Scrubtny of the Draft Budget 2015-16
Written Evidence to the Education and Culture Committee

Scottish Youth Parliament
October 2014

The Scottish Youth Parliament is the democratically elected voice of Scotland’s young people.\(^1\) Our vision is of a stronger, more inclusive Scotland that empowers young people by truly involving them in the decision-making process. Among the strongest youth representatives structures of its type, we provide young people with a democratic platform to affect change, based on a mandate, by facilitating engagement with key decision makers.\(^2\)

In working towards our aims, we support the following values:

- **Democracy** - All of our plans and activities are youth-led, and we are accountable to young people aged 14-25. Our democratic structure and the scale of direct participation across Scotland give us strength and set us apart from other organisations.

- **Inclusion** - We are committed to being truly inclusive. The Scottish Youth Parliament believes that all young people have a right to a voice, it doesn’t matter who we are or where we come from: we celebrate our diversity.

- **Political independence** - We are independent from political parties. Only by working with all legitimate political parties can we make progress on the policies that are important to young people.

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\(^1\) The Scottish Youth Parliament is comprised of 160 Members of the Scottish Youth Parliament who meet three times a year in national sittings to represent the views of their constituents by selecting campaign priorities, formulating policy and participating in Subject Committees. In the last Scottish Youth Parliament national elections, 67,000 votes were cast. In addition, there were almost 43,000 responses to the consultation on your 2010 youth manifesto, “Change the Picture”. You can find out more information about SYP here: [http://www.syp.org.uk/who-we-are-W21page-66](http://www.syp.org.uk/who-we-are-W21page-66)

• **Passion** - We believe that drive and energy are key to successful campaigning. We are passionate about the key issues and believe that young people are part of the solution, not the problem.

**Executive Summary**

• The Scottish Youth Parliament welcomes the opportunity to provide the Education and Culture Committee with written evidence, based on the views of young people, to aid its scrutiny of the Draft Budget 2015-2016.

• Our response welcomes the Committee’s approach to its scrutiny with a particular emphasis on school spending and opportunities for preventative spending measures. We further acknowledge the difficult public finance conditions that Scotland has faced over the last few years.

• We are concerned by the findings of the Audit Scotland report which highlights a declining trend in education and school spending by local government and the significant variation in spend per pupil. Early indications from estimates contained in this Budget point to a continuation in this trend.

• A survey carried out by the Scottish Youth Parliament into the views of young people in relation to the Curriculum for Excellence point to problems in its implementation.

• We believe that the Committee should consider the important interaction between the increased budgets for Training, Youth and Women’s Employment, the Education and Lifelong Learning, and the schools budget as facilitated by local government. We believe that there are important preventative spending opportunities by considering these links within the context of the recommendations made by the Commission for Developing Scotland’s Young Workforce.

• The Scottish Youth Parliament would welcome the Committee’s consideration of how young people could be more meaningfully consulted, through a process of co-design and co-delivery, in how the funding for schools and education is allocated at a local level. We believe that engagement of this type results in more optimal and representative outcomes.
The Scottish Youth Parliament welcomes the opportunity to submit written evidence to the Education and Culture Committee to aid their scrutiny of the Draft Budget 2015-2016.

Our submission is based on the policies selected and passed by our democratically elected Members of the Scottish Youth Parliament (MSYPs) at our tri-annual National Sittings, where MSYPs meet in plenary to debate policy issues of importance to their constituents. Our contribution is further grounded in the policy statements contained in our youth manifesto “Change the Picture”, which received almost 43,000 consultation responses. Therefore, our remarks are shaped by the genuine views of young people.

We welcome the approach taken by the Committee to its scrutiny of the Draft Budget 2015-2016 with a particular emphasis on school spending. As such, our submission will seek to highlight the views of young people in relation to their priorities for education in the context of these budgetary proposals.

We further acknowledge the difficult public finance situation experienced by the UK as a whole over the last number of years, and its affect on the Scotland’s allocation of UK public expenditure. In addition, we note the concerns raised in a recent report produced by Audit Scotland about the likelihood of continuing budgetary pressures on school spending as facilitated by local government.\(^3\) Our submission will not comment on the performance of particular local authorities, nor shall it comment on matters which may be construed as party political and outwith our role of highlighting the views of young people.

As an organisation that fundamentally values the contribution young make to society, both in the present and in the future, we view any discussion on spending in the area

of education and employability as one of preventative spending: a key priority in the Committee’s approach to its scrutiny. By investing in our young people’s education, and reducing the adverse effect of poverty and inequality on educational attainment, we are investing in the future contributors to the Scottish economy. While we appreciate the Committee’s desire to focus on school spending specifically, we place significant value on the links between school education, and training and employability.

Our submission will focus on four specific areas: firstly, highlighting the areas of importance in terms of education, training and employability, as informed by our ongoing consultation and engagement with young people; secondly, the experiences of young people in relation to the implementation of the Curriculum for Excellence in the context of school spending; thirdly, the importance of linking policy and spending in the areas of education and employability; and fourthly, the importance of meaningful consultation with young people in terms of the development and implementation of spending proposals.

**Educational priorities for young people**

As previously mentioned, the Scottish Youth Parliament provides a democratic and youth-led platform for young people to discuss the issues of importance to them. Members of the Scottish Youth Parliament raise issues of importance at our national sittings after ongoing dialogue with young people in their local communities.

The following statements are taken from the Scottish Youth Parliament’s manifesto, which was informed by a mass consultation with young people, receiving almost 43,000 responses:

> “From primary level, schools should provide up-to-date and effective personal, social and sexual education, tailored to pupils’ specific needs and lifestyles.”

> “There should be an emphasis on the long term development of young people as part of the labour market, emphasising the provision and availability of apprenticeships and placements which will equip young people with important skills and experience on which to build careers.”

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“The success of Scotland’s students must not be compromised by financial worries. Immediate action needs to be taken to ensure students don’t face poverty and hardship in pursuit of their education.”

“All young people should have the chance to participate in work experience.”

“Education is not all about exams; Scotland’s young people should learn more about the law and how it affects them, sexual health and about Scottish culture and heritage amongst others.”

“Tuition should remain free in further and higher education. Top-up fees are not an option for a society which puts ability to learn above ability to pay.”

More recently, the Scottish Youth Parliament has been working with young people to inform the Commission for Developing Scotland’s Young Workforce and the Scottish Government’s revision of the Youth Employment Strategy. During this work, many issues were raised in terms of the importance of schools for future employability.

**School spending and the implementation of the Curriculum for Excellence**

As an organisation, we welcome the Scottish Government’s commitment to continue to provide Education Maintenance Allowance for young people between the ages of 16-19 who may face financial barriers to remaining in full-time education after the age of 16.⁵

In addition, we welcome the Scottish Government’s commitment to provide £330 million for the Schools for Futures programme as an acknowledgement of the importance of infrastructure in providing an environment conducive to successful learning and development.⁶

Noting the majority of education spending is contained in the local government block grant allocation, we are concerned about the findings presented in the report produced by Audit Scotland which highlights that spending on schools by local government has experienced a decline in real terms over the last number of years.⁷

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⁶ Ibid pg. 6
⁷ Audit Scotland, see note 3, pg. 8
We note with concern that local government spending on resource education spending is likely to fall between 2012-13 and 2014-15. The Scottish Youth Parliament recently conducted a survey with 62 young people to ascertain their experiences in relation to the implementation of the Curriculum for Excellence, and how prepared they felt to undertake the new examination structures.

The results of this survey indicate that there have been significant problems with the implementation of the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) from the perspective of young people. While it does not necessarily follow that this situation should be remedied by further resourcing, the impact of a funding reduction on the successful implementation of CfE and the new examination structures should be seriously considered, particularly if local government is achieving efficiency savings through staff reduction as suggested by the Audit Scotland report.

We further share concerns in relation to significant variation in spend per pupil noted by the report. While we understand that there are wider factors which influence spending, such as the need to take account of local circumstances and urban/rural differences, we believe the Committee should consider the impact of such variation on equality of educational outcomes in the context of this Budget.

**Linking education and employability**

The Scottish Youth Parliament welcomes the introduction of Training, Youth and Women’s Employment as a new budget category, reflecting the restructuring in national government and the increased emphasis on youth unemployment, noting its potential for increased coherence between policy and spending.

As key contributors to the Commission for Developing Scotland’s Young Workforce, we further welcome the Scottish Government’s commitment to implement its recommendations with corresponding resources in this Budget.

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8 Table 15.04 in the 2015-16 draft budget suggests that local government is forecast to spend around £4.6 billion in 2014-15, having spent around £4.8 billion in 2012-13 as highlighted by the Audit Scotland report.
9 A summary of the survey findings are included in the Annex to this submission.
10 Ibid. Pg. 9-12
11 Ibid. Pg. 9-12
12 Scottish Government, see note 5, pg. 70
13 The Scottish Youth Parliament organised a discussion day with over 60 young people to consider the issues that the Commission should consider and submitted a report based on the findings to inform the Commission’s final report.
Our engagement with young people for the purposes of the Wood Commission demonstrated the key role secondary schools and colleges play in providing young people with the appropriate knowledge, experience and skills to gain successful employment in the future. Young people frequently cited the lack of investment in robust and substantive careers education and work experience at secondary school as a barrier to future employment, and the Wood Commission made several recommendations for improvement in this regard.\textsuperscript{14}

Given the pressures in local government budgets, we believe the interaction between spending in education, as facilitated by local government, and the spending in youth employability and skills development is critical for success moving forward. While we welcome the increased funding in Training, Youth and Women’s Employment overall, we believe that significant focus should be given to how this funding can be used to improve the link between education, skills and employability.

We believe the relationship between these budgetary areas represents a key opportunity for effective preventative spending given its potential to deliver improvements to education that will ultimately create more successful economic participants in the future. Therefore, we view this as an area in which the Committee should give consideration.

In addition, we note the importance placed on vocational education through high quality further education in Scotland, and the links between schools and colleges, by the Wood Commission.\textsuperscript{15}

While we welcome the commitment from the Scottish Government to deliver on its commitment to increase college funding to £526 million, we note that the overall budget for the Scottish Funding Council will experience a significant decrease in real terms.\textsuperscript{16} We believe that the Committee should give consideration to the impact this will have on the delivery on the recommendations made by the Wood Commission.


\textsuperscript{15} Ibid pg. 20-35

\textsuperscript{16} Scottish Government, see note 5, pg. 62 Table 7.02 & pg. 66 Table 7.06.
**Effectively consulting young people**

A founding principle of the Scottish Youth Parliament is that young people should be meaningfully consulted about issues that affect them. We believe this consultation should take place at the beginning of policy development, fostering a process of co-design and core delivery.

The following statements are also contained in our youth manifesto:

“All young people should be involved in the services which affect them and should have the opportunity to get involved in local decision making opportunities.”

“Each local authority education committee should include pupil representatives as expert advisors.”

In our experience of engaging with key national and local decision makers, we have found that where there is genuine and meaningful engagement with young people in policy development and decisions pertaining to spending allocations, the policy outcomes are more representative and optimal. On a national level, the Scottish Youth Parliament provides an appropriate and legitimate forum for this type of engagement. The same applies to local youth representative bodies, such as youth councils and youth forums for local policy development.

The Scottish Youth Parliament would welcome the Committee’s consideration as to how this could be taken forward within the context of its scrutiny of the Draft Budget, with specific reference to spending in schools.

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Annex A: Key findings from the Scottish Youth Parliament’s Curriculum for Excellence Survey

Preparation for the new National 4 and/or 5 courses

When respondents were asked whether they felt that their courses prepared them for the new National 4 and/or 5 exams, there was not a clear majority. While 38% felt prepared, 29% did not, and 33% were unsure.

Notable comments included:

- There were nowhere near enough resources.
- Well I felt relatively prepared but I did feel like I was struggling to understand the new system...
- Although my results worked out well, teachers and pupils were placed under massive pressure to teach and learn the courses.

Additionally, 71% of those respondents who had taken the new National 4 and/or 5 courses believed that their teachers were not prepared. Only 18% reported that their teachers were prepared to teach the new courses, while 12% were unsure.

Those surveyed stated:

- I felt as though the teachers were not prepared to teach the new system as they did not fully understand the courses we were sitting. They openly admitted it, some of them. Also the textbooks not being ready on time did not help.
- They were prepared only because of the actions they took themselves. They weren’t helped by the education board and lacked teaching resources for the new national courses.

76% of respondents believed that their educational experience had been changed by the Curriculum for Excellence.

Key comments included:

- There is too much focus on analysis and evaluation, not giving us enough time for the course.
- The SQA did not know what they were doing at points which made it difficult for our teachers. The SQA needed to have a clear plan before they implemented the change.
I feel like the Curriculum for Excellence was rushed and unprepared. In the long run it will be and was beneficial and now the teachers do know what they are doing, it will help this year’s 4s and 5s. However, I think there were too many ambiguities last year and they should have waited.