

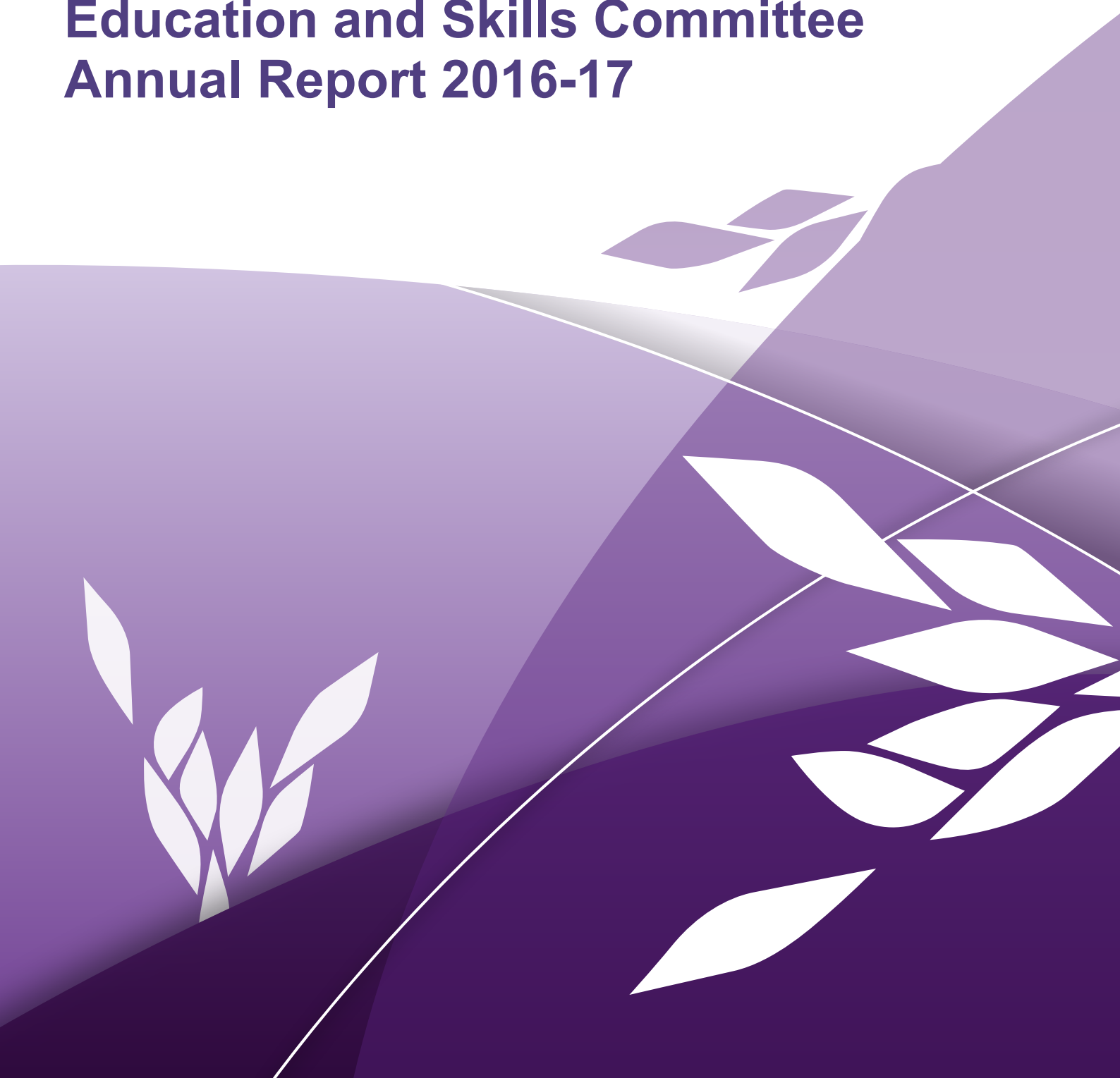


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Education and Skills Committee Annual Report 2016-17



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Education and Skills Committee

To consider and report on matters falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills.



<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/education-committee.aspx>



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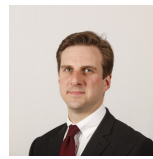
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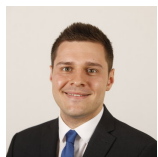
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Liz Smith
Scottish Conservative
and Unionist Party



Ross Thomson
Scottish Conservative
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Introduction

1. The Education and Skills Committee was established by a resolution of the Scottish Parliament on 1 June 2016. Parliament agreed that the Committee's remit would be:

 To consider and report on matters falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills.

Source: Scottish Parliament, 2016¹

2. The Committee has quickly established itself as an important part of the Education and Skills policy landscape. The Committee's work has been effective in bringing to light issues of concern and framing political debate.
3. All committees are required to produce an Annual Report covering the "Parliamentary Year", which began when the Scottish Parliament first met after the election in May 2016. This report therefore covers the work of the Committee during the period of 12 May 2016 to 11 May 2017.

Committee approach

4. The Committee met informally in Stirling in August 2016 to discuss its working practices. The Committee agreed that it would, where possible, be an inclusive and responsive committee. That is, the Committee would consider evidence and experience from a broad base of individuals and organisations, and the Committee would build in flexibility to respond quickly to issues.

Membership changes

5. There have been two occasions where the membership of the Committee changed in the reporting period:
 - Richard Lochhead MSP replaced Jenny Gilruth MSP on 6 September 2016; and
 - Clare Haughey MSP and Ruth Maguire MSP replaced Richard Lochhead MSP and Fulton MacGregor MSP on 30 March 2017.

One-off sessions

Overviews

6. The Committee's remit is very broad, covering early years to adult education and encompassing child protection issues as well.
7. The Committee was therefore keen to cover a good deal of ground as early as possible in order to inform its work planning. The Committee took evidence from the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills on 29 June 2016 on the Scottish Government's priorities.²
8. After the summer recess, the Committee held a number of overview evidence sessions on: skills; further and higher education; attainment; Curriculum for Excellence; children's services; and early years. After these sessions, the Committee heard again from the Cabinet Secretary on 2 November 2017.

Enterprise and Skills Review

9. The report on Phase 1 of the Enterprise and Skills review was published on 25 October 2016.³ The Scottish Government's proposals on the structure of enterprise and skills agencies became clearer over November 2016 and some members of the Committee were concerned at plans to replace the Scottish Funding Council's board with an overarching board. The Committee therefore agreed to take evidence from the Cabinet Secretary for Economy Jobs and Fair Work on 7 December 2016.⁴
10. The Committee focused on the evidence base for the Scottish Government's proposals and the Committee's work contributed to the policy development in this area.

Curriculum for Excellence management board

11. During the Committee's work on [key public bodies](#) the Committee became concerned that the lines of accountability for the delivery of Curriculum for Excellence ("CfE") were not clear.
12. The Committee took evidence from a number of members of the CfE management board on 19 January 2017 and scrutinised how the decision-making process takes place.⁵ The Committee produced a letter recommending changes to the Board.⁶ The Committee also held a follow-up session with Education Scotland in April to raise issues with its response to the Committee's report on key public bodies.

Commissioner for Fair Access

13. Following the Commission for Widening Access' final report in March 2016,⁷ the Scottish Government appointed Professor Peter Scott as the Commissioner for Fair Access on 16 December 2016.⁸
14. On 25 January 2017, the Committee took evidence from members of the Commission for Widening Access followed by the Commissioner for Fair Access.⁹ The Committee will keep a watching brief on the work of the Commissioner over the remainder of this parliamentary session.

Inquiries and reports

Key public bodies

15. The Committee agreed to scrutinise the role and performance of four public bodies, namely:
 - Skills Development Scotland ("SDS");
 - the Scottish Funding Council ("SFC");
 - the Scottish Qualifications Authority ("SQA"); and
 - Education Scotland.
16. Prior to the evidence sessions with these bodies, the Committee sought views on their performance from experts, stakeholders and the people who use their services. The Committee produced an online survey and undertook a focus group with teachers and informal meetings with the four agencies. The breadth of evidence the Committee collected produced a very powerful narrative, particularly in respect of the work of the SQA and the views of teachers on its work.
17. The Committee took evidence from the four bodies in November 2016, followed by representatives from Education Authorities on 14 December 2016 and from the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills on 21 December 2016.¹⁰
18. Initially this work was to inform the Committee's consideration of the Scottish Government's Draft Budget 2017-18. However, given the strength of the evidence, the Committee decided to report on this work separately.¹¹ The Committee secured a debate in the Chamber on this work on 12 January 2017.¹²
19. In this work, the Committee was very successful in bringing the voice of teachers into politics which aided the Committee's scrutiny of the performance of these bodies.

Draft Budget 2017-18

20. There was a relatively short timescale for scrutiny of the Scottish Government's Draft Budget 2017-18. The Committee took evidence from the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills on 21 December 2016¹³ and published its report to the Finance and Constitution Committee on 27 January 2017.¹⁴

Personal and Social Education

21. The Committee undertook a one-off round-table session on Personal and Social Education ("PSE") on 22 February 2017.¹⁵ In advance the Committee was keen to

hear the views and experiences of young people, parents and carers, teachers and other interested parties. The Committee sought views through Facebook, Twitter, short emails, as well as accepting longer more traditional submissions. The Committee also undertook a number of focus groups and other informal fact-finding exercises. The breadth of evidence contributed to short but in-depth look at how PSE is delivered in Scotland's schools.

22. The Committee also took evidence from the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills on PSE as part of a wider session on 8 March 2017.¹⁶
23. While the Committee intended that this work would be a one-off session, the quality and depth of the evidence the Committee received allowed it to come to conclusions and publish a report on 23 May 2017 (which is outside the reporting period for this report).[LINK] The Committee would like to highlight the way its report drew upon the evidence and conclusions of other Committees of this Parliament, namely the Equalities and Human Rights Committee and the Session 4 Health and Sport Committee.

Additional Support Needs

24. The Committee also held a one-off round-table session on provision for individuals with Additional Support Needs ("ASN") on 1 March 2017.¹⁷ Prior to the round-table session, the Committee received hundreds of responses from parents, teachers, school staff, and other stakeholders. The focus groups and other informal fact-finding exercises that informed the work on PSE also added the evidence base for this inquiry. ASN was also raised by the Committee during the session with the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills on 8 March.¹⁶
25. As with the Committee's work on PSE, the breadth and depth of the evidence the Committee received enabled the Committee to come to conclusions and recommendations in a report published on 15 May 2017, shortly after the reporting period of this Annual Report.¹⁸

Children's Hearings system

26. In March 2017, the Committee undertook a short inquiry to take stock of the reforms brought about by the Children's Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011 and how they were being implemented. The Committee's evidence gathering included hearing directly from young people whose lives had been affected by decisions of Children's Hearings.
27. The Committee's report on Children's Hearings was published on 25 April 2017.¹⁹ The Committee made recommendations on children's participation in hearings, the role panel members, and the role of others who represent participants in hearings.

Teacher workforce planning

28. The Committee began taking oral evidence on its inquiry on teacher workforce planning on 10 May 2017. The Committee took evidence from two panels, one comprised of trainee teachers and one made up exclusively of teachers. All of the participants in that evidence session appeared in personal capacities. Again the Committee gathered a wealth of written evidence in advance of its oral evidence sessions with over 700 responses to online questionnaires aimed at teachers, trainee teachers and support staff.
29. The inquiry is continuing and the Committee's work on this inquiry is already having an impact on policy in this area, not least due to the powerful evidence the Committee has received from the "chalk face".

Legislative consent memorandums

30. The Committee has considered two legislative consent memorandums ("LCMs") in the reporting period on:
- the Higher Education and Research Bill; and
 - the Children and Social Work Bill.

Higher Education and Research Bill

31. The Committee took evidence on this LCM at its meeting on 16 November 2016 from a number of stakeholders.²⁰
32. The Committee's scrutiny of the LCM focused on the potential inclusion of Scottish Higher Education Institutions in the proposed Teaching Excellence Framework ("TEF"). There were however wider implications of the bill's UK-wide provisions on research funding and the interaction between the TEF and immigration rules, which were not covered in LCM but were highlighted to the Committee. The Committee reported on the LCM on 5 December 2016 recommending that the Scottish Parliament agree to the associated legislative consent motion.²¹ The Committee also wrote to the UK Government seeking assurances and the UK Parliament suggesting amendments to the Bill.

Children and Social Work Bill

33. The Committee considered an LCM on the Children and Social Work Bill at its meeting on 21 December 2016. The Committee took evidence from the Scottish Government by correspondence and reported on the LCM on 12 January 2017 recommending that the Scottish Parliament agree to the associated legislative consent motion.²²

Subordinate legislation and petitions

34. The Committee considered four Scottish Statutory Instruments ("SSIs") under the affirmative procedure and six SSIs under the negative procedure over the reporting period.
35. The Committee has not considered any petitions during the reporting period.

Engagement and innovation

36. [As noted above](#), the Committee has been keen to hear from a broad range of individuals and organisations. In practice this began with a number of visits in Raploch in August 2016, when the Committee met a number of students, young people involved in skills development projects, care-experienced individuals, school children, parents, teachers, academics and others. The Committee has continued this high level of engagement throughout its work in a number of different means, such as regular focus groups and online engagement, which has strengthened the Committee's scrutiny and impact.

Equalities

37. Equalities issues continue to be mainstreamed in the Committee's work. For example, the during the Committee's scrutiny of the performance of Skills Development Scotland, the gendered nature of take-up of some Modern Apprenticeships was raised in evidence and in the report. Furthermore, the Committee's work on PSE and ASN both included particular consideration of individuals with protected characteristics.

Meetings

38. The Committee met 30 times during the Parliamentary year. Two meetings were held entirely in private and 27 meetings included items in private. The main reasons for holding items in private were consideration of draft reports, reviewing evidence the Committee had heard, and considering its work programme.

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