LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

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

SUBMISSION FROM KENNA TROUP

Dear Local Government and Communities Committee,

I'm writing to share my view on your currently proposed "Non-Domestic Rate (Scotland) Bill." I believe there are two issues related to this issue which your committee may not have considered--the role of Independent Schools in allowing successful women to work and the message that Scotland sends the world regarding its education and English language offerings.

Speaking from personal experience as a mother who has worked as a policy officer for local government and holds two advanced degrees, I have had colleagues who hold high positions at COSLA and Scottish Government who feel they cannot be open at work with the fact they send their children to independent schools. (Ironically, if they sent their children to state schools they would not be unable to hold those jobs because of lack of childcare available in the state sector). Whilst sexuality, gender and disability are all issues which are protected in the workforce from discrimination, private education isn't and the stigma is very much there. Independent schools offer not only education but many have "wrap-around care" that allows mothers who commute to Edinburgh or Glasgow to have their children appropriately cared for, involved in sports, drama and other meaningful extracurricular activities which are not consistent or available in state schools. Raising the school fees to pay for higher rates, may very well disproportionately impact successful, working mothers who will need to leave the workforce, or change their availability in order to take care of their minor children. Research has pointed out the value of mothers working outside the home, however, this is often interpreted as mothers working minimum-wage/mother's hours jobs. More attention needs to be paid to the very real issue of childcare and appropriate supervision of secondary school children when their parents are working. Independent Schools fill this gap, empower mothers to have successful jobs and keep their children nurtured. Women should not be punished for choosing to pursue a top career and send their children to a quality school with wrap-around-care. Their contribution to communities and working families should not be discounted merely because the current government does not agree with them politically.

Additionally, having worked as a teacher in both the State and Independent Sector, it has been my experience that the more forward-thinking, progressive, encouraging managers have been in the Independent Sector. When I taught EAL (English as an Additional Language) for a local Council I ran up against a childcare issue. I was told by a senior manager that teachers (overwhelmingly women) "in this Council either work 9-3 or they can't work here." When I interviewed for an EAL position at a local independent school, they showed me my timetable which allowed me to drop off my children at school and pick them
up (and allowing me to work a .4 schedule across four days). I appreciated the effort on
their part to work with a professional educator, rather than trying to hold firm to a "one-size-
fits-all corporate attitude" which unfairly discriminates against educated women with caring
responsibilities.

Please don't demonise Independent schools as a classist pariah, as they have much to
offer Scotland. They support women in the workplace. They support family caring
responsibilities. They promote achievement amongst their staff and their pupils and they
encourage a thinking, progressive, achieving-mindset which Scotland desperately needs.
Not everyone who attends Independent Schools is wealthy enough to withstand a rise in
fees which would be the result of this proposed legislation. Schools would turn to other
forms of income, such as more foreign pupils and only be accessible to the very wealthy.
Scotland's English language is a pull for many International citizens, both in the State and
Independent Sectors. Its universities make the most of their international fee-paying
students because they believe a Scottish education is a valuable asset. Scottish pupils at
independent schools receive the same education as their foreign counterparts, so why
disadvantage native-born pupils by making the fees so high that only foreign pupils can get
the fully-encompassing education that Scottish Independent schools have to offer? If even
one in thirty independently educated pupils in Scotland currently had to move to their local
school, the cost of the rates increase would be outweighed with what Local Councils would
have to pay out. (The Closing of Butterstone school in Perthshire was a prime example to
Perth and Kinross Council.)

My children attend State schools. I know the advantages and disadvantages. I worked in
Inclusive Education and English as an Additional Language across multiple state schools. I
know a number of teachers who send their children to independent schools because they
see the barriers to learning in the State sector. They sacrifice nearly half their salary to do
this and it's not a decision they take lightly. (Especially considering many Head
Teachers/Deputy Head Teachers are already earning over £41,000 so are being taxed out
of another 41%). Please consider that Scotland needs to promote success. It needs to be
an example of progress, creativity and innovation. Increasing the rates paid by Independent
Schools (as well as farm and sporting estates) in a thinly veiled attempt to shut them down
and one which sends the wrong message to motivated, hard-working Scots.

Scotland needs good examples of education right now. Every piece of legislation flies a
nationalistic banner. Scotland claims it wants to decrease obesity, but it closes down PE
programmes in schools--and threatens independent schools who have advanced physical
education facilities and games programmes with crushing financial decisions. It claims it
wants to increase music and creativity, but does away with free music lessons in state
schools and then reduces the number of bursaries that independent schools can offer
talented pupils. It puts ads on Facebook about Scotland welcoming the world and being
"open for business," but in a state school that can mean no English as an Additional
Language Support from a specialist depending on location or competing numbers for
children and even in secondary school 45 minutes a week until you learn only basic
conversational English is not going to set up immigrant children or their families for integration and attainment!

Money brought in my a rates increase is not going to go to improving State Sector education. It might be all offset anyway by pupils who have to leave the independent sector due to the fee increase.

Independent Schools are advertising Scotland being welcoming as they recruit international pupils because they recognise the tremendous draw of learning English (and they have to work on a business model of paying their bills). The Scottish Government would be better off reducing their own levels of bureaucracy, the layers and layers of Educational Administration across 32 Councils and groups such as the Scottish College for Educational Leadership, and instead work in partnership with groups who are already on the ground, teaching and promoting education as a valuable asset within the country, rather than going after fee-paying schools and the families who make significant sacrifices to send their children there in hopes of a brighter future.