

Evidence to the Education and Culture Committee

The Education (Scotland) Bill 2015

Colleges Scotland notes that the majority of the provisions in the Education (Scotland) Bill relate to pupils in schools and to young children. There are, however, a number provisions in the Bill that will be relevant to the college sector. We welcome the opportunity to answer the questions put forward by the Education and Culture Committee; these are answered in turn where relevant below.

Attainment

The Committee has recently taken evidence to suggest there should be a greater emphasis on pupils' or young people's educational achievement, as opposed to their attainment (which is often seen in terms of qualifications or exam results). The Bill's Policy Memorandum, in describing these provisions, uses the word 'attainment' on several occasions but uses 'achievement' only twice. The Bill itself uses neither term.

- 1. What improvements in attainment, in achievement and in reducing inequalities of outcome do you consider the Bill in itself could deliver? What would be a desirable level of improvement?**

The Bill remains silent on the ways in which an education authority might achieve a reduction in inequalities of outcome, or the measures to be employed to determine progress, therefore it is difficult to understand how the Bill in itself will deliver the necessary improvement. A desirable level of improvement would be for educational outcomes to be independent of the students' socio-economic circumstances.

- 2. The duty in the Bill is to 'have regard to the desirability' of 'reducing inequalities of outcome'. Is this meaningful enough to have the desired policy effect?**

It is likely that some of the policy interventions on the part of an education authority may not produce the planned effect in reducing inequalities of outcome. We presume that this clause in the Bill provides for the recognition that an education authority has taken steps to address inequalities of outcome, even if not successful.

- 3. How should 'inequalities of outcome' be interpreted and should this phrase be defined in the Bill?**

There has been a lack of specificity in the government's use of the terms 'attainment gap' and 'inequality of outcome'. These terms should be well-defined otherwise there will be no uniform means of measuring progress.

- 4. What specific actions will education authorities be able to take to reduce inequalities of outcome that they are currently unable to take?**

Working in close partnership with Scotland's college sector will help education authorities offer new opportunities to provide vocational education and skills more suited to young people who are looking for a direct route to employment.

The Bill's Policy Memorandum uses a range of terms that do not appear in the Bill, for example—

- “promote equity of attainment for disadvantaged children”
- “narrowing the attainment gap”
- the correlation between a child's “social deprivation/ affluence and their educational attainment”.

6. Do you consider that such terms are clearly defined and widely understood? Could the different terms used in the Policy Memorandum and in the Bill create any problems in delivering the policy objectives?

The terms are not clearly defined, and it is highly likely that the understanding of their meaning will differ according to current practice in each education authority. This will impede the effective delivery of the policy intentions.

7. Should the Bill contain sanctions in the event that the Scottish Government or local authorities fail to achieve the policy intention of reducing inequalities of outcome? If so, what sanctions would you suggest are appropriate?

We believe it would be inappropriate to apply sanctions.

8. Do you have any views on the consultation and reporting requirements set out in this part of the Bill?

The two-year cycle seems somewhat short, given the time required to plan, implement and assess the outcomes from educational policy changes.

9. The Bill focuses on reducing inequalities of outcome resulting from pupils' socio-economic disadvantage. Should all examples of inequality of outcome be addressed?

In the present time of austerity it is unlikely that an education authority will have sufficient resources to address every possible type of inequality. However, each authority ought to have some means of prioritising which inequalities are to be addressed.

Chief Education Officer

19. What would be the possible advantages and disadvantages of legislating for the role of Chief Education Officer (CEO) in every education authority in Scotland? Are there any previous examples of the Scottish Government seeking to instruct local authorities to employ a person in a particular role? If so, are there any lessons to be learned from how this worked?

The college sector is committed to taking forward the Scottish Government's ambitions – expressed in its *Developing the Young Workforce – Youth Employment Strategy* – to provide vocational pathways for young people in the senior phase of secondary school. In order to make effective and efficient provision for young people taking up vocational education, there needs to be a close partnership between a regional college and its local authority education directorate. The appointment of a Chief Education Officer in each education authority will ensure that this partnership working is performed by professionals with a sound understanding of the educational challenges and opportunities.

Colleges Scotland makes the assumption that the Chief Education Officer would have an education background and an understanding of the education portfolio. We also note that the reshaping of Health and Social Care will lead a lot of authorities to consider how it delivers its education service.

Adopting a Chief Education Officer could ensure greater accountability, but we would need further detail on what they would be legislating for.

20. What roles could a CEO most usefully perform and to what extent are such roles already carried out within education authorities?

As suggested above, the CEO could usefully work in partnership with the regional college(s) that serve the local authority to ensure that the colleges' Regional Outcome Agreement reflects the requirements for high quality school-college partnerships and the provision of senior vocational pathways.

Colleges Scotland
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