
high quality teachers; leadership skills; and early years interventions. It was
suggested that the recent focus on teachers numbers and reduced class sizes
were mistakes; the key variable is teachers not class size;

- Other participants also considered partnership working between schools and
other bodies to be crucial (there was some concern about teachers finding the
time to do this);

- It was suggested teachers should look at each child as an individual and
understand that there are certain factors that can affect their wellbeing. There
is a need to identify – through assessment tools such as the Boxall Profile\(^4\) –
and address pupils’ social and emotional behaviours; preliminary findings of
the effectiveness of nurture groups in Northern Ireland has shown that literacy
and numeracy amongst disadvantaged groups has improved.

**Learning lessons**

- There was a discussion about whether policy-makers have learned from
previous efforts to close the attainment gap; whether current approaches are
fully evidence-based; and whether there are sufficiently good links between
policy makers, researchers and practitioners.

- Notwithstanding some of the points above (about what would lead to
improvement in education), participants said there is a lack of clear evidence
about what works in Scotland. Approaches are not always fully evidence
based – it was suggested we sometimes have “policy-based evidence
making”. Political parties need to be careful about pursuing the latest
educational ‘wheeze’;

- There has not been enough investment in education research, indeed, it was
suggested there is “virtually no education research worth speaking about in
Scotland”;

- We have to be careful about how and the extent to which we seek to learn
from and draw comparisons with other countries. South Korea and Finland
both have successful education systems but Finland, for example, is a more
equal country than Scotland;

- Despite some of the issues raised, it was noted that various aspects of
Scotland’s educational system are highly regarded internationally.

\(^4\) [https://nurturegroups.org/introducing-nurture/boxall-profile-online](https://nurturegroups.org/introducing-nurture/boxall-profile-online)
Learning lessons: National assessments

- There was some discussion about the new national assessments and the necessity of Scotland being able to realise the benefits these can deliver while avoiding the disadvantages that have arisen from previous testing regimes;
- One participant warned of creating a perception that school is all about test results, which is dangerous; testing shouldn’t be the purpose of the process, rather, the culture in which learning takes place is the most important factor;
- Tied to this, there is also a need to be cautious about using and acting on data generated, as this can have strange effects throughout the education system. It was suggested we need evidence rather than data;
- Fundamentally, we need to know the overall policy aim before agreeing on what we should be measuring.

Discussion group 2: key points

Initial Discussion; setting the scene
There was an initial discussion around terminology and in particular the meaning of “attainment”. The linkage to achievement was discussed alongside the 4 capacities from the curriculum for excellence. It was suggested if C for E is the main driver the aim and the outcomes at its heart must be clear from the outset to allow them to be measured.

A suggested aim was ultimately to ensure education is “Getting people to achieve their full potential at some time in their lives”. Underpinning the aim the following thoughts were expressed:

- Not about closing the gap, which is both misleading and unrealistic. A system change is required.
- People must want to do things for themselves
- People must feel cared for and valued
- The approach must be outcome related with long term aims
- There were equality issues including providing people with the skills to get a job and
- Giving pupils skills and opportunities.

It was suggested an over focus on attainment to ensure university admittance was happening rather than recognising individuals and allowing people to move through education at different paces/different times in their lives. Resources should be focussed not on university education but on those who won’t get there.

The issue was much wider than education policy, other areas must be involved with a need to work across current policy silos. The objective had to be to avoid ongoing problems continuing to be trans-generational requiring engagement with parents who themselves have no aspirations.
It was recognised the answer would be expensive and resource intensive with early intervention required given opportunities start at an early age.

Current schooling issues
The current approach to teaching and learning was uniform across all schools, with accountability linked to judgments based upon perceived ability at an early age which were then perpetuated throughout school life.

Current attainment measures are neither diagnostic nor remedial. Setting was criticised as not working unless a policy to allocate the best teachers to the lowest sets was to be adopted (see also the submission from Professor Boyd re setting which was agreed by others). Schools were not learning systems and significant cultural change was required.

Governance has remained unchanged for 40 years, while everything else has been subject to change. The governance system, top down, was suppressing individualism in pursuit of conformity. It reduces accountability and does not encourage risk taking or innovation, noting it might be seen as risking showing up others. (A system which highlights those who are different and particularly focuses on failure with individual schools who dare to be different blamed for trying to innovate (e.g. Hermitage school)).

Responsibility and accountability is unclear with so many tiers involved, teachers, heads, local authorities, Education Scotland and national government all involved. Multiple and conflicting accountabilities do not help.

Local authorities have the power (over budgets etc.) yet all follow similar systems/methods and keep in step with each other. A cultural shift at a national level was required with a loosening of control at all levels. Schools did not have local identities in their own communities.

Target setting is an issue, targets are not owned by the schools and there are dangers of “teaching to targets”. What is being measured is what gets done, care on what is measured is required. Virtual comparators depress aspiration.

It was noted that really challenging children were few in number and also observed that not all teachers want to work with challenging pupils.

Suggestions
A range of suggestions for improvement/change were made:

- More autonomy for head teachers
- More inspiring leadership
- Partner schools across demographic gaps
- It should be about preparing pupils for the workplace.
- Pre-school education is critical and the key.
- Need aspirational schools and parents.
- Let pupils decide who are the best teachers and who they want to teach them!
• Good governance and high level endorsement is important. Governance in particular is the way to release change and innovation.
• Have a system measure at S3 which does not measure individuals. This would prevent any production of league tables which were seen as the enemy. There was a need for credible advice and assistance in schools which did not measure.
• A “can do” attitude was required with policy owned locally.

East Renfrewshire are regularly the highest performing authority. There, aspiration to succeed is driven by the centre, bought into by councillors and applies across their full range of schools and to all pupils.

The role of Education Scotland was queried and whether they could successfully combine working for Government and their Inspection role. It was suggested that nobody at school level considers Education Scotland to be of assistance/add value. It was added that it was the Inspectorate’s job to measure and benchmark although it is unclear what they are trying to achieve and how.

An unfavourable analogy was made with multi-national businesses. The most successful have a clear purpose, clear accountability, local responsibility and understood levels of devolution culture leading to local agility. They also share best practice.

It was also noted the London Challenge schools remained sustainable and continued their high performance even after additional funding ceased. The culture had changed and they worked for local children giving a sense of identity. In Scotland there is a need to identify the schools who have narrowed the gap and allow the evidence to be scrutinised on what has worked.

Interestingly it was near the end of the discussion when the question was asked about the role of children and how empowered they are and involved in their learning. Is there an overriding tendency to do it to children, give them no say in design or what works for them and assume they shouldn’t have any input into the system of learning.

Author’s note. [A partial attempt at an overview as opposed to a summary]

The central approach is always about more rules and control. Should the professionals simply be told “just do it, fix it and deliver” after all they are highly trained and skilled…. Are we becoming obsessed with measuring the wrong thing and why are we measuring individual pupils’ attainment? Should we be measuring the added value brought by leaders in schools and individual teachers and let them learn from each other? Finally are we “doing it to pupils” and not seeking their views, surely they have something to contribute and can say what works for them?

David Cullum, clerk to the committee
Annexe – participants

In addition to members of the Education and Culture Committee, the following people took part in the Committee’s discussions—

- Mark Batho, Vice-Principal (University Services), Abertay University*
- Dr Alan Britton, Senior University Teacher (Social Justice Place and Lifelong Education), University of Glasgow
- Sir Andrew Cubie, independent consultant*
- Professor Graham Donaldson, educational consultant and part-time professor at Glasgow University*
- Donna Hamilton, consultant*
- Cristina Iannelli, Professor of Education and Social Stratification, University of Edinburgh
- Frank Lennon, Headteacher, Dunblane High School
- Sophie Slater, Policy and Communications Officer, Nurture Group Network
- Helen Stollery, Head of Training, Nurture Group Network
- David Watt, Executive Director for the Institute of Directors in Scotland*
- Lindsey Watt, Headteacher, Castlevie Primary School, Edinburgh

*These participants were nominated by the Goodison Group, which has linked with Scotland’s Futures Forum in the area of learning and skills.\(^5\)

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\(^5\) Scotland’s Futures Forum was created by the Scottish Parliament to help its Members, along with policy makers, businesses, academics, and the wider community of Scotland, look beyond immediate horizons, to some of the challenges and opportunities we will face in the future.