

PE2170/B: Abolish the General Teaching Council for Scotland

Petitioner written submission, 5 September 2025

We write to express our deep concern regarding the Scottish Government's response to Petition PE2170, which calls for the abolition of the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS). The government's reply dismisses the petition as neither "practical nor achievable," yet offers no substantive engagement with the issues raised — issues that directly affect the quality of education and the safety, health and wellbeing of children and teachers across Scotland.

Scotland's educational performance has entered a period of serious decline. According to PISA over the past decade, national scores have dropped by 70 points despite an increase in education spending. Meanwhile, England has seen only a modest fall in performance while reducing its expenditure now ranks 4th in Europe with Scotland, once internationally respected for its educational standards slipping to 16th place.

This deterioration cannot be dismissed or deflected. It raises urgent questions about the effectiveness of our national education bodies. Government assurances that the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) is fulfilling its statutory role are increasingly difficult to reconcile with the reality of declining outcomes. The system is not delivering, and the evidence demands accountability.

We are further troubled by the conduct of the Scottish Government's handling of this petition. Within 24 hours of its publication, Scottish Government staff emailed senior figures at the GTCS with the subject line "Petition," stating: *"Hi both – I'm assuming you're aware of this. We can discuss this afternoon – we have a template to fill in.."* Within minutes the GTCS's Chief Executive replied *"We are aware. See you later"*.

This correspondence suggests a level of coordination that undermines the GTCS's claim to independence. If the GTCS is truly an autonomous regulator, why is a senior civil servant initiating informal discussions with its leadership about a parliamentary petition that directly concerns its future? At best, this creates the appearance of bias; at worst, it raises serious questions about the integrity of the approach to the response process.

The government's assertion that our proposal is unachievable is demonstrably false. England abolished its equivalent body the General Teaching Council for England in 2012. Our proposal is not only achievable, it is necessary. The GTCS has faced sustained criticism from MSPs, the media, and members of the public as evidenced by the following articles -

BBC News

- Fears over teacher safeguarding investigations
- Handling of complaints against teachers in Scotland to be reviewed
- School teacher misconduct investigations need revamp

Daily Mail Online

- Probe into a teacher accused of misconduct has lasted more than eight years

These examples point to systemic failures in teacher regulation. To claim that the GTCS is “effective” in its role is not credible. Its core mission to uphold professional standards and protect pupils is not being met.

We believe the root of the problem lies in the insular nature of Scottish education governance. There is a revolving door between the Scottish Government, Education Scotland, local authorities, and the GTCS. Senior officials frequently move between these bodies, creating a network that is too close, too opaque, and too resistant to scrutiny. For example:

- The current GTCS Chief Executive previously held senior roles in Angus and Aberdeen Councils.
- West Dunbartonshire’s Chief Education Officer was formerly Interim Chief Executive of Education Scotland, having joined from the GTCS.
- Her successor at Education Scotland is the Scottish Government’s current Director of Learning.

The largest teaching union, the EIS, is also contributing to the problem when they confirmed to the Chairman of Accountability Scotland that they will not support teachers who wish to refer colleagues to the GTCS for professional misconduct. The GTCS is aware of this stance. This position is clearly not in the public interest. Teachers must be able to report wrongdoing when necessary, with the backing of their union. Without this support, professional standards are undermined and whistleblowers are left vulnerable.

Furthermore, widespread bullying of teachers by senior staff often protected by their employer is causing significant harm. This is evidenced not only by the GTCS’s own survey of provisionally registered teachers, which shows that up to 10% of new teachers experience bullying early in their careers, but also by a teacher bullying survey, which highlights severity of the issue. Despite this, the teaching regulator refuses to act, claiming that this is an employer issue. This is a misrepresentation of their statutory role, which includes maintaining and improving teaching standards and safeguarding the overall learning experience. The GTCS’s failure to intervene based on their own teacher exit surveys is contributing to the exodus of talented teachers from the profession. Their inaction is unacceptable.

This level of interconnectedness is unhealthy. It fosters groupthink, discourages accountability, and undermines public trust and caused harm to pupils, teachers and support staff. It is precisely this culture that our petition seeks to challenge.

We therefore urge Parliament to scrutinise the government’s response with care. Our petition was created in good faith by teachers and parents with experience of the GTCS’s shortcomings. It deserves more than a perfunctory dismissal. Stronger, independent teacher regulation is essential to protect children and restore confidence in our education system.

We stand by our call to abolish the GTCS and replace it with a more transparent and accountable organisation.