

Commission on Rural Education Call for Evidence

Section A – Respondent Information Form

Please note that the Respondent Information Form must be completed to ensure that we handle your response appropriately. Questions marked * must be answered by all respondents, unless you are directed past this question.

Name of Organisation (if appropriate)

Title (e.g. Mr/Ms/Mrs/Miss/Dr)

*Forename

*Surname

Postal Address and Postcode

Telephone Number

Email Address

*I am responding as: An individual A group or organisation

Do you consider yourself or your organisation as from or representing?

a rural area an urban area an area with both urban and rural components don't know / not applicable

If you are responding as an individual:

*Do you agree to your response being made available to the public (on the Commission's web site and/or in the Scottish Government library)?

Yes No

*If you have agreed to your response being made available to the public, please tell us if we may also make your name and address available.

(Please select one option only):

Yes, make my response, name and address all available
 Yes, make my response available, but not my name and address
 Yes, make my response and name available, but not my address

Which of the following best describes your role in completing the questionnaire?

(Please select one option only):

Teacher (class, chartered, deputy, head, special) Parent/Carer
 Other educational establishment staff Pupil
 Non-teaching local authority employee Elected representative
 Other, please specify

If you are responding as a group or organisation:

*The name and address of your organisation will be made public (on the Commission's web site and/or in the Scottish Government library). Are you content for your response to also be made available?

Yes No

Which of the following best describes your organisation?

(Please select one option only)

School Government agency
 Other educational establishment Community Council
 Professional body Parent/Carers' organisation
 Local authority Pupils' group
 Other, please specify

Section B – Maximising attainment and achievement through rural education

Q1: The Commission is examining how the delivery of rural education can maximise attainment and outcomes to give pupils the best life chances. Curriculum for Excellence is the curriculum in Scotland which applies to all children and young people aged 3-18, wherever they are learning. It aims to raise achievement and attainment for all, enabling young people to develop the skills, knowledge and understanding they need to succeed in learning, life and work.

(a) To what extent do you agree or disagree that there are particular challenges to delivering Curriculum for Excellence in rural schools?

Strongly agree Agree Neither agree nor disagree Disagree Strongly disagree Don't know / Not applicable

(b) To what extent do you agree or disagree that any challenges are particularly acute for small rural schools?

Strongly agree Agree Neither agree nor disagree Disagree Strongly disagree Don't know / Not applicable

(c) Please explain your answers to (a) and (b) and provide further detail on what you think these challenges are?

(d) Do you have any suggestions for how these challenges might be overcome or addressed?

Q2: Do you think rural schools provide particular educational benefits to their pupils and, if so, what do you think these are?

Q3: Do you think rural schools have particular disadvantages for their pupils and, if so, what do you think these are?

Q4: Getting it right for every child (also known as GIRFEC) is the Scottish Government's policy for improving outcomes for children and making sure that all agencies respond appropriately to needs and risks. The Getting it right approach is about making sure that leaders, managers and practitioners across all services work together when they need to, ensuring children and young people reach their full potential.

(a) To what extent do you agree or disagree that there are particular challenges to applying the Getting it right approach in rural schools?

Strongly agree Agree Neither agree nor disagree Disagree Strongly disagree Don't know / Not applicable

(b) Please explain your answer to (a) and provide further detail on what you think these challenges are?

Q5: Do you have any comments or suggestions on how to ensure the viability and sustainability of rural education? You may wish to comment on the following areas:

- attracting and retaining staff;
- school buildings;
- remote learning;
- use of technologies for learning.

Section C – The Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 and its application.

In Scotland, local authorities have a statutory duty to ensure the adequate and efficient provision of school education in their area. If a local authority proposes to change any part of the existing education provision then they must engage in formal consultation process. The process to be followed when a local authority is consulting on a relevant school reorganisation proposal is set out in the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, referred to here as the “Schools Consultation Act”. Under the Schools Consultation Act, there are specific provisions relating to rural schools – including factors that Councils must consider before proposing to close any rural school – and there are specific duties on Scottish Ministers in relation to scrutiny (call-in) and consent to Council proposals.

This section seeks your views on the Schools Consultation Act and its current application.

Q6: Under the Schools Consultation Act, a rural school is defined using statistical data under the Scottish Government’s “Urban Rural Classification”. This divides areas of Scotland into 8 types, depending on the population size of the town or settlement together with the travel time needed to get to a larger town. For the purposes of the Schools Consultation Act, schools in the three rural categories Accessible Rural, Remote Rural and Very Remote Rural are considered to be rural schools. These are all schools in settlements with less than 3,000 people living in them and with different lengths of ‘drive time’ to a bigger town or settlement of more than 10,000 people.

(a) To what extent do you agree or disagree with the definition of a rural school for the purposes of the Schools Consultation Act?

- Strongly agree Agree Neither agree nor disagree Disagree Strongly disagree Don't know / Not applicable

(b) Please explain your or suggest any alternative?

Q7: The Scottish Government’s view is that educational benefits should be at the heart of any proposals to make a significant change to a school. The Schools Consultation Act specifies that local authorities have to prepare an educational benefits statement for all consultations under the Act. Local authorities must consider:

- the likely effects of the proposal on current and future pupils of the school, other users of the school’s facilities and the pupils of any other schools in the area;

- explain how the authority intends to minimise or avoid any adverse effects of the proposal; and
- describe the educational benefits which it believes will result from the proposal and provide reasons for this.

(a) To what extent do you agree or disagree that educational benefits should be the primary consideration in making a significant change to a school?

- Strongly agree
 Agree
 Neither agree nor disagree
 Disagree
 Strongly disagree
 Don't know / Not applicable

(b) Please explain your answer, and provide any comments on how the educational benefits statement is used or how you think it could be improved?

Q8: Sometimes Councils will propose the closure of a school. The Schools Consultation Act requires Councils to have special regard to three factors before deciding to propose and consult on a rural school closure. These are:

- if there is any viable alternative to the closure proposal;
- the likely effect of the school's closure on the local community; and
- the likely consequences of the closure on travel and transport arrangements.

(a) Do you have any comments on how these factors have operated in practice?

(b) Do you have any suggestions for improvements or alternatives to the existing process?

Q9: Councils have to balance their duties under the Schools Consultation Act with their responsibilities for efficient management of the school estate. There is Scottish Government guidance on some aspects of this, for example, assessing and reporting Condition and Suitability ratings. Thinking about how Councils do this, do you have any comments on how they:

(a) make decisions about the school estate, including assessments of condition or suitability and how investment in school building is prioritised?

(b) assess the capacity of primary and secondary schools?

(c) manage and measure local information such as projected population numbers and pupil rolls?

Q10: The consultation process Councils must undertake is set out in the Schools Consultation Act.

(a) How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the statutory consultation process currently applied by Councils under the Schools Consultation Act?

- Very satisfied
 Satisfied
 Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
 Dissatisfied
 Very dissatisfied
 Don't know / Not applicable

(b) How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the informal consultation sometimes undertaken by Councils in advance of statutory consultation under the Schools Consultation Act?

- Very satisfied Satisfied Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied Dissatisfied Very dissatisfied Don't know / Not applicable

(c) Do you have any comments on consultation under the Schools Consultation Act or how it could be improved?

Q11: The Schools Consultation Act requires Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIE), who are now part of the Scottish Government agency Education Scotland, to be involved in the consultation process. They are required to prepare and submit to the Council a professional and independent report on the educational aspects of the proposal being consulted on.

(a) To what extent do you agree or disagree with the role of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education under the Schools Consultation Act?

- Very satisfied Satisfied Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied Dissatisfied Very dissatisfied Don't know / Not applicable

(b) Do you have any comments on how this requirement has operated in practice or how it could be improved?

Q12: Under the Schools Consultation Act, Scottish Ministers have powers to decide whether to "call in" or review a Council's decision to close a school. This can be applied where it appears to Scottish Ministers that the authority may have failed in a significant regard to comply with the requirements in the Schools Consultation Act or to take proper account of a material consideration relevant to the decision. When Scottish Ministers call in a proposal, they can then decide whether or not to allow the closure to go ahead.

(a) To what extent do you agree or disagree with the role of Scottish Ministers' and their call-in powers under the Schools Consultation Act?

- Strongly agree Agree Neither agree nor disagree Disagree Strongly disagree Don't know / Not applicable

(b) Do you have any comments on the call-in process or how it could be improved?

Q13: There is statutory guidance issued to local authorities, by the Scottish Government, intended to assist those who are involved in overseeing the consultation and decision making processes around proposed changes to their schools, as required in the Schools Consultation Act:

(a) Are you satisfied with the guidance to local authorities under the Schools Consultation Act?

- Very satisfied Satisfied Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied Dissatisfied Very dissatisfied Don't know / Not applicable

(b) Please explain your answer, and provide any comments on how the support and implementation of the Schools Consultation Act could be improved?

Section D – Funding issues surrounding rural education

Under the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003, Councils have a statutory duty to make arrangements to secure Best Value. They must carry out their overarching duties on delivery of all council services, including responsibilities for managing the school estate in accordance with the Best Value duty. The Commission is also considering the funding issues surrounding rural education, including the relationship between the Best Value duty and the Schools Consultation Act.

Q14: Do you have any comments on how Councils deliver their Best Value requirement alongside the delivery of rural education and their responsibilities under the Schools Consultation Act?

Q15: Do you have any other comments on the funding issues around delivering rural education?

Section E – Links between rural education and the preservation, support and development of rural communities

Part of the Commission's remit is to examine the links between rural education and the preservation, support and development of rural communities and to make recommendations on how these links might be strengthened if necessary.

Q16: Do you have any comments on the links between rural education and the preservation, support and development of rural communities?

Q17: Do you wish to highlight any sources of evidence in relation to this area of the Commission's work that you think they should consider?

Section F – Any other comments

Q18: Please tell us if you have any other comments on the delivery of rural education that you would like the Commission to consider?

**Commission on Rural Education
October 2011**