Dear sir/madam,

I am a parent of girls attending an independent school in Edinburgh.

I am writing to this Committee to take the opportunity to object to the imposition of business rates on this school sector and which is leading to an increase in the fees required to support children at school.

May I please make the argument that this action is in its widest sense a direct attack on children, girls in particular and an attack on the enabling of opportunity in society. I would recommend an alternative approach of supporting education and girls’ education is particular with emphasis on co-opting and working with the independent sector to raise excellent in Scottish education. Historically Scottish education has had a worldwide and deserved reputation for excellence.

I would encourage you to reconsider your decision and to not apply business rates to schools. May I please make the following list of individual arguments as reasons to reconsider your decision.

**Educating Girls**

Historically there have been many studies that have shown that the education outcomes for girls are better in a single sex learning environment.

This option is only available in the independent sector in Scotland.

Discouraging the possibility of this option for girls, by increasing the price of the education whilst not making the offer for children in the state sector, leads to the marginal aggregate reduction in girls’ life chances. Is this the intention of the increase in cost loading onto the independent school sector?

In addition, my understanding is that there is a general preference for single sex education amongst particular religious groups. Is it the intention of this increase in charges for schools to attack, in that way, people of those groups?
Support for dyslexic pupils and otherwise struggling pupils

It has been my experience that the independent school attend by my children had provided excellent support for dyslexic pupils and other general levels of support.

I am not convinced that the level of support that we have received would have been available to us elsewhere and I am convinced that the outcome opportunities for my family would have been significantly worse.

I would be very interested to hear from you why it is considered appropriate to diminish the overall level of support for dyslexic pupils that is likely to result from this additional charge on independent schools?

Choice

The independent sector provides significant proportion of the education provision in Edinburgh. Many families, in marginal circumstances, are able to benefit from that provision at the cost of other life style choices. Increasing the cost of that education, in this way, will drive many of those families out of the independent sector diminishing the life chances of those children. After leaving the independent sector those children will be forced back into the state education sector, increasing the cost and burden on that sector.

I would be interested to know what planning has been made for the inevitable increase in the number of pupil spaces that will be required in the state sector as a direct consequence of the increase in school fees resulting from this change in the rating approach of independent schools. Please feel free to forward me your detailed planning to support the increase in the number of state school pupils expected as a result of the increase in business rates.

Elitism

The increase in costs as a result of the increase in business rates, increasing cost to parents, will lead to an increase in the elitism in education.

There is a currently a spectrum of parents who send their children to independent school, all of whom are making a conscious choice to provide a strong educational experience for their children. In that spectrum those parents who can currently afford the costs only marginally will be forced out leading to a increase in the level of elitism in the remaining cohorts of families. As I cannot but see this an inevitable outcome of the increase in business rate charges, I can only assume that this is part of the intention behind this reform measure. Personally, as a parent who has struggled to support my children in their education at independent schools in many of their years of attendance there, I am quite happy to forego life experiences in order to benefit their education. And, in their remaining years in school I will be happy to continue doing so.
The other side of this increase in elitism is, of course, the reduction in diversity and life chances. A reduction in diversity both from different cohorts in society and as a result of the diversity of scholastic opinion as the level of independent provision reduces.

I personally find it quite challenging to understand why any responsible government would want to be involved in the reduction of opportunity and diversity.

**Independent schools in support of wider education provision**

From my experience with sending my children to the independent sector, I have come to understand the support that is provided to the state sector through for example:

- Thought leadership in curriculum structure and content;
- Raising the bar for pupil outcomes expected from non-independent schools;
- Providing support for the exam structure;
- Providing to parents (i.e. me) support in understanding the possibilities for English language education overseas;
- Providing continuity in education policy under circumstances where fashion in policy pulls it in rapidly changing directions.

In asking parents to provide greater taxation coverage in this way (by increasing the charge from business rates) I am at a loss to understand why parents (who are clearly the ultimate support for independent school) would want to encourage this continued relationship and support.

**Support for independent education overseas**

Adopting the approach of increasing costs for the independent sector is at variance with the approach in other countries, for example in Ireland and Germany where educating children is encouraged … (via tax rebates on school fees).

**Diversity of provision**

I would be interested to find out if this attack on independent education provision forms part of a wider coherent plan to improve overall provision. If so, I would be keen to learn how this raising of business rates on one part of the school sector will improve overall educational provision.

**State sector business rates**

Incidently, is the state sector also to be subject to the imposition of business rates on their budget and if not, why is this difference being created? Is a school not a school?
Independent school sector support for bursaries and overseas schools

My experience from sending my children to their particular independent school is that the school organises support for able students of weaker financial means and provides support for a particular overseas school. By raising business rates may I please ask if it is your intention to force parents to discourage these supports and to garner resources within their own interest at the expense of the wider society interest?

Development of school branches overseas

My children’s school currently plans to develop an overseas branch in China. As a result of this, I would imagine that the Scottish brand for education and Scotland in particular are projected favourably in that country.

May I please ask if it your intention to discourage, by reducing the schools’ resources and the willingness of parents to provide support, cultural engagement, the wider dissemination of Scottish culture and Scottish education best practice to the wider world?

Finally, may I please take this opportunity to thank you for this chance to send my views in to the investigation.