LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

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

SUBMISSION FROM ALAN ROBERTSON

Both myself and my wife are state educated and recognise the important role that these institutions play in society and to those attending them. We have two young children, one soon to start in Primary 1 with the other to follow in a few years. Upon relocating to Edinburgh, the opportunity and decision as to whether to send our children to an independent school was available to us. This was not an easy decision, but one we chose due to:

- School of choice for their friends. Our children have made good friendships which we are keen to see continue
- Availability of after school care
- Engagement with the local community and availability of sport and social clubs attached to the school

Our decision to send our children to independent school is exclusively linked to affordability. We fully recognise this is choice we are making, however we had also made this commitment prior to the policy changes that are now proposed. We are making a conscious decision to invest in our children in this way and making a number of sacrifices to do so. The proposed increase in costs may ultimately make this unaffordable in which case we would have to remove our children from school at which they have started, something which we feel would be incredibly disruptive and detrimental to their development and happiness.

A key concern in this regard is the capacity and availability of places within our catchment area. The local primary school is already over subscribed and is soon to face further pressure as new homes are developed in the west of Edinburgh. There is simply not enough capacity within the local state schools to educate the children soon to live in these new homes and those who have to re-enter state education as a result of affordability issues. The financial pressure that is taken off the state education system due to the sacrifices of parents like me and my wife in sending their children to an independent school is not reflected in the proposed policy change. The number of available school places and the additional cost of educating a portion of currently independently educated school children does not appear to have been considered.

Both myself and my wife are in full time employment, and do not have the luxury to be otherwise. We have no family connections in the city and therefore do not have the benefit of grandparents or auntie/uncles to help with childcare. A key point therefore when selecting a school was the availability and quality of the wrap around child care given that we would need to have such a service 8am-6pm daily. Unfortunately when looking at the options at the local state school we could not be guaranteed to have this.
child care available and indeed in some cases it was not directly linked to the school meaning that the children would have to make their own way from the school to the child care. This was not a palatable (and in our view safe) option. The school we have chosen offers the after school care that was so important to our decision.

The engagement of the independent schools with the local community and range of opportunities to be part of a social club or team is something that the state education is not able to offer. In my opinion this helps to keep children engaged and provides important development opportunities, as well as keeping them safe during after school hours within a secure environment. The sporting and other facilities at each of the campuses are also of wider use to the communities. An inability of the schools to continue to invest in these facilities (due to lower enrolment numbers and associated fees) would mean poorer facilities or at a minimum a need to charge local groups higher rates for access. This would place a further burden on the local government to make the required investment to make comparable facilities available.

I also believe that the schooling in Edinburgh is unique and helps to attract a number of skilled and educated individuals to the city that may not otherwise be possible. This has a direct impact on jobs and job creation as a number of these people have the ability and inclination to start their own business thus driving further value into the city. It is certain that some people choose Edinburgh as a city to live due to the choices available on affordable education. At a time when Scottish income taxes are diverging from the UK, further costs being added to those living in the city will surely make it a less attractive location to relocate to and raise a family.

I would also highlight my understanding that the independent schools are not for profit organisations. The simple fact is that any surplus which is run is a direct result of fees paid by parents with the excess used to support scholarships and reinvestment in the schools. I also think that it is important to highlight that parents pay for their fees out of net salaries and there is no tax deduction or savings available. The increased costs that would arise from the implementation of the Barclay review would only increase the cost to parents and effectively act as a further tax. As above, myself and my wife both need to work full time, meaning we contribute to tax receipts greater than if one was in the fortunate position to not have to work. We have paid taxes all of our working lives and do not feel that the proposed changes are justified.

There does seem to be an unfair bias being targeted at private / independent education establishments. We are making a number of personal sacrifices to support the decision we have made (granted voluntarily), but our ability to continue to do so is being negatively impacted by the policy choices of the sitting Government. As outlined above, the aggregate financial impact of these policy changes will make it unaffordable and at present I do not believe that the Government are able to provide the requisite number of school places or after school care that would require to be provided if the recommendations of the Barclay review are followed through.