

PE1759/B

COSLA submission of 20 December 2019

Local authorities are dedicated to providing every child with the best education, ensuring they are equipped with the right skills, qualifications and experiences to allow them to achieve and attain throughout their lives.

The current legal position under the Schools General (Scotland) Regulations 1987 requires schools to provide a minimum of 190 days in a school year, however the length of each days is not prescribed. As the committee are likely aware under the Education (Scotland) Act 2016 Scottish Ministers have the ability to mandate the length of the school week. During the Bill's approval process COSLA had raised a number of concerns with this duty, which we believe does not fit with the wider direction of travel of education policy in Scotland and would require much further consideration and engagement with Local Government before enacting.

Scotland's communities are diverse in terms of geography, population and level of deprivation. Local services need to be able to shape their local communities and their needs. This has been recognised by both Local Government and the Scottish Government as a core tenant that runs throughout the School Empowerment agenda. As the [Joint Agreement](#) sets out Headteachers are leaders of learning and teaching in their school. They are senior officers of the local authority and have operational responsibility for the service they provide, meaning the majority of decisions should be made at school level.

This reflects both the relationship between both Headteacher and Local Authorities, and the relationship between Headteachers and the Scottish Government. It's vital that schools have flexibility in how they shape the structure of their week to meet their local circumstances. To our knowledge there are only a very small number of schools who chose to operate a 22.5 hour week model, and this is to meet particular local circumstances, often linked to transport needs for the youngest pupils in some of our remote and rural communities.

A similarly important shift in our approach in education in recent year has been the move from thinking about inputs and outputs to a much greater focus on outcomes. We believe the priority, locally and nationally, should be on the experiences delivered in schools, how this supports children to meet the four capabilities of the Curriculum for Excellence and attain and achieve throughout their time at school.

It continues to be the view of the education professionals from across Local Government that a national minimum of hours per week will not make a difference to these outcomes. The Curriculum for Excellence is designed to be the totality of children's experiences in and out of school, recognising that children learn in a variety of contexts, and therefore not fixed to a specific model of a school week. Moreover there is no educational evidence which draws a link between a 25 hour school week and better attainment.

The clear view across local government is the retention of local flexibility alongside a sustained focus on from across all spheres of government on to support the improvement of the education and life chances of our children and young people

It is however also important to view this issue in the broader context of resourcing education by local authorities and the limits on local decision making. The prolonged financial challenges facing Local Authorities impact on every decision taken about local services. As set out in COSLA's evidence to the Scottish Parliament's [Local Government and Communities Committee for pre-budget scrutiny](#), Local Government core budgets have decreased significantly over a number of years. In 2019/20, once new Scottish Government policy commitment were considered, core revenue budgets fell by £147m while core capital budgets fell by £17m. Funding reductions, increased national priorities and protections, coupled with increases in funding that is ring-fenced for a specific purpose (either formally or informally) have a fundamental impact on the ability of local authorities to invest in the day to day essential services that create sustainable communities.

Our agreement with our partners within the teaching unions means that within the 35-hour week for teachers there is a maximum of 22.5 hours classroom teaching with the remaining 12.5 hours split between 7.5 hours of preparation and correction and 5 hours' collegiate time

COSLA would be more than happy to provide clarification or further information on the above if that would be helpful to the Committee's continuing deliberations on the petition.