ADES Response to the Request from Scottish Parliaments Education & Culture Committee on Education Scotland

HOW EDUCATION SCOTLAND ASSESSES THE UPTAKE OF THE ADVICE AND SUPPORT IT PROVIDES

We are aware of course evaluation approaches that Education Scotland [ES] deploy when large events are organised but not aware of any strategic, market led approaches that are used more generally.

The vast majority of Education Scotland’s work in the advice and support field revolves round national programmes which reflect large national initiatives and Government priorities. There tends to be a top down approach taken and teams of ES staff work centrally to develop national materials and programmes. There is far too little bespoke local support developed in a partnership model with schools and local authorities.

One area of recent success however was the co development of national qualifications materials in partnership with local authorities. This approach is something that ADES would like to see repeated.

EDUCATION SCOTLAND’S RELATIONSHIP WITH SCHOOLS AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES, REFLECTING ON KEIR BLOOMER’S COMMENTS

All schools and local authorities are aware of Education Scotland but there is variability in the degree to which they access Education Scotland for practical advice on the core education functions on a day to day basis. While there are opportunities for accessing a range of web based materials which have been developed by ES, too few teachers seem to do that as a matter of course. For many schools and teachers ES is a distant national organisation which is still probably better known for its inspection functions.

Local Authorities [LAs] have professional working relationships with ES and it is common for the Area Lead Officer in ES to visit LAs quite regularly. While this relationship can be very helpful to authorities it can be variable, and it tends too often to be used by ES as a means through which the local gathering of information for national purposes is carried out. There is no evidence that partnership agreements between ES and local authorities have added value across Scotland to date.
The leadership team of ES tends to be remote from day to day school and local authority business and cannot be said to have direct impacts and added value to the work of schools apparently being focused on national priorities. ADES has been disappointed that the promised movement of leadership teams between authority Directorates and ES Directorate has only taken place once, and that various new posts have been advertised and filled internally. We also feel that the post of Chief Executive, and the relatively new post of Chief Operating Officer, should have been subject to a national advert and open competition, as should have been the case with the recent internal appointment of the national lead for the Scottish Attainment Challenge.

In the current challenging era of financial austerity, and with schools and local authorities having to make savings in areas of core provision, it is necessary for us to ensure that we are as efficient as possible in every respect. ADES would like to see far greater joint planning and deployment of local authority and ES staff. We feel that schools would be better and more equitably served right across Scotland if that happened.

**HOW IT’S INSPECTION OF SCHOOLS DELIVERS ACCOUNTABILITY**

The inspection functions discharged by Education Scotland have a statutory footing and are treated very seriously by schools and local authorities, teachers and parents. There has been ongoing dialogues between ES and local authorities on various elements of inspection activity which is mutually beneficial. While there is support for the ongoing self evaluation programme and the validation of this through inspection activity, ADES feels there is too much inspection activity across education and children's services and, despite recommendations from the Crerar Report and promises from the various inspection bodies for a more targeted and proportionate approach, the amount of activity has actually increased.

While ADES supports external inspection activity and can demonstrate how that can benefit schools and local authorities, the main desired outcome is school improvement and not accountability. Accountability can be demonstrated in other aspects of public sector scrutiny.

**THE EXTENT TO WHICH IT HAS HELPED TO PROMOTE HIGH QUALITY PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AND LEADERSHIP AMONGST EDUCATION PRACTITIONERS AND THE CHALLENGES THAT REMAIN**

Education Scotland has still to fulfill its potential in the range of functions it delivers. There is no doubt that there have been successes in a number of areas where it has created opportunities or programmes leading to individual professional development, and through inspections, to school improvement. In reality however it is very difficult for ES to reach out to 50,000 teachers and impact on them individually, but ultimately that is where school improvement will happen. In this respect a far more collaborative approach is required addressing local as well as national priorities.

Given the current financial challenges, and the need for us to address inequality and attainment issues in Scotland, local and national agencies must work in a planned and targeted fashion. The proportionate distribution for example of the staff of ES across local authorities would add significant school improvement capacity to the system.
ADES has concerns that the centrally driven model that the current Raising Attainment initiative is following has seen a rapid deployment of ES staff without necessary engagement of all stakeholders. That has left some schools and local authorities feeling a lack of involvement.

THE RISKS AND BENEFITS OF SPREADING ITS ACTIVITY ACROSS A WIDE RANGE OF EDUCATION SETTINGS

Education Scotland is the principal national education improvement agency in Scotland with almost 400 members of staff. In that it is funded centrally from the national education budget, it is not unreasonable to expect that all schools and local authorities should benefit. The majority of staff in ES are not deployed equally across the country with larger numbers centred in the central belt. The quality of some staff and associated functions is perceived as variable. While the inspection programme reaches out across all parts of the country that is not the case with the developmental activity. Better use of digital solutions and better collaboration with local authorities, as well as third sector organisations, could help with greater penetration of ES activity and resultant impact. While it is impossible for every teacher to have a direct ongoing contact with ES, every teacher should feel that there is something they can easily and pro actively access from ES to improve their practice, and ultimately opportunities for all learners.

ADES feels that we have not arrived at the place yet but has had recent discussions with the Chief Executive of ES to discuss opportunities for improvement and partnership working. A commitment was given to do this.

HOW EFFECTIVELY IT IS ADDRESSING THE PRINCIPAL RISKS LISTED IN ITS ANNUAL ACCOUNTS

ADES is not in a position to answer this question because are not involved in such activity. There is less external involvement in such ES processes than, for example that of SQA.

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SEPTEMBER 2015