Call for evidence on the Education (Scotland) Bill by the Education and Culture Committee

Response from the CLD Standards Council (draft)

The Standards Council for Community Learning and Development for Scotland is the body responsible for the registration of Community Learning and Development (CLD) practitioners, the approval of training courses, and the continuing professional development of the sector workforce. Members of the Standards Council play a key role in reducing “inequalities of outcome” including those directly related to educational achievement and often working in partnership with schools.

The Standards Council welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Committee’s call for evidence on the Education (Scotland) Bill. Our comments relate to Part 1 of the Bill, inequalities of outcome, and Section 20, appointment of Chief Education Officer.

Comments on Part 1 of the Bill

The Standards Council welcomes the Bill’s aim to: “promote equity of attainment for disadvantaged children and take steps towards narrowing the attainment gap” (Policy Memorandum paragraph 8).

The Committee seeks views on “what improvements in attainment, in achievement and in reducing inequalities of outcome” the Bill could deliver. The Standards Council’s view is that improvements arising from the Bill would be greater if it more clearly supported:

- A focus on wider achievement as well as attainment; and
- The role of all educational provision, not exclusively what happens within schools, and of communities as active partners, in promoting equity of achievement and attainment.

The underlying point here is that without increasing the engagement and motivation of disadvantaged children and young people, of their families and of the wider communities of which they are part, efforts to “promote equity of attainment” have little or no chance of success. Schools have an essential role in increasing engagement and motivation but it is not a task that they are well-placed to undertake alone.

Both the Bill and the Policy Memorandum refer to consultation arrangements. Paragraph 20 of the Policy Memorandum states that “The
provisions will ensure that communities have the opportunity to shape those decisions [about how best to support more disadvantaged learners], with education authorities being required to consult key groups including children and parents”. However there appears to be a significant risk that it will be possible to comply with these provisions in ways that have little real impact on the substance of the educational opportunities available or on efforts to promote equity of achievement and attainment.

It is noticeable that paragraph 14 of the Policy memorandum, in referring to “All key policies and programmes which affect children and young people provide targeted support to children and young people from disadvantaged communities within an overarching universal offer” does not include in its list of policies and programmes ‘Our ambitions for improving the life chance of young people in Scotland’ – the National Youth Work Strategy or the strategic guidance to Community Planning Partnerships on Community Learning and Development.

These Scottish Government provide the strategic framework for linking the work of schools with the learning that young people and their families undertake in the wider communities of which they are part. Finding ways of ensuring that making connections with the work done to implementing these strategies is a central part of the implementation of Part 1 of the Bill would greatly enhance its effectiveness in achieving the policy aim to: “promote equity of attainment for disadvantaged children and take steps towards narrowing the attainment gap”

**Comments on Section 20 of the Bill**

The Standards Council considers that the proposal to legislate for the role of Chief Education Officer in every education authority should be given very careful consideration..

The Policy Memorandum (paragraph 86) states that “it is expected that local authorities will appoint a Chief Education Officer who has the appropriate qualifications and experience to provide professional advice on the extensive education provisions that the education authorities are responsible for”, and at first sight it would seem almost impossible to disagree.

However, it is less straightforward than it might at first seem to specify what qualifications and experience would be appropriate. The Standards Council wishes to emphasise that the “extensive education provisions”
referred to do not consist solely of formal educational provision, and that if there is a statutory requirement to appoint a Chief Education Officer who has the “appropriate qualifications and experience” the implications of this wider educational context need to be fully recognised in stipulating the qualifications and experience required. If the aims of the Bill, in particular those set out in Section 1, are to be achieved, it will be essential that Chief Education Officers have a depth of understanding of all aspects of educational provision and of working with disadvantaged young people, families and communities to bring about positive change.