Managing Scotland's Schools: What are the Options?

Conference Report

Managing Scotland's Schools: What are the Options?
Holyrood Magazine, in association with Reform Scotland, ran a conference on Tuesday 9 November to look at issues surrounding the future management and structure of schools in Scotland. This was particularly timely because the Scottish Parliament's Education, Lifelong Learning & Culture Committee is currently looking at this issue.

The conference brought together a wide range of speakers from Scotland and further afield, including an address by the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning Michael Russell MSP. Electronic polling was also used throughout the day to record the views of those attending on a range of issues.

Reform Scotland has put together this report which is a summary of the speeches made during the day and the results of the electronic polling which produced some very interesting results.

Together with Holyrood Magazine, we would like to thank all those who took part in the discussion or attended on the day. We thought it was a lively and interesting debate on a very important issue and we hope that you will find this report a useful record of proceedings.

About Reform Scotland
Reform Scotland is an independent, non-party think tank that aims to set out a better way to deliver increased economic prosperity and more effective public services based on the traditional Scottish principles of limited government, diversity and personal responsibility.

Geoff Mawdsley is the Director of Reform Scotland and Nefertali Deeb is Reform Scotland's Researcher.

Contents:

1. Setting the Scene

Interactive polling

Two initial questions were asked at the beginning of the day, the results of which are below:

Which of the following best describes your role within Scotland's education sector?

1. Delivery/front line
2. Management
3. Policy
4. Research
5. Training/development
6. Commentator
7. Inspection
8. Parent
9. Other

27% 25% 15% 3% 16% 1% 13%

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In your opinion, should local authority control of schools be:

1. Increased
2. Decreased
3. Remain the same

5% 71% 24%

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1.1 Giving schools real autonomy

Keir Bloomer, Director, The Tapestry Partnership

Throughout the developed world, there is a growing concern that education is not changing rapidly enough to equip young people for the challenges of the modern world. Schools need to develop lifelong learners with increasingly sophisticated skills. They have to be ambitious and enterprising. At the same time, they should be active and responsible citizens with strong values, able to cope with the many difficult choices that they will face.

Most governments have over the past decade or so produced new mission statements for their schools, setting out objectives like these. Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence is a good example. However, change has been slow. School systems remain tied to their nineteenth century origins. Each year that passes sees them falling further behind the world around them.

There are many factors contributing to this 'resilient conservatism' but one of the most important stems from the way that school systems are run. Governance is unduly top-down, centralised and bureaucratic. Accountability systems tend to encourage compliance. There are few incentives to innovate and create the rich diversity of experience that allows learning to take place.

In Scotland, we have begun to take steps in the right direction. Curriculum for Excellence offers new thinking. The school is portrayed as the centre of innovation. Teachers are urged to be creative and to take well-calculated risks. There are broad guidelines but no detailed blueprint to be followed slavishly. There have been mistakes too, but the underlying philosophy is sound. Unfortunately, the institutions of Scottish education were not set up to handle this kind of development and struggle to do so.

An effective system of governance would actively promote innovation. It would seek to involve the whole community – particularly parents, business and learners themselves – in the process of change. Above all, it would empower schools, giving them the autonomy, freedom of action and responsibility they need if they are to be adventurous and effective agents of change.

To be sure, a debate is under way about the governance of schools. However, it has arisen out of concern for the impact of the coming cuts and is focused on reducing costs. There is a lot of discussion of sharing services or of reducing the number of education authorities from the current 32. While there may be merit in some of these ideas, they do not address the fundamental questions. Creating fewer bigger authorities would of itself do nothing to empower schools, nothing to promote innovation and nothing to make schools more accountable to their legitimate local stakeholders.

To develop a better approach, it is necessary to break down the idea of governance into its component parts. How should schools be funded? Where should they obtain all the kinds of support that they need? To whom should they be accountable? At present, the answer to all three questions is, in theory, the local authority.

In practice, that statement has to be qualified because, since the last reorganisation of Scottish local government in 1996, the strategic role of central government has greatly increased. Councils now have little impact on educational policy, while schools increasingly see themselves as principally accountable through HMI to government. So, the real answer is that schools are governed by a combination of central and local government with the balance between the two tilting towards the centre. There has been no serious attempt to consider whether the components are fit for purpose.

Funding remains a local authority concern. Most of the money comes from central government, but how much is devoted to schools and how it is distributed among them is decided at council level. As a result there is considerable variation. It is not uncommon to find spending per child in secondary schools serving similar areas differing by as much as £2,000 per year. Few people see this as justified or helpful.

There is, therefore, a strong case for a national funding mechanism. It could not be a simple fixed sum per pupil, but would have to reflect crucial factors such as disadvantage, rurality and the incidence of additional support needs. Furthermore, schools would need access from time to time to significant capital resources. It would be important also to avoid the kind of pork barrel activities that direct political involvement might involve. A funding council, such as the one that currently distributes resources to FE colleges and universities could well be the answer.

So far as support is concerned, schools find themselves very largely in the hands of compulsory monopolies. Some of these are national but most are arms of the council. Schools are obliged to obtain services such as maintenance, cleaning, catering, legal advice and so on from other council departments. Educational support comes from a combination of national agencies and local quality improvement teams.

Schools may have notionally devolved budgets but the extent to which they are free to use resources as they please is severely constrained. Much of the money never reaches the school budget, but goes straight to these various support agencies which provide the service they see as appropriate. It is surely time to bring this situation to an end and give schools genuine control of their own resources. Council agencies may very often be best placed to provide the necessary support, but that is a decision for schools to make.

Accountability is the most complex of the three components. Nobody would deny the need for some level of national accountability, a necessary recognition that there are minimum requirements in return for public funding. However, there are other stakeholders who have a legitimate interest in schools, particularly at a local level.

There are several models that could be explored. East Lothian Council has canvassed the idea of schools being accountable to charitable local trusts which would represent parents, local business and the community at large. Not-for-profit companies could offer an alternative approach to community governance. And, of course, the local authority, without its funding and support roles, might well be seen as a suitable route through which schools could give account.

These are large and complex issues. What is needed is not an instant blueprint, but a recognition that there is a genuine problem and a willingness to examine options and seek solutions, perhaps through the mechanism of some kind of national commission.

1.2 What are the alternatives?

Professor Richard Kerley, Professor of Management, Queen Margaret University

The reason we are currently discussing the organisation of publicly-provided schooling in Scotland is because of two major factors. The first is the extent to which we can now increasingly find well-evidenced questioning of whether the current system of governance for our schools produces the best outcomes for students and society. The second factor is, of course, the current financial circumstances we are in and whether there are ways to tackle this that are helped by changing the way in which we manage schools. The third, albeit less significant factor, is that major changes are both planned and apace in England and we can possibly learn from these. It seems wise to start by outlining our current system of governance as that is, effectively, the status quo, although the reality has been a lot more flexible and varied than this is often taken to mean.

Parents have a legal duty to educate their children; in Scotland, councils have a duty to both provide for that education and [though this rarely surfaces] ensure that parents do have their children educated. That is why councils employ staff who used to be called attendance officers – a rather unfashionable phrase now. That balance between parents and council is an important one, and an arrangement that will, in effect, be rebalanced if some of the more extravagant proposals for school education that are being discussed are introduced.

The current arrangements
Councils are required to have an Education Committee and to appoint a Direct of Education, although he or she does not have to be qualified in any specific way. The Education Committee has oversight of a department; still in the main called an 'Education' department though an increasing number are labelled 'Children and Families' or

something similar. This department supports and manages an array of single units; secondary schools; special schools; primaries; nurseries; community centres and similar.

This management is a combination of oversight, control and support. While the 2000 Standards in Schools Act provides for budget delegation to schools, so that a head teacher gets a financial allocation each year, a lot of functions are retained at the centre of the council. So, for example, if the school requires repairs or redevelopment in some form that is a decision made by the council, measured against other investment priorities and determined as being done next year …or sometime in the future. The same backstop capacity applies if a parent, staff member or some other person feels they may have a complaint or legal claim against a school; the department deals with it using council expertise and staffing.

This is a long-established model and one that has weaknesses and strengths. There was provision in earlier legislation for schools to 'opt out', but very few even attempted to do so – Jordanhill being a notable, and very specific, exception.

The disadvantages of this form of organisation are more often stressed than are the advantages. Most recently, head teachers in both primaries and secondaries have expressed their wish to see changes; including more freedom for schools; as well as more money and believe this may be achieved by a reduction in the number of councils. Whether that might achieve what they are seeking is hard to know but as long as the current model remains in place then it will continue as one where many decisions are made at council level, not school level. Whether a school is rebuilt; improved; or re-equipped will have to fit in with council budget priorities. This much is well known; what is worryingly apparent to any informed observer is the extent to which calls for change – particularly from teachers' organisations – often

appear to be based on what we might call 'a grass is greener' assumption of the alternatives that are available.

The alternatives
There are, of course, alternatives, some of them are tested elsewhere, others more speculative in form.

The regional board
If we followed the Northern Ireland model, we might opt for some smaller number of organising units – called over there Education and Library Boards – that managed the schools in say, the North East , West and South of the country. Of course, we'd then have to decide if councillors were to be on these boards, and, if so, whether nominated from the councils that fell within these boundaries, or whether board members would be appointed or directly elected.

The minister decides
Perhaps all schools could be managed from the centre with direct reporting lines from and to the Scottish Government, through civil servants and Ministers there. If that were the case – and this is not far short of the model being discussed by Ministers in England – then the burden for Minsters and the remoteness from decision making for schools would be very starkly exposed. Imagine a primary head in Pitlochry with a failed heating system on a cold Monday; does she telephone or email Mike Russell? Does he visit? Or is it more likely a 4th or 5th tier civil servant based in Dundee will field the call? Is that really an improvement on current arrangements?

School clusters
Some discussion has taken place in a number of councils about the 'clustering' of schools, perhaps by geography or by 'mission'. If the geography lends itself, then this clearly has a lot to recommend it; three primaries and a secondary in one discreet town have a lot in common and can share both problems and solutions. But, of course,

in such circumstances they do that anyway. The potential new development is whether greater powers of governance and community-based management are vested in such clusters in a co-ordinated way. There are some complex issues in any such arrangement and exploring these takes time and raises questions that may not readily have an answer. This is the discussion that East Lothian Council is prompting at present with mixed views expressed by both schools and parents.

In current circumstances, change of some kind may seem attractive to some; but people might be well advised to be careful of what they wish for.

1.3 The Finnish approach: what is the attraction?

Professor Jouni Välijärvi, Director of the Finnish Institute of Educational Research , University of Jyväskylä

The Finnish comprehensive school is not only a system. It is also a matter of pedagogical philosophy and practice at the school and classroom level. An intrinsic part of comprehensive school philosophy is the principle of equity, which is a fundamental trait of Finnish education practice. Efforts have accordingly been made to provide all students, population groups and regions of the country with equal opportunities to study and learn. A small country, it has been thought, cannot afford to leave anyone outside high-quality education. This became especially evident during the economic recession years of the 1990s, which greatly strengthened faith in the significance of education and motivation to learn, not least with respect to employment opportunities and economic growth.

The Finnish comprehensive school is for every child and, hence, has to adjust to the needs of each child. Instruction and pedagogy at Finnish schools have accordingly been structured so as to fit heterogeneous student groups. Finnish teachers know, for example, that basically no student can be excluded and sent to another school. In line with this principle, students' own interests and choices are likewise taken into account at schools when planning the curriculum and selecting the contents, textbooks, learning strategies, methods and assessment devices. All this calls for a flexible, school-based, teacher and student-planned curriculum and evaluation along with student-centred instruction, counselling and remedial teaching.

In the Finnish culture, the profession of teachers has been seen as one of the most important professions in society, and a lot of resources have consequently been invested in teacher training. Teachers have also been trusted to do their best as true professionals. Accordingly,

Finnish teachers have been entrusted with considerable pedagogical independence in the classroom and schools have likewise enjoyed substantial autonomy in organising their work within the flexible limits of the national core curriculum.

The regulatory practice of the education system in Finland has changed rapidly. In the 1970s, decision-making was heavily centralised. At that time, evaluation was not much discussed even though many research projects, conducted almost exclusively by the Institute for Educational Research, were essentially evaluation research. Through the legislative reforms of the 1980s and 1990s, Finland moved to the era of decentralisation. The number of mandatory rules and regulations has essentially decreased.

Consequently, the local administration's decision-making powers were increased. This development has led to a situation where the position and importance of assessment and evaluation has strengthened. The new framework curricula were enforced in 2004. Compared to the previous ones, they define the goals of teaching at the national level in more detail and represent, to some degree, a return to a centralised system. They do not, however, essentially restrict schools' and teachers' freedom to determine the content and methods of teaching. By the same token, the curricular reform of 2004 did not bring any major changes to the prevailing evaluation system.

Evaluation in its present form started as early as the beginning of the 1990s when the new steering system – steering by information - was adopted. At the same time, the practice of official school inspections, a tradition dating back more than a hundred years, was abolished. The new Education Act was issued in 1999, and it also set guidelines for the evaluation of education. According to the new Act, the evaluation of education is compulsory and concerns all areas of education. The evaluation system seeks to ensure that the objectives set in the legislation are achieved and to support the development of education

as well as to improve opportunities to learn. Although the emphasis of evaluation is on outcomes, the system does not include any allocation of funds to different educational institutions according to the results they have achieved. Neither does it involve any ranking of individual schools.

It is not overstated to say that quality assurance in the Finnish education system is largely based on trust. We believe that academically educated teachers are the best experts to design their teaching in practice, within the fairly loose framework of national curricula. We also trust that they do their best in the classroom to promote learning. This may sound quite idealistic, but in view of the results of the recent international studies, at least, the teachers have deserved this trust. It is also important to keep in mind that, in terms of educational investment, Finland has clearly made a choice different from most other European countries, including the Nordic countries. Instead of external valuation, Finland has invested heavily in teacher education. It seems that this investment has yielded good results and kept up the high esteem and popularity of the profession.

Standards have often been seen in Finland as restricting teachers' innovative thinking and pedagogical freedom. To set standards for educational practices and student outcomes is a task quite different from, say, setting standards for industrial products or services. To educational goals there are always many parallel routes which can be equally effective, and the effectiveness depends largely on the context in which teachers and schools do their work.

The role and significance of standards in Finnish education is determined largely in relation to teacher's work and pedagogical development. There are nationally set, subject-specific standards for good mastery. Their purpose is, above all, to help schools and teachers in planning their own work. These standards are not binding in the sense that their realisation would be specifically controlled or

evaluated. As was mentioned earlier, the learning outcomes of nine-year comprehensive schools are monitored by sample-based surveys. Yet, these results are also published on the system level only, while the results for individual schools are delivered only to the schools in question.

The standards are seen as aids and tools that schools and teachers may use at their discretion. For many parts, these standards have also been phrased in such a manner that their assessment by any specific measures or indicators would not even be possible. Teachers' academic education prepares them quite well for applying the standards creatively in adjusting their own teaching. Teacher education provided by different universities is also consistent to such an extent that teachers' conceptions about good learning and teaching would be highly coherent even without any set standards, although then textbooks would easily form the guiding standard for many teachers.

The current standards describe good learning. They are expected to provide a kind of "outlook" both for teachers and students as to what is considered good mastery at the end of compulsory education. In autumn 2007, the Minister of Education set up an expert group who are to define standards for good teaching. The work is only in the erly stages, but it is evident that the standards will define some requirements to be set for schools as learning environments as well as describing good practices of learning at school. Again, these will not actually be criteria for evaluating the quality of teachers' work, but rather depictions of teaching arrangements that are most likely to yield good results.

1.4 Embracing innovative thinking

Michael Russell MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, the Scottish Government

Introduction

The changing political and economic environment provides a compelling context for the need to look at how we manage and govern education in Scotland. **Richard's** presentation touched upon Academies and 'Free Schools'. Interesting, but not for us. What is the best model for Scotland? What fits best with Scottish reality and traditions? With our future aspirations?

Keir talked about giving schools real autonomy. What levels of autonomy do schools actually want – or need? What do we mean by autonomy?

We heard from **Jouni Välijärvi**. Some of you may know that I visited Finland earlier in the year. The purpose of that visit and others was to learn. Could Scotland achieve political consensus as achieved in Finland? Stability arising from a policy consensus around the way forward – teamed with the highest standards of teaching – sit at the centre of successful innovation in education.

A Scottish solution

Concerns about Scottish education have been acknowledged since the Parliament was established in 1999. There have been two major initiatives to chart a way forward: the inquiry into the purposes of Scottish education and the national debate on education. Curriculum for Excellence is, without doubt, the right way forward. Let's not lose courage or diminish our support. Have faith in Scotland's teachers and be confident Curriculum for Excellence will free our teachers to teach.

There is still work to do, but CfE is based on firm foundations and is rightly being praised by international experts. The principles of Scottish Education are the twin principles of Access and Excellence.

- **Access**: education is a right and not a privilege.
- **Excellence**: "good enough" is not good enough.

We need well-rounded, highly skilled and educated Scots to be at the heart of the nation's future success. Never before has the link between education and economic prosperity been so important.

We aspire to create the best possible environment in which our children can thrive and prosper. This is critical to the common weal. At the same time, we know that there is no option but to change the way that we deliver education. It must be leaner and fitter than ever before, and it must be better.

Spending review 2010
The Scottish Cabinet will be prioritising:
- Economic recovery and increasing sustainable economic growth;
- Protecting services which meet the needs of the public and which are most effective in tackling deep-seated problems and delivering real benefits and better outcomes for the people of Scotland; and
- Establishing a competitive advantage through our approach to climate change.

Education choices that will be made will seek to:
- Protect our investment in early intervention / early years services;
- Stimulate high quality research and lifelong learning that contributes to economic growth;

- Protect the front line by targeting reductions, as much as possible, on those areas of activity that do not contribute directly to front line service delivery;
- Empower the front line, by giving professionals working directly with the users of the services more authority and expecting them to take more responsibility for decision making.

The push and pull factors
We must simplify how we deliver education; redesign our systems for a different age and for different demands, both locally and nationally.

We recently announced the creation of the Scottish Education Quality and Improvement Agency. Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education [HMIE] and Learning and Teaching Scotland [LTS] are two sides of the same coin. One supporting improvement, the other inspecting standards. The introduction of CfE makes now the right time to bring the two halves together.

The Scottish Education Quality and Improvement Agency will be charged with leading the drive to complete implementation of CfE and constantly improving our school education. It will do this with less bureaucracy, less red tape and more resources freed to go to the front line.

Autonomy and governance
Devolved school management currently means devolved budgets. The Education authority devolves some budgetary control to the head teacher. The reality is that the head teacher's freedom on how to spend the money is very limited.

What we should be talking about is devolving school **governance**. There is no real evidence that parents in Scotland want to take over the running of our schools. Look to the attempts of the last

Conservative administration in 1989 to introduce self-governing schools - only 2 schools out of around 2,800 in Scotland made that choice. It was not the choice of the vast majority of parents then and is not the choice of parents now.

Scottish parents want the ability to contribute as genuine partners to the educational process – to decisions which affect the learning and the future lives of the children and young people at their schools – to decisions which have a direct impact on the very communities in which they live.

Head teachers tell me almost every time they meet me that they want more control over the direction that their school takes.

International experts from the OECD make 3 main points about autonomy in education relating to: early years; leadership; and implementation.

- Provide autonomy, funding and support to early childhood services.
- Redefine school leadership responsibilities so that leaders have significant autonomy.
- Establish a balance between institutional autonomy and public accountability.

Part of the solution lies with Government. The previous Government's guidelines provided a steer to local authorities on what should – and should not – be devolved to schools.

I would like to revisit this in discussion with my council colleagues with a view to developing this guidance to providing the greater autonomy, and therefore responsibility, to head teachers that they require.

Any revisions made will be about enhancing opportunities for pupils and learners and not about bureaucratic systems.

Leadership
We need to think too about the implications for the kinds of leaders we need in schools and how they are developed.

This will mean building on the best of the qualities we already see demonstrated in school leadership in Scotland. Qualities of entrepreneurialism and resilience and a refusal to accept second best.

How do we attract more head teachers and most effectively prepare and support people to thrive in leadership roles in those new environments?

There is an important principle here. We cannot allow more autonomous schools to, in any sense, become synonymous with more isolated schools. Schools leaders must support and learn from each other.

Local learning communities
There is no desire in Scotland to see a school **versus** school approach which uses competition to drive up standards. This is not in the best interest of pupils, nor what parents or communities want here in Scotland.

People forget the differences between Scottish and English schools; there exists already a duplication of provision in England. Grammar schools, Church of England Schools and others that already provide that duplication within communities in England. This does not exist here in Scotland.

Much better is a model of schools working together, a school **plus** school model. We would like to see schools working in partnerships and schools with local communities at their heart.

This is how Community Planning Partnerships work, where the council and its partners work together on issues that face communities.

CfE Excellence Groups made clear that excellence across all learning will benefit from strong, meaningful partnerships between schools and their communities; with employers, with universities, with colleges.

Schools working in partnership with one another, with other local public services and with the local community is desirable for many reasons. It would widen the pool of talent. It would widen the scope for the generation of new ideas so that specialisms could emerge, while leadership could be nurtured and developed. This would all be achieved through the mutual support and increased capacity of working together.

Most important of all – opportunities and outcomes for all pupils and learners could improve.

Conclusion
Achieving this is all about listening – listening to head teachers, teachers, pupils and parents. It's about listening to communities – school communities, parent councils, local towns and villages.

One thing I am certain about though is that Curriculum for Excellence will be at the heart of the changes.

Interactive polling

This session concluded by asking the audience to choose from a range of options to improve schools. The results of this are below:

Which single model of governance, if any, has the greatest potential to improve Scotland's schools?

1. Academies
2. Consortia
3. Federations/clusters
4. Non-profit organisations
5. Private companies
6. Regional education boards
7. Trusts
8. Central government control
9. National education agency
0. It should remain unchanged

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0
11%	10%	26%	11%	3%	11%	4%	4%	10%	9%

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2. Considering the Options

2.1 Working with the grain to explore the alternatives

Ken Greer, Executive Director of Education, Fife Council

It's relatively easy to speculate about structural solutions to school problems. It's harder and more important to ensure high quality learning and teaching in every classroom, every day, to enable excellent school leadership and to engage every one of our staff, every day to focus on how their work makes a difference for children and young people and their learning.

The options include:
- A mixed economy
- Fewer education authorities,
- EAs (in)dependent of/to local government
- Community-based school governance structures;
- SG direct funding
- Sharing across boundaries
- Closer working between existing establishments, including the independent sector

Structural reorganisation of school governance does not always change cultures, practices and outcomes for children and young people, nor does the present structure preclude innovation, continuous improvement or radically different ways of making school provision. There are enough freedoms and opportunities within the system, the supporting legislation and guidance to allow us to enable excellent provision in schools and to make continuous improvement reality rather than aspiration. This avoids some of the cost, the pain and unproductive disruption of untested reforms which limit rather than enhance the capacity of our system, adopting alternatives which cloak activity as outcome with change masquerading as improvement.

The approach is neither dogmatic, nor narrowly ideological. It uses existing structures, tools and approaches. It is based on what has been achieved in Fife in part by the team at the centre, but largely by school leaders working in progressively effective networks.

Results have improved. They are now at record levels across all the areas we measure. Collecting and reflecting on evidence is the key. Accountability depends upon it.

Improvement measures
- Record levels in 2010 in 5-14 and SQA performance in Fife schools
- HMIE inspections now consistently well above national averages
- Staff perceptions of pupils' behaviour and discipline and staff well-being very positive
- Significant reductions in school exclusions
- Customer satisfaction surveys over 90% positive

While the overall system can be clumsy, it can be effective. We can make better use of its functionality. The challenge is to reflect on **how** we do things now, using the existing permissions to evolve an approach which is fit for purpose, continuously improving outcomes for learners. Good outcomes follow from good processes.

The powerful coincidence of:
- Curriculum for Excellence;
- the GIRFEC imperatives; and
- the significant pressure on public sector budgets

makes it essential that we find a more efficient approach. We call this process 'Better with Less'.

The Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act (2000) is very clear about the roles and responsibilities of:

- The wider community
- Learners and Parents
- The Scottish Government
- Education Authorities
- Schools
- HMIE
- Other agencies

However, the legislation cannot define the quality of relationships which are the key to a social enterprise such as education. It is the refashioning of relationships that is at the centre of the transformational improvement in Fife Education Service, underpinned by three broad working principles:

- Devomax[1]
- EA Lite[2]
- Enhanced and extended collegiality: a confederacy of leadership[3]

And the process is characterised by:

- Service-wide focus on learning and the learner
- Building a continuum of leadership in a climate of mutual trust
- Alignment of accountability and responsibility

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[1]We presume to devolve all budgets/decisions/policies to schools which can be meaningfully and efficiently devolved, so far as possible in line with national Council policies and the principles underpinning CfE.
[2]We aim to keep the permanent team at the centre as small as possible, with leadership extending to heads and others staff in schools.
[3]We work closely with Heads/union leaders, the Council and other services to seek ways of facilitating networking and joint-working, with a shared focus on the best interests of the learner and taking feedback on progress.

- Focus on enabling, not providing, doing nothing at the centre which schools (individually or collectively) can do better themselves
- Searching out opportunities to form productive networks

Fife does not take a laissez-faire approach to school management. The key roles for an education authority are:
- Strategic direction, including planning school provision and raising expectations in line with local and national priorities
- Quality improvement, including taking action to deal with underperformance
- Ensuring equity, fairness and inclusion for every child and family

In Fife, we facilitate where we can, intervening where we must. We work with the Head teachers as members of an extended Council Management Team. We take an increasingly proportionate approach. We use data and other system feedback to target the honest conversations about performance and the associated actions essential in a system committed to progressive improvement.

An Education Authority with a close knowledge of its schools, well-connected to its communities is best placed to be the body to intervene when external intervention is required. Scotland's Councils with their range of services can support children at risk in line with GIRFEC.

Councils and education authorities provide democratic accountability of schools to the community wider than the parent body. Where schools are ineffective, leadership is weak, or learning and teaching are less effective, there needs to be capacity to challenge and take effective remedial action. The system must be advocate for the child and mentor for staff. This requires strong networks characterised by co-operation, collegiality, collaboration and clarity, where resources, talent and energies are pooled.

## 2.2 Governance: the pros and cons of changing governance

Ken Cunningham CBE, General Secretary, School Leaders Scotland

The underlying principles of good governance
- **Entitlement:** all children in Scotland, wherever they live, should have access to a core educational entitlement in terms of: Curriculum; Facilities; Transition and progression beyond school; and Funding.
- **Purpose:** the entitlement derives from the broad ambitions for a rounded education defined by CfE and in relation to support for choice post-16. Our focus must be to 'get this right for every child.'
- **Clarity in responsibility and accountability:** management arrangements should clarify who is responsible for what aspect of strategy, policy and delivery and who, therefore, is accountable.
- **Power and communication:** decision-making processes should allow those responsible for making policy work in practice to influence and contribute to strategy, but should also give a strategic voice to the various other stakeholders.
- **The role of the secondary school:** secondary schools operate within a complex set of public services, but make a distinctive contribution which should be clarified and recognised.
- **Diversity, ownership and identity:** the various stakeholders in individual schools often identify strongly with their school and contribute far more than the core 'entitlement'. Management arrangements should support such diversity.
- **Stability:** effective planning and delivery in schooling result from stable, long-term planning and funding in areas such as teacher training, examination and certification arrangements

and staffing of schools.   Short term changes are damaging to provision.
- **Funding:** a funding system that is transparent, consistent across the country and both equitable and fair.
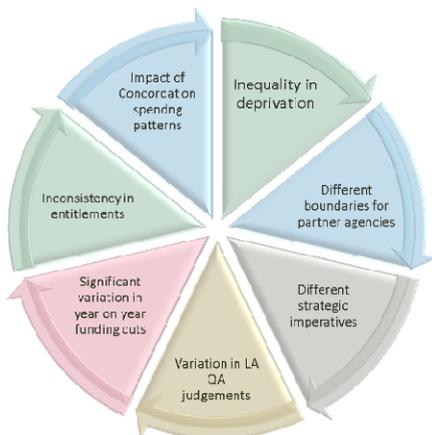
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Governance- some funding examples
This information is based on "similar schools" based on Principal Components Analysis. The schools were identified on the Scotxed website.

The mean figure for these 13 "similar" schools is £5,002, while the difference between highest and lowest cost/pupil is £2,346. For the lowest cost/pupil school the difference from the mean is £830. In a 1,000 pupil school this equates to a difference in funding of £830,000 which, taking the average cost of a teacher (£40K, including on-costs), is just over 20 teachers:

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[4] **Entitlement, clarity, stability and funding:** a funding system that is transparent, consistent across the country and both equitable and fair

School/Authority	Roll	Budget	Cost/Pupil
A	1,061	6.916,000	6,518
B	895	5,051,655	5,644
C	1,151	6,361,000	5,526
D	615	3,241,000	5,269
E	793	4,155,000	5,239
F	1,380	4,355,435	5,005
G	1,744	8,498,000	4,872
H	783	3,787,480	4,837
I	923	4,377,081	4,742
J	1,328	5,869,254	4,439
K	977	4,335,431	4,437
L	1,713	7,420,000	4,331
M	1,000	4,172,000	4,172

Arguments for the current structure
- LAs can provide secondary schools with a strong 'safety net'.
- LAs deliver other services which are relevant to schools and can encourage joint-working across them.
- LAs are 'close' to schools, with knowledge of local communities.
- LAs have capacity to plan strategic educational provision, beyond individual schools.
- There is an argument for stability in retaining existing management arrangements. Restructuring does not always deliver anticipated benefits, while often imposing new costs.
- Restructuring may also restrict opportunities, as energies go into the restructuring, not delivery.
- The recent OECD report recognised that the LA model of delivery had served Scottish education well. Some of our members believe that their LA carries out its functions effectively and supportively.

2.3 What do head teachers need to make new structures manageable and sustainable?

Greg Dempster, General Secretary, Association of Head Teachers and Deputies in Scotland (AHDS)

- Greater consistency of provision across the country
- Better professional management of secondary schooling
- Clearer lines of responsibility and accountability
- A more stable environment for long term improvement
- A balance between strategic capacity and local community/identity
- Enhanced strategic capacity

The governance debate is fascinating, but it is not new. This begs the question – why now? Why are ideas about restructuring education being pulled out and investigated now? The answer of course is impending financial doom.

This leads to another question. What do we want from any change to governance of education? Is it the cheapest possible model or is it improvement? I'd hope it was the latter, or at least a combination of the two.

Of course, we don't yet know the scale of the cuts we are facing. This debate is predicated on the notion that we are facing cuts of about 20% in education. In England, where spending decisions determine the overall budget available to the Scottish Government, it seems that education will face either a real terms cut of 0.6% or an increase of 0.1% over the course of the next few years. Why then are we talking about such big cuts to education in Scotland? Politicians south of the border have clearly considered education to be a core/crucial service and have prioritised it.

I urge local and national politicians to do the same in Scotland. This is not a call for the status quo. It is healthy to explore alternative governance models - provided the motivation for doing so is the improvement of education.

A snapshot survey of 100 AHDS members tells us that 77% would like to see education stay in local authority control. Two thirds of that group felt that there were too many local authorities. To give a little more insight into the governance models that AHDS members favoured, I asked them to rank seven options. These were the results in order of preference:

- Fewer local authorities with same school/LA relationship as now
- Area education boards
- Directly-funded clusters of schools
- Exactly the same model as we have now
- Community Trust School model (proposed by East Lothian)
- Free schools and the 'traditional' English model had very little support indeed.

What do head teachers need to make new structures manageable and sustainable?
The simple, but unhelpful, answer is that it depends. The reason for this is that we are not looking at one option and commenting. There are many - significantly different - models of governance that we might look at.

Perhaps a better question is 'What would head teachers want to see from any new system of governance?' The following items came up time and again in member responses to my questionnaire:

- Involvement in decisions - including arriving at any new model

- Power to set school level priorities
- Freedom to inspire and lead, not simply do what told to
- Resources that match expectations
- Avoidance of a postcode lottery - staffing/budget/support
- Support in legal and financial matters
- Clear vision/strategic plan

What are the pros and cons of change?
Clearly this depends what you are changing to and why the change is happening. There must first be agreement in the system that there is a need for change. The options for change need to be put on the table. The change itself can't be too expensive. If it is agreed that change is necessary and will improve education then teachers will be on side.

Variations across Scotland
There is huge variation in size and style of LEAs and huge variation within LEAs. There is nothing wrong with variation, indeed Curriculum for Excellence has at its core a recognition that every child is different and our response to each child should be different. A rigid system would not be able to deliver this, so whatever model of governance is proposed or adopted it needs to provide for variation (within parameters).

The potential impact of new models of governance
The potential impact depends on the model and on the reasons behind any change. If improvement is the motivation for change, then a new governance model would have the potential to deliver: administrative economies, stability of funding, stability of staffing, genuine responsiveness to pupil need rather than political priority and full delivery of the intended ethos of CfE. Or, and this is the one we all have to watch for, it could deliver a cheaper service with little, no or negative impact on pupils.

2.4 Involving parents: why would you want to?

Eileen Prior, Executive Director, Scottish Parent Teacher Council

I chose this title for my talk today because I have heard this said many times since I took up my role, and not always in jest.

A little bit of background about SPTC. We are a charity, a membership organisation for parent's groups in Scotland for more than 60 years. We have almost 2,000 member groups all over Scotland, Parent Councils and PTAs primarily. We offer a range of services to our members including insurance, information and advice, workshops/development work. Our office here in Edinburgh receives a steady flow of enquiries from parents: enquiries about the workings of their PC or PTA; calls from parents with concerns about their own child; enquiries about specific aspects of what's happening in education today. We believe this contact with parents puts us in a unique position to talk from the parent's perspective.

So why would you want to involve parents?
The truth is that parental involvement is viewed by many as a burden to be borne, a challenge to be dealt with, not as a thing of value which has the potential to bring benefit to the school, and most importantly, the child.

There has been a good deal of research on the topic and it's clear there are many gains from parental involvement. There's a simple answer as to why parents should be involved: because we know when parents are involved with their children's lives and learning, at home and at school, kids do better at school, they are more likely to stay out of the youth justice system, their life chances are significantly enhanced and of course parents add value, quite simply because they are not simply parents. Like many of you in this room today, parents are also knowledgeable in their area of work, they have skills and talents

which can be accessed by the school. They are not simply the mum or dad of wee jimmy.

Parents offer a wide range of things to a school: time; cash; practical support; ideas and fresh thinking and an external view – that of a 'critical friend'. As Mike Russell said earlier today, parents don't want to run the school, they simply want a meaningful partnership – collegiate working – with schools.

I would argue that any school which is not geared up to work closely with parents – and by that I mean a two-way process, not simply one-way – is missing out on a huge resource, at a time when we all need to be making maximum use of whatever resources we have.

So what does parental involvement look like?
I may be teaching granny to suck eggs, but bear with me. There are two models of parental involvement – spontaneous and intervention. The first has been widely researched (in the US mainly) but the second has less robust research to measure value.[5] I'm going to focus on the first as the one which is of most interest to us today. There are a number of factors which influence the spontaneous involvement of parents, and for the most part they are entirely predictable:

the social class of the family; mother's educational attainment; level of deprivation in the family; health (particularly mental health); family shape (eg single parent families); the age of the child (the younger the better…as every high school will tell you); the child's own attainment

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[5] Impact of Parental Involvement, Parental Support and Family Education on Pupil Achievements and Adjustments: Literature Review, 2003, Charles Desforges and Alberto Abouchaar

(almost perversely, the better a child is doing, the more their parents are likely to be involved in the life of the school).

Other factors are the role of the child herself as home/school mediator, in other words how she manages that relationship to a large extent. Ethnicity also play a part: some cultures do not have any tradition of involvement in education.

In other words, the parents who get involved with their child's education and school tend to be:

- Middle class
- In a stable relationship
- Confident and well
- With younger children
- White

Whatever way you look at it, it's simply not good enough to have such a restricted group of parents involved in education….whether for the children themselves, or for the school. Are we content with this? I'm not, and I feel it is a sorry state of affairs if we are. But we shouldn't think that parents who aren't involved have nothing to give! We should keep in mind that those who don't get involved often have specific issues such as having a difficult educational experience themselves or having specific learning difficulties which make the whole process of engaging with schools very intimidating. They may have low levels of self confidence and educational attainment, or they could have had difficult interactions with the school in the past. Once bitten, twice shy!

We should also remember that what parents do at home can be more important than social class or schooling! So, if we want to involve a wider group of parents – and I think we do – that demands a greater commitment from education authorities and schools as well as CLD,

education, social work and other children's services. We need to tailor opportunities to meet the specific needs of children and families.

From our experience, the situation with parental involvement in Scotland is far from ideal. Support and practice varies widely between authorities and within authorities. It very often comes down to the individual head teacher and how open and committed he or she is – a head teacher who sees information as power and wants to hang onto that power will be reluctant to include parents in a meaningful way, ie beyond fundraising! Parents raise a substantial amount of money for their schools each year, but they have much more to contribute.

We know the profile of parents is pretty predictable, and we lose those parents for whose children involvement is most important!

And so we get to the nub of the question. What does all this mean for different models of school management?

I believe if we want parental involvement in different and new models of education we need to get the basics right. We cannot be content with the status quo. We really need to get our priorities sorted out and make true parental involvement a priority across services. We have seen that we can predict those parents who will - and will not – participate. This demands real commitment to parental involvement from education and other public services.

Interactive polling

At the end of this session, a further series of questions were asked about changes to education in Scotland. The results are below:

In your opinion, which of the following is most in need of change so far as the running of Scotland's schools is concerned:

1. The role of local government
2. The role of national agencies (e.g. LTS, HMIe and SQA)
3. School leadership
4. Involvement of parents, community or voluntary sector
5. Involvement of private sector
6. A combination of two or more of the above
7. Other
8. It should remain unchanged

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
29%	22%	6%	5%		35%	1%	3%

In association with: reform scotland

Brought to you by: Ipsos MORI Holyrood HOLYROOD

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Headteachers should be given more budgetary control of schools"?

1. Stongly agree
2. Tend to agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Tend to disagree
5. Strongly disagree

1	2	3	4	5
52%	35%	4%	7%	1%

In association with: reform scotland

Brought to you by: Ipsos MORI Holyrood HOLYROOD

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Any change to school governance must be decided locally in collaboration with parents and the community"?

1.Stongly agree
2.Tend to agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Tend to disagree
5. Strongly disagree

25% — 1
34% — 2
8% — 3
17% — 4
15% — 5

In association with:
reform scotland
Brought to you by:
Ipsos MORI   Holyrood   HOLYROOD

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Creating federations or clusters of schools with a shared governance structure would spread good practice among school leaders and teachers"?

1.Stongly agree
2.Tend to agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Tend to disagree
5. Strongly disagree

20% — 1
37% — 2
18% — 3
18% — 4
6% — 5

In association with:
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Brought to you by:
Ipsos MORI   Holyrood   HOLYROOD

3. Setting the Next Steps

3.1 A community affair

Councillor Paul McLennan, Leader of East Lothian Council

East Lothian is approximately 270 square miles in area and has 43 miles of coastline. Our boundaries extend from Musselburgh, immediately east of Edinburgh's suburban edge, eastwards to Dunbar and beyond to the Scottish Borders. From the coastline of the Firth of Forth, an agricultural plain extends southwards to the Lammermuir hills. The population of East Lothian is 94,440. More than half the population live in its western sector, the main towns being Musselburgh (population 21,900), Prestonpans (7,070), Tranent (8,940) and Cockenzie/Port Seton (5,640). The principal towns in the east are Haddington (8,750), North Berwick (6,380) and Dunbar (6,940). Although Musselburgh is the largest town, Haddington is the administrative centre for East Lothian Council.

We are proud of our educational achievements and our schools perform above the national average in terms of attainment and have shown sustained improvement over a number of years. Nevertheless, we believe that it is still possible to improve further and are committed to finding ways in which we can ensure that every child, regardless of background, can fulfil their potential.

When our SNP/Lib Dem Administration came into power in May 2007, we set out our vision for the future though our Contract with the People

Our Contract with the People is based on four key principles:

- Vision-driven Strategy—we will express a clear vision for East Lothian and its residents which will inform all key decisions taken on behalf of those residents.
- Democratic Accountability—we will endeavour to discuss and decide all key matters in public after consulting with those people most affected.
- Community Orientation—we will devolve decision-making down to the ward level as far as it makes economic and managerial sense.
- Resource Maximisation—we will seek out and engage financial and human resources both within and outside of the Council that can help deliver and maintain the superior quality of life that residents enjoy in East Lothian.

Throughout our time in power, we have encouraged and empowered our Senior Officers to come up with innovative solutions to service delivery which are in line with these principles.

Over the last two years, our Education and Children's Services Department has been researching models of education delivery which accord with our commitment towards Community Orientation.

A year ago, our Education Committee unanimously approved a proposal to:

Explore and develop the Community Based Management of Schools Outcome: To develop and explore a model for educational delivery based upon cluster working through greater devolution of budgets and associated responsibility to local communities.

A key element of this process has been to adopt a different model of policy development, whereby we took a much more open-minded attitude about the outcome of the exploration process. By engaging with head teachers, unions, young people, parent councils, community

representatives and other partners we have come up with what we believe to be an exciting and radical approach towards educational delivery which capitalises upon the strengths of our communities and the quality of the leadership and teachers in our schools.

Through worldwide research into alternative models, visits to other schools in the UK, a national conference we organised at Queen Margaret University and the establishment of a Stakeholder Planning Group we have created an environment which has stimulated debate and created a momentum for change.

This will culminate in a report derived from our Stakeholder Group which includes representatives from our major partner groups.

What has been fascinating throughout this process has been the disbelief from so many parties that we had – and have – an open mind towards the outcome of this exploration. The deeply-held suspicion was that we had a secret plan tucked away in a drawer which we would unveil at the last moment. This was not helped by one of the options which our Education Department explored, namely the creation of Community Based Trusts to manage schools on our behalf. A "feeding frenzy" of media interest dominated the other aspects of our exploration but did not detract us from our goal.

What has emerged over the last 12 months has been a clear signal from our stakeholders that there is no immediate appetite for community trust schools at this time – despite there being an significant saving from such trusts not having to pay non-domestic rates on school buildings, which for East Lothian Schools would amount to nearly £2.5 million. We are sympathetic to this perspective, but would not wish to rule out trust status at some time in the future if stakeholders thought it to be of benefit to educational delivery.

The most important of the points to emerge has been agreement with the principle that "it takes community to raise a child". It is this tenet which underpins some very key changes which the Stakeholder Group will be recommending to East Lothian Council in December.

Our Group believes that the key to the future is to build upon the existing partnerships by making better use of current structures and legislation. The Group have suggested that we should consider developing "Community Partnership Schools".

Our Stakeholder Group believes that schools should:
- Be given more freedom to enable them to make local decisions about the curriculum;
- Be trusted to deliver education on behalf of their communities;
- Be able to make decisions on staffing and resource spending;
- Be much more outward facing, i.e. their place in their community; and
- Share more performance information with parents and other stakeholders and involve them in the school improvement agenda.

In turn, we – the Local Authority - should:
- Focus on confirming the school's self evaluation;
- Advocate for and protect the needs of the most vulnerable children and young people;
- Focus on developing each school's ability to help themselves by building capacity in the school and the community;
- Maintain some capacity to intervene directly to support any school where the quality of education is seen to be declining.

The final task given to the Stakeholder Group was to identify the preferred option for change.

What was clear was that there was no desire to remain with the status quo, i.e. the Consultative Model we currently have where schools engage in consultation only with parents. The alternative model which received unanimous support was to seek to develop a model which was founded upon the twin principles of Partnership and Shared Evaluation. Such a model would extend the current relationship by including a clear expectation that the local accountability is enhanced by introducing a shared evaluation responsibility. The Group felt that this would ensure real transparency and collective ownership of issues as they emerge through the evaluation process.

Perhaps the most surprising recommendation emerging from the Group is that we need to involve more than parents in such a process. Once again, the unanimous feeling from the group was that we need to enhance our local accountability systems with community representatives.

What is less clear is that some of our communities would seem to prefer to see this done at school level – whilst others are keen to explore this at more of a community level, involving all of the schools in their area. One Head teacher went even further and stated that his preferred option would be for a much more robust form of local governance where he was held directly accountable to his community.

We would hope to work with our schools and communities encouraging them to take up the flexibility we hope to afford them and in so doing improve the quality of education we can provide to children and young people in East Lothian. We are excited by the future. Our communities are vibrant places with a strong sense of local pride and identity. We are convinced that by helping our schools to become more outward facing and community connected that there is so much to be gained for all parties – especially in the face of some of the challenges we face over the next few years.

3.2 Raising quality through improved governance

Dr Bill Maxwell, Senior Chief Inspector of Education, HM Inspectorate of Education (HMIE)

The Scottish Quality Improvement Approach
The aim is for continuity through the application of some fundamental principles. These are:

- The primary responsibility for accounting for and improving service quality lies with the providers (e.g. schools, teachers) themselves
- Quality should be 'built in' and not 'bolted on'
- Pupils and parents have a right to know how well their school is performing
- Self-evaluation needs an infrastructure of national support and challenge to be effective

National infrastructure to support a self-evaluating system
To ensure improvement, there is a clear need for national infrastructure such as:

- provision of high quality national data for benchmarking
- nationally consistent quality benchmarks (QIs) for areas that data doesn't address
- preparation and support for a profession of reflective practitioners
- programme of independent external review to moderate local self-review

Changing inspection
- move from 'generational' cycle to more targeted and proportionate approach
- responding to government policy on public sector scrutiny

- building further on success of recent changes – inspecting 'with' rather than 'to'
- adapting to policy & curricular changes
- reducing cost & environmental impact
- closer coordination of national support and challenge - new improvement agency

The likely direction of travel
- shifting responsibility for self-evaluation further from local authority towards schools/networks/clusters
- more delegated authority at a local level
- enhanced scrutiny at local, network, cluster and community levels
- EAs working more remotely and proportionately
- EAs and inspectors working together to share information and assess risk
- might there be a stronger scrutiny role for parent or other local bodies?

Shifting the focus further towards more local governance

Opportunities
- stronger engagement of learners, partners and communities
- more dynamic, innovative schools energised by autonomy
- growth of 'system leaders' to inspire and assist others

Areas of risk
- coherence of inclusion/ASL strategies
- capacity of local governance to scrutinise effectively
- greater variability in quality

3.3 Academies, governance and rising standards

Chris Montacute, Strategic Director, Specialist Schools & Academies Trust

The level of autonomy now enjoyed by schools in England goes back to legislation that introduced Local Management of Schools (LMS) in the late 1980s. Head teachers have complete control over their budgets including the proportion spent on staffing. The Education Reform Act of 1988 also created the opportunity to open City Technology Colleges (CTCs) in some inner city areas. These City Technology Colleges were sponsored by local business, ICT rich and focused on maths, science, and technology. They were independent of the local authority. For their critics, they were cited as the 'privatisation of state education'. However, the innovations that they introduced soon stirred much positive debate. Between 1988 and 1993, a total of 15 of these institutions were opened. In retrospect, these can now be identified as the origin of what we now refer to as academies.

The academies movement in England today aims to transform the education system through offering school leaders new freedoms to innovate, transform teaching and learning and introduce a new model of governance. The introduction of academies was led by the new Labour Government in the year 2000 as part of the Learning and Skills Act. These academies were introduced in an attempt to reverse the poor standards of educational attainment evident in many inner-city areas. Like their CTC predecessors, they were sponsored, initially by the business community (although the requirement for cash sponsorship was later dropped to encourage other institutions such as those involved in further and higher education to get involved) and tasked with transforming teaching and learning. They chose a curriculum specialism which often mirrored the sponsor's area of expertise and re-designed the curriculum. There was, and still is, a

strong moral purpose associated with these academies who take seriously their aim to help disadvantaged young people raise their ambitions for the future. They were also beneficiaries of major investment in capital. These academies were independent of the local authority and answerable directly to the Secretary of State. The structure of the education provided was both innovative and transformational. The evidence of the impacts can be seen in examination results rising above national average levels, students who had lacked motivation now had raised aspirations, increased social mobility, improved behaviour and improved attendance. Teachers at the schools would use non-traditional methods of instruction and motivational curriculum structures which attempted to address the lack of basic skills and recognise the importance of engaging parents and other community partners. The success of this programme has seen the number of these 'sponsored' open academies rise from 3 in 2002 to 267 in September 2010.

When the Coalition Government came to power in 2010, the formation of a new wave of academies became its first major piece of legislation. In fact, within three weeks of being elected, the Secretary of State had written to all head teachers of schools in England (including primary and special schools) promising them the opportunity of becoming an academy. However, this new approach to academies or independent state schools was not restricted to establishments with low standards of achievement as had been the case in the past. Initially, the coalition's priority was to offer all schools judged to be outstanding by OFSTED the opportunity to go through quite a simple process to convert to academy status and benefit from a whole new range of freedoms. These freedoms included the ability to set pay and conditions for staff, freedom from the National Curriculum and the ability to change the lengths of terms and school days. This change of status was obviously an important decision for schools. With this in mind, the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust organised not only a series of seminars aimed at

providing information for school leaders considering this change of status, but also a large conference in which they were encouraged to discuss how best to use the new freedoms and responsibilities they would have. Experienced leaders of sponsored academies, together with colleagues who had recently taken advantage of the opportunity to convert to Academy status, shared ideas on effective ways of using this new autonomy. These discussions centred on three key areas of the use of freedoms: freedoms around structures including governance, staffing, and the pattern of the school year; freedoms around the formation of partnerships and networks; and freedoms on the means to ensure strong academic performance.

One important new aspect of this policy concerns the academies grant. Academies receive this directly from government and not via the local authority. Therefore, there is no retention which, traditionally, would have covered local authority services. However, the actual formula is based on that provided to all schools in the area. Therefore, the total sum at the disposal of academy leaders is higher than their budget as a maintained school, but they have to decide which key services they will require to purchase either from the local authority or elsewhere eg human resource management and payroll. With freedom comes the responsibility to ensure all such aspects of leading an academy are sufficiently robust.

When considering freedoms around the structure of governance, it was agreed that a balance had to be reached between creating a governing body of a manageable size and one that provided sufficient capacity to undertake the wide range of responsibilities taken on by governors of these independent state schools. Each school in England has a governing body to which the head teacher is accountable. The head teachers that spoke stressed the importance of attracting governors with the right skills, but also those who had a passion about their local communities.

When discussing staffing and curriculum, a number of examples were cited in which freedoms, supported by the self-management of resources to address priorities given to academies, could be used to reflect local circumstances. Some heads used this to give additional support to students in greatest need by providing nurture groups, some academies had appointed additional language assistants, teaching assistants for core subjects or sports coaches for after-school activities. Many cited further development of summer schools and the extended curriculum. The freedoms associated with curriculum structure had, in many of the newly-converted academies, only been recently explored and some heads were concerned that although they had freedoms, they were still subject to accountability regimes such as Ofsted which could impact on their decisions in areas such as new curriculum structures.

The topic of the use of freedoms in forming partnership and networks highlighted the importance of such networks. However, the freedoms arising from academy status led to discussion of the potential extent of these networks. Head teachers stressed the benefits of working in networks of schools in the local, regional, national and international environments such as those supported by the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust.

The third area debated by head teachers who have chosen academy status was that linked to performance. It was recognised that this was an area in which freedoms were associated with great responsibility. The greater the autonomy that you accept, the fewer the opportunities for excuses for underperformance!

What became clear from the discussions at the conference was that head teachers looked forward to greater freedoms and autonomy and felt confident this would lead to higher standards of achievement by students in their schools. However, it was also obvious that many of the examples cited were possible without the greater autonomy

provided by a change to academy status. In essence, the change of status had acted like a catalyst which encouraged strategic thinking and innovation. Head teachers felt they were part of a growing and exciting movement of academic empowerment free from much of the bureaucracy associated with the past. It was also recognised in the present economic climate that the investment in capital associated with the early academies is unlikely to continue with the new converters. Although there is no doubt that state-of-the-art buildings can have a positive impact on the ethos of the school, there are many good schools which do not benefit in this way and which offer an outstanding education.

The success of the new UK Government's academies policy will be judged by the impact on education standards and the aspirations of all students. Unlike previous policy in this area, primary schools, special schools as well secondary schools are able to take advantage of the freedom. It is likely that the number of secondary schools converting to Academy status will rise quickly. A combination of the changing nature of local authorities, economic imperative and the confidence that academies can provide a new style of networking will also ensure a rise in the number of primary schools opting for greater autonomy as independent state schools. The generic umbrella of academies also includes 'free schools' and university technical colleges. Although small-scale at present, they are receiving increased levels of interest. The future governance structure and level of autonomy of schools in England will look very different in years ahead.

Interactive polling

This last session concluded with a final series of questions and ended by repeating the question asked at the beginning of the conference on local authority control of schools. The results are below:

In your opinion which one of the following options, if any, would do most to improve educational outcomes in Scotland?

1. Improving the quality of teacher training and CPD
2. Improving access to training and CPD opportunities
3. Successful implementation of Curriculum for Excellence
4. New approaches to school governance
5. Improving resources and infrastructure eg. school buildings
6. Reducing pupil / teacher ratio
7. None of these
8. Dont know
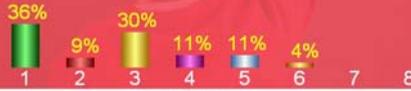
36%   9%   30%   11%   11%   4%
1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8

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In your opinion, should local authority control of schools be:

1. Increased
2. Decreased
3. Remain the same

before
71%
5%   24%
1   2   3

After
78%
8%   14%
1   2   3

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