

# First Class

FROM NURSERY TO UNIVERSITY:  
ESSAYS ON IMPROVING SCOTLAND'S EDUCATION





## INDEX

<b>Introduction</b>	5
Ruth Davidson MSP	
<b>Why Tradition and Freedom both matter</b>	7
Lindsay Paterson, Professor of Education Policy at Edinburgh University	
<b>Two cheers for Curriculum for Excellence</b>	13
Keir Bloomer, independent education consultant	
<b>Follow the child</b>	24
Alison Payne, Research Director, Reform Scotland	
<b>Hard knocks</b>	30
Sophie Sandor, Edinburgh University student	
<b>The real enemy</b>	33
Chris Deerin, journalist	
<b>A better way</b>	36
Alex Massie, freelance journalist and blogger for The Spectator	
<b>A challenge in itself: the college sector in Scotland</b>	41
Sue Pinder OBE, Former Principal of James Watt College	
<b>Scotland's universities need plenty of help to stay ahead of the game</b>	48
Professor Pete Downes, Principal and Vice-Chancellor of Dundee University	
<b>Ask not what our schools do for them: The contribution of children with disabilities to education in Scotland</b>	55
Sophie Pilgrim, Director of Kindred Scotland	
<b>Headteachers need and want a coherent vision for Scottish Education</b>	61
John Low, Former rector of Breadalbane Academy and head of Perth Grammar School	
<b>Family values should support our young people not state interference</b>	66
Elizabeth Smith MSP, Scottish Conservative Spokesman on Children and Young People	



## FOREWORD

The genesis for this short book of essays came about in mid 2014 in the run up to the referendum vote. Whatever the result, it was clear that – immediately after a No vote – people would want an answer to that simple question: what next? For the Scottish Conservatives, the question of how we improve our education system in order to give all young Scots the best opportunities possible is of paramount importance. Hence our decision to commission this series of essays on the future of Scottish education, from nursery right through to university.

It is important to note what this book is not. It is not a list of policy proposals. It is not a manifesto. Nor is it even a collection of Conservative party thinking; with the exception of a minority of contributors, the writers are not members of the Conservative party and are not affiliated to the party in any way.

The book is an attempt simply to kick-start a greater focus and a wider debate about our education system. This debate, in our view, has been neglected in recent years. Our aim here is to air the thoughts of just a few of those whose views deserve to be heard more widely. Our contributors - who include academics, journalists and teachers – were approached for their knowledge, their perspective, and for their original insight into some of the intractable problems facing the education system we have created. They write without fear or favour. We hope politicians of all colours will find time to read their views, and to challenge their own thinking as a result.

The fact is that the debate around Scottish education has ossified. This must now change. Scotland's forgotten education debate is too important to be ignored any longer.

It remains to thank all the contributors for agreeing to set out their thoughts. We are extremely grateful for the time they have put in, and the effort involved.

November 2014



*“For the last three years, and arguably longer, the debate over constitutional change in Scotland has pre-occupied our political class. The independence referendum debate was necessary and invigorating – but it cannot be disputed that the relentless focus on the constitution has crowded out debate on other crucial parts of public policy. This imbalance must now be righted.”*

**Ruth Davidson MSP**

## INTRODUCTION

For the last three years, and arguably longer, the debate over constitutional change in Scotland has pre-occupied our political class. The independence referendum debate was necessary and invigorating – but it cannot be disputed that the relentless focus on the constitution has crowded out debate on other crucial parts of public policy. This imbalance must now be righted.

Nowhere is that more necessary than in the field of education. The Scottish Government has complete control over every step of our children's path from nursery to University. Yet all too rarely do we hear a vigorous and passionate debate about the direction of their policy. It is time for us to reset the compass – no more backward glances from government on a referendum whose question was asked and answered, rather a focus on the crucial task policy makers have in directing change today.

The Scottish Conservatives are clear. While Scottish administrations since devolution have held the power to chart a bold new course for our nation's schools, they have ducked this challenge. In place of long overdue reform, they have too often retreated into a 'Scottish exceptionalism' which closes its eyes to the transformational change that has swept through the delivery of education across much of the world. And Scotland's education system is the poorer for it.

Reforms to promote educational choice, decentralisation and diversity of provision have been driven forward from New

Zealand to Poland and from Denmark to the United States, raising standards and improving the life chances of pupils. But successive Scottish governments have stood inflexibly against such innovation and modernisation.

We need to face up to some hard facts. According to the annual Scottish Survey of Literacy and Numeracy, thousands of Scottish pupils fail to meet basic levels of reading, writing and counting. International performance comparisons show Scotland's schools treading water, while many other countries race ahead. There is a continuing trend of general attainment levels slipping back between the middle years of primary school and the early years of secondary school. Last year fewer than 3% of pupils from the poorest backgrounds got three or more 'A' grades at Higher level, compared to 20% of those from more affluent homes.

Our view is that Scotland's unreformed, one-size-fits-all comprehensive system is falling short, and its failings are most chronic for those children who begin life with the fewest opportunities.

So when the case for change is so clear, why has so little been done? Where is the determination from government to give the same choice and opportunities to poorer families that are so often taken for granted by the more affluent? Where is the political courage to confront the special interests which stand against change? Scottish Conservatives believe that educational reform should be founded on common-sense principles - more parental choice; rigorous testing; the transfer of

responsibility from Council bureaucracies to individual schools and a determination that every pupil everywhere should have the same opportunities through a good grounding in core, traditional subjects. Of all the challenges facing Scotland today, the cause of education reform is the most imperative. The inertia, entrenched special interests and excuses of past years can no longer be allowed to stand in the way of the change that is so demonstrably needed. We want a vigorous debate to begin. We want to see our views, and the views of others, tested in the public forum so that we find a way to improve our education system.

This book represents our effort to help start that process. Nearly all of the contributors come from outside the Conservative party. Some are sympathetic to our proposals; others will, doubtless, disagree with our plans. As is noted in the Foreword, the aim here is not to set out a policy platform but to fire up interest, to challenge received wisdom, and to provoke fresh thought.

In a Scotland which is too easily satisfied by unchallenged orthodoxies, and as part of a world which is changing at an ever more rapid pace, this is a debate our country needs. It is a debate the Scottish Conservatives are resolved to lead.

**Ruth Davidson MSP**

Leader of the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party

## WHY TRADITION AND FREEDOM BOTH MATTER

*Curricular change ought always to be accompanied by a cultural debate, a discussion of what matters from the past. That has not happened in Scotland, says **Lindsay Paterson**, Professor of Education Policy at Edinburgh University.*

Scotland likes to think of itself as enjoying a consensus about education. It is the land of the democratic intellect, a place where learning is supposedly free and respected by all. It prides itself on discussing educational topics without rancour, on there being a consensus around recent educational reforms. There may be some arguments over resources, but the principles are intact.

But there are two versions of Scottish educational principles now being practised in the UK, seemingly in stark contrast with each other. One is in the Curriculum for Excellence, as agreed by all political parties in Scotland, and by most shades of professional opinion. It is radically child-centred, placing 'the child or young person ... at the centre of learning provision.'<sup>1</sup> It concentrates on action not contemplation, on outcomes not on traditions, on 'what a child or young person should be able to do and the experiences that contribute to their learning, rather than detailed definitions of content or prescribed hours of study.'<sup>2</sup> It is a supreme instance of what the former Education Secretary in England, Michael Gove, called 'hostility towards traditional, academic, fact-rich, knowledge-centred, subject-based, teacher-led education.'<sup>3</sup>

And that, by contrast, is the second version of Scottish educational philosophy – Mr

Gove's, practised in England but deeply Scottish in its ideas: 'having grown up in Scotland,' he has explained, 'I identify the principle that all should have access to the best with the Scottish Enlightenment ideal of the Democratic Intellect. It is an ideal which underpins everything I am arguing for.'<sup>4</sup> He describes it as embodying 'every citizen's right to draw on our stock of intellectual capital.'<sup>5</sup> The democratic intellect is democratic because the intellect is empowering: 'for those who grow up in homes rich in knowledge, where conversation is laced with learning and childhood curiosity is easily satisfied, future learning is made easier, deeper understanding comes more readily.' For those who do not have that privilege, only the public education system can make up the absence: 'for those of us who were not brought up in such homes the need for an education rich in facts and respectful of knowledge is all the greater.'<sup>6</sup>

So there we have the two Scotlands: liberation through spontaneous freedom, through action, through breaking loose from stultifying tradition; and liberation through initial humility, through entering into a rich legacy in order to learn from centuries of accumulated knowledge how to emulate the best. The Curriculum for Excellence has so completely come to dominate the Scottish consensus, and Mr Gove is so execrated by liberal opinion in Scotland, that the contrast even became one part of that vast utopian radicalism that underpinned the Yes campaign in the referendum on independence. The journalist Lesley Riddoch, prominently part of that campaign, wrote in August 2014:

1. p.22 in Scottish Government (2008). *Curriculum for Excellence: Building the Curriculum* 3. Edinburgh: Scottish Government.  
 2. p. 5 in *ibid*.  
 3. p. 20 in Gove, M. (2008). 'Higher standards, freer minds'. Haberdashers' Aske's Education lecture, 18 November.  
 4. p. 4 in Gove, M. (2009). 'What is education for?'. Speech to the RSA, 30 June.  
 5. p. 2 in *ibid*.  
 6. p. 24 in Gove (2008), 'Higher standards'.

*Scottish education now aims to develop deeper learning with pupils truly understanding subjects rather than just regurgitating facts and figures – a change devised by the last Labour/Lib Dem Scottish Government and implemented by the SNP. In other words, there is a settled will in Scotland to have an educational system which spends less time examining and dividing pupils, ... combines practical and abstract knowledge and crosses subject boundaries in learning.<sup>7</sup>*

About the only point in common between Ms Riddoch and Mr Gove is in handing control of this to teachers, but for two quite contradictory purposes. Ms Riddoch would trust them in the way that we might trust a doctor to be the best judge of a patient's symptoms, the person best-placed to understand what needs to be done in practice. Mr Gove would trust the teacher only to the extent that the teacher is an expert embodiment of tradition and, through that, of valid authority.

This contrast is not new, and not just Scottish, and the debate between them gets to the heart of the difficulties which any society faces in deciding how to prepare young generations for the future and yet also to maintain and renovate its valuable traditions from the past. Mr Gove may be provocative, but his public manner does not detract from the force of his case. Curriculum for Excellence may be vague because it concentrates on the child, not on what the child must learn, but no teacher, not even one enthusiastically following Mr Gove's ideas, could remain effective if the needs and interests and personality of each individual child were ignored.

Neither can the two sides of this argument be neatly assigned to political ideologies: in truth, there are right wing and left wing versions of each. Child-centred education has, since the 1960s, usually been associated with what we might call the romantic left, and certainly the hostility of Margaret Thatcher's government to it helped that link to be maintained. In the 1960s, the ideal of child-centredness was to liberate children from what was felt to be the dead hand of tradition and of unwarranted authority. No longer was the curriculum to be divided into subjects, and no longer were children studying it to be seen and not heard. Learning was to be active. It was to be based on projects in the real world, which would draw on several school subjects since real-world problems do not come divided into disciplinary bundles. Children would be encouraged to follow their interests since only when engaged emotionally does a child learn very much. So teachers were what later came to be called facilitators or consultants, though the 1960s rhetoric might have preferred words such as liberator: the teacher would advise, encourage, perhaps cajole; but would not impose.

The seeds of Curriculum for Excellence are there in that ferment of left-wing anti-establishment radicalism that the 1960s spawned. The scope was made much greater by the internet, so that it became practicable for children to discover things for themselves. Schools would become what one of Tony Blair's educational advisers called 'learning networks'<sup>8</sup>, in which the teachers would not even be guides to knowledge, being, instead, counsellors on how to learn.

7. Riddoch, L. (2014). 'Let's concentrate on real debate'. *The Scotsman*, 10 August.

8. p.183 in Bentley, T. (1998). *Learning Beyond the Classroom*. London: Demos.

Yet child-centredness is much older than the 1960s, and also much more philosophically distinguished than the right-wing caricatures of that indubitably naïve decade might lead us to believe. The ideas go back ultimately to the great freeing of European thought which came with the eighteenth-century Enlightenment: Mr Gove's opponents have their origins there as firmly as he does. They were expressed most eloquently by Rousseau, challenging stale authority. They were developed by European Romanticism in the early decades of the nineteenth century as a rebellion against the most barbarous treatment of children during the early phases of industrialism – what Dickens castigated to great effect in *Hard Times*, and what Robert Owen tried to counter with his pioneering child-centred schooling at New Lanark. And they became an intellectual movement by the early twentieth century, led by philosophical radicals such as Bertrand Russell, but coming to permeate some of the most influential currents of educational thought, such as the report on secondary education of the Scottish Advisory Council on Education in 1947: 'the good school is to be assessed not by any tale of examination successes, however impressive, but by the extent to which it has filled the years of youth with security, graciousness and ordered freedom.'<sup>9</sup> That is not anarchy, but it is very firmly child-centred.

So child-centredness has deep roots, including deep Scottish roots, and is by no means the passing whim that Mr Gove sometimes, in his more extravagant moments, likes to suggest. It also, we might add, has impeccably right-wing roots, too, finding expression for example in the

origins of outdoor education, but most notably in the sphere of vocational education, where the challenge of persuading disaffected young people is the central question facing educational policy. That role for student-centred education first came to prominence in the 1930s, and was intensified during Mrs Thatcher's government of the 1980s, so much so, in fact, that even some very left-wing writers about education could praise what one of them – Stephen Ball of London University – called 'vocational progressivism' for maintaining the principles of the 1960s.<sup>10</sup> The current belief that education is a route to social mobility belongs to this way of thinking: there could be nothing more student-centred than thinking of education as a route into a worthwhile career.

Yet, counter to that, is the tradition which interprets the democratic intellect as being first of all about the intellect, and about shaping it by immersion in a tradition of enquiry. Just as the child-centred ideas are often – inaccurately – thought of as the preserve of the left, so this tradition is often thought of as belonging to the right. It is true that some of the most cogent expositions of these ideas have come from conservative thinkers. Professor Michael Oakeshott, philosophically conservative though never politically partisan, deplored in 1975 the tendency to seek 'relevance' in the curriculum, or to equate education with 'socialisation'. It was not even enough, he believed, to encourage 'general' education (in the manner, we might add, of Curriculum for Excellence). 'Learning to think for oneself' or cultivating 'intelligence', or inculcating 'certain intellectual and moral aptitudes', desirable though these implied ends might be, can

9. p.10 in Scottish Education Department (1947). *Secondary Education*. Edinburgh: HMSO.

10. pp. 101-19 in Ball, S.J. (1990). *Politics and Policy Making in Education*. London: Routledge.

never be achieved in the abstract.<sup>11</sup> They can be developed only in contact with a culture, with a tradition of thought, with what the nineteenth-century liberal Matthew Arnold called ‘the best that has been thought and said.’ Mr Gove admires Arnold, and it is to that tradition that he and the Scottish democratic intellect mainly belong. Mr Gove’s critics generally reject this tradition as invidious, exclusive, and – contrary to Curriculum for Excellence – placing the subjects that are to be learnt ahead of the person who is doing the learning.

Yet it is as inaccurate to describe this way of thinking as being of the right as it is to portray child-centredness as being only about left-wing anarchism. Oakeshott’s immediate predecessor in 1951 as professor of political science at the London School of Economics was Harold Laski, firmly on the left, and one of the most influential of socialist thinkers in Britain in the period between the wars. Marxist though he was, he respected – even venerated – the past: he wrote in 1930 that ‘what ... it is essential for the student to encounter is the great mind which has formed the civilised tradition.’<sup>12</sup> R. H. Tawney, more than any single person the shaper of the Labour Party’s ideas on education between the early 1920s and the 1960s – and, like Laski, a professor at the L.S.E. – believed that ‘no one can be fully at home in the world’ unless they are acquainted with the cultural traditions of society, in which he included ‘literature and art, the history of society and the

revelations of science.’<sup>13</sup>

And, for Scottish debate, the association between these ideas and the principles of democratic intellectualism are fundamental. It was not child-centredness which lay at the heart of that tradition but rather a veneration of the intellect, an ultimately Calvinist belief that the good person can be shaped through the mind, though with an admixture of Catholic rationalism and of socialism of the kind which Laski and Tawney expressed. More than any other, one Scot in the twentieth century combined all these currents of thought, A. D. Lindsay, philosopher, Master of Balliol College, Oxford, founder of the University of Keele in 1951, and a son of a Presbyterian manse in Glasgow, Labour politician, and – in the 1930s – public opponent of appeasement. He summed up the importance of both tradition and radical innovation succinctly: the central problem of educational policy, he said, is finding ‘a standard which [i]s corrigible and progressive, creative and authoritative.’<sup>14</sup> To this end, the study of a canon of English literature was – for this socialist – democratically indispensable: ‘an understanding and appreciation of English poetry, of its history and its relations to the history of English culture, is a far more effective way of teaching a common outlook on the world, and a common understanding of our heritage, than a technical instruction in Philosophy.’<sup>15</sup>

Moreover, not only is there a distinguished left-wing tradition of attachment to ideas

11 pp. 31-2 in Oakeshott, M. (1989 [1975]). ‘A place of learning’. Reprinted in Michael Oakeshott on Education (ed. T. Fuller). New Haven: Yale University Press.

12 p. 97 in Laski, H (1930). ‘Teacher and student’. In *The Dangers of Obedience, and Other Essays*. New York: Harper and Brothers.

13 p.88 in Tawney, R.H. (1964 [1953]). ‘The Workers’ Educational Association and adult education’. Reprinted in *The Radical Tradition*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

14 p. 145 in Lindsay, A.D. (1957 [1950]). ‘Philosophy as a Criticism of Standards’. Paper read to The Scots Philosophical Club, September 1950. Reprinted in A.D. Lindsay, *Selected Addresses* (privately published).

15 p. 370 in Scott, D. (1971). *A.D. Lindsay*. Oxford: Blackwell.

very similar to Mr Gove's; there is also a right-wing distrust of them, a philistinism in some segments of Conservative thought that presumably makes Mr Gove shiver in private. If Margaret Thatcher and her main educational adviser Keith Joseph presided over what the left could admire as vocational learner-centredness, they also imposed what Professor Anthony O'Hear called at the time an educational utilitarianism that is inimical to sound learning of any kind: 'the educational theorists and politicians who want to bring about a respect for "wealth creation" and to make education "relevant" to "the needs of industry"' were in effect imposing the quite anti-educational 'belief in the overweening importance of the present moment and the stimulations and demands of the present.'<sup>16</sup>

Curriculum for Excellence, just like these Thatcherite forebears, ignores tradition, or at best takes it for granted: it has nothing worthwhile to say about why tradition is important, of why we might want children to learn where they have come from, of how the multiple currents of cultural ideas that we inherit are what shape any capacity we have to be innovative. The Curriculum for Excellence does touch on such matters, but always cursorily because its focus is always on the learner, never on what has to be learnt. Curricular change ought always to be accompanied by a cultural debate, a discussion of what matters from the past. That has not happened in Scotland.

Although Michael Gove has paid scant attention to how students might be encouraged to engage with the cultural legacy, his thinking and practice have

directed our attention to the necessity of paying attention to it. In that sense, he is a more truly and thoughtfully conservative a politician than any education minister in the governments of the 1980s and 1990s. He is also thoroughly Scottish in his sources, as Scottish in a cultural sense as his worthy rival, the SNP's Michael Russell who became Scottish Education Secretary after 2009. The two men might agree about much, not only about Scottish culture but also about the much greater educational traditions to which the democratic intellect is heir. If a choice had to be made, then preserving the best that has been thought and said – Mr Gove's public preference – is the more compelling of the two philosophies that have been outlined here, since, if we forget that, then we have nothing left.

But the choice need not be so stark. Indeed, the very existence of the contrast is inimical to thinking creatively about it, something that has never properly been done since the present phase of massive expansion of education started in the 1960s. How do we find ways in which the great intellectual traditions are, at some level, engaged with by most pupils? Scotland started to do that with the Standard Grade reforms of the 1980s – a Labour legacy that was presided over by the Conservatives and which quickly came to be accepted by teachers. The philosophy of these courses was to enable all the main domains of knowledge to be made available to a much wider range of students than had ever been able to take part in such learning previously. That was the last time in Scotland when a respect for inherited structures of knowledge and practice was deliberately combined in

16 p.104 in O'Hear, A. (1987). The importance of traditional learning'. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 35, pp. 102-14

policy with an understanding of the diverse needs of individual learners. Thereafter, the learner – and choice, relevance, and utility – came gradually to dominate.

At a time when Scotland is so concerned with its traditions, has opted in the referendum of 2014 to acknowledge politically the multiple traditions to which it belongs, and yet neglects the importance of tradition in its school curriculum, there is a strange vacuum at the heart of how we think about education. How the two dominant trajectories of educational policy are to be reconciled is not at all clear, but if they are ever to be brought together then they both have to be expressed with some force inside Scottish debate. Scotland used to have many exponents of the kind of intellectualism to which Mr Gove aspires, many of them from political positions quite different from his. Any party which began to question, not child-centredness but the uncritical adoption of it in Curriculum for Excellence, might start to shape the Scottish educational debate profoundly. Whatever the eventual resolution of the resulting tensions between these two positions, Scotland would eventually be able to develop, more carefully and self-consciously than it has had for a long time, an understanding of the variety of ways in which a society might engage critically with the many traditions that have formed it.

## Two cheers for Curriculum for Excellence

*If Scotland is to become again a country with a genuinely cutting-edge education system that is perceived as world leading, the complacency and the self-congratulation must go, says **Keir Bloomer**, who is an independent education consultant. He was Director of Education and later Chief Executive of Clackmannanshire Council. As a member of the review group which wrote "A Curriculum for Excellence" (Scotland's national curriculum), he has been closely involved with curriculum reform.*

### Introduction

Scotland has long been proud of its education system. Indeed, education, along with the law and the church, was greatly prized after the Act of Union because it retained its distinctively Scottish character. Of the three, it is now unquestionably the one with the greatest impact on Scottish society.

Furthermore, Scottish pride has been well-founded. The fact that many people were able to sign their own names, rather than merely, make marks on the seventeenth century Covenants shows that the ability to write was widespread. By the end of the eighteenth century, Scotland seems to have been the most literate society in Europe. The Enlightenment and the industrial revolution were, in large part, the result of the quality of education offered by Scotland's schools and universities.

Scotland's universities remain world class. Collectively, their contribution to the Scottish economy is huge and their influence is global. Three – Edinburgh,

Glasgow and St. Andrews – are placed in the top hundred universities of the world.

This article, however, is concerned with school education. In this case, the picture is more mixed. Two indicators of quality call for more detailed consideration. How does the performance of Scotland's schools compare with that of other countries? How successful has Scotland been in improving the prospects of young people coming from disadvantaged families and communities? There are, of course, other aspects of the system that might profitably be examined but, in an increasingly globalised and competitive world, these two will largely determine how successful Scotland will be over the coming decades.

### How good are Scotland's schools

At the time of the National Debate on Education in 2002, thousands of parents, teachers and others addressed these questions and the conclusions they reached were optimistic. Scotland's schools, they said were doing a good job. The great majority of young people were receiving a good education and being well prepared for later life. There were reasons why schools should change but they had to do with changes in the world rather than failures in the system.

Twelve years on, there seems little reason to change that impressionistic judgment. Looked at in isolation, Scotland's schools continue to provide a good service. The great majority of young people emerge well prepared and qualified for later life. Standards are high and vary surprisingly

little. Scotland's teaching profession is both good and improving.

However, it is now more possible – and more necessary - to see how Scottish education compares with what is on offer elsewhere.

International rankings of school performance are a relatively new venture and methodologies are still the subject of considerable dispute. There is obvious scope to question whether they measure the aspects of young people's learning that will prove most important in determining success as the twenty-first century unfolds.

Nevertheless, they have quickly become very influential. Across the world, governments are convinced that high educational performance is a crucial determinant of economic progress and, to perhaps a slightly lesser extent, of a stable and contented society. The outcomes of the main international surveys, especially of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), are eagerly awaited. Poor PISA scores can throw an education system into crisis. In many countries, raising PISA performance has become a key objective, influencing – perhaps distorting – what goes on in classrooms.

Apart from PISA there are two other highly-regarded studies; the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Survey (TIMSS). Scotland has now withdrawn from these two, thus reducing the amount of evidence available to Scottish policy makers and the public. It is difficult to avoid the suspicion that Scotland has chosen to make itself less accountable by ceasing to take part in

the surveys in which it tended to do less well.

By the time of Scotland's withdrawal from PIRLS, 19 countries were performing better. Most of these were countries with developed economies, in other words, Scotland's direct competitors. By contrast almost half of those operating at a similar or lower level were third world countries with seriously under-funded schools and no heritage of operating at a level remotely comparable to Scotland.

If anything, Scotland's performance in TIMSS was a cause of greater worry. The following tables show that performance in maths could be described, at best, as static while a decline in science is very clear.

### Mathematics

Year group	1995	2003	2007
P5	493	490	494
S2	493	498	487

### Science

Year group	1995	2003	2007
P5	514	502	500
S2	501	512	496

Of course, these results are now some distance out of date. For more recent comparative statistics, only PISA is available. It measures the competence of fifteen year olds in three areas; reading, mathematics and science. Each time the survey is undertaken, one of these subjects is examined in greater detail. The survey looks at competence at six levels ranging from simple factual recall to

complex problem solving. It cannot, therefore, easily be dismissed as a measure only of routine low level tasks. This last point is of considerable importance. There is a tendency to dismiss the excellent performance of parts of China and other countries of the Pacific Rim by conjuring up stereotypes of serried ranks of children reciting facts by rote. PISA, however, tests much more than that.

The following table sets out Scotland's results in the five surveys so far. The international average is set at 500 points.

	2000	2003	2006	2009	2012
Reading	526	516	499	500	506
Maths	533	524	506	499	498
Science	522	514	515	514	513

In all three areas, Scotland's performance was significantly worse in 2012 than it had been in 2000. The best that can be said is that the rapid decline between 2000 and 2006 appears to have been halted. There is little sign of recovery.

Yet the Scottish Government hailed PISA 2012 as a success. Predictably, much was made of Scotland's supposed lead over England. The figures, however, reveal that the difference is of little significance.

	Scotland	England
Reading	506	500
Maths	498	495
Science	513	516

Neither country has done particularly well – below average in maths, average in reading and rather better in science. The following table gives an indication of how

the best performers compare:

	Shanghai	Singapore	Hong Kong	Taiwan	South Korea
Reading	613	573	561	560	554
Maths	570	542	545	523	536
Science	580	551	555	523	538

The fact that Scotland's performance was billed as a success is very significant because it demonstrates the tendency to self-congratulation, which is such a damaging aspect of the culture in which Scottish education operates. The difference between the public stance of Scottish and English education ministers over the years is instructive. English ministers are almost always unrelenting and negative critics of the system while their Scottish counterparts are the chief cheerleaders. Neither of these is a healthy standpoint. Neither assists their respective systems to learn from their experience.

Another suggestion made by the Government was that the results showed a narrowing of the gap between the most and least successful Scottish students. The evidence for this is slim. Indeed, examination of levels of success at different percentile points over a period of time suggests otherwise. Taking the lowest and highest performing groups in 2003 and 2012, it would appear that, while there had been a decline at all levels, it was greater among the low-performing than the high-performing in maths and reading. In other words, equity had declined. In science, where overall decline has not been significant since 2003, equity has increased but only because performance at the highest level has

dropped. Presumably, this is not how 'closing the gap' is supposed to happen.

This obviously raises the other key measure of performance; ensuring that opportunity is being successfully taken up by all children rather than only those from more advantaged circumstances.

It has been an objective of virtually every important Scottish educational reform for half a century to improve the prospects of the disadvantaged. This was the aim of introducing comprehensive education in the mid-1960s and it is one of the purposes of Curriculum for Excellence today. Sincere efforts have been made throughout this long period both by teachers and by politicians of all parties to make Scottish education fairer. And they have failed.

The proportion of young people experiencing serious educational disadvantage has remained approximately constant at about 20%. It could, indeed, be argued that their relative disadvantage has increased. Society has become more polarized. Highly qualified people have seen their earnings steadily increase, both in real terms and in comparison with the national average. At the other end of the scale, people have seen the value of their low-skilled labour fall. Over the period of this century so far, the 'graduate premium' may have increased by as much as 20% in real terms while there has been a decline of at least 10% in the pay of the unskilled.

This is, of course, a matter of supply and demand. There are too few suitably qualified applicants for jobs requiring the highest level of skill. The opposite is true

at the other end of the scale. The education system has failed to keep up. Radical improvement would be needed before it could match labour market requirements. To a large extent, that is true of every country. Schools are simply not as effective as they need to be.

There is another sense in which the gap has widened. The growing complexity of many jobs means that the unskilled are even further from being able to compete. Employers are also concerned about attitudes to work in households where there has been generations of worklessness. It is becoming increasingly clear that 'excluded' is unfortunately all too accurate a description for many of the young people who fail at school.

### **How important are these shortcomings?**

Children growing up today will enter an adult world very different from anything experienced even in the recent past. The pace of change is more rapid and is still accelerating. The impact of globalisation becomes ever greater. The opportunities and threats of the modern world are without precedent.

A country with a developed economy such as Scotland will prosper in the future only if a large, and ever-increasing, section of its workforce is capable of operating somewhere near the cutting edge of knowledge. A modern economy will support many jobs at all levels of skill but it is driven by ideas, innovation and the high added-value of intellectual property. Without a successful, creative, leading-edge sector, an economy will inevitably enter relative decline.

The point is well illustrated by the case of the iPhone. Most are assembled in Shenzhen in southern China from components made in a host of countries. Of the \$560 selling price of the iPhone4 in 2011, the assembly accounted for \$14 and the components for \$178. The remaining \$368 was Apple's slice; the value of the ideas, design, R&D and so forth.

The kinds of skills that are essential in this globally competitive world are problem solving, creativity and systems thinking. They in turn are dependent on other more basic skills, crucially literacy and numeracy. Furthermore, staying competitive depends on adaptability and skills of continuous learning through life.

It is now quite unrealistic to expect schools to give young people a complete toolkit of knowledge and know-how to last a lifetime. Rather, the aim must be to equip young people with the attitudes and skills of adaptable lifelong learners. Schools today must be in the business of preparing young people for a future that cannot be foreseen for more than a few years ahead. Educators have never previously faced such a challenge.

Despite growing prosperity, modern economies seem to have only a limited capacity (or willingness) to carry passengers. The outlook for the ill-educated, unqualified and unmotivated is bleak indeed.

It is probably fair to say that international competition in standards of education has been driven primarily by this kind of economic consideration. However, there

are at least two other vital concerns that must be borne in mind.

Firstly, the history of the modern era makes clear that economic failure is almost always followed by social collapse. Social harmony is closely bound up with continuing prosperity. Economic success is perhaps not the most important objective but it is a prerequisite of achieving other less material aims.

Secondly, as human society faces the massive challenges of the contemporary world, especially achieving a sustainable future, it becomes increasingly clear that developing an enlightened culture of public opinion is of huge importance. Many people are alienated from politics because they believe that contemporary democracy affords them little, if any, influence on society. It is, of course, true that the individual's voice or vote has negligible impact. However, the condition of public opinion is another matter. An ill-informed and unthinking public makes it more profitable for politicians to appeal to ignorance and prejudice; an educated public has the opposite effect.

Whether judged from an economic or a more altruistic viewpoint, it is clear that having good schools is no longer enough. There is a need for education systems in the future to be far more effective than they have been up to now. Standards need to rise across the board and particular effort has to be devoted to trying to ensure that the gap between the disadvantaged and other learners narrows at the same time. Unless these conditions are met, serious economic and social problems will almost certainly follow.

## Scotland's big idea

The previous section implied a set of objectives. Young people need to be helped to be “successful learners”, “confident individuals”, “effective contributors” and “responsible citizens”. This is, of course, what Curriculum for Excellence seeks to achieve.

There is nothing uniquely Scottish about this vision. Over the past decade many governments have been reconsidering the purposes of education and have adopted mission statements setting out very similar objectives, often in similar words.

UNESCO's commission on education, chaired by Jacques Delors, attempting to devise a global mission for school education talked about “learning to do”, “learning to be”, “learning to learn” and “learning to live with others”. It would be difficult to identify any important difference between this and the objectives of Curriculum for Excellence. In other words, Scottish thinking is firmly placed in the global mainstream.

Furthermore, the programme that has emerged is notably ambitious and comprehensive. It contains many strands of which the following are, perhaps, the most important.

1. There is a commitment to a long-term programme of iterative change in which successive innovations bring the system gradually closer to its four objectives.
2. Success is to be seen in terms of outcomes – what young people learn to do and be – rather than in terms of inputs.

3. Cultivating skills – especially advanced cognitive skills – is seen as essential.
4. Knowledge remains vital but is not in itself sufficient. Teachers need to help young people become active learners, making sense of what they encounter, not merely remembering it.
5. To achieve this, learners have to be much more positively engaged with their learning. Intrinsic motivation is important.
6. Learning in school is important but so too is what is learned elsewhere. Schools need to value wider achievement.
7. Young people need to become familiar with the main disciplines such as maths or science or history but they also need to understand the connections among them. The curriculum should balance disciplinary and interdisciplinary learning.
8. Education should become increasingly personalised or suited to the needs of the individual.
9. Learning needs to be coherent and continuous. Points of transition, for instance from primary to secondary school, should be as smooth as possible.
10. Greater flexibility is needed, especially in the later years of school education where alternative pathways to different kinds of destination should be available. Vocational education has an important part to play.

This is a highly enlightened programme. It has the capacity to create the kind of education that would compare with the best in the world. However, having good ideas is not necessarily the same as realising them successfully.

## How are we doing?

Curriculum for Excellence is approaching its tenth birthday: the original document was published in November 2004. It would be reasonable to expect substantial progress across that timescale.

And, in some respects, significant progress has taken place. The Experiences and Outcomes have sought to define the curriculum in terms of outcomes and have influenced teachers' planning and classroom practice. However, many teachers have experienced real problems in interpreting them and the formula works better in some curricular areas than others. Revision is certainly required but the approach has much to commend it.

Teachers have taken on the notion of active learning but more requires to be done. This concept, which is the central principle of Curriculum for Excellence, perhaps warrants more attention than it has received. Nevertheless, there is a general awareness that developing understanding and the capacity to apply knowledge are vitally important.

Schools value what young people learn elsewhere more than they ever did before. Achievement is being recognised in increasingly diverse ways.

Learner engagement is a success story of Curriculum for Excellence. Almost everywhere teachers are seeking to help young people take increasing responsibility for their own learning.

Much more could be said that is positive. Good practice could be found in relation to every item on the earlier list. However,

there are also serious problems and shortcomings.

At a very basic level, there is insufficient understanding of the essence of Curriculum for Excellence. Parents, employers and learners themselves lack a clear grasp of what it is, why it is necessary or how it will make things different. Even teachers, if asked to define it, would produce a myriad of answers, none perhaps wrong but showing a bewildering variety. The big ideas have simply not been communicated.

The all-important idea of iterative change is being lost and, with it, the notion of an agreed long-term sense of direction. Instead, the familiar concept of implementation is taking over. At any rate in the secondary sector, examination changes have become all-important. Immense effort is being put in to relatively minor changes while teachers entertain the expectation that the pace will slacken once the new examinations are in place. By opting for examination reform, government ensured that attention would be almost wholly diverted from the lower secondary where the need for change was greater and more urgent.

In relation to skills and interdisciplinary learning the programme has lacked ambition. The main guidance on the former is contained in the weakest of the Building the Curriculum series while high level guidance on the latter is conspicuous by its absence.

This mixture of achievement and missed opportunity is typical of educational reform in Scotland. A scorecard on Standard

Grade or 5-14 or earlier structural changes such as comprehensive reorganisation or raising the school leaving age would reveal a similar balance and the same ultimate outcome; reform falling well short of expectations and promise.

Scotland does not lack good ideas but it lacks the capacity to capitalize on them.

### **What is to be done?**

Scotland needs to look seriously at how it brings about educational change.

Experience has repeatedly shown that having worthwhile ideas is not enough. Developing a policy does not guarantee that change will take place.

The single most important factor in achieving change is winning commitment and support for it. Public opinion is important and parental opinion even more so. However, the key constituency is teachers. Teachers need to believe that the proposed change is necessary and likely to achieve its objectives. They are more likely to believe if they are convinced it will address difficulties they are actually experiencing. Poorly explained proposals that are externally imposed will never achieve much.

In one respect this lesson has been learned. It is understood that teachers' professional development of huge importance. Resources in this area have not been cut during the current financial difficulties in the way that would have happened in the past. It is time to take this appreciation of the need to invest in building capacity into the field of policy development and implementation.

There needs also to be a clear understanding of the difference between high-level strategy and other areas of decision making. It is legitimate for government to set a clear sense of direction, as was done by the original Curriculum for Excellence paper in 2004.

One of the aims set out in that paper was to empower schools and teachers, thus releasing their creative energies. In retrospect, it is clear that not enough was done to spell out what that would mean or at what level particular decisions could be made. Neither was attention given to building the professional self-confidence needed in a more decentralised system. The results have been confusion, reversion to a belief that all important decisions are taken at the centre and a growing demand from teachers to be told what to do.

The guiding principle should be subsidiarity, the concept that decisions are best taken at the lowest level consistent with effectiveness. In other words, in the absence of legislation or regulation, the default assumption should be that the school has the right to decide.

Recent years have seen a decrease in the resources available to local government. Most councils have tried to protect spending at school level, preferring to make cuts in central support services. While this is in many ways very commendable, it means that, in many areas, councils lack the means to help schools. It is becoming increasingly difficult to see what they add to the process of educational management.

It is interesting that CoSLA, probably in

anticipation of local government reform becoming an issue in the 2016 Scottish Parliament elections, decided to establish a commission to look at the future of Scotland's councils. In a lucid and potentially radical report, the commission argued that the central role of local government is promoting democracy, especially at grassroots level. The report argues that Scotland is one of the most centralised countries in the developed world and that the need is for more (and, therefore, more local) councils. This is, of course, quite contrary to the prevailing, but ill-founded, wisdom that education would best be managed through 10 or so regional authorities.

The decision on the future of local government should be made on the basis of what best serves democracy in an increasingly devolved Scotland. However, the question of how schools are best managed and supported is important too and it is quite possible that the best approach to local government reform would require schools to be managed in some other way.

This, however, is not inevitable. It is quite possible to see how even quite small local councils could have a role in helping schools to network and assist each other, to collaborate with other services and to meet community needs. This would be a very different role from the current role of councils (that they are decreasingly able to fulfil) but it could be a valid one.

At the heart of this discussion is the question of accountability. Here there is a paradox. Teachers and schools have powerful feelings of responsibility to young

people, their families and, to perhaps a lesser extent, their communities. However, they are not formally accountable to any of these. Schools' accountability is to local and national politicians through local education directorates, HMI and other bodies. Many teachers, however, have no strong feelings of responsibility to them. Whatever the future structure of local government and the nature of its involvement in education, it is important that lines of accountability and feelings of responsibility are brought into closer alignment.

This clearly requires a strengthening of governance arrangements at a very local level. Scotland does not have a tradition of effective governing bodies except in the independent sector. However, such bodies are a potential source of strength and a useful counterweight in a system in which the power of central government is increasing as that of local government declines.

Another, and totally compatible, way in which this very local tier of governance could be strengthened is by seeing the cluster, rather than the individual school, as the key unit in the organisation of the system. Such a development is already under way. Most local authorities are trying to promote more collaboration at cluster level in order to achieve better curricular continuity, better transitions and more effective support for pupils with difficulties as they progress from one level to the next. In more rural areas, it is becoming increasingly common for a single headteacher to take charge of more than one school. The logical endpoint of these developments is to see the group of pre-

five, primary, secondary (and possibly ASN) establishments as a single 3 to 18 institution under unified management and governance.

An added advantage would be that, instead of requiring well over 2500 school leaders, less than 400 would be needed. The demand for exceptional leaders would become more realistic. The management capacity of the cluster would be much more powerful than that of the individual school, especially that of small pre-five establishments and primary schools. Were the idea of setting up an effective local tier of governance to be adopted, it would also be easier to ensure the availability of committed and capable lay members, especially in areas of deprivation where these might be difficult to recruit in the numbers required if the school, rather than the cluster, were to be the unit.

Apart from reforming its management and governance arrangements, Scotland requires to be more confident and innovative. It is ironic that innovation at school level appears to be more widespread in England where the inhibitions imposed by statute and regulation are much greater. A quarter of a century of consistent transfer of operational management decision-making to school level has clearly played a part. It is now vital that Scotland translates the empowering rhetoric of Curriculum for Excellence into practice. This is particularly important in relation to aspects of the programme, such as promoting skills and developing interdisciplinary learning, where action so far has been too tentative.

There is, however, a further step that

requires to be taken; one that depends on central government adopting a new and proactive role.

The principal role of central government in relation to schools, apart from being the main source of finance, is strategic direction. This should not imply micro-management or, indeed, involvement at all at an operational level. In principle, guidance at the high level of generality of the Building the Curriculum series is appropriate (although the planning of the series and the quality of individual papers have important shortcomings).

To this needs to be added a more ambitious and future-oriented role. Globally, education has been slow to change. Even in the best systems, what is being achieved falls far short of what is either possible or necessary. Education has lagged in exploiting the possibilities of new technology and exploring the implications of expanding knowledge of the learning process. It seems inconceivable that, were universal education in childhood and adolescence to be developed today for the first time, anything resembling the school - especially the secondary school - would be seen as the appropriate way forward.

Everywhere governments know that much of the organisation and practices of schools are seriously obsolescent but they have had little success in breaking out of the constraints of what remains in many ways a nineteenth century institutional structure. Within the context of a public education system - at any rate, as currently understood - only government has the capacity to seed and fund far-reaching

innovation. Over the years, this kind of long-term and radical change has not been a strength of government. If school education is to meet the needs of the twenty-first century, in Scotland or elsewhere, it needs to become so.

Finally, if Scotland is to become again a country with a genuinely cutting-edge education system that is perceived as world leading, the complacency and the self-congratulation must go. Scottish education has many strengths - fine teachers, forward-looking policies - but it needs to be constructively self critical. It needs, in short, to shed the defensiveness and become a learning system.

## **FOLLOW THE CHILD**

It is time for parents to be able to choose the nursery that suits them best, rather than have their choice restricted by the council, writes **Alison Payne**, Research Director, Reform Scotland

Pre-school provision is an important issue which can too often be sidelined as a “women’s issue”, as if somehow it is only of concern to mums, not dads.

Numerous studies have highlighted the importance of nursery education in helping the development of youngsters, but wider childcare issues are also important for parents and the country as a whole, not just in terms of helping people re-enter, or maintain, a position in the work-place; but a lack of affordable childcare can deter some people from having additional, or indeed any, children. Considering Scotland’s ageing population, this could have consequences for the economy and for public services in years to come.

The Scottish Government has recognised the importance of childcare and made a number of pledges, if Scotland becomes independent, to radically increase the amount of government-funded nursery and child-care provision available by the end of an independent Scotland’s first parliament. Although the commitment no longer stands because Scotland voted ‘No’ on September 18th, childcare and education are devolved areas of competence and, therefore, Scotland can still look to improve and simplify the existing system. (As an aside, I believe the Scottish Parliament should be responsible for raising what it spends, which would allow for greater discussion and debate over tax raising and spending priorities, as opposed to just focusing on spending.)

### **Background**

Although there had been historical provision for some three and four year olds to attend nursery in Scotland, provision varied from area to area. As a result, politicians at a Scotland-wide level tried to improve access for all which led to a few big policy ideas which have had a major impact on the debate on how nurseries are provided in Scotland – arguably, the main areas are old-style nursery vouchers and The Standards in Scotland’s Schools Etc Act 2000 (which placed a legal duty on local authorities to offer nursery provision and enabled them to use external providers to meet demand).

In 1995, the then Conservative Government proposed the introduction of a nursery voucher scheme with the intention of ensuring that all four year olds were able to access a year of nursery provision. Parents would receive a physical voucher for £1,100 a year which they could use to purchase nursery education. The voucher could be used to buy services from their local authority or from the private or third sector. Pilot schemes were undertaken in 1996/7 in parts of North Ayrshire, East Renfrewshire, Argyll & Bute and Highland local authority areas.<sup>1</sup> Critics of the scheme complained of the bureaucracy of

1 Local Government Chronicle, “£3m Scots Nursery Vouchers Pilot Scheme Announced”, 4/3/1996

the system and, following the 1997/8 school session, the new Labour Government scrapped the vouchers.<sup>2</sup> A study was carried out by Stirling University into the scheme and Sally Brown, Stirling's then deputy principal, told the TES:

"Parents are largely indifferent to the vouchers and some think they are an extra bureaucratic task. They are delighted with the provision that is free, provides them with guaranteed places and in some areas provides them with some choice."

This suggested that the idea of increased provision and some element of choice were popular, though the method by which it was delivered was seen as bureaucratic.

However, it was not until the enactment of The Standards in Scotland's Schools Etc Act 2000 that a duty was placed on local authorities to provide pre-school education to all three and four-year olds and set a minimum entitlement of the number of hours of pre-school education per year a child should be able to receive, if their parents wanted it. Section 35 of the Act also gave authorities express power to secure provision through suppliers other than themselves. It is up to each local authority who it commissions care from and, therefore, not all privately-run nurseries will necessarily be partnership providers. The ease of gaining partnership status will vary from council to council with some local authorities granting partnership status to a nursery, while others will only fund a certain number of places at a partnership nursery.

While the operation of the system varies from council to council, in many ways in some areas the Act re-introduced the nursery voucher scheme and choice of provision that the Conservatives tried to implement in the nineties, but adapted it for the 21st Century. For example, depending on where they live, some parents using a partnership nursery more or less get a virtual voucher with a discount applied to their bill to take account of the cost of providing the 600 hours in their area.

The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 also increased the entitlement so that currently all three and four-year olds are now entitled to 600 hours of government-funded nursery provision as well as vulnerable two-year olds.

## **Problems**

Despite the growth in nursery provision, there remain some variations in the ability of parents to secure government-funded nursery provision for their children.

Birthday discrimination:

Unlike school provision where all children start together in the autumn term normally in the calendar year they turn five, with nursery provision the entitlement only begins in the term after a child's third birthday. As a result, children born before the start of the autumn term will be able to receive two years of nursery education, but those born after this point will receive less. Children who are born in January and February and plan to

start school when they are four and a half may end up only receiving a year of nursery education. This can result in a year's difference in nursery provision based purely on when a child's birthday falls and is illustrated in Table 1 below:

**Table 1: Birthday discrimination in entitlement to government-funded nursery provision**

Child's birthday	Entitlement to government funded nursery provision begins	Total nursery entitlement before beginning school	Approximate entitlement in hours, based on 600 hours per year <sup>3</sup>	Approximate financial entitlement for partnership provision under 600 hours <sup>4</sup>	Number and percentage of births registered in 2012 - provision starts in 2015 <sup>5</sup>	Number and percentage of births registered in 2011 - provision starts in 2014 <sup>6</sup>
1 Mar to 31 Aug	August/ Autumn Term	2 years	1,200 hours	£4,200	28,980 50.0%	29,374 50.1%
1 Sept to 31 Dec	January/ Spring Term	18 months	1,000 hours	£3,500	18,627 32.2%	18,560 31.7%
1 Jan to 28 Feb (Assuming child starts school at 4)	April/ Summer Term	15 months	800 hours	£2,820	10,300 17.8%	10,658 18.2%

Table 1 illustrates that only 50 per cent of children are guaranteed the legal entitlement to two full years of government-funded nursery provision.<sup>7</sup>

Scottish Conservative MSP Elizabeth Smith put down amendments to correct this anomaly during the passing of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act, which would have ensured that all children were entitled to a basic 2 years of government-funded nursery provision. The amendments were supported by Labour and the Liberal Democrats, but were unfortunately voted down by the SNP.

The Scottish Government suggested<sup>8</sup> that the current system takes “proper account” of a child's development. However, the current practice of using the term after a child turns three is simply an arbitrary point in the year, as it takes no account of a child's development and no qualifications, such as a child being fully toilet trained, must be met. In addition, there is a wide variation in the age that a child's entitlement begins - a child born at the end of August starts nursery when they are 2 years 11 months, while a child born in early March starts nursery when they are 3 years 5 months. Reform Scotland wants one arbitrary point in time replaced by another, but our point will see all children

<sup>3</sup> We have approximated the hours based on each of the three terms being equal, therefore 200 hours per term.

<sup>4</sup> Edinburgh Council has yet to update its funding leaflet ([http://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/downloads/file/8809/pre-school\\_funding\\_leaflet](http://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/downloads/file/8809/pre-school_funding_leaflet)) that Reform Scotland used under the 475 hours regime, therefore I have based this on roughly £2,100 per year I receive as an Edinburgh parent. This would give costs of £3.50 per hour/£700 per term.

<sup>5</sup> Taken from the weekly birth registrations from the National Records of Scotland <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/statistics/theme/vital-events/general/weekly-monthly-births-death-data/weekly/index.html>

<sup>6</sup> Taken from the weekly birth registrations from the National Records of Scotland <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/statistics/theme/vital-events/general/weekly-monthly-births-death-data/weekly/index.html>

<sup>7</sup> According to the Growing up in Scotland research, Early Experiences of Primary School, published in 2012, just under 50 per cent of children born in January or February deferred entry for starting school in 2009. If the deferral rate remained the same, only 59 per cent of children born in 2011 and 2012 would in practice receive the full two years, or 1,200 hours provision.

<sup>8</sup> Scotsman, 7/1/14 - <http://www.scotsman.com/news/politics/top-stories/scots-tories-bid-to-change-unfair-nursery-care-1-3258423>

treated equally and, more importantly, all children will be entitled to the same basic 2 years of government-funded nursery provision.

#### Public/private:

There is a more fundamental problem, a problem that seems to be growing, and that is the attitude in certain areas to the use of the private sector in delivering government-funded nursery provision.

Partnership nurseries are private sector businesses which are paid to provide a public service. In this case, local authorities pay the partnership nurseries to deliver government-funded nursery entitlement. There seems to be a huge misunderstanding by some politicians that this means that parents are actively choosing private sector provision over the public sector and, arguably, as a result councils such as Glasgow, East Dunbartonshire and East Lothian have restricted the number of places that they will fund in partnership nurseries. Councils have suggested that parents can move their child to an alternative nursery either a council-run one or a different partnership one, as if the child was an object that could be taken out of one environment that they were secure and happy in and placed in another without consequence every time the council changed its mind about which nurseries they would give partnership places to.

However, this attitude also ignores the fact that in reality the public and private sector are offering very different provision. The majority of state nurseries, though this will vary from council to council, offer around 3 hours a day, for 5 days a week during the school year – which makes up the 600 hours funded by the Scottish Government. Some councils may allow hours to be bundled so that more than one session is taken in one day, others will not. Some may allow only part of a provision to be taken up, others will not. And these policies may change over time. There are no catchment areas for council nurseries, including nurseries attached to schools, so there is no guarantee of a place in a nursery at a convenient location (especially important if parents are also organising the drop-off and pick-up of other children at school or nursery.)

Therefore, for many working parents it is almost impossible to take up a place at a council nursery under those circumstances, unless you have some sort of wrap-around system in place through family, friends, or another nursery.

Councils are supposed to consult with parents and try to be more flexible. However, I have been present at meetings where this discussion veers towards a situation which suggests there is a potential conflict between a child's best interest and their parents' interest when it comes to childcare. Of course, it is vital that the childcare being provided should be of a high standard and provides an environment within which a child feels happy and secure. However, there is danger of pitching interests against each which could lead to the suggestion that a parent, normally a mother, should not work because it is not in the interests of her child to be in childcare for too long. After all you cannot have

more women working without more children using childcare, and using childcare for more than the 3 hours 10 minutes-a-day government provision. I also find it insulting to suggest that parents wouldn't try their best to ensure their child's best interests were met. Surely they are the best judge of their own child's interest, as opposed to any politicians or committee trying to second guess them?

At this juncture I should also declare a personal interest in this subject. I am a part-time working mum. Both my children began attending a partnership nursery in Edinburgh when they were about 10 months old, attending three days a week. Having children was my choice, as was returning to work. When my children turned 3, I was unable to take a position for either of my children at a local authority nursery. This was not a choice to avoid the public sector – my son has started at a state primary and my daughter will follow him there next year – it was simply a matter of practicality. If I wanted to carry on working, I would need to use a partnership nursery. However, thankfully because of the way the system works in Edinburgh, I received a virtual voucher towards the cost of my children's nursery provision via a monthly discount on my fees.

I don't regret sending my children to nursery and nor am I ashamed of it. I think this was the best decision for me and my family and I would argue with anyone who tried to tell me having my children attend the nursery they do, for the length of time they do was not in their interest. In saying that, I also acknowledge that this is also largely down to the excellent care they receive and it is important that, as a society, we place greater value on childcare workers. I have also been particularly fortunate in that my choice of nursery has responded to parental demand and extended its wrap-around cover to include the state school my son started in August. This means that I know that during the holiday and outside school hours, my son is in a secure environment he loves.

### **Nursery vouchers**

I don't claim to have all the answers regarding childcare, but I strongly believe that we need to embrace the partnership sector, which includes private and third sector nurseries. Local authority provision is simply inadequate to allow parents to work or study as well as ensuring their children receive nursery education. And once a child starts school, it is often the case that breakfast and after school clubs offered by some schools don't have enough places for all the children at the school. Local authority nurseries generally don't have the capacity to cater for school children out of school, but the partnership sector does.

Since we published our report in January 2013, a number of parents have contacted us, outlining really difficult situations they have faced trying to juggle working and accessing council nurseries. Too often I have heard stories from mothers, for it has normally been mothers who have contacted us, who have had to use private nurseries in order to carry on working, but being criticised for doing so with the inference that they must be well off to afford it and therefore shouldn't receive government funding – ignoring the plain truth

that they have no alternative. Indeed, some people who got in touch told us how their children received no government-provision, because they could not access the provision the local authority made available, either due to location or hours offered, so they had no alternative but to use a private nursery and pay the full price themselves.

Reform Scotland believes that as long as a nursery meets necessary standards set by both Education Scotland, which is responsible for inspection of the education side of the nursery, and the Care Inspectorate, which is responsible for inspection of the care side, parents should be able to take up their entitlement with that provider. This will offer far greater flexibility as parents can then access their child's entitlement in a way which better complements their family life. This would mean that a virtual nursery voucher scheme would be in place, where the funding follows the child and parents are able to choose the nursery which suits them best, rather than have their choice restricted by the council.

It is our hope that a premium could be added to the nursery entitlement scheme to help children from more disadvantaged backgrounds or those with special needs.

What Reform Scotland is calling for is not new, and works to a lesser or greater degree across Scotland at present, but is fully dependent on the attitude of the different local authorities.

Whilst I believe in greater decentralisation and greater local decision making, if a policy, such as nursery education for three and four year olds, is set centrally, as it currently is, then it is the Scottish Government's responsibility to ensure that the policy is actually delivered. It is unfair on both parents and children for the Scottish Government to set a policy, but allow local authorities to restrict the ability of parents to access that vital provision. It is not an excuse to argue that you have provided enough places in local authority nurseries, if parents are unable to access those places because the hours or location on offer make it impossible to access. All political parties argue they want to help get people into employment, training or education, so policies in other areas, such as nursery provision, need to reflect that and I believe that nursery vouchers would be a step in the right direction.

## HARD KNOCKS

*Sophie Sandor's school bottomed the league tables, she writes. Too many of her former class mates are being left behind by an education system that fails too many. Sophie is currently studying law at Edinburgh University.*

Education is the vehicle to creating the life you imagine no matter where you have started; the inception of ideas, ambition and freedom. But what if you attend one of the poorest performing schools in Scotland? Well, you may find the institution in which you spend most of your childhood stifles this potential.

Scotland's self-regarding claim to be one of the most highly-educated countries in Europe with a world-class education system and rising exam performance is blinding us to the discrepancies in quality of education being received in state schools across the country. Most worryingly, neglected educational institutions are not being rigorously brought to book. So the disadvantaged are ever less likely to reach the influential positions.

Neighbouring schools are performing to levels at opposite ends of the attainment spectrum. According to figures produced by Education Scotland, 1% of Glasgow's Drumchapel High School fifth year pupils achieved five or more Highers in 2013 while 24% achieved the same in the close-by Hyndland Secondary School. Far from a unique example in the city, hundreds of parallels can be drawn throughout Scotland with the greatest gaps being in

Dundee, Edinburgh and Glasgow. Attainment differences of at least 50% also exist in Dumfries and Galloway, Highland, Renfrewshire and Stirling.

Rankings rarely shift. My school still bottomed the league tables and bared a negative reputation when I left. At 11% below the national average, less than 4% had prospects of a good university place.

It points to a dangerous lack of competition. And it leads to the unhelpful stigma of being regarded as one of the 'worst schools'.

In a public statement by the Harvard University professor from Ayrshire – Niall Ferguson – our school was singled out. He declared he would not be where he was today had he attended Ayr Academy. This represents a saddening truth. Young people's chances to rise from the bottom through merit cannot be realised when when the state school you attend remains a major determinant factor in where you are headed.

Professor Ferguson went on to suggest that more scholarships and bursaries to private schools should be implemented while state schools are unsatisfactory. Although private schools set an example that, with a demand for quality, a school can become nothing short of amazing, there are exceptional state schools outperforming private schools in many areas. His has not been the first, nor will it be the last, of outside interventions in an attempt to highlight the problem with Scottish state schools.

Mine was a positive experience. Ayr Academy taught me resilience and tenacity for I soon learned I would have to seek out, grasp and hold tightly onto every opportunity in order to succeed. I left believing anything is possible, that mindset is everything and that so long as you possess a quality education, there is nothing that can stop you. However, as I know, too many are being left behind by an education system that is failing a generation.

The correlation between performance and socio-economic status – highlighted by indicators like low attainment coming hand-in-hand with a high number of pupils on free school meals – has been used as a scapegoat to conclude that poverty results in a poor education. Wrong. A poor education results in poverty.

This has been proven. Despite economic background having an evident effect on educational outcomes, a report released earlier this year by the Accounts Commission concluded: “[S]ome schools have achieved better attainment results than their levels of deprivation would indicate, suggesting that the gap between the lowest and highest performing schools cannot be wholly attributed to different levels of deprivation.”

If, like me and children I grew up with, you fall within the lowest income bracket entitling you to a childhood of free school lunches, your ability to learn for the six and half hours a day you spend at school is not diminished. Nor is your potential. Quite simply, it means greater investment in the educational experience is required because paying for private tuition and extra-curricular experiences are either

unaffordable or not a priority; often a number of contributing factors result in less educational advancement at home; and, imperatively, education is your greatest chance of alleviating yourself.

I was fortunate to find inspiration in my teachers at secondary school. Of particular influence was the leading lady of Modern Studies who opened my eyes to political activism. Not long after I started, she encouraged my first action of many at the school: a petition for our 1st year Westminster school trip to be put back on after its disappointing cancellation due to an absence of funding. This was not an unfamiliar story for us.

An underfunded school has so many more real consequences than the sacrifice of the odd school trip. A lot of the time we did not have enough textbooks, jotters, stationary, musical instruments, sports equipment – you name it. We even ran out of teachers. Teaching is an admirable challenge as it is. But when you cannot make it through the day with ease; when lesson plans have to be changed, classes delayed in search of essential learning tools and there are insufficient facilities to deal with disruptive pupils and pupils who wish to be further challenged – learning is affected and people are held back.

A 5% reduction in councils' spending on education when comparing the years of 2010/11 to 2012/13 was highlighted in the aforementioned Accounts Commission report. This is a result of the Scottish Government's 8% cut to councils' General Resource Grant which councils mainly dealt with by reducing numbers of teachers employed.

Education became solely Scotland's responsibility in 1999 – the year I started school. Fifteen disappointing years of devolved education have now passed. Among other free things, a prominently proud moment for the Scottish National Party – in power since 2007 – has been the removal of university tuition fees for every undergraduate student in Scotland. Given it benefits only those who are making it to university anyway, concerns have already been expressed that it does nothing to ameliorate the attainment gap or widen access to higher education in Scotland.

Edinburgh academics last year highlighted the little difference, if any, between Scotland and England's university applicant numbers post and pre devolution. Despite the stark contrast of Scotland's non-existent tuition fees since 2008 with England's increase to a yearly £9,000 cap, the numbers of those applying to university from the most-deprived quintile in society have been unchanged overall between 2001 and 2011. There was even a drop in Scotland from 8% down to 7% of the applications to our ancient universities being made up by the poorest fifth.

In an attempt to pass the buck to universities, another shamefully unambitious idea has been easing grade requirements for disadvantaged students to tamper with the outcome of our education system. Not least does it ignore the core need to improve education but it permeates an idea that money equates to ability. Social-engineering and free-for-all policies do not solve underlying problems but instead sustain a 'poverty cycle' and manifest the undesired societal attributes they purport to combat.

A misguided assumption that success was only possible for the few who were considering university created a noticeable gap in perceived prospects. High expectations and a belief and encouragement in everyone's ambitions are extremely important or young people can leave school with a very skewed view of the world; a world in which the paths to pursue are endless and which are definitely not limited to being academic. Focussing on those reaching university, and from this deducing the success of a school, looks past the importance of literacy levels, skills and experience to every child from the very beginning. The unfairness experienced when applying to higher education transcends into every sphere of life and the working world.

So the answers lie not in adjusting outcomes but in what takes place behind the school doors; in nipping disadvantage in the bud from the very beginning. This change of mindset will be crucial because we are in a rut while spending on the here-and-now, in the name of political popularity, is prioritised over investment in what carries the country on when politicians are long-gone.

Now that the Scottish independence referendum on the 18th September is over we must maintain momentum to gear Scottish politics towards ambitious educational improvements. Nowadays, individuals are truly free, through hard work, to create the life they envisage for themselves. Once education is debated and acted upon as passionately as independence has been contested for the past two years the vision can be achieved.

## THE REAL ENEMY

*Those with low educational attainment are almost five times as likely to be in poverty. If Scotland cares about 'social justice', writes **Chris Deerin**, isn't this something we might want to look at?*

*Chris Deerin is a journalist and columnist for the Scottish Daily Mail.*

It was quite the row, and it lasted most of the summer of 1985. In fact, 'row' doesn't do it justice. It was a siege: weeks of attritional warfare, underhand tactics and ruthless strategy. The Geneva Convention was forgotten. Battering rams and trebuchets were wheeled out; flaming arrows and buckets of boiling pitch rained down.

It's no way to talk about your parents, of course, but if I was Stalingrad, they were the German Sixth Army. I had just finished my final day of primary school when they informed me that I wouldn't, as I'd thought, be starting at the local state secondary in Stirling after the holidays. Instead, they were sending me to St Aloysius' College, a fee-paying, Jesuit-run school in Glasgow. It would be good for me, they said. Blood-curdling words such as 'lawyer' and 'doctor' were used freely.

I can't remember how I phrased my response, but it was something along the lines of 'aye, that'll be right.' And so began the long July of the great Deerin family dispute. They wanted to place me among the flower of prosperous Catholic Scotland; I wanted to stay with my pals and play Bloody Knuckles. The outcome was never really in doubt: I won, through the expert

deployment of ear-splitting tantrums and huffs so large they were visible from the moon. Serves me well to this day.

Statistically - St Aloysius or not - life was always more likely than not to work out ok for me, not least because I had successful professionals as parents who would, unbidden, go the extra mile. But it wouldn't work out so well for some of the kids I sat beside in the classrooms of St Modan's, the school to which I turned up - triumphantly - that August. These were not the flower of prosperous Catholic Scotland: these were damaged children from broken areas such as Raploch and Culterhove and depressed former mining villages such as Fallin, Plean, Cowie. Their family surnames were recognisable from the court reports in the local papers, and sometimes the nationals. They had grown up amid neglect, unemployment, violence, alcoholism and drug abuse.

They were tough: they arrived pre-tempered. By the age of 12 they'd settled into a way of things, moving around the playgrounds and corridors with the loose-limbed swagger of big cats; they fought with each other and, when they got bored with that, beat up the rest of us; they dogged it; when they did turn up, they deliberately provoked the teachers; they played stupid.

But they weren't stupid. Most struggled academically, but you caught flashes, sometimes, of a sparkle beneath the surface - a terrifically sharp insight, casually delivered; a one-liner of dazzling wit; an expression of self-awareness that

stopped you in your tracks.

And then they were gone. At the end of fourth year we left for the holidays, and on our return six weeks later found they had, to a boy and girl, vanished. There had been no goodbye - they might have been snatched by aliens. At the first opportunity they had, simply, baled out, because that's what kids like them did, and were expected to do. Standard Grades, Highers, certificates, graduation ceremonies, degrees - these were the baubles and garlands of an invisible world.

Inevitably, you'd bump into people over the years. Some had found work, got married, had kids, grown out of the madness. But you'd hear too many stories of others who had slid into the abyss - crime, court, prison, drugs, death. Still do: a few months ago I read in the local paper that a girl from my year - with whom I'd got along well when we were 14 but who happened to have been born into a notorious family - had been found dead from an overdose. At least she reached 40.

Here's the point: a grim fate is, for too many of our kids, preset. There is no possibility the angel will ever be released from the marble. And it strikes me that a humane society - especially one such as Scotland that does not wear its sense of moral superiority lightly and that rails against the apparent compassion deficit of Westminster - might want to do something about it. As might a new First Minister whose stated aim is to 'tackle the inequality that scars our nation'.

A recent report by the Office for National Statistics contained some illuminating

findings. Those with low educational attainment are almost five times as likely to be in poverty. This is no surprise, of course. But the factor most associated with poor educational performance in children is similarly poor performance among their parents - especially their fathers. And the study found that low educational attainment by fathers had a far greater impact on their child's performance than did the state of the household finances. The implication is clear: character and stability matter more than money.

It's now widely accepted, even scientifically, that a child's future is determined long before they start school - perhaps before they are even born. The deprived are not only less likely to succeed in education, they are considerably more likely to suffer from poor mental and physical health, to be unemployed, to go to prison, to earn less, to die younger, to become teenage parents of children doomed to be trapped in the same cycle. They simply never catch up.

So if we in Scotland care about 'social justice', why don't we make this our number one public policy priority? It's not as easy as pressing a button that nudges up the minimum wage or increases benefit levels, conscience-salving as those steps are. It's about the harder graft of getting in early, teaching parenting skills to those who are obviously going to struggle when the baby arrives - and then providing the support and mentoring to disadvantaged children that middle-class kids can take for granted. It's about sticking with it.

Between 1962 and 1967, the Perry Preschool Project in Michigan taught self-

control, perseverance and social skills, along with cognitive skills, to low-IQ African-American children aged three and four. Their mothers were given parenting lessons to increase their attachment to and interactions with their children. This has resulted in better educational, economic and life outcomes for those involved.

The Carolina Abecedarian Project gave cognitive stimulation plus training in self-control and social skills in the first few months of life to children born between 1972 and 1977, and parenting lessons to their families. The kids were given health checkups and health care, too, and their progress monitored over decades. There has been a lasting impact on IQ, parenting practices, educational attainment and quality of employment – and even lower blood pressure, lower obesity levels and less likelihood of heart trouble.

These innovations are expensive - they can be very expensive - but it's how I want my tax dollars spent. As the economics Nobel laureate James Heckman says, 'quality early childhood programmes for disadvantaged children more than pay for themselves in better education, health and economic outcomes. Our choice in these difficult economic times is not just whether to spend or cut, but whether to choose knowledge over conventional wisdom.'

Where can the cash be found? Well, let's see: this year, the Scottish Government will spend around £600 million of our money on university tuition fees, bursaries, grants and loans. It will shell out a further £60 million on free prescriptions for all. This is tokenistic guff. I don't need or

expect free prescriptions, and nor should anyone in regular employment. No one in relatively comfortable economic circumstances should choose a free university education for their children - an increasingly rare policy in the developed world anyway - over early intervention in the lives of those kids who have least. So, if we scrap the grotesque middle-class subsidies, we instantly make a few hundred million available.

Scotland is the perfect size for an attritional war of this kind – big enough for worthwhile, localised pilot schemes, small enough to roll out the most successful of them nationally. Ms Sturgeon could even begin in the deprived parts of Glasgow and Dundee, as a reward for those Yes-voting cities.

It doesn't take independence to do any of this – it takes courage, clear-headedness and persistence from those who claim to have the qualities to lead. Ms Sturgeon may, like her predecessor, prefer playing Bloody Knuckles against her political opponents. Alternatively, she could unleash the battering rams, catapults and flaming arrows of Scotland upon the real enemies: disadvantage, deprivation and neglect. Let the siege begin.

(This article appeared in the Scottish Daily Mail on October 6, 2014)

## A Better Way

*Over the course, our schoolchildren produce test scores which are neither that much worse nor that much better than international average. Are we really content as a nation to settle for being average? asks **Alex Massie**. A freelance journalist, Alex is one of Scotland's leading commentators and blogs for the Spectator.*

How do you judge the character of a nation? How do you ascertain the seriousness of a country's politics? These are large questions with many possible answers but chief among them must be what we bequeath - collectively - to the next generation. Do we leave them in a position to surpass our own achievements? Do we give them the best possible chance of making their own mark on our country and, indeed, the world? Are we doing everything we can to ensure this happens?

To ask these questions is to be confronted by the nagging thought that the answer to each of them is probably No. Public discourse in Scotland often centres on questions of equality, social justice, compassion and solidarity. This is laudable. No-one is against the idea of a fair shake for all. No-one thinks it right that too many people lack the ability to make the best of their lives. No-one can look at the amount of squandered human capital in this country and think this tolerable. To many lives are wasted, too many people are unfulfilled. Too much - much too much - talent is wasted.

It all starts with education. The affluent have long known this. They recognise the unrivalled importance of education. It is

their legacy to their children and they will move heaven and earth and make whatever sacrifices are deemed necessary to give their offspring the best possible start. If that means moving house, taking on a second job or remortgaging a property then so be it. Their children are worth it. This is their future.

For this they are often deemed "pushy" or "selfish" as though there was something dishonourable about thirsting for the best for their children. They are only guilty of doing for themselves what our education system should do for all: give children the greatest chance of fulfilling their potential. Where is the social justice, the compassion, the solidarity, in an education system that fails so many?

We need to be honest about this. That means acknowledging, of course, that many teachers do their best. That local authorities do not seek to thwart educational improvement. That considerable effort has been devoted to improving educational outcomes. And, most of all, that none of it has been enough. Not nearly enough.

If we are honest with ourselves we know this to be true. We know that many pupils are well-served by Scotland's school system. The top third of Scottish pupils perform well, at least by international standards. In general our schoolchildren produce test results that are neither significantly better nor significantly worse than the OECD average. But is average the best we can be? Why should we settle for average?

It does not have to be like this. There is a better way. A way that, school by school and community by community, can make a difference. We know it can because we need not travel far to find examples of an astonishing educational transformation. We need only look a few hundred miles to the south.

In 1995 Hackney Downs comprehensive in north London was closed by the authorities. The school had become a notorious failure, even by the grimly low standards of sink-estate failure. The Times Educational Supplement, far from being encouraged that this failure was at long last deemed unacceptable, complained Hackney Downs was the victim of a "murder". The paper moaned that "the school was labelled a failure and since failure is unacceptable, it must close. What crude logic!"

Crude indeed! But right. Blindingly, shatteringly, magnificently right. In 2004 Mossbourne Academy opened on the same site once occupied by Hackney Downs. Within five years 80% of its pupils were gaining five good GCSEs, including Maths and English. It became, according to its headmaster, "a grammar school with a comprehensive intake". In 2011 this comprehensive, in one of London's poorer boroughs, sent nine pupils to Cambridge University.

Mossbourne Academy is not alone. Consider King Solomon Academy, a new school established in 2007. Some 51% of its pupils qualify for free school meals and 65% speak English as a second language. Despite these apparent obstacles 93% of pupils in its first GCSE class achieved at

least five passes (at grades A-C), including English and Maths. Three-quarters obtained the so-called English Baccalaureate of five passes in "traditional academic" subjects.

Comparisons between the Scottish and English systems are necessarily inexact but, by way of illustration, at Jordanhill School in Glasgow's west end 84% of S4 pupils obtained at least five standard grades at credit level. Jordanhill regularly features in lists of Scotland's "top Ten State Schools". Fewer than 3% of its pupils qualify for free school meals.

Meanwhile at Govan High, just a couple of miles away from the city's affluent west end, only 10% of pupils achieved five standard grades at credit level (though 62% achieved five awards at SCQF level 4) and, last year, not a single pupil staying on from S4 achieved even three Highers in S5. By the end of S6 only 2% of the S4 roll left school with five Highers. 43% of Govan's pupils qualify for free school meals.

In other words, some of the best state schools in Scotland are outperformed by academies in London in which more than half the intake qualify for free meals and the gap between the performance levels of schools such as Mossbourne and King Solomon and Scottish schools with comparable socio-economic demographics is so vast it should be considered a national disgrace.

We are failing the neediest parts of our society, denying them the kind of education their wealthier compatriots consider a birthright. As Doug Lemov, an

American educationalist, puts it, "the inverse correlation between wealth and attainment is immoral."

How bad is this correlation in Scotland? Well, the Scottish government's own analysis of the 2009 Pisa tests concluded that "while socio-economic status is as likely as in other countries to affect students, the effect it has is likely to be greater than in other countries". In other words, relatively-speaking, it is better to be poor in other countries than to be poor in Scotland.

Make no mistake, a system of educational apartheid thrives in Scotland now. Unless we end a culture of denial - a culture that insists all is well despite ample evidence to the contrary - that cannot and will not change.

In 2011, only 37% of Scottish students achieved three highers and only 26% passed five. The headline figures, however, mask a picture of appalling educational inequality. Only 2.5% of pupils from the poorest fifth of households achieved at least three A-grades at Higher. That is, only 220 such children - in the whole of Scotland - gained the kind of grades needed for admission to Scotland's leading university courses. In Dundee only five pupils from the city's most deprived neighbourhoods met that standard.

In 2013 one Edinburgh school recorded that no pupils achieved five awards at S4. In East Renfrewshire's best-performing school, by contrast, 81% of pupils enjoyed five passes at level five. By this measurement the top school in East Renfrewshire is twice as successful as the

best-performing school in Clackmannanshire, East Ayrshire and Midlothian. But the best schools in East Renfrewshire are little better - if better at all - than reform-minded schools in deprived parts of London. Indeed, in London there are more than 150 comprehensives at which pupils from poor backgrounds achieve GCSE results that are better than the national average for pupils from ALL backgrounds. How many Scottish comprehensives could make a comparable boast?

Precious few. If five passes at Higher are considered Scotland's educational "gold standard" then it is depressing to note there isn't a single state school in Scotland from which a majority of pupils who enter the school will leave with five Highers in their pocket. Not one. In Glasgow just 7% of state-educated pupils gain five Highers. Nor is this simply a question of the private sector "creaming off" more academically able pupils. In the Borders and Dumfries and Galloway - where very few pupils are educated privately - results are no better than the national average of 12% of state-educated children gaining five Highers.

Ministers boast of annual improvements across the country. Many of these improvements are tiny. Audit Scotland reported this summer that, in the last decade, performance in Glasgow City had increased by six percent. At least that showed some improvement, however modest. In terms of S4 achievement, schools in Aberdeenshire, East Lothian and Angus actually regressed between 2004 and 2013. Across ten different attainment measures the chasm in performance between the best and worst performing

councils decreased in five, increased in four and remained the same in one. In other words, broadly speaking, the overall picture is the same as it was ten years ago. It is a picture which reveals that the children of refugees and asylum seekers do almost as well as school as white, male, Scottish pupils.

Nor is this simply a matter of finance. As Audit Scotland concluded, "Spending more money on education does not guarantee better pupil performance". Audit Scotland identified five key factors for improving educational attainment: Improving teacher quality, developing leadership, improving systems for monitoring and tracking pupil data, increasing parental involvement, developing pupil motivation and engagement.

All of which is all very well and good. But how is it to be achieved? Only, it is clear, with a change in culture. Only by setting schools free. Despite much well-intentioned endeavour, local authorities have squandered their chance. Their time is up. How much longer are we prepared to maintain a system that fails so many pupils?

It is not as though Scottish ministers do not see what can be done. Several have visited outstanding charter schools in the United States - many of which are the inspiration for reformed schools in England. They come back impressed by what they have seen and yet, appallingly, nothing - or next to nothing - happens. Change is swallowed by the system or otherwise thwarted by powerful vested interests.

Why, for instance, is there no Scottish equivalent of Teach for America or Teach First (in England), programmes designed to persuade high-flying graduates to choose a teaching career? Why is so little attention paid to teacher development? In his vital book "Education, Education, Education" Andrew Adonis, the former Labour education minister, recalls asking a Finnish head teacher about the biggest problem she faced and was astonished to discover it was, "My best teachers going to do PhDs". Can you imagine any Scottish head teacher having that problem?

So what can be done? The good news is that reforms can have a remarkable effect very quickly. The English experience tells us this. Not every educational flower will bloom in England's educational experiment but enough of them have already done so to demonstrate that change is possible. The soft bigotry of low expectations - as George W Bush put it - can be defeated.

The second piece of good news is that Scotland is a small country. There is some evidence from England that academy "chains" can become too large for their own good. Scale matters and small tends to be better than large. But, especially in the cities, successful academy schools quickly prove inspirational. They become examples to follow. And they work. Of that there can be no doubt. Research by the Sutton Trust has found that in five leading Academy chains poor pupils GCSE results are at least 15% better than the average for pupils educated in "traditional" schools.

This isn't just a question of education for education's sake (though that's a good thing too) but a matter of giving our

children the best chance to succeed in whatever they choose to do. And, vitally, once the education "bug" has been caught it is transferred to future generations. The cycle of low attainment and despair can be broken.

The first matter of business, then, is to invite the sponsors of the best academies in England to set up schools in Scotland. As in England, these schools would be centrally-funded and, ideally, established across the country. A modest start - perhaps 12 schools, or roughly 5% of secondaries - could, in time, kickstart a larger revolution while providing time and room to fight the political battles that must be won to make change on the scale and permanence required.

Other partners - including universities and even private schools - should also be encouraged to enter the education market. Birmingham University, for instance, is establishing an Academy under its own auspices that will also be used to train the next generation of teachers. Why can't Scottish universities do something similar?

There are many things that can be done. There are many things that must be done. There is a better way. Scotland's resistance to education reform has gone on too long. As a society it is as though we are trying to drive a car without first releasing the handbrake.

If we're serious about the "values" we claim to cherish we'd begin to live up to the responsibility inherent in all our talk of fairness and social justice instead of simply paying lip service to these by now shop-soiled shibboleths. By our actions,

may we be judged. At present we are found wanting. How many more children must suffer before we recognise the problem lies, not in them, but in us?

## A challenge in itself: the college sector in Scotland

*With the Scottish Government having set itself up as a hands-on manager, Scotland's Colleges 'couldn't do much worse', writes **Sue Pinder** OBE. Sue is the former principal of James Watt College.*

Following on from the Independence Referendum and the full engagement of the people of Scotland in a political debate which has captured the imagination and drawn praise from around the world, it can be argued that Scotland is moving forward into a positive and much clearer future.

Hopes and fears for the economy were at the heart of the referendum debate and there is no doubt that the Scottish electorate recognised that economic prosperity is key to the successful Scotland they want for future generations.

However, economic prosperity is critically dependent on the skills, knowledge and enterprise of the people.

To ensure that we can compete as individuals and as a nation we need a strong and seamless education system – a concept which has received broad political support as highlighted by the introduction of such initiatives as Learning for All, the Curriculum for Excellence, More Choices More Chances to name but a few, and the continuing emphasis on higher education.

Still, if we were to collate a Report Card for the component parts of the education system we would see significant disparities:

- *News on the school system is positive:*

Scotland has one of the most equitable school systems in the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) area and performs at a very high standard in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). There is however an achievement gap that occurs in late primary school and runs over into key areas of secondary education. There is also intense concern from employers about the 'work readiness' of school leavers.

- *Scotland's universities* consistently appear in the world top rankings. However there is a lingering concern about the fit between the knowledge and skill sets of graduates and skills gaps in the economy. Questions need to be answered about the potential squandering of public resources on graduates who cannot find work and/or are not work ready when they graduate.
- *The college sector* is the most critical for the economy: it falls to colleges to complement and extend the work of schools and universities by delivering first class further and higher education. Colleges are all about vocational skills and workforce development; it is the college sector that is crucial to a vibrant and enterprising economy. Colleges and employers together hold the key to the future prosperity we all want for our country.

Hence our report card might read:

- Schools and universities....*'showing encouraging signs but could do better'*
- Colleges on the other hand, where the Scottish Government has set itself up as a very hands-on manager ...*'couldn't do much worse...'*

### **Retrospective**

*'come to your local college...learn new skills....get a qualification...improve your job prospects...hundreds of courses at a college near you, available full or part time'*

These were the messages sent out by the college sector to the people of Scotland for generations. Hundreds of thousands of Scots – at one time as many as 1 in 10 of the population - had personal experience of their local college, whether that be to better their educational attainment; acquire a skill; pursue a vocational qualification; improve their business performance or attend one of the many evening or leisure classes that were on offer at centres across Scotland.

But these are changed days, and change brings with it new challenges.

The Scottish Government (SG) began introducing its radical regionalisation agenda during the academic year 2010-2011. What started out as a series of draconian spending cuts, some £50 million per annum, soon evolved into a direct attack on the governance, performance, leadership and management of the colleges.

The colleges were no strangers to change,

nor did they fear it, they had a long standing reputation as drivers of social justice and economic growth both nationally and within their local communities. They had an enviable ability to embrace new initiatives and to respond swiftly and imaginatively to the demands of their students and stakeholders.

Thus a major challenge to the colleges, which remain a key, if much depleted, public service, is the political direction they are now under and the varying levels of control, impingement or influence exerted upon them by external agencies and other intermediaries.

In the two decades following incorporation in 1992, colleges had operated with significant autonomy. They were influential both locally and nationally and played a key role in shaping the skills landscape of Scotland at a time when it was evolving rapidly from a manufacturing and industrial base into a service and knowledge economy.

In post referendum Scotland the colleges find themselves dislocated from local economies and communities. Regionalisation has seen them merged with neighbouring colleges to create thirteen public sector institutions. They are without a strong representative and development body and suffer from a lower standing in the eyes of the current government.

What had been an encouraging move towards parity of esteem between vocational and academic elements of education in Scotland has been halted and reversed.

Regionalisation has been promoted under a number of different banners, including collaboration and efficiency. The irony is that colleges were already collaborating successfully to improve quality of service to students and create the economies of scale the government so desired. It is questionable whether the massive cost of the mergers, the costs associated with the setting up of new regional offices and the fees of the many consultants paid for out of public money will be justified in the longer term.

What is not in any doubt is that regionalisation has diminished colleges' public profile and changed their relationship with their primary funder, the Scottish Funding Council (SFC). Public perception of the colleges has always been variable, with many people unclear about their role and status: they do not realise that more than 20% of all higher education in Scotland is delivered in colleges.

At the start of this decade when the government crowed about a 50% progression to higher education/university the reality was that 37% went to university. The remaining 23% progressed to vocationally focused higher education courses in colleges.

However, as the funding to colleges has been cut again and again, parents and students in Scotland could be forgiven for contrasting the 50% of Scottish learners who now achieve a 'no fees' degree with the college offering and finding it less attractive.

Colleges remain in competition for scarce public resources with other government

funded bodies such as Skills Development Scotland (SDS), Scottish Qualifications Agency (SQA), Scottish Enterprise (SE) and are often described as the 'Cinderella sector' when compared with their university colleagues, whose grip on political favour and funding is as firm and unchallenged as ever.

And so to the challenges ahead for the colleges as we move towards a seminal change in the leadership of the SNP (Scottish National Party) and a new First Minister, new powers for Holyrood, the UK General Election and the simmering momentum of the Yes campaign:

### **Political intervention**

Colleges have always been a 'political football,' an easy target, and never more so than now.

In the wake of the government's reform agenda the number of colleges in Scotland has been dramatically reduced. There are now thirteen regions, of which ten are single college regions. Glasgow has three colleges within its region, which is chaired by a former First Minister; the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) encompasses nine colleges and Lanarkshire for the moment has two colleges. It is worth noting here that fourteen colleges have their own board of management.

However, the policy and strategic leadership role now lies with the thirteen publicly appointed remunerated chairs and their respective regional boards. Those thirteen make up the national Further Education (FE) Strategic Forum, which has representation from other bodies including

the Scottish Government, Scottish Funding Council and Skills Development Scotland to name but a few. It is chaired and directed by the Cabinet Secretary for Education: it is without doubt an arm of government, very different from previous governance structures in the colleges where Chairs were unpaid and they, and all board members, were volunteers.

Reconciling this level of overall political control with the demands of the SFC; the powers of the Regional Boards; the needs and priorities of local business and the interests of staff and students is a major leadership challenge for Principals, some of whom do not sit on their Regional Board yet are accountable to that board via their own college Board of Management.

Overbearing political interference via centralised power brings with it a diminution in creativity and sphere of influence in those who lead public services and can ultimately lead to stagnation and 'group think'; thus reducing choice, opportunity and quality of service to end users. Ensuring this does not happen will be a challenge for college leaders.

Unlike Northern Ireland and Wales the Scottish Government chose to accede to the Office for National Statistics (ONS) reclassification of colleges as public bodies. This was a deliberate move to further extend ministerial control over the college sector and to limit colleges' freedom of budgetary control especially in relation to capital expenditure and income generation.

Colleges are already in competition with schools and universities to provide state of

the art buildings and learning resources. The ONS ruling presents a further challenge to colleges and may have longer term, as yet unseen, financial consequences.

Lack of a direct and unfettered governance role in major investment decisions relegates college boards from the strategic to the functional and further emphasises the power exerted by the Scottish Government via the Regional Chairs. This is a challenge to the democratic accountability of colleges at a local level.

### **Academic Leadership**

Academic leadership is the responsibility of the college Principal and Chief Executive who is appointed to lead and manage the college. The Principal acts as chief adviser to the Board of Management along with which she/he sets the strategic direction and objectives of the college and monitors its financial and educational performance against agreed targets.

Today's Principals find themselves more akin to their pre-incorporation colleagues: responsible, ultimately accountable to a plethora of 'masters', yet not completely 'in charge' and with limited independence of action.

Their challenge is to re-define their leadership role internally and externally when the overall strategic leadership and funding control of their college lies with an independent Chair and a Regional Board, which in turn sets funding parameters to individual college boards which are part of a multi college region.

Principals' personal leadership skills are

also tested and challenged. In an uncertain environment where teaching staff numbers fell by 22% between 2008-09 and 2012-13; student numbers declined; curriculum was significantly trimmed back and their own position is not exactly rock solid; it is down to Principals to offer reassurance and stability to staff, students and their community.

Students are a force for positive change in any college and their expectations are of particular importance to college leaders who must balance the needs and interests of students against what they can reasonably provide. The relationship between the college its Student Association and the National Union of Students (NUS) should be a formative one, but it may become more challenging in the wake of the referendum, particularly as young people become more politically aware and socially motivated.

Education professionals know that innovation and creativity underpin advances in learning which are expressed through academic freedom and independence of thought. Witness the contrast between Scotland's colleges and its universities which still bask in academic freedom and can set their own agenda to achieve competitive advantage.

### **Funding**

Some senior politicians claim not to understand the formula funding of colleges, but they have understood enough about it to re-direct funding that should go to colleges for the delivery of training and skills, to other intermediary bodies such as Skills Development Scotland. This mission creep is a serious threat to colleges and

shows no sign of abating.

The continuing erosion in college funding, coupled with the budget cuts referred to elsewhere is evidenced in Audit Scotland's 2013 report which reveals that total income for colleges fell by 9% between 2010-11 and 2011-12.

Audit Scotland asserts that there will be a further reduction of 11% in government grant between 2011-12 and 2014-15.

These budget cuts are real and have resulted in major restructuring of the college sector; the loss of hundreds of jobs; a decrease in women returners and a reduced curriculum portfolio, particularly in part time study - and all this while maintaining activity levels, thereby severely reducing the unit of resource available to fund learning and support students.

What business would not be challenged by a 20% drop in its income and a subsequent reduction in its unit of resource over four financial years?

### **Widening Access**

For decades now widening access to further and higher education, especially for people from the least privileged social classes and under-represented groups, has been one of the main priorities for the college sector. It is an area in which colleges have excelled.

In 2003 the then Cabinet Secretary launched an ambitious drive to promote and embed Lifelong Learning across Scotland. Aimed primarily at young people not in education or training (the NEETs); women; the unemployed and the under-

qualified this was a very popular and successful initiative.

The colleges were at the heart of Lifelong Learning; using their skills and expertise they engaged the disengaged and won their confidence, encouraging a broad church of learners back into active learning by a variety of means.

Colleges gained even more credibility with their students by delivering courses at a very local level, courses which promoted self-confidence and boosted employability and skills in some of Scotland's poorest communities. At this time the colleges were the 'go to' sector as politicians in Scotland and Westminster introduced a raft of measures to address the worrying growth in youth unemployment.

That credibility is now under severe challenge because funding cuts have inevitably meant cuts in numbers enrolled in Further Education. Enrolments have fallen significantly over recent years according to the Funding Council's In Fact data base. Inevitably those people now missing from the college population are those who most need to be there.

*In session 2010-11 almost 272,000 students enrolled in colleges, by 2012-13 that had fallen by 25% to less than 204,000 students.*

### **The Wood Commission**

Sir Ian Wood's report was commissioned by the Scottish Government. It presents major challenges and opportunities for the college sector, not least because it places colleges where they should be – in poll position in the delivery of vocational

education.

The government has made a commitment to implement Sir Ian Wood's main recommendations which are ambitious and far reaching and include

- Greater coherence in the system and a more proactive collaboration between schools, parents, pupils, teachers, employers and colleges
- The report promises that colleges will be at the centre of a future 'world class vocational education system'
- Wood proposes a major strengthening of the school/college partnership with pupils being able to access qualifications such as National Certificates and Higher National Certificates whilst still at school. Under Wood's recommendations 60% of pupils who do not achieve Highers will leave school with a vocational qualification
- The Wood report also proposes a significant increase in apprenticeships up from 10,000 in 2007 to 30,000 new starts per year.

The challenge for the college sector is one of capacity. Spending cuts have resulted in up to a 30% reduction in experienced staff in some colleges and the removal of whole swathes of curriculum. Difficult financial decisions have meant that investment in infrastructure and expensive resources has been cut back especially in highly specialised technical and practical skills.

## Conclusion

By its very nature change is unpredictable, but whatever change the future holds for colleges in Scotland they will rise to the challenge and continue to do what they have always done – the very best for their students.

If the Scottish Government is serious about its commitment to implement Sir Ian Wood's recommendations it will go a long way towards delivering the prosperous Scotland we would all like to live in and maybe then the Report Card would read:

**Scotland's Colleges ....'couldn't do better!'**

## Summary of the challenges facing

### The college sector:

- The current political environment and future government policy
- Unhelpful and overbearing political interference at a micro-level
- The power base of the Regional Chairs
- The influence of external consultants
- Potential changes to the funding methodology
- The multiple layers of governance and accountability, especially in multi college regions
- Further budget cuts
- The lack of a strong, politically independent representative voice
- Competitors with whom they cannot effectively compete
- Public perception and profile.

### College leaders:

- Complex relationships with funders, partners and stakeholders
- Strategic frustration and operational overload
- Regaining public confidence in the wake of cuts and mergers
- Offering strong leadership and reassurance to staff in the face of continuing uncertainty
- Trade union unrest
- Expectations of students, especially in light of their recent voting experience
- Personal risk, isolation and emotional resilience
- Succession planning

## Scotland's universities need plenty of help to stay ahead of the game

*Scottish higher education institutions like Dundee University are punching above their weight. In a changing world, that can't be taken for granted, writes **Pete Downes**. Professor Pete Downes is Principal and Vice-Chancellor of Dundee University*

The University of Dundee's new Discovery Centre, which opened for business in October is a place where remarkable discoveries in biosciences will be made that may impact on all our lives. How this was achieved during one of the deepest economic recessions this country has experienced is a microcosm of what makes Scotland's higher education system amongst the most admired and successful anywhere in the world.

The Discovery Centre is a citadel of glittering science and technology housing scientists from around the globe where an investment of £5million of Scottish Government funds leveraged an additional £20million of capital investment from UK and international sources and a further £30million of research grants. The Centre will create 180 new, high value jobs, providing a further boost to Dundee's life sciences cluster which already accounts for around 16% of the region's economy.

At the same time Dundee has nurtured a reputation for the quality of student experience and this year we achieved our highest ever National Student Survey and International Student Barometer scores. We have also admitted record numbers of students from the most deprived backgrounds in Scotland enabling people

from all sections of society to participate in our country's economic success.

This is a scene that is repeated across Scotland with Universities at the heart of activities which are key to the country's success. The impact our universities have made, both within Scotland and on the world stage, has been remarkable and we continue to punch above our weight in many ways as drivers of economic, social and cultural change. According to the UK Government's Scotland Analysis Science and Research paper, our universities employ over 38,000 staff and support more than 142,000 jobs in the Scottish economy creating £1.3billion of export earnings. In 2012/13 Scottish Universities attracted £257million of UK Research Council grants which represents around 13.1% of the UK total. This figure is significantly higher than either Scotland's 8% share of UK GDP or its 8.4% share of UK population.

### **Disruptive Forces**

Scotland's universities operate within a global sector that is undergoing remarkable expansion and disruptive change. We are witnessing the emergence of major new competitors and sources of students, particularly in India, China and other countries of the far east. The demographics are hugely complex with nations like China expanding HE rapidly, but soon to experience declining proportions of young people, whilst in countries like India there are huge and increasing numbers of potential students many of whom do not have access to HE. There are global shifts from public towards

private provision and technological developments, such as the advent of massive open on-line courses, or MOOCs, which claim to offer the best academic programmes to hundreds of thousands of people worldwide for free.

The worldwide expansion of HE also brings competition in terms of research and the ability to use the fruits of research to drive economic development. This competition may be seen in terms of which nations will nurture and invest in a research culture which draws inward investment and the growth of innovation-based economies replacing economies currently built on low value manufacturing. The most successful models of innovation, therefore, will drive the most prosperous economies of the future and universities which develop effective innovation strategies will enhance their reputations, not just locally, but on the world stage.

### **Strength through autonomy**

In the context of such disruptive forces the continuing success and global competitiveness of Scotland's universities must not be taken for granted. We should look at how we achieved our current success, what will be needed to keep Scotland at the forefront of HE and hence what policies Scotland should adopt to support success.

Detailed analysis of different HE systems shows that there is a strong correlation between the degree of autonomy afforded to a country's universities and their success. Scotland's universities are amongst the most autonomous in the world allowing them to set their own strategic visions, missions and goals within

an effective and trusted framework of governance. To paraphrase words used in a rather different context in Scotland in the last couple of years, autonomy gives our universities control of the levers with which we can respond to opportunities that otherwise might be seen as threats. Autonomy allows universities to plan and invest for the long term, to build diverse income streams and to innovate in their research and their educational missions. In Dundee, for example we are able to respond to the particular needs of our city and region, stimulating new economic developments, educating a skilled workforce and catering for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. At the same time more than 60% of our income comes from sources other than the Scottish Government.

Mission diversity is an important consequence of autonomy promoting competitiveness and international advantage. Even our largest universities cannot hope to build competitive advantage in all areas of opportunity, but the sector as a whole, comprising of distinct, autonomous institutions, can be expected to do so. This gives Scottish students a greater breadth of subject choice and innovative curricula and we can achieve depth of focus too through our small specialist institutions. It doesn't all have to be based on competition with Scottish universities frequently collaborating and sharing best practice where it makes sense to do so. Our real competitors are outside Scotland, not each other.

We need policies in Scotland therefore that celebrate autonomy and support diversity

of our institutions. Governing bodies should possess the breadth and depth of experience and leadership needed to challenge executive teams to be forward looking and ambitious, to strengthen institutional brands and distinctive strengths and to create the financial headroom needed to invest in new initiatives, modern estates and the most advanced infrastructure. Successive Scottish Governments will also be ambitious for our universities to contribute to a successful Scotland which they are likely to equate with their own policy initiatives. This is currently done at arms length via the Scottish Funding Council which distributes Scottish Government Funding and sets targets in key areas of policy through outcome agreements negotiated between the Funding Council and individual institutions. Outcome agreements have been controversial, but can be a force for good if they champion diversity and demonstrate the collective contributions of the sector as a whole.

If universities function autonomously and have distinctive missions what is it that distinguishes a university from other bodies that deliver post-16 education. In Scotland most would agree a definition based on the ability to award the PhD degree, in other words that the job of education to degree and postgraduate level is done in an environment where research is conducted which profoundly influences student learning. With this definition all universities will both educate and conduct research. I would add a third element which I believe is also true of all universities in Scotland and that will become increasingly important, which is to be drivers of innovation. Innovation is

about putting new knowledge and ways of doing things to work on behalf of society often, but not exclusively, associated with economic impact. All three of these areas of contribution in the majority of Universities are played out, not just locally, but on an international stage. What then are the policy requirements needed to ensure Scotland's universities remain at the global forefront of educational standards and quality, continue to be internationally leading in research and commit to driving innovation?

### **Funding**

Before tackling each of the above issues in turn it is worth making some generic comments about funding of universities. It has long been an ambition of both the sector and the Scottish Government to secure funding for our universities equivalent to the upper quartile of OECD countries. It is understandable why this has not been possible in recent years, but it should remain the goal. Given the time scales likely to be required to achieve this outcome it would need cross party support and maintaining funding at that level would need long term commitment when there will be competing claims for public funding and changing political priorities. There needs, therefore, to be broad understanding that Universities offer a significant advantage when it comes to the efficient and effective use of public funds. The annual economic impact of Scotland's universities now stands at around £6.7 billion GVA (gross value added), meaning that every £1 of public investment in our universities results in more than £6 of economic impact. That extra money is attracted from sources across the UK, Europe and internationally,

from governments, charities, industry and philanthropy all built on the essential core of funding from the Scottish Government. The desire to keep Scotland's universities at the top table internationally must continue to be shown at the top level of government whichever political party holds the balance of power.

### **Internationalisation**

Achieving our international ambitions is not just about maintaining competitive levels of funding. We must also be able to recruit the most talented staff and students from around the world. Much of the £1billion plus export earnings of Scottish Universities arise from overseas students studying and spending in Scotland. More than this, our overseas students and staff enrich our campuses and broaden the experience of students from Scotland. There is currently a paucity of home students who take up opportunities to study abroad so that their experience of global citizenship disproportionately depends upon overseas students coming here. There is no doubt that the current UK immigration policy has significantly damaged overseas student recruitment especially from vulnerable markets such as India and sub-Saharan Africa, policies which I have in the past said are shooting us in the foot. In the short term I and others have argued that the student immigration figures should be removed and treated separately from the aggressive target to reduce net migration into the UK and to restore the post-study work visa which is available in competitor countries. Beyond this and more generally policies are needed which support and encourage high talent migration into the UK and Scotland.

### **Education**

I have already discussed the rapidly changing landscape for higher education nationally and internationally. The combined effects of expansion, technological developments and increasing competition focus particular attention on how to fund the rising national costs of tuition and it is not surprising that tuition and student support mechanisms represent the areas of greatest divergence between the policy environment in Scotland and elsewhere in the UK. Highly divergent systems are in place throughout the world too and we should take the opportunity to learn from the experience of these other systems.

Choosing who contributes to the cost of higher education, including public, private and personal sources, will always be a decision for politicians, but we should and indeed must agree on the principles such funding mechanisms aim to achieve. Firstly any system needs stability over timeframes typically much longer than the political cycles. It therefore follows that an approach which works today must extrapolate to the future. Whilst there are some downward pressures on cost where Scotland has been particularly successful in achieving substantial improvements in business efficiency, the trend from where I see it seems inexorably upwards and funding mechanisms will need to be able to respond. Secondly, Scotland's approach must ensure our universities continue to be drivers of social inclusion and opportunity for all. Tuition costs and student support must be compatible with encouraging enrolment of students from the most deprived sections of society. Finally any funding mechanism must be

compatible with maintaining the flow of students between the constituent nations of the UK something which depends as much upon England, Wales and Northern Ireland as it does upon the systems we choose to adopt in Scotland.

### **Research**

There are two fundamental principles of funding research in Scottish/UK universities which are admired throughout the world and arguably underpin our success. The Haldane principle, which argues that decisions about which fundamental research to support should be made by researchers rather than politicians; and the dual support system which provides core funding for research infrastructure alongside response mode funding on a competitive basis distributed primarily through research councils.

The Haldane principle is vital to ensure universities continue to fulfil their key role as producers of new knowledge and understanding, the basic fuel of any innovation-based economy, and as inspiration and a source of national pride and reputation. Dual support is equally important because it ensures the best research departments can attract the best researchers from around the world and can make long term commitments to building and maintaining cutting edge infrastructure whilst responding rapidly to new opportunities.

Researchers in Scotland have access to a wide range of funding sources which provides us with great flexibility. During the referendum debate Universities Scotland and both the Scottish and UK Governments acknowledged the importance of the UK-

wide research ecosystem for Scottish research. This includes UK funding sources such as the Research Councils and major charities and much shared infrastructure as well as the UK-wide Research Excellence Framework (formerly the Research Assessment Exercise) which rates the quality of research on a discipline by discipline basis and is influential within the UK and amongst our international partners. The policy environment needs to support these distinctive features and reaffirm Scotland's long term commitment to UK-wide assessment and funding streams which are vital to maintain our world class research reputation.

### **Innovation**

When difficult decisions are made in successive spending reviews about which areas of public funding should be cut, protected or expanded, the case for universities will depend upon how well we demonstrate our impact on society, especially but not exclusively our economic impact. Scotland's economic prospects, as much as its historic success, depends upon the creation and growth of innovative companies. Our universities are vital components of Scotland's innovation ecosystem both in terms of research and knowledge exchange to exploit the fruits of research and in educating the next generation of employable, innovative graduates.

Scotland's innovation ecosystem is characterised by relatively high levels of investment and exceptionally high levels of international recognition of university-led research, but relatively weak investment in research and development in business of all scales, but especially amongst the small

to medium sized companies that comprise the largest proportion of Scotland's business capacity. Without intervention this risks the possibility that Scottish discoveries in our universities will be exploited elsewhere because our own businesses lack the necessary capacity for research and development.

Part of the solution therefore will be policy initiatives that encourage and support research and development in Scottish companies and inward investment from innovative companies of scale from elsewhere attracted by the world class reputation of Scotland's universities.

Scottish universities perform well by international benchmarks in some aspects of innovation especially in terms of new companies that spin out from university research. But there is much more we can do to prioritise innovation and the impact of our work. This might include a research culture that explicitly rewards and celebrates the knowledge exchange activities of staff; that places less emphasis on intellectual property and more on open innovation/partnership models of collaboration with industry; and which incentivises and facilitates engagement with SMEs. These are just some of the objectives of 'Innovation Scotland' which comprises a high level Forum chaired by the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, industry sector led components including the new innovation centres, university knowledge exchange services and 'Interface' which brokers collaboration between universities and business.

In terms of the policy environment, all

universities in Scotland should be part of our innovation ecosystem with roles reflecting their divergent missions. Many commentators draw a distinction between fundamental and applied aspects of research which may imply that innovation could be promoted by shifting the emphasis to give more support to applied, near-market research. Without new money, however, this would undermine one of Scotland's great strengths. We can't compete with the scale of many of our competitors, so we must back our ingenuity. To do this we need to facilitate transitions from fundamental knowledge to applied research to proof of concept to innovation in partnership with industry. The components of Innovation Scotland are well placed to promote such an approach, but the results will not be instantaneous. Once again some policy consistency and confidence in the longer term will be needed. There has been too much chop and change in the past where the emphasis has been on specific solutions rather than the overall health of a complex ecosystem.

Making the right decisions now about how best to support innovation could not be more important for Scotland's universities and the long term health of our economy. In order to gather the evidence and make clear recommendations on what works and what Scotland could do better the independent National Centre for Universities and Business (NCUB) has set up the 'Growing Value Scotland' Task Force which will be co-chaired by Sir Ian Diamond of Aberdeen University and Rob Woodward, Chief Executive of STV and will report its findings in the middle of 2015. Its executive and steering groups comprising

of leading figures from the public, private and university sectors are well placed to lay the foundations of a new chapter in Scotland's economic development in which universities must play an essential part.

### **In conclusion**

I agreed to write this article long before the outcome of the Referendum to decide Scotland's constitutional future was known. In reality the policy issues I have outlined would have been the same regardless of the outcome although the solutions and their context may well have been different. By remaining part of the Union, the objective to retain the UK-wide research infrastructure, including access to Research Council funding and participation in the Research Excellence Framework should now not be in doubt. Whether the further devolved powers on offer allow Scotland to develop divergent policy solutions to the issues described here remain to be seen.

## Ask not what our schools do for them: The contribution of children with disabilities to education in Scotland

In dealing more imaginatively and creatively with our most challenging children who need special care, we have made great progress in improving schools for all children writes **Sophie Pilgrim**, a Director of Kindred Scotland and a member of Scottish Children's Services Coalition.

David Cameron has said that when he realized the extent of his son Ivan's disabilities, he assumed that he and his wife would dedicate themselves to being selfless carers. He has talked of his amazement that he came to feel that it was Ivan who deserved his gratitude and not the other way round.

Many parents of disabled children, even those with extremely challenging behaviour, would recognize this sentiment. It seems contradictory to say that caring for a disabled child brings joy and meaning to your life when at the same time you are bitterly complaining and battling on all fronts for support (an experience the Prime Minister perhaps doesn't share). So it is no wonder that valuing disability does not come easily to our institutions. It is difficult to make the mind-shift and think of disability in a positive light. This may change with the inspirational Equalities Act 2010 that proudly sets a new standard for those who provide public services to treat everyone with dignity and respect. Who can say no to that?

In conversations about education budgets, and more recently, education cuts, there is a pervasive view that children with additional support needs are a burden on

our education system. This is usually expressed in words to the effect that 'actually, they get more than their fair share of resources'. But there is a case to be made that positive developments in our education system have been driven by the need to provide for children with additional needs. Every child at some point will have some extra reason for requiring support. They may go through a phase of being bullied, struggle with a particular subject, or experience illness, the separation of their parents or loss of a grandparent. Or perhaps all of these. How much better to have a responsive, caring school setting that is able to nurture each child's journey.

If we look back in time, we see a very different world for children with disabilities. It was only following the 1978 Warnock Report that children were entitled to an education. Prior to this, institutionalization of disabled children was an accepted norm. None of us would want to go back to such a world, and since the millenium we have seen an acceleration of change in our schools. This momentum has been driven by an inclusion agenda led by parents, a human rights campaign that has gone largely uncelebrated. Hundreds, if not thousands, of parents across Scotland have dedicated their precious spare time to fighting for a better deal for their own disabled children and for disabled children of the future.

We often hear of the dispute between those in favour and those against inclusion. Is there really a dispute about the benefits of mainstream, or is this actually about a squeeze on stretched

resources? If those against inclusion sat down with those who are in favour of inclusion and we unpicked our arguments I think we would find we are on the same side. We want a better deal for children with disabilities. We would unite to disagree with those who say that children with disabilities get more than their fair share. We would agree that there are major challenges to inclusion.

The presumption of mainstream which is enshrined in the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000, is described in the following extract from a Scottish Executive circular (3/2002):

“The intention behind the new duty is to establish the right of all children and young persons to be educated alongside their peers in mainstream schools unless there are good reasons for not doing so. It is based on the premise that there is benefit to all children when the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs with their peers is properly prepared, well-supported and takes place in mainstream schools within a positive ethos. Such inclusion helps schools to develop an ethos to the benefit of all children, and of society generally. It also helps meet the wishes of many parents that their children should be educated alongside their friends in a school as close to home as possible.”

Can anyone disagree with this statement? I was at a mediation meeting recently (which I have fictionalized). The parents of a five year old girl had asked for a place in a special school. Their daughter attends nursery at a mainstream school. They had

been turned down and offered a place at the mainstream school with 15 hours support from a Pupil Support Assistant (PSA). In the meeting we explained the difficulties the child faces in coping with the school and the Head Teacher explained all the different ways in which the school could help to support the child. The outcome was that the education authority granted full time PSA hours. The Head Teacher was pleased. The parents were delighted. They acknowledged that this was a better solution than they had hoped for in the first place.

The presumption of mainstream does not mean that all children will be in mainstream. It means that all children will be in mainstream if that is the best thing for them, balanced with the needs of their peers. If children are placed in mainstream and their needs cannot be met, then this is not 'inclusion'. It is a simple failure to provide. In the last five years we have seen shrinking budgets for education and yet there are much higher expectations that the particular needs of each child are met. In this context, it becomes more likely that 'inclusion' is said to fail.

The Education (Additional Support for Learning)(Scotland) Acts 2004 & 2009 radically changed the landscape of education across Scotland. The legislative framework was broadened to include any child requiring additional support and very large groups of children were included such as children with English as an additional language and children who are looked after. In 2013, around 19.5% of pupils in Scotland's schools were identified as having an additional support need

(131,621 children). 15,510 pupils were recorded as Assessed or Declared Disabled which equates to 2.3% of all pupils.

Anyone passing judgement on whether the presumption of mainstreaming has been a successful policy must consider the demographic pressure on resources. The most significant challenge in meeting the needs of the 19.5% of children with additional support for learning is that the demand for special school places is increasing. This is because advances in medicine have meant that premature babies are surviving from a younger age, and these very young babies are likely to have complex medical needs. In addition, children with complex or life limiting conditions like David Cameron's son Ivan are surviving longer than previously expected. Of course medicine is advancing to improve the prognosis for these children and this is to be celebrated. The recent story of Ashya King and his parents' quest for proton therapy and other press coverage shows that the public are supportive of new treatments for children, irrespective of cost.

Increased life expectancy means more children with very complex needs in special schools and this means that other children who would in the past have special school places will move to mainstream. We need to ask Education Officers about these trends because they are hidden within current statistics on additional support for learning. Local authorities are being forced to create tacked-on special school classes to cope. It would not take a lot of resource to ask the views of Education Officers on this matter.

There are multiple other demographic and policy factors that add to the pressure on resources. The increase in nursery hours will mean authorities are supporting children with additional needs from a younger age. There has been a dramatic decrease in the age of diagnosis of autism as a result of public awareness of the condition and improvements in provision. Numbers of children with English as an additional language have increased and there has been a bulge in the school population. All these factors add strain to stretched resources in mainstream schools.

But there is also good news. In the same time frame, we have seen the introduction of Curriculum for Excellence and Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC). There is a synergy between these developments and the ASL legislation that may protect us through these times of austerity. Curriculum for Excellence emphasizes the need of children to learn according to their own strengths and needs. GIRFEC is about accountability and making sure that each child is on the radar. Overall, there is a shift towards supporting children individually. These commitments to our children are something to be really proud of. We should congratulate our policy makers for such a coherent and caring strategic approach. It is inspiring to hear that some schools in Edinburgh have taken a whole school approach and trained every staff member in autism awareness. Doesn't this make sense? After all, it has been contended that almost all of us are on the autistic spectrum, it is just that most of us are not adversely affected in our daily lives. And many educationalist would say that an autism friendly

environment benefits all learners.

With the best possible policies within mainstream schools, surely we all know that some children need exceptional arrangements. It is clear that a very small number of children have acute psychiatric problems and these children are unavoidably out of mainstream school, sometimes for many months or years. Other children have complex medical needs that are prohibitively difficult to meet outside of special school environments. Children with learning disability and Autistic Spectrum Disorders may have a need for a level of structure and stability which conflicts with the learning needs of their mainstream peers. Children with Social Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties may disrupt the learning environment. Meeting the educational needs of these children is challenging for education authorities who have to provide appropriately from a restricted range of placements.

At Kindred we support around 700 parents each year in Edinburgh, the Lothians and Fife. Of these parents around a quarter have come to our service for support over the educational placement of their child. We have greatly improved our statistical recording over the last three years and we are nearly at a point where we can look at our data over time. From what we can already see, it seems likely that most parents will return to use our service every three or four years, and that the majority will ask for support with regard to education at some point or another during their child's school years. Parents tend to turn to us for support at times of 'transition' when the child is moving from

nursery to primary school, from primary school to secondary school, and from secondary school to college or adult services. These are times when assessment, planning and decision-making are heightened.

The fact that many parents require support over educational placement might seem to suggest excessive conflict or a failure of the system. Another explanation is that negotiating the right schooling for a child is a complex process requiring the specialist input of teachers, Head Teachers, educational psychologists, education department staff and the parents themselves. Parents often feel stressed because they feel they are competing for scarce resources and are unfamiliar with such daunting negotiations.

Both parents and professionals are almost always acting on good motives, but often their motives do not coincide. Parents are standing up for their child, while professionals are trying to be fair to all. Feelings run high, and we have evolved an effective system for managing these delicate negotiations, often involving mediation between the parent(s) and the education authority, with advocacy to support the voice of the parent, and where necessary recourse to the Additional Support Needs Tribunal Scotland. When we have all worked together to resolve a dispute there is a palpable feeling of satisfaction all round. Skilled folk have come together to negotiate the right school solution for this child, given the available resources.

A key player in this process is the educational psychologist. Their role is to

give a professional assessment of the educational needs of the child so that decisions can be made about allocating resources with an appropriate expertise. A principal Educational Psychologist was telling me recently about the drastic effect of cuts over the last two years to grant funding for trainees. The quality of applicants has plummeted. We will certainly be seeing the impact of this decision in years to come with a drop in standards of decision-making on crucial resource allocation as well as falling standards of support to parents. The decision to cut the funding of grants to trainee Educational Psychologists shows that our carefully constructed system for negotiating the right education for very challenging children is vulnerable to stealth cuts. We have to be on our guard.

Those who are closely involved in this world of Additional Support for Learning see patterns in areas where provision does not attain desired standards. There is a major issue about the number of young people not in education and also the number who have a greatly reduced timetable. It is typical that parents who ask for placements in the independent sector's special schools do so because their child has been out of school for long periods of time, anything up to eighteen months, or because they are only in school for an hour a day or some other restrictive timetable missing out on the full curriculum. Most of these young people have not been excluded for bad behaviour. They are out of school because they cannot cope with the school environment. If they are given the right support in the right circumstances, they can often flourish and develop into independent adults -

sometimes displaying considerable talents.

Out of authority placements in residential schools and those who are able to fight have a prolonged battle on their hands. It is usually over a year for the process to run its course. If a young person is fourteen when the process begins then crucial time is lost.

This is evidently the next challenge for those of us with a close involvement. We need to develop new models of schooling for children, particularly those on the autistic spectrum. These children and young people need smaller, calmer school settings which incorporate intensive behavioural support. Such schools have been proven to be successful in the independent sector. Local authorities must start looking at developing their own provision to meet demand because there is a business case which will be hard to overlook.

It has been entirely predictable that children on the autistic spectrum would be the most difficult to place in Scotland's educational system. We are able to provide for children with complex medical needs and we would consider it entirely unacceptable if these children were not offered school places. It follows that we would be able to provide for children and young people who are overwhelmed by a mainstream environment. These children and young people have somehow become the undeserving.

Fortunately, recent legislative developments such as Self Directed Support, the Public Bodies (Joint Working) Scotland Bill, and new rights for young

people under the Children & Young People Act (Scotland) 2014 will result in provision moving away from the institutionalization of the past. As children, young people and their families are able to take more 'personalised' choices, so long term outcomes will improve. Parents are likely to opt for local support for their children and young people including education, respite and housing. This will mean that families retain their connections and are able to provide natural networks of support. The practice of sending children and young people far from home for psychiatric care or residential schooling on the grounds that there is no suitable local care will soon become a thing of the past.

Without our most challenging and rewarding children we would not have made such astonishing progress in our thinking on policy and legislation for our universal statutory services. We would not have had the imagination to travel so far. If we see a better future for us all it is because we have been inspired by those who need our selfless care.

## Headteachers need and want a coherent vision for Scottish Education

*Curriculum for Excellence is an opportunity missed. Cut back on the well paid consultants, get rid of 32 separate directors of education, and give head teachers real freedom and autonomy, writes **John Low**. The former rector of Breadalbane Academy and head of Perth Grammar School, John Low is one of Scotland's most experienced teachers. Under his leadership, his schools won numerous awards. He is now retired.*

I believe that we have a lack of vision and true creative and strategic leadership at the very top which is stifling the spark that is needed for education in the 21st Century.

These are my personal views. I should emphasise I am not a member of the Conservative Party. I realise as I write this that the immediate reaction of many former colleagues in the educational establishment will be to attack these views by pointing to individual statistics and or examples. However, my comments are sincere and based on many years of success so I ask they are taken for what they are: a considered and honest opinion.

I would state as a starting point that I genuinely believe we have the best cohort of teachers in Scottish schools that we have ever had and that schools are by and large doing a very good job in delivering what they are asked. However, with visionary and motivational leadership at the highest level, and the correct tools to do the job, we could do so much better.

What is education for? If you look at Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) it has a huge list of things which tell us what it is for but in reality it is just that - a list. It does not encapsulate the essence of what we are about, which is simple. Through education we aim to maximise the potential of the individual both for themselves and for society and nothing less. How we do that is the moot point; what structures, partnerships and resources do we need to deliver that vision?

Currently I do not believe we have a national 'vision'. Rather we have a series of statements and things we are doing. Education is compartmentalised and pigeon holed into 'what schools do', 'what colleges do', what 'Universities do' etc (often parents and business are totally missed out of the equation) and essentially, by this narrow approach, we entirely miss the point. I am sure Education Scotland and the Education Secretary would say this is not what CfE is about but it is certainly what is happening. Without a doubt some good work has been done in some areas; for example, Perth and Kinross have shown a strong lead in developing integrated working by establishing Education and Children Services. But across the country we cannot claim to have the strategic lead we need.

Curriculum for Excellence was and is a great opportunity missed as it has simply revamped (with knobs on) what currently existed rather than fundamentally look at the bigger questions. This was entirely

understandable and predictable as there are so many vested interests that 'breaking the mould' was and is quite radical and therefore very unlikely to happen without bold and visionary leadership. Putting the responsibility for developing CfE into the hands of Education Scotland, the SQA and a vast array of expensive 'consultants' such as former Directors of Education was a recipe for a polishing up what already existed. The very nature of their long experience and bureaucratic vested interest meant we could not expect to get anything other than a new version of what we already had. The people who should have been at the front of the process - teachers, headteachers, parents, pupils, Business, Colleges and Universities - were left to follow on along the path chosen for them and contribute to the detail not the vision. A question for national government is this: how many times have you brought headteachers together to ask them what they think, what they need, to get them to debate the issues and challenges? I was in education for 34 years, the last 16 of them as a successful headteacher, and only once have secondary headteachers ever been brought together - although it wasn't a consultation or debate. Rather it was more a talking to by the then Minister.

Are politicians and the educational establishment so sure of their own rightness that they do not feel the need to genuinely listen to and follow the advice of school leaders? I know they will argue that they do. As a highly experienced and successful 'Heidie' I can genuinely say I do not believe that. The current method of consultation is both superficial and controlled.

Additionally I would add that as we developed CfE we did not put enough trust in our dynamic young staff to lead this development but rather relied on older more experienced colleagues and so we got a fancier version of the same. We are well into the 21st century but we are certainly not at the forefront of the use of information technology in learning. Young people learn on a daily/hourly basis outside of schools using iPads etc. They communicate through the same medium outside of schools. How many of our schools have wifi available, or afford the opportunity to 'bring your own device' into school, or provide charging points, or address the IT needs of the socially disadvantaged, or deliver lessons using IT at its best, using an interactive white board as an alternative to the blackboard?

To me CfE can be summed up by a quote from part of Spike Milligan's autobiography when he was in North Africa during WW2. Along with some of his mates they were watching native women walking to and from a well to get water and then carry it in tall pots on their heads. One squaddie says 'You'd think their old man would buy them a suitcase to carry the water in' and another squaddie says 'How would that work then?'. The first guy replies: 'Listen mate, I only come up with the good ideas it's up to them to make it work.' This is where we are with CfE - schools, teachers, pupils, parents left to make it work.

What do we need to do?

Firstly give pupils, parents and teachers stability and certainty by clearly stating 'no more changes for three years'.

Next we need to take a step back and have the debate as a society about what we need and want from education in its broadest sense in the 21st Century and how we will deliver it. The current model was designed in the Victorian era with some changes in the 1960s with comprehensive education and then certification for all in the 1980s and CfE in the 2000s. Now we need to take a fundamental and visionary look.

The question is: will we have the debate, who will lead the debate and will the debate be about school based education or education and learning in its broadest context including the needs of the individual and of society? Will the debate include all providers and recipients of education or - as has been in the past - will it be limited in the scope of its membership? If we could agree the parameters then this need not take long and certainly should not take the length of time it has to get CfE in place. Realistically the pace of debate which is being set on the further devolution of powers to Scotland is what we need.

Future change should be agreed and involve all partners. It needs to be planned, staged, progressive, resourced and built on a solid and transparent framework. It should be led by headteachers and practising educationalists, by business and parents, by young people and young teachers. As much as anything future change should be radical under the surface but it should also be recognisable, coherent and understandable to all and at the same time not be threatening or create worry and confusion. You can have real and dynamic change within a recognisable

framework. A clear set of Conditions and Arrangements should be produced which are succinct with supporting materials. Until these are there for educators to study and adapt and add their flair to, nothing should be implemented. The current model is make it up as you go supported by the most overly detailed layers of 'guidance' including Experiences and Outcomes - all of which has encouraged a tick box approach to curricular development and over assessment so as to ensure that when inspected by HMIE everything is covered.

To support new development we need to decentralise and devolve responsibility and resources down to delivery level. The development of CfE has cost tens of millions of pounds yet virtually none of that money went directly or indirectly to schools; most of it supported national and local authority teams and consultants. As a direct move I would suggest we do not need 32 local authorities with 32 Education Departments (stand alone or otherwise) and 32 Directors of Education etc. This duplication needs to be addressed and would allow significant savings to be made and allow reinvestment in the front line. I realise that there are a number of amalgamated services and also some joint working between a few authorities but this does not go far enough.

Currently in the state sector devolved school management of resources is there in words but not in practice. Headteachers do not control the vast majority of the budget needed to run the school they are charged with leading. Put the resources into the front line, redeploy staff from the centre into schools. Energise and empower

Headteachers – set them free and give them true accountability.

Let me give you two examples of developments I think illustrate where we should be going. When I was Headteacher of Breadalbane Academy we were a highly successful school and normally sat in the top twenty schools in Scotland for SQA attainment but this was not enough. We adapted our curriculum to the needs of our rural community. We offered Land Based Studies including Gamekeeping (4000 pheasants and we had our own processing unit to butcher and package the birds), Agriculture, Equestrianism, Horticulture, Fencing and Dyking. We started to develop a Centre for Rural Entrepreneurship with the support of high flying local Businessmen/entrepreneurs so that young people could start their business plan in S6 with a view to staying in their community with their own businesses. We planned with Perth College to offer the opportunity to start your degree in S6 through the UHI with the option to move on to a mainstream University or complete your degree and stay in the area. We also planned to support our community by broadcasting radio and developing local TV. We were an integral part of our community delivering high quality education in a format that suited our community.

As Headteacher of Perth Grammar School I rebuilt the school around Sport and Health and the Expressive Arts. They became the drivers to raise attainment and achievement for all. When we did this, the senior school core subjects got less teaching time but the results improved. We also jointly developed a Professional Development Award in General Insurance

at Higher level with Aviva (a major and visionary employer in Perth) and Perth College which came with a guaranteed interview scheme on successful completion. We adapted the middle school to include a wide variety of vocational courses including Sport and Recreation, Hairdressing, Horticulture and Mechanics as an option instead of French or German. However this was balanced by enhancing the Modern Language curriculum with the introduction of Spanish and Mandarin. Results in all subjects and behaviour improved when these changes were introduced. From the junior school upwards we introduced drama as a core and optional subject for all. All pupils in S1 and S2 had to join at least one extra curricular club and the vast majority sustained this throughout the year. As a measure of effectiveness all SQA results improved and over five years exclusions dropped by 62%. This was supported by pupils, staff, parents the wider community and the local authority but was mainly done within our own resources with the exception of extra curricular sport which we financed significantly through our own Sports Trust. The Charitable status that a Trust brings gives huge added value to a school for example it found funding for and installed what is the largest and technically most varied indoor climbing wall of any school in Scotland. The pupils were proud of their school and believed we were the best.

All the above was achieved by not following the lead of others but by being creative, calculated risk takers. Unfortunately the current demands of CfE and subsequently the endless demands for plans, data, self auditing and self evaluation are sapping the strength out of schools as they feed

the needs of local and national governments for facts, figures and signs of conformity.

If we want to develop creative, innovative, happy, high achieving, confident young people and professionals in school we need to radically rethink the current model.

In conclusion I would say that I believe we have missed an opportunity with CfE to be bold and creative. I and my generation developed Standard Grade of which we were rightly proud 30 plus years ago. Let us trust our young staff and young people to work with business leaders, parents, politicians and wider society to come up with a 21st Century model for the 21st century. All they need is the opportunity.

## Family values should support our young people not state interference

*The SNP Government's policy to have a "named person" for 0-18 year olds has pushed the boundaries of the state way too far, argues **Elizabeth Smith MSP**. Elizabeth is the Scottish Conservative Spokesman on Children and Young People.*

Political philosophers are always, quite rightly, keen to argue that there is an important distinction between political power and legal power. In democracies, governments which wish to remain in office pay just as much attention to political power as they do to legal power since their tenure of office depends more on their electoral popularity and their ability to take the public with them rather than on forcing the public to do what the state tells them.

Throughout history, a substantial part of philosophical thinking has evolved around how best to strike the right balance between the two conflicting principles of individual liberty and the authority of the state, and around how to define the common good. For example, Hobbes argued that individual liberty necessarily had to be limited to allow additional benefits of state authority. Locke, on the other hand, argued the reverse; that the authority of the state should be limited to allow individual liberty to flourish.

This debate, which also underpinned so many of the writings of the ancient Greek philosophers, is just as relevant today. If the actions of the state are directed too much in favour of compulsion and laws backed by punitive sanctions, then the exercise of personal, social and moral freedom is inhibited – what Aristotle

described as the state's ability to diminish "the good life". The issue is very much at the heart of how democracies run their government and, as such, it is a major factor which determines what political parties write in their policy manifestoes. More interesting however, is the fact that as Western democracies have become more liberal in their social attitudes, the philosophical tensions about the role of the state have grown stronger.

Herein lies a contradiction within the SNP's current policy-making. They are quick to tell us that they whole-heartedly espouse a liberal democratic tradition and that they will do much more to increase personal freedoms by promoting greater equality and social justice yet, over the course of its majority government since 2011, the SNP have become increasingly authoritarian and paternalistic. Within SNP social policy there have been overt moves to increase the power of the state; to centralise the police force, abolish the right to buy council houses, undermine the autonomy of Scotland's colleges and universities and take back private land into state ownership. In the recent Referendum, we heard threats about nationalising key industries so there is a strong suggestion that SNP economic policy is going in the same direction.

But it is the SNP's insistence that all children between 0-18 should have a "Named Person" which has been the most controversial and which, for many families in Scotland, is an example of pushing the boundaries of the state too far and which is symptomatic of a government that does

not trust its people.

To be fair to the SNP, the Named Person policy had its origins within the serious challenges facing some of our most vulnerable children. Everyone knows that there have been a number of shocking cases across Scotland and the UK which have demonstrated just how bad it can be for some of our most vulnerable children. We are all repulsed by the depths of depravity which confront these children as they struggle against abuse and isolation and a childhood that is permanently blighted by poor care and living in harmful environments. It is something about which we must all be concerned and it was one of the main reasons behind the Children and Young People's Act, which was passed at Holyrood on 27th March 2014.

It also has its origins in the fact that there is so much incontrovertible evidence which tells us that the early years are the most important when it comes ensuring that children are given the very best start in life and that key components of the support are more health visitors and better, and more flexible, provision of child care. No-one doubts either of these facts and it has been clear that all political parties have seen the need to place considerable focus on these policy areas, even if they differ in approach.

As a result of this co-operation between the political parties at Holyrood, the Children and Young People's Act did many good things, especially in terms of measures to improve child care, kinship care, support for care leavers and the protection of rural schools. It had, however, one fundamental flaw which prevented it

from gaining final cross party support and which has continued to cause alarm amongst many parents. That flaw was the sinister proposal to introduce a 'Named Person' or state guardian for every child between 0 and 18 years old.

What is implicit in this proposal to have a "Named Person" for every child is the insistence that the state, rather than parents and families, has the primary obligation to look after children. It is an invasion of family life and it therefore tips the balance of individual responsibility in favour of the state rather than the family – a point very well made by Allan Massie, in his Daily Mail column of 6th June 2014 when he reminded us that it is traditionally totalitarian régimes which, throughout history, have been hostile towards the family since they see the existence of the family and its values as threats to the authority of the state.

He is right. If there are thousands of parents across Scotland doing a thoroughly good job of bringing up their children – and there are – then what right does the Scottish Government have to tell them that the state knows better? The introduction of the Named Person smacks of the worst form of intervention largely because it repudiates individualism and the associated family and it is this aspect which has given rise to such concern across Scotland.

In any case, the rights of children do not stand in isolation. They should be seen in the context of the rights of parents and families and the responsibilities of these families. This holistic approach is the principle which already underpins most

children and young people's legislation – whether that is within Scots, UK or European law – so it is little wonder that both the Faculty of Advocates and the Law Society of Scotland raised concerns about the new Act "diluting" the legal role of parents. They pointed to the fact that the Act allows ministers not only to have more powers, but that these are both ill-defined and open-ended, and they questioned whether the Named Person part of the legislation can ever meet the accepted criteria for "good law".

The No to Named Person Campaign ([www.No2NP.org](http://www.No2NP.org)), which has been up and running for some months now, has been hugely successful in representing these deep seated concerns amongst parents who feel that they are being told that they are not competent to look after their own children. They are rightly worried that there has been a withdrawal of trust and that this will alter the previously strong relationships which have existed between parent and teacher, parent and health visitor and, most importantly, between parent and child. It is this matter of undermining trust which is now so central to this debate and which is responsible for the legal challenge to the Named Person legislation led by human rights QC Aidan O'Neill.

But apart from all this, what on earth is the point of insisting that the vast majority of families who are coping perfectly well must have a "Named Person" on the same basis as those families who face genuine problems? What is the point of forcing all children to have a Named Person even when no problem exists? It defies common sense, particularly at a time when local

authorities are facing increasingly tight budgets. Throughout its deliberations within both Holyrood's Education Committee and the Finance Committee, the Scottish Government was not able to provide the necessary detail on how much the Named Person legislation would cost – particularly over the longer term - and it was clear from the evidence provided by groups like health boards, the teaching unions and the Royal Colleges of Nursing and Midwives that they did not believe the financial memorandum which accompanied the initial bill was, in any way, a statement of the true cost. The drain on time and money and additional training within local authorities and social services is considerable. If money needs to be spent providing Named Persons for all children, then, by definition, resources are diverted away from children facing the greatest challenges. That, surely, is not meant to be the intention. It does not add up to good government and a responsible state.

Other legal experts have pointed out that by defining a child as between 0 and 18, the Scottish Government has moved against existing legislation which defines a child as between 0 and 16. Does the Scottish Government really think this is workable? Are we really going to expect an 18-year-old couple who have their first child to have three Named Persons in the family? This is surely ridiculous as it evidenced by some of the strongest proponents of the Named Person admitting that it can't work in these older age-groups.

Now, there are some people who tell us that there is nothing to worry about – that this policy is just a formalisation of what is

already happening and that it is just a means of expanding the successful GIRFEC project which had its origins in Highland Council. However, it is very clear that there are large swathes of the parent body who do not accept that. They point to the fact that there is little or no evidence that proves that the areas of success within Highland Council's children and young people policy, is directly a result of a Named Person policy. Indeed, it can be easily argued that Highland achieved better success rates without legislation and because the local authority's culture of care has meant the various departments have collaborated so well which is, after all, the main principle which underpins GIRFEC .

At the same time, we have many parents arguing that the Named Person part of the GIRFEC policy has been introduced by the back door and that the full details have never been made clear, something which these same parents will not forget when they support the No2NP campaign's legal challenge.

Is it really acceptable that because of the undoubted failure of a small minority of social workers or teachers or health workers to detect problems, we allow the imposition of a large bureaucracy of state monitoring for every child between 0 and 18 and that this is allowed to take place without the whole parent body being made fully aware of its implications?

Inherent in this, is the hugely controversial issue over data-sharing; in particular, concern about what is meant when it is said that information should be shared if it "might be relevant" to a child's wellbeing and "ought to be provided" as a safeguard

against any potential problems the child might encounter. Under the scheme, Named Persons can have access to the child's school records, NHS files and other confidential documents so it is not hard to think of scenarios where there will be potential for conflict between parents and the Named Person. What happens, for example, in a situation where a young girl becomes pregnant and both she and her parents decide they would like to keep the child but the Named Person disagrees because - on account of being privy to the medical records of the girl - he or she feels that caring for that child would be too difficult? What would happen in situations where the parents and Named Person disagree about the child's access to sex education or religious observance in school? These likely scenarios prompted the Oxford academic, Adrian Hilton, to describe the Named Person policy as the "nationalisation of nurture".

This essay began with some comment about the ever-present tension between individual liberty and the authority of the state. It is a tension which has troubled philosophers down the ages and it will undoubtedly trouble them in exactly the same way in the future. If history is anything to go by, governments will never be able to remove that tension, but these same governments are defined by the extent to which their people will accept the authority of the state. At present, we have a Scottish Government which is increasingly willing to extend the boundaries of the state. Will the people of Scotland now start to rebel against that move and, in the first instance, demand that the Named Person policy is removed from the statute books?





