



**PUBLIC PETITION NO.**

**PE01423**

### Name of petitioner

Gordon Hall on behalf of The Unreasonable Learners

### Petition title

Harnessing the undoubted talent of public sector staff

### Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to review the considerable research into the thinking that underpins the approach to managing the contribution from staff that has been undertaken over the past decades and compare this with the assumptions that underpins existing management practice; and subsequently to use the findings to ensure that it harnesses the talent of its staff.

### Action taken to resolve issues of concern before submitting the petition

The Unreasonable Learners is made up of forward thinking groups and individuals who have come together to cooperate in addressing the challenge of modernising the management culture of Scotland. Our reasoning is that by working together we will have a greater impact. Its formation is relatively recent. The individual members however have been working in this field for many many years, some more than 20 years.

- Learning groups such as The Centre for Confidence and Wellbeing, The Deming Learning Network, The RSA, CQI etc. have been running seminars and monthly meetings for at least the past 10 years.
- Consultants have been taking on projects and securing very significant improvement. The most prominent being Vanguard Ltd.
- In house consultants such as Jim Duffy at Dundee City have been running improvement projects within the Public sector for at least the past 10 years
- There has been extensive research into management in the past decades, the findings of which have been written in some excellent books. We even have our home based authors in David Erdal, in context of Employee Ownership, Tim Stapenhurst in context of Statistical Process Control and David Fraser in context of “Relationships”
- Individuals themselves keep spreading the word though they have to be very cautious in challenging the status quo within their own organisations.
- Finally the Unreasonable Learners had a stand at Holyrood in November 2011 highlighting the opportunity available to Scotland if Government was prepared to think differently. Copies of the leaflet supplied to MSPs at the time have been provided to Clerk for Public Petitions

The challenge we face is that individuals (including MSPs and Civil Servants) can appreciate the evidence in front of them and acknowledge the opportunities. But as the “Status Quo” needs to maintain stability, it has defence mechanism. Individuals working within a system are required to support that system or move elsewhere.

Furthermore these systems are extremely complex. In these circumstances the individual has very little scope to effect change. No individual or learning group has the means of transforming society's underpinning assumptions. Somehow we have to devise a means through which a critical mass is able to facilitate change by challenging the underpinning thinking of the whole. Government cannot do this on their own; society needs play its part. However the politicians and The Government could lead the exploration of modern management concepts across the whole of society.

## Petition background information

We understand that The Scottish Government and their public sector face major challenges for the future. They are faced with demands to drastically reduce costs, commissions and consultants consistently prove that there is waste in the system, our society needs more services and our public are demanding better delivery.

The sector also has noteworthy aspirations:

- To recognise the 40% waste, identified by the Christie Commission, through expenditure on interventions that could have been avoided. The aim is to switch expenditure to preventative measures.
- A greater customer focus
- Much faster responses to customer needs
- Joint up thinking
- And the aspirations detailed in The "Renewing Scotland's Public Services" document such as "improving performance," "speeding up cycles of innovation," "releasing the nation's potential," etc.

But – as this often used quote from Albert Einstein says:

"We cannot solve our problems from the same level of thinking that created them."

And the follow on which defines madness as carrying on thinking and doing the same things and expecting different results.

And a quote from W Edwards Deming:

"Ruined by Best Efforts"

What Einstein, Deming and many many others keep saying is that if we have not changed our mindset about how people are managed then, no matter how hard we try, we will not make significant progress. Furthermore we are all too ready to move straight into the doing mode, the difficult recognition is that change and progress starts at the thinking level.

Might we develop the above by considering this definition of bureaucracy from the Oxford University Dictionary of Business and Management:

A hierarchical administrative system designed to deal with large quantities of work in a routine manner, largely by adhering to a set of strict and impersonal rules; it is characterized by its permanence and stability, its body of experience and precedent, and its absence of a reliance on individuals.

But surely the primary asset within the public sector is its people. The individuals with their commitment, thinking potential and creativity. The important question to ask ourselves is: - is there an alternative to our present management culture that would be significantly better at harnessing the potential of our people?

Can the application of recent researched knowledge make better use of the ability of our people, significantly improve the delivery of services, markedly reduce costs, ensure stability and at the same time give "Government" better control of the outcomes?

We do however recognise that modernising society's paradigm of management is a long term process that involves the whole of society. We look to our politicians and our government to engage society and play a prominent role in the journey of exploring and understanding the opportunities that are open to us all.

We request that the Government gather evidence concerning the appropriateness of modern management concepts to the Scottish people.

Finally we ask that consideration also be given to the barriers to change.

Obviously, it will be essential that the members of the evidence gathering team be fully familiar with existing management thinking and practices as well as the concepts developed through the research over the past decades.

We attach the leaflet that supported the Unreasonable Learners' stand at the Scottish Parliament in November 2011. The themes were:

- The need to think differently
- The inordinate waste from the present systems of government
- The cause of this waste is the flawed assumptions that underpin present practice
- The opportunity to think differently especially in context of our intrinsic desire to do a good job and the design of systems to enable this commitment
- The nature of the change in thinking and the methods it spawns
- It Works – examples showing that modern concepts show remarkable improvement.
- The many resources that are available
- A way forward.

The Unreasonable learners have a website – [www.unreasonable-learners.com](http://www.unreasonable-learners.com)

The above is supported through extensive management literature. A bibliography of some of this literature is available from the above website.

Footnote: On the Scottish Mace are four words one of which is "Wisdom." The Chambers Dictionary defines wisdom as "the application of knowledge." We call on the parliament and the Scottish Government to open the way to Scotland's public sector applying wisdom and the use of modern knowledge. Might we conclude with this quote from Dan Pink, author of the excellent book "Drive, the surprising truth about what motivates us"

"For too long there has been a mismatch between what science knows and what business does"

#### Unique web address

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/GettingInvolved/Petitions/PE01423>

#### Related information for petition

**Do you wish your petition to be hosted on the Parliament's website to collect signatures online?**

NO

**How many signatures have you collected so far?**

1

**Closing date for collecting signatures online**

N/A

**Comments to stimulate online discussion**

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