LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

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

SUBMISSION FROM THE HIGH SCHOOL OF DUNDEE

As the Rector of the High School of Dundee I would like to express my vigorous objection to Section 10 of the Barclay Review, namely to remove rates relief for ‘mainstream’ independent schools. This move will cost the school approximately £250,000 per year. This is a massive amount for the school to digest. But a drop in the ocean for the state coffers. The High School of Dundee has been a charity since 1897. It has as its purpose “the advancement of education”, and this has been recognised and completely endorsed by the Office of the Scottish Charities Regulator (OSCR).

We are a not for profit organisation. The trustees give voluntarily of their time and expertise. We contribute hugely to the Dundee, Fife and Tayside community in terms of education, employment an economic impact. We employ over 200 teachers and support staff. Our turnover amounts to £12m but we budget so carefully to keep the surplus to a minimum required for developing the school. We charge fees but only what we have to, to preserve the quality of education all children deserve. The centuries old High School tradition of providing financial support to those who cannot afford independent education lives on today. 20% of our pupils receive fee relief in the form of bursaries, which enable them to come to the school. This relief amounts to between 100% and 10% of fees, and amounts to £1mill per year in means-tested fee relief. Barclay threatens that.

In educating 1030 children the High School alone saves the city of Dundee aprox £7million per year. If the school closed where would the children go and who would find the money to cover this £7million? On top of that, this £7mill is paid for by parents who are also additionally paying their taxes into supporting city schools.

The Bill punishes excellence and accessibility. We aspire to excellence and to bring out the best in every child. In 2017 three of our pupils achieved the top marks in Scotland in three Advanced Higher subjects, namely Maths, Chemistry and Physics. Two of these were ‘bursary pupils’. 15% of the class of 2017 secured places to study medicine at university. A number of these were ‘bursary pupils’. Pupils on 100% bursaries go on to top universities across the UK and beyond. All of them will go on to benefit the whole community.

This Bill punishes community. The High School is at the heart of this great city and is proud to bear its name. ‘Dundee High’ has grown up with the city since 1239. The school’s history is entwined with that of Dundee, Tayside and the nation. We give back a huge amount. Our staff are involved in a wide range of local organisations, many charitable. Many are involved with the SQA as markers and other roles. Our pupils and staff are engaged in a huge range of community and charitable activities, and our charities and community outreach activities raised over £40,000 last year for great causes. Our sports, musical
and other facilities are widely used by local groups, some free of charge, some at cost, some for a small surplus. Approximately **1,900 people from outwith the school use our facilities every week**, whether it is the Dundee Eagles Rugby, Dundee Wanderers hockey, the Dundee Choral Union or indeed a host of other smaller sporting or cultural groups. Furthermore we freely and willingly offer our facilities to city schools, such as Morgan Academy for their sports days, and for the past two years have hosted the Dundee Schools Track and Field Championships.

This Bill punishes creativity and access.

We have invested time and money at every stage to support the city of Dundee in its bids to secure, first the UK City of Culture bid, and now the European City of Culture bid for 2023.

In addition, we are currently engaged on a transformational arts project for the city of Dundee and Tayside which this Bill will put in jeopardy. Our aspirational and transformative **Meadowside Arts Centre, or MAC, a proposed conservatoire for Dundee and Tayside**, is of equal worth and value to the wider Dundee and Tayside community. This £15m project has received the explicit and wholehearted support of the Council Leader for Dundee, and has also received explicit support from the leader of Leisure and Culture Dundee, as well as the verbal support of Dundee Cultural Partnership. Housing music, drama, art & design and dance under one roof. It will enhance and complement what is already happening in the city with the V&A, the El Sistema initiative and the general efforts to regenerate this city and area. The High School of Dundee will use it, and is the major investor, but it will be a **facility open to all** in the evenings, at weekends and throughout the school holiday periods.

This Bill punishes Music and Support for Learning.

Barclay seeks to differentiate between ‘mainstream’ independent schools and ‘specialist music schools’ and ‘special’ schools. The High School of Dundee provides more specialist music than any specialist music school in the country. We also have a learning support provision which caters for many of our pupils with specific learning difficulties and also those with other issues such as autism, Aspergers, cerebral palsy and cystic fibrosis.

it is invidious and a matter for dispute to seek to draw a distinction with an independent school such as the High School of Dundee which has very substantial learning support facilities and resources, and which has huge music and performing and visual arts provision, not to mention sports provision, which is extended across other local schools and the community - much of which will be made possible and supported as part of the specific public benefit requirements that charitable rates relief aims to support.

Similarly, in Music the High School of Dundee exceeds the provision provided in specialist music schools, with 489 individual music lessons per week and 90 pupils with lessons on two instruments. Each week there are 28 co-curricular rehearsals per week, involving a total of 650 pupils. As an indication, 350 pupils
performed at the Spring Concert. And here were 83 occasions during the year on which the Music Department organised pupils to perform, not including the 5 performances of “Fiddler On The Roof”, done in conjunction with the Drama Department. These would include events such as Performance Platforms, Autumn Concert, Jazz Evening, Pipe Band Competitions, Carol Service, performances for local charities, and performances at community events.

I therefore cannot express how dismayed I am at the proposal relating to independent schools that has been put forward in the Scottish Budget, namely the abolition of our charitable rates relief. This is a retrograde and utterly counterproductive proposal which will cost more than it claims to raise, and does nothing to address the serious fiscal challenges faced by our public institutions. After years of working ever more closely with the government and all our educational partners, this proposal will have a significant detrimental effect, not only on the High School and the wider Dundee community, but also on the sector and the educational profile of Scotland as a whole.

I implore you to see sense and the bigger picture and resist the temptation to make a populist political gesture in singling out independent school charities for this punitive tax. Please, please, please therefore reject Section 10 of the Barclay Review.

Dr John D Halliday
Rector
High School of Dundee