LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

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

SUBMISSION FROM ALEXANDER HAGON AND LYNDSEY HAGON

We have read through the details of the proposal to remove eligibility to claim charitable relief from non-domestic rates relief from mainstream independent schools. We thoroughly support the aim to improve fairness in the education system and the access of the maximum number of children in Scotland to the best possible education. However, the impact of this particular policy would be counterproductive to the equitable aims of the policy.

Rates relief enables many families who otherwise wouldn’t be able to do so to send their children to an independent school. Removing such relief would mean that independent school fees would rise, making them unmanageable for many families. Independent schools would become inaccessible to many families who opt to stretch their own resources rather than the public purse to send their children to an independent school.

From a social point of view, much more so than today, independent schools would become inaccessible bastions of privilege. They would become more elitist and the policy would create a more rather than less polarised school system.

From an economic point of view, any short-term financial gain the Government may hope to attain from removing this relief will be offset in the longer term by more pupils attending state schools.

Unless further Government funding is provisioned to meet the increased demand, this would divert resources away from current state school pupils, to their detriment.

The increased stress on resources in state schools would be an unwelcome side-effect of an otherwise well-intentioned policy to improve the equity of the Scottish education system.

It cannot be denied that on the face of it, at the headline level, the policy appears to have the merit of being progressive in redistributing from the better off to the less well-off.

But upon reflection of the likely consequences, the policy cannot be supported either on equity or efficiency grounds. The shift of a large number of pupils between sectors would lead to a net cost to the public purse while simultaneously reducing education opportunities for Scottish pupils in both the state and independent sectors.

Thank you for considering our submission.