EDUCATION, LIFELONG LEARNING AND CULTURE COMMITTEE

AGENDA

4th Meeting, 2011 (Session 3)

Wednesday 2 February 2011

The Committee will meet at 10.00 am in Committee Room 2.

1. **The future of schools management in Scotland:** The Committee will take evidence, in a round-table discussion, from—

   Kay Barnett, National President, Educational Institute of Scotland;

   Keir Bloomer;

   Greg Dempster, General Secretary, Association of Headteachers and Deputes in Scotland;

   Professor Richard Kerley;

   Don Ledingham, Executive Director of Education and Children's Services, East Lothian Council;

   Christina McAnea, National Officer for Education, UNISON Scotland;

   Dr Judith McClure;

   Professor Denis Mongon;

   Robert Nicol, Team Leader, Children and Young People Team, COSLA;

   Eileen Prior, Executive Director, Scottish Parent Teacher Council;

   Colin Sutherland, President, School Leaders Scotland;

   Gordon Ford, Depute Chief Executive, West Lothian Council, Association of Directors of Education in Scotland.

2. **Public Records (Scotland) Bill (in private):** The Committee will consider a draft Stage 1 report.
The papers for this meeting are as follows—

**Agenda item 1**

SPICe briefing  
**ELLC/S3/11/4/1**

Further information

**Agenda item 2**

PRIVATE PAPER  
**ELLC/S3/11/4/2 (P)**
Introduction
This paper sets out themes to aid the discussion of school management at the round-table on 2 February 2011.

The issue of how school education should be organised – in particular the role of local authorities – has had a relatively high profile over the last year. East Lothian Council consulted on various alternatives, including a community trust model. Policies on free schools and academies in England have led to speculation on whether change is also needed in Scotland, while the preparation for tighter budgets has made the need to ensure efficient provision of education more urgent. There is also a wider context of shared services,¹ the number of local authorities and the public sector reform agenda – all of which impact on education as well as other services.

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, Michael Russell, has encouraged debate but has not made specific proposals for changing local authorities’ role. He has, however, suggested that free schools and academies are “interesting but not for us”, that “there is no desire in Scotland for a school versus school approach which uses competition to drive up standards” and that “there is no real evidence that parents in Scotland want to take over the running of our schools”. Instead, he advocates partnership between schools.² Recent policy developments include:

- A working group on devolved school management – with a view to providing greater autonomy and responsibility to head teachers. This is expected to report in March 2011;
- A review of the McCrone agreement, to report to Ministers in June 2011 with implementation by August 2012;
- Merger of LTS and HMIE in June 2011.

The Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee issued a call for evidence in 2010. The responses can be viewed on the Committee’s web pages and a summary of evidence received is attached as an annexe. The key drivers for change were considered to be budget cuts and the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence. Many responses were quite cautious about structural change, pointing out that there was no “off the shelf solution”, that the answer to some of the problems might not be changes to management structures, that it was risky to implement large scale structural reform at the same time as curricular change and that the costs and benefits

¹ For example, Clyde Valley, Clackmannanshire and Stirling and East Lothian and Midlothian
² Speech at Holyrood conference, 9 November 2010.
of any changes needed to be fully considered. A minority of responses, including those from Keir Bloomer, East Lothian Council, Reform Scotland, SPTC and Care for Scotland, were more definite that there was a need for change. More recently, the EIS has been reported as advocating a move to 12 regional boards, which it considers would ensure consistent delivery of national policy (TESS, 7 January 2011).

The next section of this paper suggests framing the discussion around four key areas:

- What is the problem and are changes to structures the way to solve it?
- Which elements of education should be consistent across Scotland, which can vary between different local authorities and which can vary between different schools? What does this imply about structures?
- Does the potential for economies of scale and partnership working suggest a particular structure?
- What should the mechanisms for accountability be for education at school, local authority and national levels?

The paper concludes with some examples of structures.
Theme 1: Nature of the problem
Key challenges include implementing budget cuts in the context of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) and additional support for learning (ASL).

- Is structural change the way to address this?
  - Would CfE be easier to implement if education structures were different?
  - Would ASL legislation and guidance be easier to manage with different education structures?
  - Could a change to structures deliver the same level of education for significantly less money? (or are there better ways to save money?)

Theme 2: Consistency or variation
Some areas of education policy and practice are consistent across Scotland and set by national policy or legislation or reflect long-standing tradition. Others vary between local authorities and still others vary between schools. Generally, the broad framework is set at national level, with considerable discretion left to local authorities. In particular, legal duties in education are generally on the local authority rather than the head teacher.

Key areas of education management include curriculum content and teaching method, educational supplies and services, school estate, facilities management and human resources. Each of these has elements decided at national, local authority and school level. For example, teachers’ pay is negotiated at a national level, teachers are employed at a local authority level but day-to-day management is at a school level. In many policy areas, local authorities vary in their interpretation of guidance and legislation and exercise their discretion in the way they fill in the detail of national frameworks. In practice, this discretion has increased in recent years due to the concordat.

- Which elements of education ought to vary between local authorities and which ought to vary between individual schools? What does this imply about structures?
  - For example, if more decision making power were to be given to head teachers, would this lead to more variation in educational provision?
  - What kind of variation would be desirable/undesirable?
  - Should parents and pupils have the ability to choose between different ways of providing school education?
Theme 3: Economies of scale and partnership working

Economies of scale in, for example, procurement of IT, cleaning and catering or specialist ASL provision need to be balanced against the need for flexibility to deal with individual circumstances.

Some schools and local authorities have potentially bigger economies of scale than others. Schools vary hugely in size, as do local authorities; for example, Clackmannanshire has a pupil population of 6,689 compared to Glasgow’s 64,905. The table below shows the variation in size of schools from 434 primary schools with a roll under 50 to 49 secondary schools with a roll over 1,200.

Table 1: Size of schools, 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School roll</th>
<th>Primary</th>
<th>Secondary</th>
<th>Special</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>under 50</td>
<td>434</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-99</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100-199</td>
<td>541</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200-299</td>
<td>448</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>300-399</td>
<td>285</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>400-499</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500-599</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>600-799</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>800-999</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>1,000-1,199</td>
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<td>65</td>
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<td>1,200 and</td>
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<tr>
<td>over</td>
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Another key aspect of capacity in individual schools is their ability to meet the needs of pupils with very specialised needs. A larger unit of organisation (such as a local authority or a school cluster or even a national provision) enables these costs to be spread more evenly and allows for pooling expertise.

Schools also need to collaborate with other services – particularly with social work and health through the GIRFEC framework. Local authorities are also responsible for delivery of pre-school education and childcare services.

- Do we have the right balance between economies of scale and local flexibility? How could it be done differently?
- What does the need for highly specialist ASL support for relatively few pupils imply about the way education should be structured?
- What kind of structure would best support the implementation of GIRFEC?
**Theme 4: Accountability**

At a national level, accountability is through the national electorate and parliament. At local authority level, accountability is to the local electorate. At school level, there are more varied accountabilities. Accountability is to the local authority, to the national level via HMIe and to the parents via the parent council (although this is essentially a consultative, rather than decision making, body).

- If schools were to be given more autonomy – would there be a greater role for the parent body and/or the local community?
- If there were to be a move to regional boards should these be locally elected?

**Example structures**

There are many possible ways to change the existing structures – the following examples are intended only as a starter for discussion. Different structures might include:

- Greater autonomy for schools, which could cluster together where necessary to ensure diversity of curricular provision/economies of scale. Reduced role of local authority.
- Local authority functions devolved to an intermediate body such as a charitable trust.
- Regional boards take on education authority functions – could be elected or appointed.
- Greater autonomy of schools, increased power of parent body and increased prescription from national government (or some national education agency). Reduced role of local authority.
- Local authority sharing education services or fewer local authorities.

**Camilla Kidner**  
**SPICe Research**  
**28 January 2011**

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**Note:** Committee briefing papers are provided by SPICe for the use of Scottish Parliament committees and clerking staff. They provide focused information or respond to specific questions or areas of interest to committees and are not intended to offer comprehensive coverage of a subject area.
Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee

Future structure of state education in Scotland – scoping exercise

Summary of evidence received

This paper provides a summary of the key themes in the 39 submissions received by the Committee and focuses on the advantages and disadvantages claimed for various models discussed.

All the submissions can be viewed on the Committee’s web pages—


Respondents

Of the 39 responses received by the Committee 15 were from local authorities. There were 7 responses from trades unions, 3 from parents organisations, 2 from academics and 2 from public bodies.

There was a large minority of responses, mainly from unions and local authorities that were strongly in favour of the current system and strongly against the idea of publicly funded independent schools. Most of the remaining responses considered that the financial crisis meant that some change was required. There was a cautious reaction to the proposal in East Lothian Council for community trusts with many submissions emphasising the need for detailed consideration of the proposals. There seems to be a general consensus in favour of more collaboration between schools and between local authorities and of the merits of local decision making. However there is no consensus on how far this should be taken. Judith McClure’s submission suggests how the debate can be taken forward by the committee.

The need for change

The key driver for change is the financial crisis although COSLA noted that structural change would not be enough to meet the financial challenge and the STUC said that change should not be driven by finance.

Many responses were quite cautious pointing out that there is no ‘off the shelf solution’, that the answer to some of the problems may not be management structures, that it was risky to implement large scale structural reform at the same time as curricular change and that the costs and benefits of any changes needed to be fully considered. A minority of responses including Keir Bloomer, East Lothian Council, Reform Scotland, SPTC and Care for Scotland were more definite about the need for change.

A number of submissions referred to diseconomies of scale in the current system. The SPTC referred to the problems of having small authorities and Angus Council stated that 32 local authorities are unlikely to continue to be affordable. The level of variation between local authorities was also considered by some to be an issue (eg SPTC, Dumfries and Galloway Council).
There was also frequent mention of the need for change in order to improve attainment, although some questioned the link between management structures and exam results. Whereas Reform Scotland said that the current structure meant that pupils from deprived areas were not achieving their potential as suggested a voucher system, the unions argued that increased diversity of provision had no educational merit. East Renfrewshire Council argued for spreading best practice rather than changing the system and described local authorities as: “the glue that holds our schools together.”

The implementation of Curriculum for Excellence was also considered by many to support the case for structural change although others, such as the STUC claimed it as a reason to not create more disruption and expense. UNISON stated that reorganisation distracts attention from delivery.

The STUC said they were not clear where the demand for change is coming from. In contrast, Keir Bloomer states that the current system “does not yet demonstrate the agility and flexibility and success in contemporary circumstances demands” and is “no longer fit for purpose.” Angus Council states that no change is unlikely to be an affordable option.

The national agencies such as Learning and Teaching Scotland, HMie and the Scottish Qualifications Authority were also criticised in a few submissions. For example, CARE for Scotland referred to duplication and expense and Keir Bloomer questioned whether there functions could be delivered in a different way. Fife Council thought that role of agencies and Scottish Government Departments should be included in any review.

**Local authority control – current system**

Eight\(^3\) of the responses received were strongly in favour of retaining the current system of local authority control although most submissions discussed the advantages and disadvantages of the current system. Some things claimed as advantages by some are claimed as disadvantages by others. The following therefore groups the main themes in a table for ease of comparison.

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\(^3\) COSLA, EIS, Highland Council, NASUWT, South Ayrshire Council, South Lanarkshire Council, STUC, UNISON
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Democratic accountability (Glasgow Council, South Lanarkshire Council, COSLA, EIS, STUC, ADES, EIS, Highland Council, NASUWT, North Lanarkshire Council)</td>
<td>Involved in local politics (SPTC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balances local decision making/autonomy and national policy/coherence/consistency (Highland Council, Stirling Council, East Dunbartonshire Council, North Lanarkshire Council, South Lanarkshire Council, Stirling Council)</td>
<td>No need for democratic accountability at both central and local government levels (Keir Bloomer)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic framework /planning (Edinburgh Council, Fife Council, Glasgow Council, NASUWT, North Lanarkshire Council, SLS) Ability to fund high cost pupils (UNISON) Ensuring equality and fairness (Fife Council)</td>
<td>Possible tensions between local and national needs and policy (EIS, North Lanarkshire Council)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Consistency within an authority (Fife Council, Stirling Council) Supports the comprehensive principle (EIS, COSLA)</td>
<td>Duplication (CARE Scotland, SLS, SPTC) Overly complex and hierarchical (CARE Scotland) Bureaucratic (SLS) Not all local authorities plan strategically (SLS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economies of scale (STUC, UNISON, East Dunbartonshire Council, NASUWT)</td>
<td>Variation between local authorities (Dumfries and Galloway Council, SPTC, Reform Scotland, SLS) Lack of parental choice (Reform Scotland) Pupils in deprived areas unable to reach their potential due to lack of choice of provision (Reform Scotland)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close relationship with schools (SLS)</td>
<td>Diseconomies of scale in small authorities (SPTC) Expensive/unaffordable/not always cost effective (Angus Council, SLS, CARE Scotland, Glasgow Council)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gives a voice to all parents not just ‘interest groups’ (ADES, UNISON)</td>
<td>Some do not take account of school ethos (SCES)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supports integrated and partnership working (Fife Council, COSLA, Glasgow Council, Highland Council, NASUWT, North Lanarkshire Council, SLS)</td>
<td>Levels of parental involvement vary (SPTC)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Different boundaries to health and police hinders joint working (SLS) Joint working is more aspiration than reality (SLS) Schools compete for resources with</td>
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</table>
other local authority services (SLS)

| Provides appropriate challenge and support *(Edinburgh Council, Highland Council)* | Clash of interests in being both service provider and quality assurer *(Denis Mongon)* |
| Local authority has the legal duties *(South Ayrshire Council)* | Accountability for performance is with the school but legal responsibility is with the local authority (SLS) |
| Stability (SLS) | Risk of inertia *(North Lanarkshire Council)* |

Submissions in favour of the current system also pointed out that it had been praised by the 2007 OECD report and tended to see change as a threat to the comprehensive principle. Finland was cited as an example of a strong local authority system which produced excellent results in PISA. However, others cautioned that this wasn’t necessarily due to administrative structures.

**Local authority control with fewer local authorities**

SPTC suggests that although schools are best managed by local authorities, there are fewer advantages in smaller authorities. They suggest a reduction in the number of local authorities which should be aligned to health boundaries to assist integrated working in children’s services.

**Local authority control with shared services**

Angus Council and the SPTC propose that schools should remain within local authorities but that there should be improved collaboration or shared services. Edinburgh Council mentions that it is currently in discussions with other councils about this. COSLA supports greater collaboration where this is what local authorities want. Dumfries and Galloway Council and South Lanarkshire Council also see merit in the idea. Angus Council proposes formal joint liaison arrangements between adjacent authorities which ‘reconfigure services across local authority boundaries’ where authorities take the lead in different functions and share key ‘back office’ functions. The SPTC suggest that strategic development of shared services could reduce costs relatively quickly. Outwith the public sector, the Scottish Council for Independent Schools mention that their members collaborate to achieve economies of scale in the provision of some services.

**Advantages**

- keep local responsiveness (Angus Council)
- cost reductions (Angus Council, SPTC)
- reduce duplication (SPTC)

**Disadvantages**

- need to reconcile different policies, practices and priorities (Angus Council)
Local authority control with more devolution to schools

While supporting the current system, many responses suggested that more power could be devolved to the school level. For example, the SPTC state that: “many parents want to see a system which provides greater autonomy at school level” and ADES suggests that Quality Development Services could be devolved. A number of submissions (for example Fife Council and Highland Council) mention that their central management of education has been ‘slimmed down’ in recent years.

However, North Lanarkshire Council states that: “there is no evidence that most head teachers wish to have powers and responsibilities in direct employment, procurement and legal matters” and UNISON state that head teachers need to be managed implying that this is done by the local authority. However, Professor Denis Mongon states that: “neither central nor local government officers are the right people directly to manage school leaders.”

East Dunbartonshire Council notes that DSM requires suitably qualified staff and that it can work well in large schools but that the local authority needs to continue to hold resources centrally for small schools. Angus Council suggests that all schools should enjoy the type of devolution available in the best current DSM schemes.

The advantages and disadvantages will to some extent depend on what is devolved, but the submissions mentioned the following:

Advantages
- greater autonomy, professional responsibility, creativity and potential for local partners involvement (ADES)
- exposes decisions to closer local scrutiny and deepens local understanding about decision making (East Lothian Council)
- fits with CfE approach (Angus Council)
- closer to parents and communities (CARE Scotland, East Lothian Council)
- balances coherence and local freedom (Highland Council)

Disadvantages
- less assurance to parents and public at large (ADES)
- less democratic control (ADES)
- national comparisons difficult (ADES)
- less capacity for effective DSM in small schools (East Dunbartonshire Council)
- too much devolution might risk vulnerable children missing out (Glasgow Council)
- total devolution might risk loss of coherence and fragmentation (SCES)

Local authority control with school clusters

Some submissions advocate running schools in clusters but still within local authority control. Many local authorities already do this to some extent, but there were some submissions – particularly that from Denis Mongon that suggested taking this further. He notes that shared governance can have a
beneficial impact on pupil attainment when high and low attaining schools are linked. This federation model involves two or more governing bodies combine with the option of appointing a single executive head teacher. Keir Bloomer suggests that schools could: “join together in a federation based on common interest and shared philosophy.”

One extension of a cluster model is joint headships. AHDS say they are: ‘not opposed’ but that it must be considered on a case by case basis. Dumfries and Galloway Council sees clusters becoming increasingly autonomous within performance parameters set by the local authority. East Lothian Council proposes move towards acting as a commissioner rather than a ‘micro-manager’. This is discussed below, but the options include cluster arrangements.

**Advantages**
- shared governance can “create a powerful impetus” if it draws in local people (Denis Mongon)
- can lead to shared and co-located services (Denis Mongon)
- linking high and low attaining schools can improve attainment (Denis Mongon)
- encourages joint working between school leaders (Denis Mongon)

**Disadvantages**
- joint headships may not generate cost savings (AHDS)
- may not work if there is a large distance between schools (AHDS)

**Local authority control – with community trust**
East Lothian Council’s options for a community trust have received widespread attention. The options do not include taking schools out of local authority control and in many ways are an extension of the ‘school cluster’ and extended DSM models. Their submission notes that: “there will always be a place for some centralised function, such as pupil placements, school planning, severe and complex needs etc.” Their paper puts forwards four options:

- **Consultative**: - the current situation with greater community representation
- **Partnership and shared evaluation**.
- **Governance models** – greater management responsibility of the governing body
- **Co-operative Trust** – governing body employs the teachers and is commissioned by the local authority to deliver education.

In general, other submissions are very cautious in their reaction, raising the need for far more detailed consideration. The more positive are Keir Bloomer, Care Scotland, Denis Mongon. However, EIS (who describe the proposals as taking schools out of local authority control) would ‘caution against’ such a move and NASUWT are against a substantial increase in governance autonomy.
The pros and cons mentioned of governance via a trust model are set out below:

**Table 2: Advantages and disadvantages of community trusts**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>as a separate legal body it can be commissioned to work with other services (Mongon, East Lothian Council)</td>
<td>creates an additional layer between school and local authority (Angus Council)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>local authority is a commissioner not micro-manager (East Lothian Council, Keir Bloomer)</td>
<td>unclear how a community would deal with placement transfers, pupils with complex needs, arbitration between school and parents, individuals with 'single minded agenda' (East Dunbartonshire Council)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>community involvement could work well in rural areas where the school could be a ‘community hub’ (Children in Scotland)</td>
<td>unlikely to work in very rural areas (Eilean Siar)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>closer partnership working with the community (East Lothian Council)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>integrates the school in its local community (Denis Mongon)</td>
<td>might exacerbate social distinctions between areas (EIS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nurtures autonomy and personal responsibility for the quality of the school (Denis Mongon)</td>
<td>unclear whether there is community/parent capacity (AHDS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>avoids the clash of interests of the same body being the service provider and quality assurer (Denis Mongon)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>exempt from non-domestic rates (East Lothian Council)</td>
<td>increase costs (NASUWT)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>risk that NDR savings may be less than expected (AHDS)</td>
<td>NDR exemption is lost revenue to the treasury (Angus Council)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following are some of the additional concerns raised in response to East Lothian Council’s proposals:

- create a post code lottery
- parental interference
- bypasses local democracy
- special interest groups could dominate
- less support from local authority
- risk of lack of capacity in schools and the community
- vulnerable groups disadvantaged
Publicly funded independent schools

The most radical option is to enable public funding of independent schools based on US Charter Schools, Swedish Free Schools and English proposals for extending the academy programme. Reform Scotland is the only submission to propose this option which it links to a voucher system. This would enable parents to choose either an independent or a local authority school. They also suggest that local authorities and new independent schools should be given control over teacher pay and conditions.

Care Scotland suggests that the academy model should be considered and Keir Bloomer suggests that many education functions of local authorities and the national agencies could be delivered by others through a market based model. If schools were to be removed from local authority control, he suggests that one approach might be to establish a body similar to the Scottish Funding Council to ensure equitable funding between schools.

Most other submissions which referred to independent schools were not in favour of it. The examples of Sweden, US and England were used both for and against and there was a reminder that a previous policy of ‘opting out’ in Scotland was unsuccessful.

A number of submissions claim more widely that there is little support in Scotland for this model. AHDS states: “other than the conservative party manifesto it is hard to find a positive assessment of taking the free schools concept and applying it in a UK context” ATL do not believe there is “any appetite amongst charities or not-for-profit trusts to set up new schools” EIS describe it as: “not a serious agenda item in Scotland”. SPTC do not perceive any push from parents to open or run schools, but they do want greater involvement and partnership. NASUWT and STUC refer to a survey which found that: “95% of the general public are opposed to schools being run by private companies, voluntary organisations, charities and universities and instead want schools to be run by national and local government.”

Advantages
- provides choice (Reform Scotland)
- competition will improve attainment (Reform Scotland)
- clearer lines of responsibility and accountability (SLS)

Disadvantages
- per head costs might rise as overheads in publicly run schools would not be reduced even if number of pupils attending fell (AHDS)
- diseconomies of scale (NASUWT, STUC, UNISON, North Lanarkshire Council)
- reluctance to take high cost pupils – such as those with additional support needs (UNISON)
- might be run for profit (UNISON)
- can lead to a reduction in wages (UNISON)
- risk of misappropriation or stock piling of funding by schools (NASUWT)
• governed in interests of the sponsor not the parents or community (ATL)
• doesn’t support comprehensive education (Angus Council)
• could become more selective and less comprehensive (South Lanarkshire Council, North Lanarkshire Council)
• less diversity in provision as schools become risk averse (STUC)
• doesn’t support integrated children’s services (Angus Council, North Lanarkshire Council)
• less collaboration between schools (EIS, STUC)
• compromise strategic planning by local authorities (Angus Council)
• does not raise standards (NASUWT, STUC, Terry Wrigley)
• would widen the gap in attainment (EIS)
• would add to social divisions (EIS, Terry Wrigley)

Area boards
The idea of area boards was not proposed by any respondent. However, it was discussed by a nearly a third of respondents with a proposal for discussion being put forward by School Leaders Scotland. They describe an area board running 35 to 50 secondary schools which would employ teachers, be accountable for quality of provision and be required to work in partnership with relevant agencies. It would remove funding decisions from ‘competing funding interests’ and ‘political fashion’.

Advantages
• clearer accountability (SLS, EIS)
• improved consistency, (SLS, AHDS)
• improved balance between national and local (SLS)
• less duplication of ‘back office’ and management functions (AHDS)

Disadvantages
• loss of local responsiveness (EIS, AHDS)
• local needs might be given precedence over national needs (North Lanarkshire Council)
• might be an excuse for cuts (EIS)
• might have high initial costs (AHDS)
• might be difficult to get people to stand for election (North Lanarkshire Council)
• joint working with local authority services might suffer (North Lanarkshire Council)

The EIS also raise the issue of how the appointments would be made.

Some submissions referred to the idea of regional boards as a long standing concern since local government re-organisation in 1996. EIS refer to FE boards (taken out of local authority control in the 1990s) as ‘not an encouraging precedent’. Dumfries and Galloway Council suggests that regional boards might emerge from shared services agreements, and that if they were developed, they should be co-terminous with groups of local authorities.
National education system
No-one advocated an education system directly run by central government, however the issues raised were discussed in a few submissions. Angus Council describes a national system administered by civil servants and accountable to the Minister as ‘not inconceivable’ with regional provision being similar to NHS boards. Dumfries and Galloway Council thinks the effect on autonomy depends on the model implemented. The Association of Teachers and Lecturers refer to the single board established in Northern Ireland and note that it was welcomed by teachers there. However, it points out that Scotland already has national pay and conditions and suggest that effort might be better spent in improving procurement procedures within the current system.

Advantages:
• consistency (ADES, Angus Council)
• cost savings (ADES)

Disadvantages:
• less local knowledge of schools (ADES)
• might not meet local needs (Angus Council, North Lanarkshire Council)
• less democratic control (ADES)
• schools distant from quality improvement process (ADES)
• may not raise standards (ATL)
• may not deliver diversity (ATL)
• possibility of undue political influence (North Lanarkshire Council)
• would not want it delivered by a quango (Angus Council)

Camilla Kidner
SPICe Research
23 July 2010

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