LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

CALL FOR VIEWS ON THE NON-DOMESTIC RATES (SCOTLAND) BILL

SUBMISSION FROM SIMON JOHNSON

I write as Head of a small/medium sized all-through independent school located in the town of Ayr in order to express my concern at the proposal to remove the current rates relief available to us as a charity. An outline of the reasons for my concern is provided below.

Education is a well-established charitable purpose. Wellington School exists solely for the purposes of providing education and meets the stringent conditions set by OSCR in order to retain its status as a charity. If implemented, the proposal to remove rates relief from mainstream independent schools undermines the work done by OSCR and creates an unnecessary and unfair two tier charity system.

The costs of providing education mean that it is difficult for a school like Wellington to break even. As a result, the impact of the proposed five-fold increase to our rates bill is significant and will result in rising fees. Across Scotland, rising fees will pose an existential threat to some schools.

Wellington School has been part of the fabric of the town of Ayr for more than a century. It employs more than 100 people and contributes significantly in many ways to the economy and the culture of the town. Pupils and staff enrich the community through extensive fundraising and voluntary work. Wellington has a strong and successful partnership with Ayr Rugby Club and there are many ways in which the school shares its resources and expertise with the wider community.

It has been argued that the removal of rates relief will lead to greater fairness as local authority schools do not receive the same benefit. The source of funding for local authority schools and independent schools is entirely different and this argument is at best disingenuous, at worst mischievous. If the objective of the removal of rates relief is to raise money, on the other hand, then it is likely that the migration of pupils from the independent to the state sector will negate any benefit.

In summary, I have a duty to object to the proposed change, which will have a significant adverse impact on a school community that includes more than 100 employees and in excess of 500 pupils and their families.