

THE EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTE OF SCOTLAND

Submission to Education and Skills Committee's

Pre-budget Review of the Performance of Education Scotland

1. The Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS), Scotland's largest education union, welcomes the opportunity to provide a written submission to inform the Committee's pre-budget review of the performance of Education Scotland (ES).
2. As has been stated previously, the merging of HMIe and Learning Teaching Scotland in 2011 led to EIS concerns around the dual functions of the single organisation and its resultant capacity to provide effective support to schools in the interests of improvement. The EIS believes that a degree of tension remains around responsibility for inspections and curricular support being encompassed within the same body. Whilst the primary function of ES, as outlined within its own strategic objectives, remains reasonably well defined, and its activities understood, the EIS would express the view that the support function which ES inherited from LTS has been marginalised in significant ways.
3. This, coupled with the disappearance of local authority advisors and quality improvement staff, has created a void in terms of the support that is available to schools and teachers in their delivery of the curriculum- an issue which the EIS believes should be addressed within the Governance Review. Given the evident lack of capacity in a number of local authorities around pedagogical leadership and support, there is a discussion to be held around the capacity of Education Scotland to support individual or regional clusters of schools in this key area.
4. This is particularly pertinent in light of the recent additional demands placed on Education Scotland since the introduction of the National Improvement Framework (NIF), at a time of shrinkage of staffing resources. The EIS is concerned, for example, at the significant reduction in the size and capacity of Education Scotland's Rights, Support and Wellbeing Team which has been delivering essential support to practitioners: training in restorative approaches; developing nurturing principles for secondary schools; working with a number of local authorities on behaviour-linked matters and on GIRFEC. Key members of the team employed on a seconded basis were returned to local authorities while others were reassigned to focus on NIF.

5. A further source of frustration in recent years has been the inadequacy of the support provided at times from Education Scotland for CfE curriculum development and the introduction of new qualifications. For example, guidance on de-cluttering of the curriculum within the Broad General Education (BGE) has been long-awaited; also, learning and teaching resources and assessment materials with exemplars to support the delivery of the new qualifications have frequently been made available too late and have often been of questionable quality.
6. The EIS remains of the view that Education Scotland should have been stronger in its leadership in relation to the management of internal assessment within the new National Qualifications. It, along with other key agencies, fell short in providing the level of guidance and exemplification that teachers required to enable more streamlined approaches to internal assessment and it continues to give mixed messages in relation to qualification delivery and senior phase curriculum architecture, as evident in the advice issued in May of this year following discussions within the Assessment and National Qualifications Review Group.
7. Furthermore, in spite of being a signatory of the Tackling Bureaucracy Reports (2013 and 2015) and having a key role in promoting their recommendations, Education Scotland had to provide further advice aimed at reducing teacher workload at the beginning of the school session under the direction of the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills. Indeed, only months before, ES itself had issued direction to schools on moderation and assessment within the BGE, the timing and content of which did not take proper account of the cycle or reality of School Improvement Planning or Working Time Agreements.
8. In several respects, therefore, the EIS believes that Education Scotland's strategy and systems require to be more finely tuned to the needs of schools and colleges, teachers and lecturers.
9. The EIS continues to have concerns, also, over the increasingly politicised role of Education Scotland within Scottish education. With the role of the Inspectorate having been brought closer to government, questions remain about the independence of the inspection process and its relationship to government policy, and have emerged more recently regarding the capacity of Education Scotland to influence government policy through evidence-based advice. Importantly, in the discussions within the various groups that have been set up since the publication of the National Improvement Framework, particularly those that have focused on the introduction of standardised assessments and the publication of attainment data as a

means of closing the attainment gap, ES has been reticent to challenge the misconceptions and/ or politically motivated approaches of civil servants and ministers who have little knowledge of, or expertise in, education philosophy, or in learning and teaching pedagogy. Little or no evidence, either of the benefits or disadvantages of standardised assessment and the publication of attainment data in terms of raising attainment and improving equity, was brought to the table to inform thinking. Even the simple fact that employees of Education Scotland were reclassified in 2011 as civil servants is indicative of the centralisation which has occurred, with no discernible gain to Scottish education as a result: rather than function as an organisation that is objective and independent of the political slants and motivations of government, Education Scotland appears, publicly at least, to be politically compliant.

10. In addition, the EIS would again highlight tensions between the different purposes of inspection: as an accountability tool and as a support mechanism for driving improvement. The EIS would reiterate the view that inspection statistics might suggest the need for a more strongly supportive approach to the work of Education Scotland with individual schools and school communities, and possibly the abandonment of formal inspection altogether, following the lead of Finland (one of the highest performing education systems in the world), in favour of a model designed solely to provide support to teachers and educational establishments.
11. Regarding school inspections, the EIS would acknowledge the progressive changes over the recent past period of HMIE seeking to promote self-evaluation at establishment level as the dominant tool in quality assurance. Feedback from EIS Representatives in establishments which have been inspected, however, continues to provide a variable picture. While some EIS Representatives report that members find the inspection process supportive, others- a minority but not in insignificant numbers- express negative views on behalf of members. These centre on confusion around the process of inspection; the lack of opportunity for genuine professional dialogue between teachers and the members of the inspectorate teams; excessive workload and stress that inspection generates for teachers and senior managers; long delays between the inspection having taken place and the final report being published; and overall, the erosion of staff morale by the process.
12. The EIS acknowledges the efforts of Education Scotland to address some of these matters within its ongoing review of inspection, including the recent try-outs of the various inspection models but continues to believe that an altogether more effective and efficacious model would be to shift the balance of inspection activity towards local councils around their responsibilities as education authorities. A further matter which the EIS

believes requires consideration is the additional demands on the capacity of inspection teams generated by NIF (this, of course, also has implications for schools staff). Finally, in this regard, the EIS view is that the underlying principles and value of the inspection regime, and the extent to which these are aligned with the aims and values of CfE, require close consideration also.

13. The EIS recognises and values the commitment of Education Scotland to partnership working. The EIS has been invited to work with ES in a number of areas, for example, on Guidance for School/ Employer partnerships as part of the work on Developing the Young Workforce agenda; within the Equality and Diversity Network Group; and in the development of the recently issued Benchmarks for Literacy and Numeracy.
14. Such a partnership approach is evident, also, in some aspect of Education Scotland's efforts to quality assure its effectiveness in terms of the support that it provides to the stakeholders within the education system. For example, it meets biannually with the EIS with regards to strategic matters and more often to discuss inspection feedback from EIS members, and seeks the views of stakeholders via formal structures such as the External Reference Group on review of inspection processes.
15. Regarding the extent to which Education Scotland promotes high quality professional learning and leadership among practitioners, the EIS recognises the contribution that ES has made to this agenda. For example, ES for has worked collaboratively with the EIS most recently in delivering Tackling Bureaucracy workshops to practitioners and in supporting EIS Learning Representatives and HT and DHT members to become familiar with the new HGIOS 4 self-evaluation tool. Such partnership working is continues to be valued and appreciated by EIS members.