



# **Scotland's Educational and Cultural Future**

## **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 March 2014**

## Introduction

UNISON Scotland welcomes the opportunity to respond to the call for evidence from the Education and Culture Committee on Scotland's educational and cultural future. UNISON represents over 165,000 members across Scotland's public, private and voluntary sectors. Our members are the key workers in early years and childcare, they deliver a range of services in further and higher education 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 we therefore welcome the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry.

## General Comments

### Further and Higher education

There is widespread agreement that Higher Education in Scotland is one of our country's strengths particularly in terms of the disproportionate numbers of institutions in the Times Higher Education Top 200. However Scotland moves forward after September we will need to invest in and build on that success.

Table 2.1: Comparison of universities for each country according to a variety of measures

	No of universities considered	Average size of institution (student nos)	% of UK Research Council money won*	% of UK research money from industry*	% of 3* & 4* research in RAE	No. of universities in Times Higher Education World University Rankings Top 200**	No. of universities in Times Higher Education World University Rankings Top 400**	Spin-off companies formed***
Scotland	14	11,627	14.7%	17.0%	52%	5	8	70
Wales	10	11,626	3.3%	3.9%	49%	0	4	5
England	89	15,982	80.4%	77.9%	55%	27	39	346
Northern Ireland	2	12,748	1.5%	1.5%	50%	0	1	11

Source: Times Higher Education, 5 July 2012; for details refer to [www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/Journals/THE/5\\_July\\_2012/attachments/Measures\\_of\\_strength.pdf](http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/Journals/THE/5_July_2012/attachments/Measures_of_strength.pdf)

<http://www.britishcouncil.org/scotland-report-a-strategic-analysis-of-the-scottish-higher-education-sectors-distinctive-assets.pdf>

UNISON fully supports the current policy of no fees for Scottish higher education. Free higher education is a public good in itself. However despite the removal of the barrier of fees Scotland still has fewer students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds in HE than all the other UK nations.

Table 2.2: Achievements of students in Scottish universities relative to the rest of the UK

	Number of universities	Average size of institution (student nos)	Average satisfaction score in National Student Survey 2011	% HE students from lower socio-economic backgrounds
Scotland	19	11,627	84.8	26.4
Wales	10	11,626	81.8	30.7
England	89	15,982	83.1	30.9
Northern Ireland	2	12,748	85.3	39.1

Source: 'Universities and constitutional change in the UK: the impact of devolution on the higher education sector'. Tony Bruce, Higher Education Policy Institute (2012).

<http://www.britishcouncil.org/scotland-report-a-strategic-analysis-of-the-scottish-higher-education-sectors-distinctive-assets.pdf>

More needs to be done to support those from less well off backgrounds to access higher education. Given the substantial advantage that higher education brings this requires urgent action. This will require work and investment across a range of bodies, not just schools and colleges otherwise free higher education risks entrenching inequality rather than overcoming it.

Attracting international students brings a great deal of money into higher education and ensures that our universities are diverse and outward looking places broadening the experience of Scottish students who study alongside them. Scotland can also benefit if those students are able to stay here and contribute to our economy post study. The ability to set different immigration rules in an independent Scotland could make it easier to set such rules. Independence is not the only route and it could be possible to set area based immigration policies within the UK by including residential requirements for migrants.

Scotland's Future states that there is a legal basis under which RUK students can continue to be charged tuition fees by Scottish institutions under EU rules. This has been challenged by a range of politician and experts. The Telegraph reported on Feb 14<sup>th</sup> 2014 that the European Commissioner for Education Androulla Vassilou stated that this policy would be "covert discrimination" and therefore ruled out by EU law. At best maintaining this income stream is uncertain. This will place considerable financial pressure on Scottish Universities. Clearly there is also some doubt as to whether or under what rules Scotland would remain or join the EU. If Scotland ends up outside the EU then clearly all EU students including RUK could pay to study in Scotland potentially opening up a new source of revenue.

As well as the devolved funding of research through the block grant, competitively awarded research grants are provided across the UK by the research councils. In 2012-2013, Scotland was awarded 10.7% of UK Research Council funding, against 8.4% of population. When you break research funding down areas such as science and technology and biomedical sciences receive 23% and 15% of UK wide funding there are substantial benefits to Scottish Institutions from a continued shared research budget and substantial risks if this cannot continue.

Table 3.3: Percentage of award funding from each UK Research Council for Scottish and English universities (2010-11)

Research Council	Scottish universities (Scotland = 8.4% of UK population)	English universities (England = 83.9% of UK population)
Arts & Humanities Research Council	10.1%	84.8%
Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council	15.0%	81.0%
Economic and Social Research Council	9.1%	84.7%
Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council	13.2%	85.1%
Medical Research Council	10.9%	86.1%
Natural Environment Research Council	14.9%	81.6%
Science and Technology Facilities Council	22.7%	73.4%

Source: calculated by the authors from funding tables supplied by the Research Councils UK Strategy Unit.

<http://www.britishcouncil.org/scotland-report-a-strategic-analysis-of-the-scottish-higher-education-sectors-distinctive-assets.pdf>

Scotland's Future states that a shared research area would also be beneficial to the rest of the UK and would therefore continue post independence. The Scottish Government would continue contributing funds and then Scottish universities could continue to bid for

funds from this larger UK wide pool. It is hard to see what the advantages are for RUK in taking part in a shared research budget. It's not just that RUK institutions would not want to compete with Scottish institutions directly for research grants. Having high quality research teams at universities attracts high quality students, particularly international post-graduate students. It would seem unlikely that RUK bodies would want to give funds to competitors in this market. The Research Council funding could be used to attract high quality academics to RUK institutions. It cannot be guaranteed therefore that the RUK would agree to this sharing. The UK Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) has already stated that there is no guarantee.

There are significant opportunities for universities to access EU Horizon 2020 research funds and as an independent country Scotland may with a separate 'seat at the table' at the EU would make it more likely that Scotland would access more of these funds than under current arrangements. UNISON members working in HE would therefore like to see further information on how we would move forward if the shared research area was rejected by the RUK.

### **Early Years childcare and employability**

UNISON Scotland represents over 160,000 workers in Scotland who are currently facing a cost of living crisis. Wages are stagnant or falling and everyday costs continue to rise. For many with young children the high cost of childcare is either a barrier to work or leaves many women working to only to keep a foot in the workplace. The UK has a relatively low participation of women in the workforce by EU standards. A recent Mumsnet survey showed that 67 per cent of mothers in work and 64 per cent of those not working say the high cost of childcare is a barrier to taking on more employment. Parents in Scotland pay 27% of their household income on childcare, compared to the OECD average of 12%. The latest Family and Childcare Trust<sup>1</sup> report shows that even a part-time nursery place costs on average £5710 per year. We need a radical overhaul of childcare provision to ensure that it provides what families actually want: a safe nurturing environment for their children that doesn't cost the earth.

Families are faced with difficult choices weighing up what they and their children lose by not spending time together against the financial benefits of working. The better paid you are the more reward there is for working. The higher up the career ladder you are the bigger the penalty if you take a break from paid work. Most people want to be able to balance money and time with their children. Carrying on working after you have a child isn't just about current wages: taking time out of the workforce makes it much harder to find a job when you try to return and often leads to one on lower wages than pre children. There is also a gap in paying into a pension increasing the risk of poverty in old age. Childcare is very expensive and for many families is the single biggest monthly bill. Free childcare, or even heavily subsidised like in Canada, will help with this balance. It cannot be used to make all parents work full time. Improving the lives of our children also requires changes in the workplace in order to fully support families to make the best decisions about their own children.

Developing childcare solutions must be based on research on child development to ensure that childcare is of the highest standard and supports child development. We need to base childcare on what's best for children: not just as a tool to get women into work. There is already a substantial body of work in this area for example: Joining the

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/News/part-time-childcare-costs-are-now-higher-than-average-uk-mortgage>

Dots: a better start for Scotland's children by Susan Deacon. The government is committed to preventative spending: free high quality childcare offers massive future savings and also considerable immediate benefits for Scotland's families. Much has been made of the fact that increased taxation from extra hours worked will go to the UK treasury not directly to the Scottish Government but savings in other areas will be in the Scottish budget which in any case comes from the treasury.

Developing the right childcare cannot be separated from improved maternity leave and flexible working rights. Families need time to look after their own children and to have a choice about how they balance work and life. The workplace penalty for motherhood is substantial. The answer is to change workplaces flexible working; part-time work and paternity leave will reduce the impact of motherhood on women's earnings and therefore reduce the gender pay gap. We need as a society to make space for people to nurture their own children and stay in work. Those who look after their own children full-time should also have that work and the skills required recognised when they attempt to return to work.

We must also remember that for too many workers there is little or no career progression, much of the current debate on the gender pay gap and discrimination concentrates on board rooms and high paid executives. Too much focus on how to help high flyers stay high fliers will not change the lives of most women. The living wage, minimum year's paid maternity leave and rights to time off and flexible working and ongoing training and development opportunities regardless of whether you work full or part-time are more important ways of helping ordinary women/families.

Childminders are a popular choice for caring for under-threes. We need to explore the impact of expanded nursery provision on both parents who prefer this type on less formal care and this largely female workforce. While many choose family care for financial reasons, many parents also choose family/childminders because they don't want to use formal setting like nurseries. Improving childcare must be based on what's best for children and allow parents to choose from options which suit their needs.

Nurseries need to be provided in the public sector. This is both more cost effective, as money won't be lost to profit, and is where we will be best able to ensure that the workforce is properly paid and well qualified and ensure that they system is easy for parents to navigate.

The current system is too complex and expensive and availability is very varied across the country. Parents looking for care for under threes use private sector nurseries, third sector organisations, childminders or family/friends. The costs are high and availability across the country is patchy. There is no one place to go to find out what's available, local authorities don't even have to keep a list of what childcare is available, what it costs or monitor what demand for care is in their areas. There is no statutory obligation to provide/organise childcare for under-threes. Once children reach three they are once again faced with complex choices. Local authority centres tend to offer morning or afternoon education sessions which are unsuitable for most working parents. There are also limited places so even if the hours suited there are not enough places to meet demand. Many who would choose the public sector are forced into the private sector so they can continue to work.

Childminders or family/friends often support families, who do get places in the public sector nurseries, to "top and tail" while parents are at work. The system creates huge barriers for women trying to return to work. Until you know what specific childcare is available then it's impossible to say what hours you will be able to work. Parents can't

secure childcare until they know what hours they may be expected to work or how much they will be earning. This is hard for those hoping to negotiate changing working patterns returning to their pre child job and almost impossible for those trying to find new work.

Once a child reaches three those already in work often keep children in current nursery and use "free childcare" money to subsidise fees. Only local authority approved nurseries can deliver the early years education. Clearly this is about setting and maintaining standards but new nurseries can take time to go through the process leaving parents out of pocket while they wait. The money the council gives for your "free hours" is a set rate. It bears no relation to the actual hourly fees your private nursery charges. In private nurseries you also only get whole or half days so even if you pick up your child at 4.30 you have to pay 'til 6. Parents find the system complex, stressful and expensive.

UNISON also represents childcare workers. This largely female workforce faces all the same challenges as other working women in balancing their own caring responsibilities with work and the high costs of childcare. The childcare changes that are about to be introduced have serious implications for their workload and work patterns yet there has been little consultation. Many have caring responsibilities and can't work the extra hours being asked of them. Even if they can it's not just contact time with children that increases but also the planning, preparation and recording children's progress time. So a child in nursery for 20 hours is not just 20 hours work for her key worker. We are not convinced the hours of work and numbers of staff needed for to deliver the expanded hours are being properly calculated. Meeting with those who will implement a policy is crucial to its success.

UNISON welcomes the new childcare commitments but delivery will require adequate funding. Childcare workers need flexible part-time working. Many choose this work because it fits in with their own caring responsibilities. There needs to be a substantial increase in staff numbers to cope with both the extra hours the current children will now attend for but also the extra children who take up the service. As many will want to work part-time the number of actual people will be higher than the FTE figure.

Quality of childcare depends on the skills of those who work there. This will require training and ongoing professional development. Pay must reflect the skills and experience required to do the job. Cuts and centralisation in FE will impact on colleges' ability to delivery this training. Meeting the longer term aspiration requires investment and planning now.

The childcare workforce, particularly in the private sector is not well paid. The skills required to deliver high quality childcare, as with much work traditionally done by women, are not widely recognised or rewarded in the market. There has been progress in the public sector and one of the key reasons for our support for ensuring that the public sector delivers childcare is to ensure that this is not pulled back by expanding the low paid private sector.

Career progression is also a key issue. The degree level early years qualification and the recent clarification that it qualifies holders for leadership roles are welcome. Gender segregation in the workforce and its impact on the gender pay gap is a key issue in Scotland and just as there needs to be support for girls in schools to consider a wider set of job options but boys should also be encouraged to consider childcare as a career.

Free publically delivered childcare can transform Scotland. With adequate investment it offers the opportunity to take pressure off families by enabling more women to take up

paid work and ensuring they have more of their pay to spend or save. This will also ensure that working mothers can continue to pay into pensions, preventing poverty in old age. More than that through creating high quality care and education and seamless transitions through to school it will give children the best possible start in life. We must ensure that parents also have the opportunity, through well paid and flexible work, to set their own work life balance. Children have the right to be cared for by their parents. Expanding childcare is about better lives for families not forcing parents into full time work. This will bring longer term savings to a range of public services and short term savings to the benefits bill.

While UNISON is generally supportive of a rights based approach, it is essential that these rights are accessible in practice and do not require costly legal procedures. The long fight for equal pay shows both the strengths and challenges of this approach. So while we welcome a right to education, employment or training, the real test will be the funding and strategy put in place to make this a reality. The current cuts to FE funding, college mergers and the cuts in part-time courses do not fill us with confidence that this will be achievable in any meaningful way.

### **Broadcasting and Culture**

As Culture is largely devolved it seems an anachronism that the public services broadcaster should be regulated at UK level. The Broadcasting Commission partly supported this with their recommendations that the Scottish Parliament should take an active role in considering the broadcasting industry and services audiences in Scotland receive in order to provide a visible and public forum for debate with Scottish Ministers having a greater responsibility within the UK framework for those operational functions directly affecting Scotland. They also recommend that the influence and responsibilities of Ofcom should be strengthened and there should be specific representation for Scotland on the Ofcom Board at UK level.

### **Conclusion**

UNISON Scotland welcomes the opportunity to respond to the call for evidence from the Education and Culture Committee on Scotland's educational and cultural future. Our members are the key workers in early years and childcare, they deliver a range of services in further and higher education 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 we therefore welcome the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry.

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