SUBMISSION FROM UNREASONABLE LEARNERS

Introduction
1. This submission follows on from the Petition PE1423 submitted on behalf of the Unreasonable Learners.

2. The theme of the petition explored Albert Einstein’s age old statement:

“We cannot solve our problems from the same level of thinking that created them.”

3. And the follow on which says that it is madness to believe that new methods and strategies based on the same thinking will provide different results.

4. We are fully supportive of the findings of the Christie” report, but we are aware that the report did not address the thinking that underpinned the problems identified. The danger is that considerable effort will be invested in addressing the issues raised, but if that effort is based on the original thinking very little progress will be achieved.

5. The Petition also underlined that many of the systems in place within Government and Local Authorities have been designed based on fundamentally flawed assumptions. This is especially the case in context of enabling the intrinsic motivation of staff and in the design of systems in which people work.

6. These flawed assumptions have been highlighted by the many many eminent “management” gurus over the past 50+ years.

7. Douglas McGregor in his seminal book “The Human Side of Enterprise,” written in 1960, likened the situation to an engineering designing an aqueduct on the assumption that water flows up hill, or designing a fire extinguisher filled with kerosene. We do not tolerate these types of flaws in our physical world, so why do we accept flawed thinking in our social world?

8. The application of flawed thinking is extremely wasteful and is costing the Scottish Government and the tax payer an extraordinary amount of money. It is also destroying the willing commitment of public sector staff - all to the detriment of the service user.

9. The above point has been supported by the papers submitted through the Petition process; in particular by the paper “Existing Research and How We Can Use it”

Call for Evidence - Methods
10. The call for evidence is focused on “Innovative Methods.” In considering the innovative methods that are being submitted, we ask that the Committee consider in depth the thinking that underpins the successful method. For Example:

11. **Employee Ownership:** - We are aware of the submissions by David Erdal and Jacqui Mitchell in context of organisations that are structured round employee ownership. This model has been proven to be highly successful, The John Lewis Partnership being the most prominent. This model is based on a belief in staff, in their ability to appreciate their whole business and their part of it. “Management” report to the front line staff and are therefore acutely aware of their views and contributions. This, of course, is a complete rethinking of current “government” thinking where regulations are written remote from the work face, and full compliance is demanded. Little time is invested in listening to staff. Rather than a fundamental belief in staff, as in the employee ownership model, current practice believes that staff cannot be trusted and have to be directed and controlled. They have to be “motivated” to do a good job through such means as targets, appraisal and performance management strategies. This contrast in perception of staff was expanded by McGregor in 1960 when he contrasted X&Y Theories of Management. For some yet to be fathomed reason, in context of management, we are inordinately slow to learn from research and the successful application of the findings.

12. **Systems Thinking:** - Within the original petition case studies were submitted by Andy Lippock (ref. PE 1423B) highlighting the success of the application of Systems Thinking, especially as developed by the Vanguard Consultancy.

13. The essence of systems thinking is that outcomes are predominately a function of the design of the system in which staff are being asked to work. In fact the research has identified that at least 90% of the outcome is dependent on the design of the system, with less than 10% down to the diligence and skill of the individual. The implication is that when seeking improvement the primary focus should be in the design of the system.

14. **Not one** of the respondents to the original petition had appreciated this fact, which, by the way, has been known since the Second World War. They all believed that improvement would be secured through better trained people. The evidence points to the recognition that The Government is yet to appreciate the implications of all the research into systems thinking that has taken place over the past 50+ years.

15. **Conclusion**
16. If the committee, The Parliament and The Government wish to “Regenerate” public services then they have to start at the **thinking level** – as per Einstein quotation. A focus on methods without appreciating the underpinning thinking is – in Einstein’s words - **Madness.**

A Way Forward
17. The Public Petitions Committee asked that the Unreasonable Learners join with those members of the Civil Service who attended the Round Table Discussions to develop a strategy to address how we think. To devise a way forward that would address how the whole of Scotland thinks.

18. A meeting was held on the 6th December which proved inconclusive. The Unreasonable Learners are now facilitating a “Dialogue Evening” on 28th January involving 30+ forward thinkers from across Scotland. The aim is to start the process of devising this holistic strategy. All members of the committee would be very welcome to participate in this process. We will, naturally, be reporting back when the strategy has been finalised.