



Draft Budget 2014-15: National Performance Framework

Response to the Call for Written Evidence from the Scottish Parliament Finance Committee

The UNISON Scotland Submission to the Scottish Parliament's Finance Committee

August 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 the public, community and private sector. UNISON is able to analyse and collate their experience as service users and staff to provide evidence to the committee. UNISON welcomes the opportunity to provide evidence of the National Performance framework.

Evidence

Scotland Performs was launched with much fanfare in 2008. The news release from the Scottish Government promised

"Visitors to the Scotland Performs website will be presented with highly visual and easy to understand pages. They will have quick access to information about the quality of life in Scotland, and where things are getting better and where things are getting worse. The finance secretary John Swinney said:

"Scotland Performs is about responsibility and accountability."

"By making this information easy to access, and by showing exactly whether we as a country are doing well or need to do more, everyone in Scotland will have the ability to judge for themselves how Scotland is performing.

"This website is about how all of Scotland is performing. For many of the progress measures responsibility for success is shared between the Scottish Government and partners in local government, with our universities, the business community and in many cases with individual Scots. Decisions we all take will determine whether we are becoming the more successful nation we all seek."

The release also states that *"Scotland Performs is based on the Virginia Model, a strategic planning and communications tool used in the State of Virginia, USA."*

UNISON believes that Scotland Performs has not lived up to this promise. The site does not have easy to understand pages, does not provide "quick access to information" nor is there evidence of it being a strategic planning tool. Scotland Performs has surface similarities to Virginia Performs but is nowhere near as extensive in terms of data or analysis. The Virginia site offers both easy to read graphics for a range of geographical and subject areas for those looking for snapshots as well as explanations/discussions of issues and extensive data for those seeking wider information or wishing to do their own analysis. Scotland Performs is not the "go to" place for data on Scotland or the delivery of its services nor has it become a source of debate or discussion. Sites like Virginia Performs and Baltimore's city website (<https://data.baltimorecity.gov/>) give access to data that require freedom of information requests in Scotland, including the amounts of individual procurement contracts. Scotland Performs may be modelled on Virginia Performs but it has only a surface resemblance to that performance framework

UNISON is not aware of Scotland Performs updates or indicators being used in question/debates in the parliament. The outcomes and indicators do not seem to have become part of the in the discussion in parliamentary committees or the wider body of Scottish debate. UNISON has not found it useful in our policy development or analysis process. So far it has not become part of Scotland policy debates.

Key Points

1. On a very basic level the site is not user friendly or easy to navigate. The first page contains data from 2007; links down the side have to be used to find current performance. Current performance should surely be the first page.
2. Virginia Performs is also set up with clear “buttons” to enable users to save pages as PDFs or print in a readable matter on an A4 page. Scotland performs is clunky, you have to cut and paste and reformat yourself to get usable pages to print. These are minor points, in some ways, but none the less discourage use by those less confident with ICT. It makes it more difficult to use to compare/analyse the information even for experienced researchers.
3. Scotland Performs is not as similar to Virginia Performs as UNISON had hoped. The Virginia site, as well as providing easy visual indicators of overall performance against the state’s own objectives, it is also a gateway to whole ranges of data which allows citizens, researchers and policy makers to analyse the delivery of services and the states’ performance on a range of levels. Virginia Performs has easy to use data sets and graphics comparing Virginia to other US states and breaks down performance across the state. The site has links to state agencies and other bodies involved in achieving and indicators supporting research for those who wish to explore further and detail to support professional researchers and policy makers
4. If the aim is to make Scotland Performs easy to use for ordinary citizens then, like Virginia Performs, it should be easier to use and have more colour, a much clearer layout and more visual content at the top level. Virginia Performs has a far wider range of “at a glance” score cards . It also has a much more in-depth discussion of the data available on each indicator.
5. Baltimore has taken a different approach opening up its data to all.
(<https://data.baltimorecity.gov/>). If you, for example report a broken street light you can see the spreadsheet with your report and others on it, when the work is sent to the appropriate department for scheduling; when it’s scheduled for and when it’s completed. You can look at what people are reporting to the police, you can see what people are being arrested for, you can compare neighbourhood and whole city crime stats. As well as access to the data staff are using to manage/schedule work you can access data sets, and raw detail. Groups and individuals can request that data sets collated and made available on the website so you can see not just a range of data sets but also who and why they were requested. This kind of information is particularly useful empower community groups to campaign and organise. People can decide what matters to them and then find out what the city leadership are doing about it and hold them to account.

6. In Baltimore you can report a broken streetlamp, complain about a city service and then track how the service is dealing with it as well as see what others are reporting through the website. The ability to do live monitoring of service providers speeds up resolution of issues and means that service providers can respond to individual events and also see quickly if there are wider issues in a community that require a longer term solution. This benefits managers and staff as well as service users
7. The Mayor of London has “a wall of iPads” allowing access to data held by London public bodies. We are not aware of managers/political leaders operating a strategic level in Scotland’s public sector using technology to improve service delivery in this way.
8. Information that would require a Freedom of Information request or even be covered by commercial confidentiality clauses like the value, lifetime and progress on work done by private contractor is open to all in Baltimore. UNISON would welcome public access to this data in Scotland.
9. UNISON does not find Scotland Performs to be a useful gateway to data about Scotland and its public services. The key indicators are mainly updated annually; there are timelags between collection, analysis and appearing on the website. Most of the figures are only up to 2011 (For example cultural activity). Figures that are updated quarterly are easier to find and use elsewhere like ONS or Incomes Data Services. The most up to date sections are those on employment and GDP but again it is easier/quicker to access the agencies that produce these figures themselves that use Scotland Performs. Scotland Performs also doesn’t have links to these sources which would be useful if you wanted to get more detail or compare with other parts of Britain.
10. Scotland Performs doesn’t link the indicators to actual government programmes or initiatives or to other public bodies involved in delivering. In particular it would be useful to see some link to and discussion of the national indicators and targets and local authority Single Outcome Agreements. These too do not seem to be widely used.
11. There is no clear link between the Scottish Government Budget, its programme and Scotland Performs, neither physically as a web link on the site or in the discussion sections of the site. There is a link to the Spending Review from 2011 and the Programme for Government 2011-12 on the front page but nothing up-to-date. The lack of connection is though more than a technical issue about the website. The performance framework doesn’t seem to us to really link in to the detail of government initiatives. The framework doesn’t provide a format for strategic planning or review of the ongoing work of the public sector or economy in Scotland in the way promised.
12. From the discussion on the indicators on the site it is hard to tell whether the criteria for claiming progress (or failure) on an indicator are appropriate. Often +1 and -1%, is given as the benchmark but it impossible to see whether this really in on track to meet longer term contracts. For example, the climate change criteria: this currently has a making progress arrow but as a non expert on carbon reduction I can’t tell from the discussion on the page or the graph whether the reduction that has been made is

significant or is on target for the 2050 deadline. There is no indication of how much it needs to reduce each year to meet that target. Even a line on the graph charting the reduction that needs to be made would help. So while the carbon footprint has been reduced there is no way to tell if it is by enough to meet the target, far less deal with the underlying issue of climate change.

13. No clear links to other public sector bodies, neither as a button to click on web pages nor information on their role on delivering on the government's objectives.
14. UNISON is supportive of initiatives like Oxfam's *The Human Kind Index* as a way of moving towards promoting the wellbeing of people rather than purely economic indicators as the progress for our country and holding elected representatives to account for their decisions.. The Scottish Government was very positive when the report was published. UNISON would like to see more concrete steps taken to quickly move towards including something similar in their performance framework. .

Conclusion

UNISON members deliver a wide range of services in the public, community and private sector. UNISON is able to analyse and collate their experience as service users and staff to provide evidence to the committee. UNISON welcomes the opportunity to provide evidence of the National Performance Framework which we believe has failed to deliver as promised.

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