LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE
CALL FOR VIEWS ON THE NON-DOMESTIC RATES (SCOTLAND) BILL

SUBMISSION FROM JONATHAN ANDERSON

I write in relation to the proposal to remove eligibility for independent schools to claim charitable relief from non-domestic rates (Section 10 of the Non-Domestic Rates (Scotland) Bill).

The consequences of such a move would be deeply damaging to the 56 independent schools singled out by this proposal, but more significantly, to the pupils and communities they support.

An increase of 80% in rates will have to be met through a combination of cost saving and fee increases, the latter punishing those parents who have already made a huge commitment to the education of their children. It may push them towards a state-maintained education system that is already under significant strain.

At Merchiston Castle School we pride ourselves in the work we do within our local community through our Koinonia programme, providing a wide range of support to a number of organisations; every independent school in Scotland does the same because they truly recognise the benefit to all involved.

This activity is already scrutinised by OSCR via their public benefit test in a way that other charities in Scotland (and across the UK) are not, including other fee charging, restricted admission education charities. Partnerships such as our Koinonia programme will be adversely affected by this legislation.

We (as do other independent schools) aim to extend accessibility through means-tested bursaries. Again, a sudden rates increase will have a significant impact on our capacity to widen access.

Independent schools support 3000 jobs in Edinburgh alone and in areas outside the capital, independent schools are often the biggest employers in their region. Placing such schools’ finances under pressure will invariably put jobs at risk.

Additionally, students attending Scottish schools from overseas contribute positively to the economy and their experience enhances our nation’s global reputation. It will be at our economic and cultural expense if the inevitable increase in fees forces such students to look at schools elsewhere in the UK, where similar fee increases will not have to be applied.
Serious thought must be given to the consequences of such increases in rates to independent schools; it is hard to see how the revenues raised for government will offset the cost of the damage done by this legislation.