1. 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?

1.1. The provision of staff is likely to be the main pressure on education budgets going forward. It has already been noted in the Audit Scotland Education report that between 2010/11 and 2012/13 spending fell by 5% in real terms largely as a result of employing fewer staff. Local authorities are likely to continue to be pressured to make savings and may choose to do so in this way. Given the already reduced numbers of teaching staff, the impact of further cuts are likely to have increasingly negative consequences in terms of work load on teachers, teacher to pupil ratios and for those pupils with additional support needs, the capacity of those needs to be met within the classroom.

Reduction in specialist staff

1.2. Over time the landscape of education provision has significantly changed for deaf learners with the provision of specialist teaching staff being significantly reduced over the past two years. The National Deaf Children’s Society is extremely concerned at the extent of cuts to specialist teaching staff for deaf learners in Scotland.

1.3. The Consortium for Research into Deaf Education (CRIDE) surveyed local authorities in Scotland in 2013 and found that:
- 79% of school aged deaf children attend mainstream schools (where there is no specialist provision); around 8% attend mainstream schools with hearing impairment resource bases and less than 3% attend special schools
- Despite an increase in the recorded number of deaf pupils, the survey tells us there has been a decline in the number of qualified Teachers of the Deaf over the past two years.

1.4. These findings are concerning as numbers of Teachers of the Deaf are reducing at the same time as recorded numbers of deaf children are increasing. The 2013 CRIDE survey illustrated the number of recorded deaf children had increased by 11% since 2011, and the forthcoming 2014 survey illustrates a further increase.

1.5. The decrease in numbers of qualified Teachers of the Deaf is concerning also as it indicates pressure on Continuing Professional Development budgets which are critical to ensuring learners with additional support needs are supported appropriately. The reduction in qualified Teachers of the Deaf indicates practitioners are not being supported to undertake the mandatory
appropriate qualifications, which under The Requirements for Teachers (Scotland) Regulations (2005) they are legally required to when working wholly or mainly with pupils with a hearing impairment.

1.6. Another example of where specialist support available to mainstream schools has been reduced is around Educational Audiology. Educational Audiologists are highly skilled teachers of deaf children with additional training in audiology. They are able to work closely between health and education, ensuring parents get the information they need from Audiology services, and that the child has a well-functioning FM or Soundfield system in the classroom. There are now only 5 Educational Audiologists working in Scottish local authorities. There is a significant impact on Teachers of the Deaf who often need to pick up additional work load to fill the gap of Education Audiologist. We are aware that some local authorities have

Attainment gap for groups of learners

1.7. As the Audit Scotland Education Report has found, there are persisting wide education attainment gaps for groups of learners. This is the case for learners with additional support needs and in particularly, deaf learners. Deafness is not a learning disability and with the right support, there is no reason why a deaf learner should achieve any less than their hearing peers. While the gap in overall tariff scores is closing between deaf learners and learners with no additional support needs, on a number of important indicators there is a worsening attainment profile for this group.

1.8. As illustrated below, the Scottish Government school leaver’s attainment destinations dataset illustrates the worsening gap that exists around two indicators: school leavers with no qualifications and those qualifying for entry into higher education.

1.9. School leavers with no qualifications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Hearing Impaired pupils</th>
<th>Pupils with no ASN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012/13</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011/12</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.10. School leavers entering Higher Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Hearing Impaired pupils</th>
<th>Pupils with no ASN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012/13</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>40.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011/12</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>38.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.11. Deaf learners also significantly trail behind their hearing peers in terms of the achievement of positive post school destinations. The number entering higher education has declined to 21.3% and while the number entering employment has increased to 19% this is still lower than the employment rate for school leavers with no additional support needs which is 25.5%.

The need for a Review into education provision for deaf learners
1.12. As a result of declining support services and the obvious attainment gap for this group, the National Deaf Children’s Society has set out a number of national recommendations to improve outcomes for deaf learners in our recent Close the Gap report. We have called on Education Scotland to conduct an Aspect Review into education provision for deaf learners in Scotland. This Review should be tasked with pulling together the national picture of current support and developing recommendations for improving outcomes among this group of learners.

We are pleased to be working with Education Scotland towards organising a Deaf Learners’ Conference in 2015 and a series of Learning Conversations for teachers on the theme of the needs of deaf learners. These events will increase continuing professional development opportunities for practitioners and open a dialogue about the issues facing this group of learners.

**Engaging in development work**

1.13. The capacity of local authority education staff to engage with development work that adds significant value to the experiences of learners in some areas is already reducing and may be further undermined if more cuts to staff take place.

1.14. An example of this development work is the Local Transitions Forum that has been set up in Ayrshire which is facilitated by the Pan-Ayrshire Hearing Impairment Service and supported by the National Deaf Children’s Society. This Forum brings together professionals working with deaf young people from across schools, colleges, universities, Jobcentre Plus, social work services as well as health services. The forum creates an opportunity for these professionals to share information and expertise and consult with deaf young people and other key stakeholders in order to improve practice in supporting deaf young people moving on from secondary school. The impact that this forum has had in a short space of time has been significant and feedback from participants has been very positive. However, staff are already under pressure to attend developmental events like this one, and as pressure on staff increases, the reality of ensuring services are joined up and engaging in partnership working will become more challenging.

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

**Assessing impact of changes to services**

2.1. A key priority for local authorities should be to monitor and evaluate the impact of any changes to service delivery on learners. Changes to service delivery can have significant implication for learners with additional support needs. The National Deaf Children’s Society would welcome the opportunity to support consultation with families and deaf children and young people to ensure these implications are fully understood and addressed.

An example of this is where an increasing number of local authority peripatetic services supporting deaf learners are moving away from a service
delivery model in which they use their specialist skills and knowledge in delivering direct one to one tuition and support to deaf learners. Rather, we have noted services moving increasingly towards a consultancy model whereby they provide information and advice to staff within mainstream schools to then deliver support. This is a significant shift which has the potential to seriously affect the learning support available to deaf learners. We are keen to ensure any implications on learners are fully monitored and addressed.

2.2. As the Audit Scotland Education Report outlines, neither the Scottish Government nor local authorities routinely collect data on attainment in the years before S4. This means we do not have a picture of the how the attainment of learners develop over time and is influenced by particular changes. The National Deaf Children’s Society continues to be concerned that without consistent national and local measures, those planning and implementing changes are unable to monitor their effects. This is the case also for the wider experiences and achievements of learners which are currently not appropriately captured.

Strategic planning of service delivery

2.3. Delivering specialist support through Communication Support Workers and Teachers of the Deaf can be expensive, and particularly for smaller authorities, can be a pressure on education budgets. This type of support however is high impact, as it can help remove significant barriers to the curriculum for deaf learners. It is crucial then, that a time of budget constraints, services are which could be regarded as well resourced are not targeted as areas in which to make savings. Guidance from the Scottish Government regarding how efficiencies should be generated would be welcomed.

2.4. The National Deaf Children’s Society would also welcome further exploration about how these issues will engage with recommendations from the Doran Review that are currently being implemented. Local authority education budgets may shift due to future processes of strategic commissioning whereby the Scottish Government will lead COSLA and health boards in the development of a planning and commissioning process to deliver national services and provision to meet the needs of children and young people with additional support needs.

2.5. The National Deaf Children’s Society is aware of the particular challenges faced by smaller local authorities which may find it difficult to deliver specialist provision for such a low incidence additional support need such as deafness. Where local authorities have pooled budgets and shared these resources they have been able to deliver more efficient services over larger geographic areas. This is the case for example in three Ayrshire authorities which deliver a joint pan-Ayrshire Hearing Impairment Service, which is better able to meet the needs of its deaf learners than if each authority attempted to do this individually in this very rural region.
2.6. Similarly, procuring and maintaining appropriate technology and equipment for deaf learners is a challenging area for local authorities. This technology is ever-evolving and can be expensive to procure for the low number of learners who require it. If equipment could be procured nationally, or if locally authorities could work in partnership to meet their technology requirements this could generate savings and ensure deaf learners have access to technology that meets their needs.

2.7. The National Deaf Children’s Society recommends that an asset based approach should also be explored by education authorities, maximising the impact of current resources to promote positive experiences and outcomes for deaf young people. An area where work could be developed with little or no need for significant investment is around peer support and mentoring. Currently there is a disparity across Scotland in how young people, including those who are deaf, have access to such support. However the potential for this type of support to foster self-confidence, self-esteem, develop deaf peer groups and allow individuals to explore their deaf identity is extremely valuable.

Opportunities to promote best practice in acoustics

2.8. The National Deaf Children's Society welcomes the £1.13 billion investment into Schools for the Future Programme which will result in the construction of over 100 schools by 2019–20. This is a significant opportunity to create the best possible educational settings for all learners. We recommend that the Scottish Government take this opportunity to ensure these new builds meet best practice in acoustics guidance. Research shows that poor acoustics are a barrier to learning and attainment for deaf children and indeed all children. Investment into good acoustics in schools should also be regarded as preventative spend given its implications for learners’ outcomes.

2.9. The National Deaf Children’s Society recommends that the Buildings Bulletin 93 is used as best practice in acoustics regulations, and we would welcome the opportunity to supply the Committee with further information on this point, based on our Acoustics Toolkit. In both England and Wales all new builds and extensions must adhere to the mandatory good practice guidelines contained in the Buildings Bulletin 93.

3. 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?

3.1. The National Deaf Children’s Society recommends that in order for local authorities to deliver quality education and meet all their statutory obligations, school budgets are protected. While many areas of the education budget are seeing proposed investment in the 2015-16 Draft Budget, it is concerning to note a proposed £1.1 million decrease in the budget for children’s rights and wellbeing and a £0.6 million decrease in the budget for learning and support. The National Deaf Children's Society would welcome further information on the services that will be directly affected by these reductions and if it has not
already been completed, recommends that an impact assessment is carried on these proposed reductions.

In light of the significant cuts which have already affected specialist support for deaf learners, the National Deaf Children’s Society also seeks assurances that these services would not be further affected by the proposed decreased budget in learning and support and in children’s rights and wellbeing.

3.2. In certain areas local authorities are already struggling to meet their statutory obligations in relation to schools and the provision of Additional Support for Learning. Recent research from the University of Edinburgh highlighted that among a group of 30 young deaf people only four had transitional plans in place. This is despite all being entitled to this support under the Education (Additional Support for Learning) Act (2004).

In addition, the 2013 CRIDE survey illustrated that there are currently 15.7 FTE Teachers of the Deaf without the mandatory qualification who are not in training. This is also represents a breach of local authority duties. It is likely that local authorities will find it increasingly challenging to meet statutory obligations like these with reduced budgets.

3.3. With regards to local authorities providing quality education it is crucial to note that without appropriate attainment measures and inspection regimes, it is difficult to be certain of the quality of education that is being provided. We note that inspection of peripatetic services such as Teachers of the Deaf is not consistent and there are no national quality standards to benchmark the work of these professionals. With current attainment measures indicating a significant gap for this group of learners, it is clear there is a need improve how robustly the quality of education provision is evaluated.

4. 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?

No comments

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

See comments above

6. 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?
It is crucial that all these groups are appropriately consulted in this process. Due consideration of communication needs of these groups should be given and the National Deaf Children's Society would welcome the opportunity to facilitate the consultation process through our members and local groups.

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

No comments

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