



# **Post-16 Education Bill**

The UNISON Scotland evidence to the Education and Culture committee

**January 2013**

## **Introduction**

UNISON is Scotland's largest public sector trade union representing over 160,000 members delivering services across Scotland. UNISON members deliver a wide range of services in post 16 education including advice, research support, IT, finance, learning and student support services, cleaning, administration, libraries, technical and security, porter services, careers advice and management. These employees are often the face of education in Scotland and contribute a great deal on the overall student experience, providing the foundations for high quality learning for all. UNISON Scotland is able to collate and analyse members' experience to provide evidence to inform the policy process. We therefore welcome the opportunity to provide evidence to the Education and Culture Committee

## **Evidence**

1. UNISON members in Higher and Further Education (HE and FE) feel that management and governance bodies do not engage adequately with staff both on the day to day running of institutions or on organizational improvement and development. Nor are they properly accountable for the public money they spend. UNISON has argued for some time that there needs to be greater oversight of management of these institutions. UNISON believes that colleges in particular would benefit from improved governance and public accountability. We therefore welcome the new ministerial powers in relation to boards.
2. More needs to be done to improve the quality of college boards and it may be these proposals could improve this particularly if board members are directly elected. UNISON is disappointed that the proposed regional boards will not include union representation unlike the proposals for HE. Our members have little or no contact with board members leaving them feeling the boards have little understanding of the day to day running of colleges and the implications of the decisions they make at board level. Moving to regional boards risks creating even more distance. Communication with staff is only via line management. This is not always of a high standard with our members in particular excluded. It is often one way i.e. management tell but don't listen. If board members had more contact with staff they would be better informed, more able to challenge management information at board level and therefore to improve the running of the college. Union representatives are best placed to undertake this role as they are directly accountable to their members through the democratic structures of the unions involved
3. UNISON members in HE are generally supportive of the proposals contained in the Von Prondiski report on governance in higher education and hope that these changes are not watered down when in the final bill.
4. UNISON fully supports the aim of widening access to higher education and is therefore concerned that the cuts in FE budgets and proposals to merge colleges will make it much harder for people from under-represented socio-economic groups to access higher education. Further Education is a key route to higher education for those from groups who are currently under-represented in HE. Proposals to concentrate courses into fewer

venues in the name of efficiency will make it harder for the government to achieve its aim. We have already seen a two percent drop in the numbers of part-time students, another important route for underrepresented groups. The fact that college courses can be undertaken close to home is really important. This cuts down on travel and childcare costs: key barriers to those on low incomes accessing and completing courses. Travelling long distances makes it difficult to work alongside study and also adds to any childcare costs as children have to be looked after longer. Transport links are often poor which makes it difficult and expensive to travel. Some people also lack the confidence to undertake study out with their own areas. There is also the added issue for young men who often face or fear violence when they travel out with their own communities. Local delivery of courses is crucial to people embarking and finishing their further education and training. Confidence and qualifications gained through undertaking FE provided the impetus for many to go on to Higher education.

5. College regionalisation is about budget cuts not improvement. Colleges have already cut over 1300 jobs; courses including vocational courses like aeronautical and aircraft engineering, computer animation, digital gaming green-keeping, and horticulture have been cut. Thousands of people were unable to find a college place this year. We believe that regionalisation could make a difficult situation worse. Instead of improving accountability and efficiency the current proposals merely merge colleges. Aside from the impact on students and the local economy our key concern is that many of the roles undertaken by our members will be moved into a “big shed” type delivering services across colleges and possible regions. Shared services are still the default option for improved public service “improvement” despite the lack of evidence that they improve public services or make substantial savings. In fact the experience of most public sector organisations in the UK and internationally is that moving to shared services creates a period of disruption and at best takes five years to make any cost savings.
6. The Roe Report called for longer hours to offer more flexible learning opportunities to help learners combine work and study but instead we see colleges closing earlier.
7. The proposals round regionalisation claim that there will be savings through the sharing of many so called back room services. This approach to service delivery still has many advocates despite the lack of evidence of them either bringing improvement or making any savings of the type needed to deal with the current spending cuts. In Further Education roles like librarians, finance staff, and welfare staff risk being pushed into a “big shed” delivery model. These require face-to-face contact with students.
8. Shared services are in fact extremely costly and have high upfront costs. The investment ratio is 2:1. Often costs are pushed to another department. The National Audit Office report indicates that so far projects have taken five years to break even. Key issues:
  - Initial costs of shared services are underestimated because implicit costs and externalities are often not included.
  - Introduction of shared services is complex and costly and requires detailed research.

- While some cost savings can be achieved, targets are rarely met.
  - Savings are mainly from job losses.
  - There are job losses in regional areas which affect the viability of rural communities
9. Evaluation of shared services projects has shown that savings targets are rarely achieved. One reason for this is that planned savings are often treated as real savings which encourage decision makers to back a project. UNISON is concerned that the same mistake is being repeated in the proposals. The Minister claims that the changes will make savings of £50million; this sum is based on estimates rather than actual savings achieved elsewhere. The only savings that have been realised in the quotes used are from the City of Glasgow merger the rest are estimates for example the Edinburgh college merger business plan assumes a saving of £9million. This has yet to be realised. It is also estimated that it will cost £14.6million.<sup>1</sup> The City of Glasgow savings are almost exclusively through job cuts.
10. Audit Scotland's submission to the audit committee indicates that the costs of the regionalisation programme will be £54million. So even if the savings do materialise they will be outweighed by the costs until 2015.
11. Merging colleges in recent years has been difficult for the staff concerned. Consultation with staff has been minimal and the key staffing issues have been unresolved long after mergers have been pushed through. If changes on this scale are to be made then the staffing issues have to be resolved as beforehand so the new bodies can focus properly on delivery. The people who deliver services cannot be an afterthought it is they not structures that deliver improvement and increased efficiency.
12. UNISON believes that if this is to go ahead these issues need be resolved as part of the process rather than as an afterthought. Many require negotiation with the appropriate Trade Unions. Issues include
- Who will the employer be?
  - How/will staff transfer to a new employer?
  - Will there be a national set of terms and conditions for staff?
  - How will these be negotiated in future?
13. Legal obligations such as TUPE need to be acknowledged in the legislation. The Water Industry (Scotland) Act 2002 provides an example which could be followed in this Bill, updated to the 2006 TUPE regulations.
- 23Transfer of staff*  
*The Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 (S.I.1981/1794) apply to the transfer of functions by section 21, whether or not they would so apply apart from this section.*

It is also important to include an amendment to clauses 23K(4) and 23L(5) to 'consult with a view to seeking agreement,' mirroring TUPE Reg13(6).

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<sup>1</sup> Correspondence from the SFC 14<sup>th</sup> November 2012 to the Scottish Parliament Audit committee

14. The Post Merger Evaluation of City of Glasgow College is frequently quoted to support the view that merging colleges is the best way forward. Our members do not feel that this evaluation reflects their experience. Contrary to the impression given many issues remain outstanding and staff morale is very low. Ignoring UNISON's warning around these types of issues during changes in the Police Service has already led to difficulties. It is essential that the same mistake is not made here.
  
15. Careers Advisers need to be fully involved in post-16 support. They are the key professionals trained to ensure that people are able to make the right career choices throughout their working lives. The need for support in the areas of advice, information and guidance has never been greater and we should be enhancing and resourcing these services accordingly. They welcome the proposed improvements in data sharing. However, the last two years have seen a cut of up to twenty percent of frontline services within Skills Development Scotland. This has led to some office closures and greater difficulties for people accessing services at a time of high unemployment.
  
16. It has also led to a re- focusing that puts more onus on web based services as opposed to crucial face to face support. Although a website can provide information to those who can access it, it cannot provide the kind of support and guidance that most people require. Young people in particular need to be supported to have a realistic view of their competencies and aspirations to ensure they make the right choice. This requires face to face interactions with trained careers professionals.

### **Conclusion**

UNISON represents a range of staff delivering post-16 education. We have used their experience to inform this evidence. The cuts in funding leave the sector facing enormous challenges. Fully involving both users and staff in developing programme for change rather than imposing from above is the best way to improve services. We therefore welcome the opportunity to participate in this consultation and look forward to further participation in the process of change.

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