

PE1535/B

Environment and Forestry Directorate
Environmental Quality Division

T: 0131-244 0312
E: peter.stapleton@scotland.gsi.gov.uk



c/o Public Petitions Clerks
Room T3.40
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP



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Our ref: PE1535

Dear Clerks

CONSIDERATION OF PETITION [PE1535](#)

The Public Petitions Committee, as part of its consideration of the above-noted petition, has asked the Scottish Government for its views on the petition:

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to:

- *make teaching sustainability and the environment mandatory in secondary schools;*
and
- *ban all disposable plastic bags in supermarkets and shops to aid the environment.*

Banning single use plastic carrier bags

The Scottish Government does not agree with the suggestion of banning disposable plastic bags. As the Committee will be aware, the requirement for retailers in Scotland to charge at least 5p charge for single use bags (including plastic and other materials) has been in place since 20 October 2014. Early indications show that this is delivering big reductions in the numbers of single use bags used in Scotland, which we expect to radically reduce bags ending up as litter and marine litter.

I note that the Committee discussed the respective environmental impacts of bags made from paper and plastic. The charge is designed to apply to all single use bags to make sure it incentivises a reduction in bag use rather than just switching between different materials with different types of impacts.

This significant measure was introduced following extensive consultation and consideration of alternative approaches, and the legislation was passed with the overwhelming support of the Scottish Parliament. The Scottish Government will off course be monitoring progress but does not propose to pursue such a radical change in approach at this time.

Mandatory teaching of sustainability in secondary schools

The petitioner suggested that teaching sustainability and the environment should be mandatory in secondary schools. The Scottish Government is working with partners to ensure that all young people have an entitlement to learning for sustainability in school, through the work of the Learning for Sustainability Implementation Group. In any case, as the Committee will be aware, whilst the Government sets the national framework for education in Scotland, statutory responsibility for the delivery of education rests with local authorities, individual schools and professional teachers. This long-standing tradition is highly valued and remains a cornerstone of Scottish education. This means it is up to schools, teachers, head teachers and local authorities, based on their circumstances, to decide what is taught and how it is taught within the national framework for teaching and learning, Curriculum for Excellence. It would therefore be inconsistent to specify that certain subjects should be mandatory within such a framework.

Update on Learning for Sustainability

The Committee asked for an update on the Learning for Sustainability programme.

Learning for sustainability (LfS) is a set of values and approaches to teaching, learning and leadership that enables young people to build the values, attitudes, knowledge, skills and confidence to engage in the key issues of sustainability and social justice, not only in their own communities but also globally. All teachers and school leaders are now required to demonstrate learning for sustainability in their practice as it is an integral part of the new General Teaching Council of Scotland Professional Standards. The goal is to help schools weave together sustainable development education, global citizenship, international education, outdoor learning and children's rights into a coherent whole school approach that makes a lasting impact on the school's curriculum, culture, community and campus (including school buildings and grounds). We believe that LfS works best when a school develops the concept for themselves in their own context with their own local partners.

We have brought key national education partners – the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland, COSLA, Scottish Teacher Education Committee, Scottish Qualifications Authority, School Leaders Scotland, the Educational Institute of Scotland into a national Implementation Group for LfS. We are working with them as well as a range of third sector organisations to align existing resources in the system in a way that enables schools to engage with this enriching agenda. This will help schools reap benefits for their young people so they are nurtured as global citizens, able to thrive and contribute effectively to their communities and an increasingly globalised world. The Implementation Group has met four times since February 2014.

The Implementation Group recently agreed to set up a working group to support it in taking forward the 31 Recommendations in the Learning for Sustainability Report. The working group is made up of representatives of local authorities, third sector organisations and national agencies. Education Scotland recently appointed a Learning for Sustainability Development Officer to support schools with their work.

Agendas, notes and papers for the Implementation Group meetings are available on the LfS pages of the Scottish Government website. The website also has links to the progress report on the Implementation Group workplan, and reports from the two Conversation Days held with stakeholders in 2014. Education Scotland recently launched a Learning for Sustainability e-bulletin and has a range of communications planned for 2015, including a

briefing on LfS for pupils, teachers, parents, and school leaders, and publication of a guide to support schools to develop their own whole school approach to Learning for Sustainability.

I hope this information is helpful in informing the Committee's consideration of these issues.

Yours sincerely,

Peter Stapleton
Policy Manager – Waste Prevention