



## Official Response

**SUBJECT:** Education (Scotland) Bill  
**REQUESTED BY:** Education and Culture Committee – Scottish Parliament  
**REFERENCE:** OR-2015/04  
**DATE:** MONDAY 18 MAY 2015  
**SUBMITTED BY:** David Bradwell, Associate Secretary, Church and Society Council  
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Thank you for the invitation to submit a written response to your call for evidence. We would be able and willing to give oral evidence if we can be of further assistance.

We have responded to questions 1-6 and 9 on attainment, and offered some general comments on some of the other sections of the Bill.

### Attainment

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

We support the introduction of a socio-economic duty on local authorities to reduce inequality. Tackling poverty at every level of Government and by the efforts of civil society and voluntary organisations should be an over-riding priority. Our views on related issues can be found in our response to a consultation on the UK Equality Bill duties to promote equality and socio-economic duty in 2009.<sup>1</sup>

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

No, it does not go far enough. It has limitations in area of enforcement, though the requirement to report publically is welcome.

#### **3. How should ‘inequalities of outcome’ be interpreted and should this phrase be defined in the Bill?**

We agree that this phrase should be clearly defined and understood. We do not have any specific suggestions but would be willing to engage in a dialogue with the Scottish Government in response to any ideas they might have.

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.actsparl.org/media/71629/or%20-%20cos%20-%20socio-economic%20duty%20sg%20-%20oct%2009.pdf>

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

The specific actions taken will arise from raised awareness of the issues at all levels and their incorporation into the processes of reporting and accountability.

**5. How do the provisions on attainment fit with existing statutory National Priorities for Education and the requirements to produce annual statements of improvement objectives and school development plans?**

The provisions on attainment fit well alongside all of the above. Narrowing the attainment gap is the most effective way of achieving increased attainment overall.

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

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

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

These terms are widely used and generally well-understood. We do not see any major difficulty with regard to delivery.

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

The advantage of a socio-economic approach is that it could provide a prism through which other policy areas could be viewed. The creation of a socio-economic duty would require public authorities to consider whether their decisions increased or decreased poverty.

Other factors need to be considered, including geographical location (and rural / urban issues), parental attitudes and many other societal attitudes. We recognise that such issues would be outwith the scope of this Bill, but it is perhaps useful to consider them in the wider debate about education and young people in Scotland today.

**Gaelic**

The Health and Sport Committee may be interested to know that the Church of Scotland held a national conference on Gaelic in March.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See

[http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/news\\_and\\_events/news/recent/landmark\\_event\\_to\\_preserve\\_gaelic\\_wi\\_thin\\_the\\_church](http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/news_and_events/news/recent/landmark_event_to_preserve_gaelic_wi_thin_the_church)

We broadly welcome the aims of the Bill with regard to the continuing development of the delivery of Gaelic medium primary education. In relation to the Health and Sport Committee's inquiry into the attainment gap earlier this year, we re-iterate the role of the local church and other voluntary and community organisations. Gaelic speaking Church members could be encouraged, both by ourselves, as well as by national government, local authorities, Education Scotland and Bòrd na Gàidhlig. To make such an outreach meaningful would need additional resources.

### **Additional Support for Learning**

We support the aim of this section of the Bill in seeking to increase young people's rights.

### **Chief Education Officer**

We note that the Scottish Government has not consulted on this proposal. It is our recommendation that this is taken out of the current Bill and that a proper consultation with relevant stakeholders does take place. The Church of Scotland's Education Committee appoints the Church of Scotland representatives on local authority committees that have responsibility for education, and we are disappointed not to have been asked for our views on this important matter relating to the structure of local government. Such a post may be beneficial; however a full consultation would allow the Scottish Government to set out its case for this position, why it should be a statutory requirement, and to include a description of what the current problem is and why this proposal would be the best solution.

A concern of the Church relates to a creeping tendency of centralisation and uniformity imposed across a range of policy areas. Our support for the principle of subsidiarity suggests that the staffing and employment within individual local authorities should be up to the local authorities and, ultimately to citizens voting at elections.

We are also concerned about whether a local authority facing difficult budget decisions will receive any additional support or ability to adequately resource this post.

### **Registering teaching staff**

We do not have any specific comments to make about this section of the Bill.

### **Complaints**

We do not have any specific comments to make about this section of the Bill.

### **Learning and childcare**

The proposals contained in the Bill are reasonable.

### **Other issues**

We were pleased to have been approached on the question of children’s rights and additional support needs by Scottish Government officials. We regret that we received no communication around the proposals to introduce Chief Education Officers, despite our statutory role in relation to local authorities and education.