



Scrutiny of the Draft Budget 2015-2016

Response to the Call for Written Evidence from the Scottish Parliament Education and Culture Committee

The UNISON Scotland Submission to the Scottish Parliament's Education and Culture Committee October 2014

Introduction

UNISON Scotland welcomes the opportunity to respond to the call for evidence from the Education and Culture Committee on the 2015-16 budget. UNISON is Scotland's largest trade union representing the key workers in early years and childcare, they deliver a range of services in schools, nurseries education departments and careers advice. UNISON members pay taxes as well as delivering and using public services and are therefore in a unique position to comment on public services in Scotland. UNISON is able to collate their views in order to inform the policy process in Scotland.

General Comments

These are tough times for local government: services are being squeezed and so are the living standards of the workers who deliver those services. The local government revenue grant has again been cut in real terms, (with the exception of additional funding previously announced for free school meals). While extra revenue is anticipated from non-domestic rates and some additional capital this leaves an overall standstill budget. The council tax freeze continues for the eighth year with no increase in funding. Local government remains the only major spending portfolio to experience a cash cut since the financial crash.

The inescapable fact for the vast majority of the workforce in public services in recent years is that prices have risen faster than wages. Many staff find themselves working harder-as staffing cuts and rising demand put them under more pressure – at the same time their standard of living is going down. Wages in Scotland, and throughout the UK, have in recent years failed to keep pace with inflation. While wages have been virtually static price increases impacting at greater levels than headline inflation figures have led to a considerable drop in living standards

The only positives have been a number of flat rate payments to the lowest paid staff and the gradual introduction of a living wage across both the NHS and Local Government during this period. The cumulative effect of frozen or near frozen pay on actual wages is easy to spot. Had pay kept pace with inflation since 2007 this would have made a difference of over £3,000 to a library assistant (SCP25), and similar sums for an early years worker.

This obviously has an impact on living standards. But the failure of pay to keep pace with indexed inflation figures conceals the extent to which the value of wages has fallen. Inflation indexes are (as the term implies) an average of prices across the economy as a whole. Inflation as it is experienced by individuals can be markedly different. This has tended to be the case for workers – particularly lower paid workers in recent years. Spending on necessities makes up a greater share of the expenditure of the low paid than it does the better off. In the 'era of austerity' the rate of inflation for these has often raced ahead of indexed inflation. Office of National Statistics data shows that food has mostly been increasing in price faster than indexed inflation for the last three years, the price of electricity and gas has always been ahead of average inflation.

UNISON members not only provide public services but also use them. And doing this is now more expensive. Although council tax has been frozen many local authorities have either introduced or increased charges for services in recent years – school meals, access to day centres, lunch clubs, bulk uplift, even burial and cremation. Audit Scotland have estimated that in recent years the proportion of local government spending raised by charges has gone from 40% of council tax funding to 57%. The shift from funding via

taxation to charging at the point of use is regressive (more regressive than council tax increases) and bears down more heavily on the low paid.

Holding down pay, is bad for workers, bad for their families, bad for the economy and bad for the public services we all rely on. The issues of poverty and underperformance in the economy won't be solved simply by increasing wages. But they cannot be tackled without increasing wages. The necessity for doing so is fast becoming a social and economic priority not merely a matter for those who will be the direct – and deserving beneficiaries.

Given recent trends in local authorities' spending on schools, what are likely to be the main pressures on education budgets in financial year 2015-16? Will there be any impacts on pupils and families; attainment; teacher numbers; the length and scheduling of the school week; teachers' terms and conditions; developing and strengthening links between schools, colleges and employers; etc?

The recent Audit Scotland report '[School education](#)' stated that—

- In 2012/13, councils spent £4.8 billion on education, of which £4 billion was provided through the block grant. Education is the single largest area of council expenditure, accounting for almost a third of total revenue expenditure in 2012/13. The majority of education expenditure, £3.8 billion (80 per cent), was on primary and secondary school education;
- Councils' spending on education reduced by five per cent in real terms between 2010/11 and 2012/13, largely as a result of employing fewer staff.

The cuts are already impacting on staff numbers. While much of the focus is on teacher numbers it is important to note that education is delivered by a whole team and the focus on teacher numbers alone does not give a full picture as to the impact of cuts of the delivery of education. The Audit Scotland report quoted above and in the call for evidence gives an overview of all the jobs lost in schools: over 1400 FTE posts. Reports from UNISON branches suggest that the worst is yet to come with far more jobs cuts in the pipeline. The current salami slicing of posts is unsustainable. Work doesn't go away when less staff are employed. The cuts mean that the remaining staff have increased workloads or some things just aren't done. Cuts in administrative and clerical staff increase the workload of teachers and head teachers, fewer classroom assistants and technicians impact on the types and numbers of activities and experiments that can be done. They also cut into the time teachers have for planning and reflecting and therefore on their ability to ensure that each child is being taught in a way that meets their individual needs.

The EIS released figures this week from a FOI request showing increased assaults on teachers. Our own research indicates that across the 23 authorities that responded to our FOI there were 4845 assaults on support staff in their schools. The EIS claims that "education budget cuts that have led to fewer staff working in schools and rises in class sizes –all likely contributory factors to any increases in pupil indiscipline". Our members support this view. Classroom assistants increasingly find their job to be one of dealing with challenging behaviour. These assaults are just the tip of the iceberg of disruptive behaviour and don't just impact on the individuals concerned but cause a great deal of disruption to the learning of the rest of the pupils. Cutting back on classroom assistants severely impacts on the quality of education provided to all children.

The cuts would be difficult to manage all things being equal but schools are also facing increased demands. There are growing numbers of children in our primary schools. This is not expected to peak until 2020. The challenge isn't just the extra number. Increasingly children with additional support needs are taught in mainstream schools: now making up 18.7% of mainstream school pupils. (The method of collecting data has changed so there are no comparable figure pre 2011) The figure has gone up from

98,523 pupils in 2011 to 131,621 in 2013. While this is a policy that UNISON fully supports, mainstreaming requires adequate resources in order to be successful.

Children with complex medical and care needs are being taught in schools without appropriately trained and qualified staff to deal with their needs. Staff, often the lowest paid: a classroom assistant, are undertaking medical and intimate duties with minimal training. Our members have real concerns for the safety of some children in our schools. The same issues are increasingly arising in nurseries.

School budgets are tight which means that charges are being introduced or increased for school trips and other educationally enhancing activities. Many children are acutely aware of how tight money is at home and don't even ask parents if they can go on trips as they don't want to see their parents stressed, sacrificing other things or taking on debt. This means that increasingly those children from less well-off backgrounds who already have the least opportunity to try these, miss out, further increasing inequalities. There are shortages of basic equipment like pens, pencils, paper and glue. This again means that children, whose parents can provide these basics, never mind additional items like your own computer, printer and craft equipment for homework, are increasingly advantaged at school.

How should schools, local authorities and the Scottish Government be preparing to deal with these spending pressures?

The only solution is more money. The low hanging fruit of efficiency savings have been picked. It is clear that the salami slicing is over and serious cuts are on their way. The Scottish Government and local authorities need to introduce ways to raise more money to invest in the delivery of services. Councils need more opportunities to raise their own money, they need power over non domestic rates and a range of local taxes to suit their needs. The underfunded council tax freeze benefits the rich most and is severely impacts on local government finances. This needs to end; the best route forward is a new fairer property tax to be collected locally. All parties should work together to agree on a fair tax as soon as possible. The Scottish government needs to use its current powers to increase its budget as well as any powers in the pipeline. Providing services through fair taxation is the most equitable and fair route.

Will the allocation to be provided via the 2015-16 Draft Budget be sufficient to enable local authorities to provide a quality education; meet all their statutory obligations in relation to schools; and deliver the Scottish Government's national educational priorities?

As stated earlier the education budget is under severe pressure. Public services in general and education in particular are the most effective route to reducing inequality and the impacts of that inequality on children. Cuts in education therefore put the Scottish Government's stated aim of making Scotland fairer at real risk in both the short and the long term. Statutory obligations particularly around additional support for learning are at risk.

The Scottish Government's national performance framework (NPF) "provides a strategic direction for policy making in the public sector, and provides a clear direction to move to outcomes-based policy making". How has the NPF helped the Scottish Government and education authorities move towards 'outcomes-based policy making' in relation to schools?

UNISON is not aware of the National Performance Framework being effective in this way. The outcomes and indicators do not seem to have become part of discussions about local

government services in, the media, parliamentary committees or the wider body of Scottish debate. The Single Outcome Agreements between local authorities and the Scottish Government do not seem to be widely scrutinised or discussed. We therefore welcome the fact that the committee is asking at this question.

How do the Scottish Government and local authorities ensure that funding for schools is spent in a way that best delivers value for money?

How are pupils, parents, teachers, and communities able to contribute to discussions on—

-the allocations that should be set out in the draft budget;

-how these allocations should be spent on schools?

Democracy separates the public realm from the market realm. Public services should be driven by accountability to the voter – not maximising profit for shareholders. Local authorities are directly elected and therefore must be free to respond to local needs. However, democracy is more than voting every four years and Scotland needs to make a leap forward in terms of improved democratic engagement.

UNISON believes that genuine consultation with both the workers who deliver services and service users offers the best route to improved and responsive service delivery. This has to be more than presenting already made plans for discussion; it must also include framing the problems at the start. This requires support as otherwise those who are already disadvantaged will lose out to those who are well organised and articulate. There is still much more to be done to give all public service users a greater say locally. The Commission for Local Democracy, while not perfect, offers a route forward. UNISON would encourage the Scottish Government and local authorities to move forward in this way.

How will the draft budget advance the preventative spending agenda in relation to school spending?

Despite widespread agreement on the value of preventative spending little headway appears to have been made in investing in it. This is particularly difficult in a time of budgets cuts when we still have to spend to deal with current problems. This cannot be an excuse not to do so. Otherwise we will continue to face the same problems.

Education is in itself preventative spending. The aim of Getting it Right For Every Child is to ensure that many of the problems we currently deal with from crime to poor physical and mental health can be prevented or at least reduced through ensuring we have a well educated population able to make good choices about their lives. This is more than qualifications though it is also about supporting the personal and social development of our children. Research shows that the socioeconomic status of a child's family still has a substantial impact on their educational outcomes. Cuts to school budgets are more likely to impact on children from lower income backgrounds as their parents/carers have less resources to pay for equipment to support homework, a quiet warm place to study or even for the basic day to day school equipment pens, pencils, calculators PE kits, and education enhancing activities both in and out with school. The current cuts will only enhance already existing inequalities. Failing to reduce these inequalities will only cost more money in the long run.

Ensuring that school provides a broad learning environment for pupils can also lead to very quick savings in other budgets: reduced crime and antisocial behaviour leads to immediate savings in police and other council budgets such as graffiti removal. It's a

cliché but the cost of secure accommodation for a teenager in 20 years is substantially more expensive than supporting her potential parents now to do well at school and to learn how to make good choices when they become adults. A local authority fireworks display or school show can save a fortune in police and fire spending in one weekend. The drop in crime during the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow this summer needs more research but it does indicate that having positive exciting things to do can have an impact on crime.

Getting preschool education/childcare right also offers savings within a few years as children come to school “ready” therefore saving money in the schools budget within a few years. The new investment in early years is welcome but there is little indication that the current allocation to local government for the extra hours has been properly costed to ensure it covers the extra staff and building costs needed. Truly transforming early years for our children requires much more than a extra hours, it requires improved maternity leave and rights, better pay, qualifications and career prospects for the staff who work in nurseries, decent well paid jobs for those mothers who choose to work and a substantial increase in the numbers of nursery places available across Scotland.

Conclusion

The local government revenue grant has again been cut in real terms. While extra revenue is anticipated from non-domestic rates and some additional capital this leaves an overall standstill budget. The council tax freeze continues for the eighth year with no increase in funding. Local government remains the only major spending portfolio to experience a cash cut since the financial crash. As the largest area of council spending and with growing demands on the service, education services and the staff who deliver them are under increasing pressure. UNISON therefore welcomes the opportunity to submit evidence to the Education and Culture Committee on the 2015-16 budget.

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