Commission on the Delivery of Rural Education - Call for Evidence

An Analysis of Responses

COSLA

The Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

COMMISSION ON THE DELIVERY OF RURAL EDUCATION
– CALL FOR EVIDENCE
AN ANALYSIS OF RESPONSES

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The report provides an analysis of responses to the Call for Evidence by the Commission on the Delivery of Rural Education. The Commission was asked to consider the provision of education in rural areas and make recommendations on best practice. The Call for Evidence provided the opportunity for any interested party to make a written submission to the Commission. It sought views in relation to four key topics:

- maximising attainment and achievement through rural education;
- the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 and its application;
- funding issues surrounding rural education; and
- links between rural education and the preservation, support and development of rural communities.

The report provides a detailed analysis of each element of the consultation exercise. It looks in detail at the responses to the consultation questions and provides an analysis of the views of particular groups, highlighting trends and issues where appropriate.

Overview of the response

There were 393 responses to the Call for Evidence split roughly equally between organisations and private individuals. The largest group of responses came from parents/ carers making up a third of all responses. A fifth of responses came from parent/carers' organisations (primarily Parent Councils). Other significant respondent groups included schools, teachers, Community Councils, local authorities and 'other' individuals or organisations. The majority of responses came from individuals and organisations based in rural areas.

Summary of responses

- Nearly half of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that there are particular challenges to delivering Curriculum for Excellence in rural schools. Just over a third disagreed or strongly disagreed. Similar proportions agreed or disagreed that these challenges are particularly acute in small rural schools. Challenges that were highlighted included: limited access to specialist subject knowledge (due to low numbers of teachers or a reduction in teacher numbers); limited access for teachers to appropriate training and engagement with their peers; and fewer opportunities for learning outside the school environment (such as sports, culture and vocational opportunities).

- Suggested approaches to deal with these challenges included better joint working (through, for example, 'clusters', 'co-operative networks' and 'learning communities'), use of technology, and better resourcing of rural schools.

- Most respondents felt that rural schools offer particular educational benefits mainly as a result of smaller class sizes. Many respondents felt this leads to more individualised learning; and any challenges pupils face being more readily identified.

- A majority of respondents also felt there are disadvantages for pupils attending rural schools. Respondents said that smaller class sizes mean there are often too few children at the same stage to deliver effective group work. Small peer groups also limit the opportunities to socialise.

- There was overall support for the definition of rural schools used in the Schools Consultation Act with respondents describing it as *"appropriate"* and *"reasonable"*. However, some respondents felt that the definition lacks clarity and that there are significant differences between the three rural categories used.

- There was strong agreement that educational benefits should be the primary consideration in making a significant change to a school. Many respondents felt that educational issues rather than costs should guide decisions on the provision of rural schools. There were a range of comments on the educational benefits statement (EBS). Local authorities said that it is helpful in providing clarity and explaining the reasons for school closures. However, a number of organisations and private individuals raised concerns that the statement can be used to justify closure proposals rather than presenting an objective case.

- There was some scepticism about the level of investigation of the three key factors highlighted in the Schools Consultation Act: viable alternatives to closure; impact on the local community; and consequences on travel and transport arrangements. Some respondents raised issues about clarity in terms of what is being asked for, and the consistency of current approaches.

- Suggestions to improve the consultation process included greater monitoring and independent oversight. Some respondents called for clear and openly available guidance on the processes that councils should follow ahead of the proposal and consultation phase.

- Among respondents there was a higher level of dissatisfaction than satisfaction with the statutory consultation process currently applied by councils under the Schools Consultation Act. There were positive experiences of the consultation process. However, many individuals, parents/ carers groups and community councils felt that decisions have often already been taken by the council, and that their views would not be listened to. A significant number felt they were not being provided with all the information they needed, or that the process was not transparent.

- There was strong agreement with the role of Scottish Ministers and their 'call-in' powers under the Schools Consultation Act. This was considered an "essential safeguard" in the assessment of closure proposals.

- A number of local authorities highlighted the tension between their obligation to deliver Best Value and the Schools Consultation Act. They felt that the former placed an onus on them to develop asset management strategies to increase the efficiency of the school estate. Conversely, the latter presumed against school closures on the grounds of costs or efficiencies.

- In terms of the links between rural schools and rural communities, the vast majority of private individuals and most community organisations identified rural schools as being at the heart of sustaining a vibrant community. Many identified a rural school as being central to rural life. They identified a range of economic and social benefits rural schools brought to the communities they served.

- COSLA noted that the debate on the delivery of rural education and schools has been almost unique in creating division between communities, local authorities and the Scottish Government. They felt that the Commission needed to look at the fundamental reason for this, and argued that it represented a clash between rights and responsibilities.

1. INTRODUCTION

About this report

1.1   The report provides an analysis of responses to the Call for Evidence by the Commission on the Delivery of Rural Education. The report provides a detailed analysis of each element of the consultation exercise.   It looks in detail at the responses to the consultation questions and provides an analysis of the views of particular groups, highlighting trends and issues where appropriate.

Background to the consultation

1.2   Against a background of considerable public and political debate over the future of rural schools, the Cabinet Secretary for Education & Lifelong Learning established the Commission on the Delivery of Rural Education in July 2011. The Commission was asked to consider the provision of education in rural areas and make recommendations on best practice. It will look at innovation and the link between rural education and rural regeneration.

1.3   The Commission will also take a comprehensive look at the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 and its application. The Act was designed to strengthen the consultation procedure around closures and make the process more transparent. It was intended to provide a legislative presumption against the closure of rural schools and for educational benefits to be the driving force behind any proposed school closure.

1.4   In announcing the establishment of the Commission, the Cabinet Secretary for Education & Lifelong Learning noted that there had been *"differences in the interpretation of the Act which have resulted in the original intention of the Act....not always being followed"* (quoted in Scottish Government press release 1 June 2011)*.* The Cabinet Secretary for Education & Lifelong Learning therefore requested local authorities to observe a one year moratorium on proposals for new rural school closures to provide the space needed for the Commission to undertake its task.

1.5   Membership of the Commission includes representatives of local authorities, parents, head teachers and educational experts. It is committed to ensuring all key stakeholders have the opportunity to contribute to its work. It is gathering evidence through three mechanisms – a Call for Evidence, oral evidence and research.

About the Call for Evidence

1.6   The Call for Evidence provided the opportunity for any interested party to make a written submission to the Commission. It sought views in relation to four key topics:
- maximising attainment and achievement through rural education;
- the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 and its application;
- funding issues surrounding rural education; and
- links between rural education and the preservation, support and development of rural communities.

1.7   The Call for Evidence questionnaire included 18 questions, with some divided into sub-questions (meaning there were a total of 32 question elements). Respondents were able to provide either an open response or complete the consultation questionnaire, offering systematic responses to each of the consultation questions.

1.8   The analysis was undertaken using a response matrix. Respondents were categorised according to stakeholder groups and responses were fed into the matrix, in accordance with the answer to the consultation question. General and additional points that did not relate to the questions were fed into a separate section of the matrix and analysed manually.

1.9   Several respondents chose not to answer the consultation questionnaire. These responses were read thoroughly and where the respondent directly answered any of the questions, the comments were fed into the appropriate place on the matrix. Other substantive comments were treated separately as with other responses.

1.10   The analysis drew out the themes emerging within each of the questions posed and the range of views being expressed. It also highlighted any specific trends among stakeholder groups.

2. OVERVIEW OF RESPONSES

Introduction

2.1   This section provides an overview of the responses received to the Call for Evidence. It considers who the responses came from, who was not represented in the response, and provides general comments on the responses.

Who replied to the Call for Evidence?

2.2   The Call for Evidence was publicised through the Scottish Government website and issued to a broad range of stakeholders with an interest in the issues. The Call for Evidence was issued in October 2011, with a closing date for submissions of 12 January 2012.

2.3   A total of 393 responses were received by the Commission. The response was split roughly half and half between organisations and private individuals. There were 202 responses from individuals (51%) and 191 from organisations (49%). Table 2.1 shows the breakdown of respondents according to their specific stakeholder group.

Table 2.1: Distribution of Responses to Rural Education Call for Evidence by stakeholder group		
	No.	**%**
Organisations		
Parent/ carers' organisation	77	20
School	30	8
Community Council	22	6
Other (organisation)	22	6
Local authority	21	5
Professional body	9	2
Other educational establishment	9	2
Pupils' group	1	0
Organisations sub-total	191	49
Individuals		
Parent/ carer	128	33
Other (individual)	32	8
Teacher	28	7
Other educational establishment staff	5	1
Elected representative	4	1
Non-teaching local authority employee	3	1
Pupil	2	1
Individuals sub-total	202	51
Total no. of respondents	**393**	**100**

2.4   As Table 2.1 shows, the largest group of responses came from parents/ carers. This group made up a third of all responses (128 – 33%) and nearly two-thirds (63%) of responses from individuals. Other significant groups among individuals were 'other' individuals (32 – 8%) and teachers (28 – 7%).

2.5   The largest respondent group among organisations was parent/ carer organisations (primarily Parent Councils). These organisations made up a fifth of all responses (77 – 20%) and two-fifths (40%) of the organisational responses. Other significant respondent groups were schools (30 – 8%), Community Councils and 'other' organisations (both 22 – 6%) and local authorities (21 – 5%).

2.6   In some cases we had to review the categories that respondents had used to describe themselves. This was either to correct an inaccuracy or to ensure consistency in our analysis. For example, while some organisations had ticked 'professional body', others that would fit into this category ticked 'other' and gave an alternative description. Where it was clearly applicable these organisations were categorised as professional bodies. Other examples included office bearers in parent councils who had described themselves as 'elected representative'. Since we took this category to mean MSPs, councillors etc, we regrouped these respondents as parents/ carers.

Table 2.2: Distribution of Responses to Rural Education Call for Evidence by area type		
	No.	**%**
Rural	303	77
Urban	13	3
Area with both urban and rural components	64	16
Don't Know/ Not Applicable	3	1
No Response	10	3
Total no. of respondents	**393**	**100**

2.7   As Table 2.2 shows, the vast majority of responses (303 – 77%) came from individuals and organisations based in rural areas. Sixty-four responses (16%) came from respondents who said that their area contained both urban and rural components. Just three per cent (13) came from respondents in urban areas. Four per cent either did not know or did not respond to the question.

2.8   We did not find any evidence of 'campaigning' among the responses (where multiple respondents submit identical responses to influence the outcome). Equally, there was no strong evidence of 'sharing' of responses although the responses to some individual questions appeared to have been shared by the Association of Directors of Education Scotland and Aberdeenshire, North Ayrshire and East Ayrshire Councils.

Who was not represented in the responses?

2.9   Responses came from a wide cross-section of organisations and individuals with an interest in the proposals. There was only a small number of organisational responses from schools. According to the Scottish Government definition there are approximately 1000 rural schools in Scotland. The response from 30 schools represents three per cent of these. More than a third of Scottish local authorities (11 – 34% of the total) did not respond to the consultation, although the pertinence of the issue will vary according to the geography of each council area.

The interpretation of quantitative and qualitative information

2.10   This report provides both a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the responses. The Call for Evidence included a number of 'tick box' questions asking respondents either how strongly they agreed with a statement or proposal (on a scale from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree') or how satisfied they are with an existing process (on a scale from 'very satisfied' to 'very dissatisfied'). For these 'tick box' questions we have presented our analysis in tables. The tables split the response by respondent grouping and show the proportion that stated 'strongly agree', 'agree', etc. Our analysis also uses an aggregate 'score' to demonstrate which types of respondent were most supportive or otherwise of a particular element. For this we assigned a series of 'scores' from +2 for 'strongly agree' to -2 for 'strongly disagree' to produce an overall score for the response.

2.11   There were also two 'yes or no' questions (2 and 3) where we have presented quantitative data in tables.

2.12   The rest of the analysis focuses on the qualitative content of the responses. The report focuses on the key issues respondents have raised and, where apparent, any conflicting views.

3.   RESPONSES TO THE CALL FOR EVIDENCE

Introduction

3.1   This section considers the responses to the questions posed in the Call for Evidence.

Question 1(a): To what extent do you agree or disagree that there are particular challenges to delivering Curriculum for Excellence in rural schools?

Table 3.1: Distribution of Responses to Question 1(a)	% Strongly Agree	% Agree	% Neither	% Disagree	% Strongly Disagree	% Don't Know/ NA	Score	Total No.
Organisations								
Parent/ carers' organisation	8	40	16	16	19	1	0.03	**75**
School	10	40	20	17	13	0	0.17	**30**
Community Council	23	27	23	14	14	0	0.32	**22**
Other (organisation)	13	44	6	6	31	0	0.00	**16**
Local authority	14	48	14	24	0	0	0.52	**21**
Professional body	0	57	14	29	0	0	0.29	**7**
Other educational establishment	22	33	22	11	11	0	0.44	**9**
Pupils' group	0	0	0	100	0	0	1.00	**1**
Individuals								
Parent/ carer	23	20	13	21	21	2	0.02	**124**
Other (individual)	34	14	0	24	21	7	0.19	**29**
Teacher	21	39	11	18	11	0	0.43	**28**
Other educational establishment staff	60	20	0	20	0	0	1.20	**5**
Elected representative	0	0	33	0	67	0	1.33	**3**
Non-teaching local authority employee	33	67	0	0	0	0	1.33	**3**
Pupil	50	0	0	50	0	0	0.50	**2**
Total no. of respondents/score	**70**	**115**	**50**	**70**	**64**	**6**	**0.15**	375
% of respondents to question	19	31	13	19	17	2		

3.2   Ninety-five per cent of consultation respondents (375) answered question 1(a). It asked them to rate the extent to which they agreed that there are particular challenges in delivering Curriculum for Excellence in rural schools. Almost half of those who answered (49% - 185) either strongly agreed or agreed there are particular challenges. A further 36% (134) disagreed or strongly disagreed. Thirteen per cent (50) of respondents who answered said they neither agreed nor disagreed and two per cent said they did not know.

3.3   A large majority of local authorities (62%), professional bodies (57%), teachers (61%), educational establishment staff (80%) and non-teaching local authority employees (100%) strongly agreed or agreed. Only two respondent groups (pupil's groups and elected representatives) mostly disagreed that there are particular challenges. However, the number of respondents in each of these groups was very small.

Question 1 (b): To what extent do you agree or disagree that any challenges are particularly acute for small rural schools?

Table 3.2: Distribution of Responses to Question 1(b)	% Strongly Agree	% Agree	% Neither	% Disagree	% Strongly Disagree	% Don't Know/ NA	Score	Total No.
Organisations								
Parent/ carers' organisation	18	22	19	20	14	8	0.10	**74**
School	14	34	14	14	24	0	0.00	**29**
Community Council	23	32	14	18	14	0	0.32	**22**
Other (organisation)	18	29	12	12	24	6	0.06	**17**
Local authority	43	43	10	5	0	0	1.24	**21**
Professional body	29	43	14	14	0	0	0.86	**7**
Other educational establishment	11	22	44	11	11	0	0.11	**9**
Pupils' group	0	0	100	0	0	0	0.00	**1**
Individuals								
Parent/ carer	26	21	11	20	21	2	0.13	**121**
Other (individual)	38	10	3	24	17	7	0.30	**29**
Teacher	19	30	19	22	11	0	0.22	**27**
Other educational establishment staff	80	0	20	0	0	0	1.60	**5**
Elected representative	33	33	0	0	33	0	0.33	**3**
Non-teaching local authority employee	33	33	33	0	0	0	1.00	**3**
Pupil	50	0	0	50	0	0	0.50	**2**
Total no. of respondents/score	**92**	**90**	**52**	**66**	**59**	**11**	**0.25**	**370**
% of respondents to question	25	24	14	18	16	3		

3.4   Ninety-four per cent of consultation respondents (370) answered question 1(b). It asked them to rate the extent to which they agreed that challenges are particularly acute for small rural schools. The response pattern was broadly similar to question 1(a). Almost half of those who answered (49% - 181) either strongly agreed or agreed the challenges are particularly acute. A further 34% (135) disagreed or strongly disagreed. Fourteen per cent (53) of respondents who answered said they neither agreed nor disagreed and three per cent said they did not know.

3.5   As with question 1(a), the majority of local authorities (86%), professional bodies (72%), other educational staff (80%), elected representatives (66%)

and non-teaching local authority employees (66%) strongly agreed or agreed – although the response was even stronger. However, teachers were less likely to agree or strongly agree with question 1(b) than 1(a), with 49 per cent strongly agreeing or agreeing.

Question 1 (c): Please explain your answers to (a) and (b) and provide further detail on what you think these challenges are?

3.6   Eighty-nine per cent of consultation respondents (349) answered question 1(c) which asked them to explain their answers to (a) and (b). Respondents identified three main areas of challenges which mostly related to small school sizes and remoteness associated with rural schools.

3.7   Many emphasised challenges with teaching provision in rural schools.   In particular, there was concern, especially among parents, parents groups and organisations, that there is limited access to specialist subject knowledge, due to low numbers of teachers or a reduction in teacher numbers. A significant number of respondents, particularly schools, also highlighted difficulties in providing specialist support (for example for children with additional support needs) because of limited skills, or fluctuating needs. Some respondents felt that recruiting and retaining good quality teachers can be more difficult in rural areas.

> *"Attracting the calibre of teachers and the variety of staff to a very small rural school could be a challenge and hence the breadth of learning that is central to CfE would be compromised."*
> (Glenluce Primary School Parent Council)

3.8   Some also suggested that teachers in more rural areas and in smaller schools have much more limited access to appropriate training and engagement with their peers.

> *"The professional development of teachers is limited by having a fewer number of peers with whom to share knowledge, concepts and skills and the geographic location may make it either difficult or expensive for the school to allow staff to attend CPD courses."*
> (East Ayrshire Council)

3.9   Many respondents who agreed there are challenges felt that pupils may have more limited opportunities for learning outside the school environment. In particular, respondents highlighted a lack of access to sports facilities, cultural and vocational learning opportunities nearby. Some highlighted that many schools are too far from other schools to share resources. Often, respondents said the distances involved and cost of travel were too great.

> "Remote rural schools are a long way from non-school education resources that urban schools take for granted such as sports facilities/ coaches, work placement opportunities, colleges/ higher education resources and other schools which may be able to help each other cover a wider range of subjects."
>
> (Private individual, parent/ carer)

3.10 Small peer groups and the multi-composite nature of classes in smaller schools were seen as key challenges, particularly among local authorities, professional bodies and teachers. It was felt that these issues make it more difficult to deliver co-operative learning and group learning opportunities within peer groups; is more challenging for teachers to tailor approaches to individual pupil needs; and limits opportunities for socialising and building confidence in larger groups.

> "Cooperative learning can be difficult and in particularly small schools differentiation of 4 stages in one class can stifle creativity and opportunity for pupils."
>
> (Association of Head Teachers and Deputies in Scotland)

3.11 Many respondents felt that the level of resources dedicated to rural schools and the way resources are allocated creates challenges for rural, and particularly small rural, schools. It was felt that resource pressures do not allow many rural schools to meet travel costs or secure specialist teaching.

3.12 Many respondents, particularly parents, were concerned that local authorities allocate teachers to many schools based on the size of the school roll, which will often fluctuate in a small school. There was particular concern that small changes in the roll could mean a teacher is lost, and a whole subject area might disappear. The roll might go up again, but recruiting another teacher in this area can be challenging.

3.13 Many respondents, particularly those who disagreed or strongly disagreed, emphasised the opportunities that rural and small schools offer. In particular respondents highlighted:
- the chance to work across age groups and disciplines;
- strong links with the community; and
- small class sizes and greater teacher input.

> "We feel the advantages outweigh the challenges."
>
> (Aith Junior High School)

3.14 Some respondents emphasised that challenges could be overcome with increased resources, as many felt that resources are less in small rural schools. Some respondents believed that the challenges are different – rather than greater – for rural and small schools.

> *"Within the context of CfE it is possible to provide the learning experiences for every child, no matter the size or location of the school. It may well be that some of the experiences will differ in rural schools, compared to urban schools but it was ever thus and part of the richness of Scottish Education."*
>
> (VOICE)

Question 1 (d): Do you have any suggestions for how these challenges might be overcome or addressed?

3.15 Two-thirds of consultation respondents (69% - 273) answered question 1(d), which asked for suggestions about how challenges could be overcome or addressed.

3.16 Almost half of those who responded suggested better joint working to address challenges. Mainly, it was suggested that schools could work better with other schools in 'clusters', 'co-operative networks' and 'learning communities'. It was felt that such approaches would give schools the chance to access resources, widen peer groups and increase opportunities for shared learning within stages.

3.17 Many respondents felt that technology could support better joint working and shared learning. A number of respondents highlighted the difference already being made by resources like Glow. However, a significant number of respondents emphasised that there needs to be investment in IT infrastructure, facilities and support to ensure adequate access in rural areas.

> "The increasing use of e-learning and accessing the world via computer technologies can and does assist teaching and learning. Collaboration between schools can alleviate some of the difficulties and enable shared developments. Broadband in rural areas needs to be increased and faster."
>
> (Moray Council SNP Group)

3.18 Other joint working suggestions identified by a number of respondents included:
- identifying opportunities to work with and use resources within the local community;
- sharing teachers across schools – particularly specialist teachers and head teachers;
- more touring resources; and
- better networking for teachers.

3.19 About a third of respondents to this question suggested that increasing resources for rural schools is the main way to overcome challenges. There was concern that small rural schools often suffer more from the impact of budget cuts, and do not have the breadth of teaching skills to ensure a varied curriculum and a wide range of learning activities.

3.20 Many respondents made the case for a general increase in resources to be allocated to rural and small rural schools.

> "Realistic funding to rural schools – they will cost substantially more to give equity of access to the curriculum. The schools also play a vital role in keeping a community prosperous and encouraging people to want to stay and/ or move to the area."
>
> (Ullapool Parent Council)

3.21 In particular, a significant number of respondents called for additional funding to meet transport costs, enabling access to other schools and other learning activities.

3.22 In addition, a number of respondents suggested:
- investment in non-teaching support staff, particularly classroom assistants;
- closing or merging smaller schools where possible and reasonable;
- developing a better method to determine the number of teachers allocated (as the current approach is based on school rolls which can fluctuate dramatically); and
- committing additional resources to ensure a minimum number of staff or a minimum curriculum can be delivered.

Question 2: Do you think rural schools provide particular educational benefits to their pupils and, if so, what do you think these are?

Table 3.3: Distribution of Responses to Question 2	Yes (%)	No (%)	Neither / Both (%)	Total no. responses
Organisations				
Parent/ carers' organisation	100	0	0	**72**
School	97	0	3	**30**
Community Council	100	0	0	**22**
Other (organisation)	89	11	0	**18**
Local authority	67	14	19	**21**
Professional body	63	25	13	**8**
Other educational establishment	86	0	14	**7**
Pupils' group	100	0	0	**1**
Individuals				
Parent/ carer	96	3	1	**119**
Other (individual)	100	0	0	**27**
Teacher	93	4	4	**28**
Other educational establishment staff	80	20	0	**5**
Elected representative	100	0	0	**3**
Non-teaching local authority employee	67	0	33	**3**
Pupil	100	0	0	**2**
Total no. of respondents	**343**	**13**	**10**	**366**
% of respondents to question	**94**	**4**	**3**	

3.23   Ninety-four per cent of consultation respondents (366) answered question 2 which asked whether they thought rural schools provide particular educational benefits to their pupils and, if so, what they thought these were.

3.24   The vast majority of respondents who answered the question (94% - 344) broadly agreed rural schools do offer particular educational benefits. The view was particularly strong among some large respondent groups – community councils, schools, parents and carers, teachers, and the organisations that represent them.   Although most local authorities and professional bodies did agree there are advantages, there was a wider spread of views.

3.25   Many advantages related to the fact that rural schools are often smaller and have smaller class sizes (although several respondents highlighted that this is not always the case).

3.26   The advantage identified by most respondents (about half) was that in rural schools smaller class sizes mean that pupils are more likely to get more time

with their teacher; more individualised learning; and any challenges they face would be more readily identified.

> "Rural schools generally offer a better pupil teacher ratio which means that the children get more individual attention."
>
> (Achiltibuie Primary School Parent Council)

3.27 Another key advantage associated with smaller schools and class sizes was that pupils have greater opportunities to work across age groups, and play an active role in school life. Respondents offered examples such as older pupils being encouraged to take responsibility for supporting younger pupils; the opportunity for most pupils to be engaged in the pupil council (rather than just a small proportion); and opportunities to play an active role in the wider community.

> "There are many advantages to education provision in rural settings, including small class sizes and there are benefits associated with the wider age range in rural classrooms with opportunities for cross-stage working."
>
> (The Highland Council)

3.28 The other main advantages, identified by a large proportion and wide variety of respondents, related to learning within a rural environment and community. In particular, a large number of respondents (about a third) emphasised that rural schools are more likely to be connected to the local community. It was felt that this brought additional commitment and resources from the community, and supported young people to be more active citizens.

> "Rural schools are more likely to be valued by local communities where local residents appreciate their value to the thriving of the community."
>
> (The Methodist Church)

3.29 Linked with this, a significant number of respondents felt that parental involvement in rural schools is likely to be higher than in other schools.

3.30 A significant number of respondents emphasised the opportunities available in rural areas to experience learning in the outdoors, and explore historical and cultural heritage.

> "Easy access to rich outdoor learning opportunities is of clear benefit."
>
> (Angus Council)

3.31 Many respondents highlighted their belief that rural schools provided a friendlier, safer and more positive learning environment. Several respondents drew attention to research evidence and anecdotal experiences which suggested that educational outcomes were better for pupils from rural, and in particular small rural, schools.

3.32 Other advantages of rural schools raised by a significant number of respondents included:

- a reduced need to travel long distances has a positive impact on pupils;
- fewer problems such as absenteeism and bullying;
- increased acceptance and support for children with additional support needs; and
- more flexibility with the curriculum and timetabling.

3.33 Respondents who disagreed there are specific benefits highlighted that there are no advantages associated with rurality. Local authorities in particular, even those who agreed there are sometimes benefits, highlighted that learning is more strongly influenced by the quality of teaching and leadership within a school than by the particular setting.

> "Every school provides a different experience for its children. Just as some rural schools are highly effective so are some in urban settings. ... there are some particular benefits that well-led rural schools can deliver ... however far more is dependent on the quality of the individual teacher in the small school setting."
>
> (East Ayrshire Council)

Question 3: Do you think rural schools have particular disadvantages for their pupils and, if so, what do you think these are?

Table 3.4: Distribution of Responses to Question 3(a)	Yes (%)	No (%)	Neither / Both (%)	Total no. responses
Organisations				
Parent/ carers' organisation	79	17	4	**72**
School	75	18	7	**28**
Community Council	67	24	10	**21**
Other (organisation)	82	12	6	**17**
Local authority	90	5	5	**20**
Professional body	86	14	0	**7**
Other educational establishment	100	0	0	**6**
Pupils' group	100	0	0	**1**
Individuals				
Parent/ carer	71	24	5	**116**
Other (individual)	59	37	4	**27**
Teacher	89	11	0	**27**
Other educational establishment staff	80	20	0	**5**
Elected representative	0	100	0	**2**
Non-teaching local authority employee	67	33	0	**3**
Pupil	100	0	0	**2**
Total no. of respondents	**267**	**71**	**16**	**354**
% of respondents to question	75	20	5	

3.34   Ninety per cent of consultation respondents (354) answered question 3 which asked whether they thought rural schools have particular disadvantages for their pupils and, if so, asked what they thought these are.

3.35   Three-quarters of those who answered the question (75% - 267) thought that rural schools, and particularly small or remote rural schools, do have particular disadvantages. Twenty per cent (71) disagreed and a further five per cent (16) commented but did not clearly agree or disagree. The main respondent groups followed broadly similar patterns of responses.

3.36   The disadvantages identified most by a wide range of respondents related to smaller class sizes which mean there are often too few children at the same stage to deliver effective group work. Small peer groups also limit the opportunities to socialise.

> "Opportunities for peer support and appropriate grouping can be limited with very small pupil numbers. Fewer pupils can mean less social interaction with a wider variety of pupils (from different backgrounds and with different needs), than is possible in larger schools."
>
> (Falkirk Council)

3.37   A range of respondents drew attention to difficulties with multi-composite classes, where children may be at different stages, and have different needs. Some felt this can be difficult for teachers to manage, and can lead to a lack of challenge and competition for some pupils.

> "Multi composite classes can make it difficult for the class teacher to provide a wide range of appropriate educational experiences for all pupils in the class. The extent to which this would happen is again dependent on the size of the composite class and stage range."
>
> (South Ayrshire Council)

3.38   A large number and wide range of respondents felt that pupils attending rural schools often have reduced opportunities - either because of their rurality (and associated access issues) or because of the small size of the school. In particular, respondents highlighted reduced opportunities to:

- access vocational learning through colleges or work places;
- extra-curricular activities, such as sporting activities (because groups of pupils are too small or transport is an issue);
- access facilities such as sports centres or cultural venues like museums;
- access specialist learning support or additional learning resources; and
- develop wider life skills and learn from people from different backgrounds or cultures.

> "Small pupil numbers within a school or at particular stage can be a barrier to participation in key cultural and sporting activities, for example, team sports, choirs, music ensembles."
>
> (Angus Council)

3.39   Transport was a key concern. It was felt that the dispersed nature of rural communities, distances from towns or centres, and the cost of transport reduced opportunities for children and young people to access wider facilities and opportunities, as well as meet friends and socialise.

3.40   Another important concern was the reliance on a very small pool of teachers, particularly in smaller schools which limits the subjects available, specialist support on offer, and the styles of teaching pupils are exposed to. Having a

poor teacher could have a disproportionate impact in small schools, where pupils may remain with one teacher over a number of years.

3.41 Other disadvantages of rural (and particularly small rural) schools mentioned by a number of respondents included:
- teachers having limited continuous professional development opportunities and opportunities to learn from peers;
- internet access and IT facilities being more limited;
- the threat of closure can be unsettling for pupils;
- difficulty in recruitment and retention staff;
- the challenge of timetabling; and
- gender or other imbalances within a class or stage.

3.42 A significant number of respondents felt that rural schools are often less well resourced, and that further funding and support could help overcome many disadvantages.

3.43 Those who disagreed or were less clear in their response often recognised that rural schools experience challenges. However, many felt that, overall, these can largely be overcome. Some, such as COSLA, reinforced their view that rural education does not bring any general advantages or disadvantages compared with education in urban areas. Others highlighted that disadvantages are often related to size or remoteness – rather than rurality itself.

3.44 Detailed statistical analysis undertaken by the Improvement Service drew the conclusion that there is no compelling evidence that attending small or very small rural and remote rural schools disadvantages children in these areas. Equally, they could find no evidence that attending a larger rather than smaller school in rural or remote rural areas would damage children's educational performance either. They suggested that the impact likely on children's educational performance of scale of school was not a useful criterion for closing or keeping open a small rural or remote rural school.

Question 4 (a): To what extent do you agree or disagree that there are particular challenges to applying the Getting it right approach in rural schools?

Table 3.5: Distribution of Responses to Question 4(a)	% Strongly Agree	% Agree	% Neither	% Disagree	% Strongly Disagree	% Don't Know/ NA	Score	Total No.
Organisations								
Parent/ carers' organisation	11	24	18	16	26	5	0.23	**74**
School	7	20	17	16	30	3	0.52	**30**
Community Council	14	14	32	23	14	9	0.05	**22**
Other (organisation)	13	38	19	18	13	0	0.19	**16**
Local authority	0	52	29	19	0	0	0.33	**21**
Professional body	33	0	33	19	0	0	0.33	**6**
Other educational establishment	22	22	33	33	0	0	0.44	**9**
Pupils' group	0	0	100	0	0	0	0.00	**1**
Individuals								
Parent/ carer	16	11	22	24	18	9	0.19	**119**
Other (individual)	21	25	14	11	21	7	0.15	**28**
Teacher	21	25	21	11	21	0	0.14	**28**
Other educational establishment staff	20	20	20	20	20	0	0.00	**5**
Elected representative	0	33	33	33	0	0	0.00	**3**
Non-teaching local authority employee	33	0	33	33	0	0	0.33	**3**
Pupil	50	50	0	0	0	0	1.50	**2**
Total no. of respondents/score	**53**	**76**	**79**	**72**	**67**	**20**	**0.07**	**367**
% of respondents to question	14	21	22	20	18	5		

3.45   Ninety-three per cent of consultation respondents (367) answered question 4(a) which asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed there are particular challenges in applying Getting It Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) approach in rural schools.

3.46   Overall, 35 per cent of respondents (129) agreed or strongly agreed there are challenges. A similar proportion (139 – 38%) disagreed or strongly disagreed. Twenty-two per cent of respondents (72) neither agreed nor disagreed and five per cent (20) said they didn't know. This relatively high proportion of

responses may partly reflect the lack of understanding of GIRFEC among some respondent groups. Individual parents and carers, parents and carers organisations, schools and community councils mostly disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Question 4 (b): Please explain your answer to (a) and provide further detail on what you think these challenges are?

3.47　Eighty-one per cent of consultation respondents answered question 4(b) which asked for further details on what they thought the challenges of delivering GIRFEC in rural schools were.

3.48　The main challenges identified by those who agreed or strongly agreed related to coordinating and accessing specialist support services.

3.49　There was concern among respondents that access to specialist services is more limited for rural schools. This was partly related to the time it takes for specialists to travel to more remote areas and a lack of access to services based in towns.

> "Practitioners in areas such as social work, child psychology usually have an immense geographical area to cover. Visitation to each school has to be shared with their other work too, meaning that a rural school will only have limited time with these practitioners. . . . In principal it's a great idea, in reality, rurality makes it difficult to be effective."
> (Private individual, parent/ carer)

3.50　Some suggested that IT can help improve communication between agencies. But some highlighted that face to face meetings are more beneficial; IT can be unreliable; and confidentiality can be an issue.

3.51　Some suggested that multi-agency working creates additional pressures for small rural schools. Senior teachers in particular may often have teaching responsibilities, be the named contact for multi-agency work, and have to travel long distances to attend meetings.

> "Multi-agency working and training are more difficult in a rural setting. Management teams tend to be smaller in rural schools so the time required to engage in multi-agency working can have a disproportionate effect on the running of the school."
> (Association of Head Teachers and Deputies in Scotland)

3.52　Confidentiality between services – and particularly in small communities – was a concern for some respondents.

3.53　A significant number of respondents reinforced points made in relation to earlier questions and highlighted concern about the level of resources in rural schools. They suggested that further cuts to budgets and services are likely

to have an additional negative and disproportionate impact on the ability of rural schools to deliver GIRFEC.

3.54   Those who disagreed or strongly disagreed there are particular challenges with delivering GIRFEC in rural schools often highlighted the benefits of rural schools. In particular, a range of respondents thought that small school sizes meant more contact with teachers and greater opportunities to identify any problems early.

> "I think staff in small schools have the chance to develop closer relationships with pupils and so potential problems are noticed."
>
> (Private individual, parent/ carer)

3.55   Some respondents felt that rural and small rural schools are more likely to treat pupils as individuals, and this was seen as a strength in delivering GIRFEC.

> "On the contrary, rural schools are admirably placed and able to implement GIRFEC in a way that larger urban schools would not be able to. The community based rural school has a much better understanding of the "whole" child and their needs, and is able to help that child realise their full potential while at the same time being able to respond to the needs and help manage risks."
>
> (Luing Community Council)

3.56   Some respondents emphasised that being part of a small and strong community also supports the delivery of GIRFEC.

3.57   A significant number of respondents who strongly disagreed, disagreed or said neither felt that the main challenges of delivering GIRFEC are not related to rurality. Local authorities in particular highlighted this. Many of these respondents highlighted how well agencies can work together, the effectiveness of leadership and teaching are more important. Others emphasised that most challenges could be overcome through partnership working.

3.58   Several respondents highlighted that having high numbers of children with particular needs may have a disproportionate impact on smaller rural schools.

> "The impact of proportionately high numbers of "at risk" children, or children who have significant needs, is magnified in a school with a small roll…"
>
> (SOLACE)

3.59   A significant number of respondents said they had not heard of GIRFEC and were unable to provide substantive comments on associated challenges.

Question 5: 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.

3.60   Eighty-four per cent of consultation respondents (331) answered question 5 which asked for comments and suggestions on how to ensure the viability and sustainability of rural education.

3.61   Many respondents focused on the four areas highlighted in the question, all of which were seen as important.

3.62   Although some respondents felt that attracting and retaining good teachers was not a particular issue in their area, many felt it was. A variety of factors were seen to influence this including:
- a lack of awareness of opportunities and benefits;
- level of pay and the cost of living in rural areas;
- a lack of housing and jobs for other family members;
- a lack of opportunity for career advancement;
- a lack of job security; and
- a limited network of colleagues and support.

3.63   However, others highlighted that working in rural schools and small rural schools is very attractive – and suggested that more could be done to promote it.

> "Appropriate professionals can be attracted to a rural education as a lifestyle choice. The challenge for a rural authority is that of attracting high calibre staff and the provision of opportunities for career advancement."
>
> (Argyll and Bute Council)

3.64   There was particular concern about attracting and retaining high quality head teachers – because of low pay levels, pressures of balancing leadership, administration and teaching responsibilities, and a feeling of isolation.

3.65   The main suggestions to attract and retain good quality staff were:
- improved salaries and allowances for living in remote areas (where this does not exist);
- better advertising and promotion of opportunities;
- improved career progression;
- opportunities to learn from and access support from other teaching professionals – perhaps through cluster schools; and
- longer term approaches to economic development, housing and communities.

3.66   Although some respondents felt school buildings in their areas were a good standard or well maintained, many felt that school buildings needed to be

better managed and kept in better repair. These respondents suggested increased investment by local authorities.

3.67 Local authorities and others highlighted that maintaining many schools can be expensive, sometimes for very few pupils. Significant number of respondents recognised this may be unsustainable, and a balance needs to be struck.

> "Those councils we have spoken to indicate they have more school buildings than necessary to deliver education provision. It is unsustainable for the majority of councils to maintain and keep to an appropriate standard on the basis that local birth rate could rise."
>
> *(COSLA)*

3.68 However, many respondents felt that local schools are an important resource – for education but also because of their active role in rural communities, and many felt they should be better supported and encouraged.

> "The principle question which must be addressed is that of ensuring viable and sustainable rural communities. Maintaining the quality of rural education has a part to play in this."
>
> (Private individual, MSP)

3.69 A significant number of respondents suggested that schools could be more viable if the buildings were put to better use, and developed as community 'hubs' offering a range of services and community activities. Some suggested that local authorities should work with community groups and businesses to secure external funding for this approach.

3.70 Greater use of technology and remote learning was welcomed by many respondents, some of whom highlighted the significant progress made in this area and the positive impact it has had on rural schools so far.

3.71 Generally, respondents wanted to see IT infrastructure improved, and resources updated and maintained. They felt IT opened up new learning opportunities and could help schools connect with other schools and wider opportunities. Some highlighted the need to develop better links with colleges and access learning from home.

3.72 However, there was concern among respondents that IT access in some rural areas is poor or unreliable – and it was felt that this needed to be addressed for technologies and remote learning to be viable for rural schools in the future.

> "Ironically the rural areas which would potentially benefit most from significant e-learning opportunities are the self-same rural areas which do not have fast broadband, 3G or even in some cases reliable mobile phone signal."
>
> (The Moray Council, Administration Group)

Question 6 (a): To what extent do you agree or disagree with the definition of a rural school for the purposes of the Schools Consultation Act?

Table 3.6: Distribution of Responses to Question 6(a)	% Strongly Agree	% Agree	% Neither	% Disagree	% Strongly Disagree	% Don't Know/ NA	Score	Total No.
Organisations								
Parent/ carers' organisation	12	51	8	15	7	7	0.51	**74**
School	0	50	17	17	7	10	0.22	**30**
Community Council	5	59	9	14	5	9	0.50	**22**
Other (organisation)	12	59	0	24	0	6	0.63	**17**
Local authority	0	0	5	75	20	0	-1.15	**20**
Professional body	14	14	29	29	14	0	-0.14	**7**
Other educational establishment	0	75	13	13	0	0	0.63	**8**
Pupils' group	0	100	0	0	0	0	1.00	**1**
Individuals								
Parent/ carer	8	44	30	7	7	5	0.43	**121**
Other (individual)	17	34	17	14	10	7	0.37	**29**
Teacher	14	57	21	4	0	4	0.85	**28**
Other educational establishment staff	0	60	20	20	0	0	0.40	**5**
Elected representative	33	67	0	0	0	0	1.33	**3**
Non-teaching local authority employee	0	33	0	33	33	0	-0.67	**3**
Pupil	0	50	0	0	0	50	1.00	**2**
Total no. of respondents/score	**33**	**170**	**65**	**56**	**25**	**21**	0.37	**370**
% of respondents to question	9	46	18	15	7	6		

3.73   There was overall agreement with the definition of a rural school for the Schools Consultation Act. Across respondent groups, 55 per cent either agreed (170 – 46%) or strongly agreed (33 – 9%). There was a positive score for the overall response of 0.37. However, 22 per cent either disagreed (56 – 15%) or strongly disagreed (25 – 7%).

3.74   There was strongest support for the definition among elected representatives (with all stating 'agree' or 'strongly agree') and strong support from pupils and pupils' groups (although respondent numbers were low for these groups).

3.75   The most negative response came from local authorities with 95 per cent stating 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree'. There were also negative responses from non-teaching local authority employees and professional bodies.

Question 6 (b): Please explain your answer or suggest any alternative?

3.76   There were relatively limited comments from those agreeing with the definition used. Typical comments were that the definition is "appropriate", "logical" and "reasonable". Some of those that agreed added caveats, primarily around the issue of remoteness. Several respondents felt that schools that are particularly isolated (with, for example, issues around wider service provision) would merit separate consideration.

> "Rural schools which have shorter travel times to larger settlements are likely to be able to allow their pupils to access some of the services provided in those larger settlements (e.g. work placements, college courses) while those schools which are more remote will need to be able to provide much of this input themselves. This will of course have implications for staffing in smaller schools, as teachers who are providing this input will not be able to teach other courses at the same time."
>
> (Private individual, parent/ carer)

3.77   There were a range of reasons why consultees disagreed with the definition. Several respondents felt that the definitions lack clarity. These respondents felt that the definitions are too broad with significant differences between the three rural categories. Consultees, including parent/ carer organisations, felt that there should be more detailed consideration of the particular circumstances of the school.

> "We feel there needs to be some kind of instrument or measure to determine the fragility of a community and the corresponding importance of the school for the community. On our island nearly all the schools were classified as very remote and rural but they are very different. Perhaps a sub category within very remote rural groups could reflect this."
>
> (Carloway Parent Council)

3.78   Many respondents felt that the current definition creates anomalies due to the focus on settlement populations. While some schools may face the same challenges as rural schools they are outside the definition due to proximity to a large settlement. Equally, some are classified as 'rural' but perceived as having fewer issues in terms of isolation. Many of these respondents felt that distance travelled to school by children is a more important indicator than distance to population centres.

> "The parameters are too broad. By the existing definition a two pupil school could be less 'rural' than a school of 40 pupils just because it is nearer a centre of population. Possibly reduce the school settlement size. Most of the schools in Sutherland are in settlements of considerably less than 3000 people. Could there also be some consideration of the distance travelled by children to school?"
>
> (Melvich Parent Council)

3.79   Respondents also felt that in terms of remoteness the comment on "different lengths of 'drive time'" was unclear. A number of respondents from across stakeholder categories argued that proximity to other local rural schools should be considered in the definition.

3.80   The Association of Directors of Education Scotland (ADES) and a number of local authorities disagreed with the existing definition and put forward factors that should be taken into account. These included:
- the physical infrastructure present in a geographic location;
- the local amenities which are present in a geographic location;
- location of and access to nearby settlements;
- population numbers in the community and its nearby settlements; and
- the distance from the nearest school.

3.81   ADES also said that there has been no justification for the decision to use settlements below 3,000 as a criteria – and argued that "the current definitions urgently require to be reviewed".

Question 7 (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?

Table 3.7: Distribution of Responses to Question 7(a)	% Strongly Agree	% Agree	% Neither	% Disagree	% Strongly Disagree	% Don't Know/ NA	Score	Total No.
Organisations								
Parent/ carers' organisation	37	47	4	10	1	1	1.10	**77**
School	30	60	7	3	0	0	1.17	**30**
Community Council	45	41	5	5	5	0	1.18	**22**
Other (organisation)	35	35	18	12	0	0	0.85	**21**
Local authority	20	55	15	10	0	0	0.94	**22**
Professional body	29	43	14	14	0	0	0.86	**9**
Other educational establishment	63	25	13	0	0	0	1.50	**9**
Pupils' group	0	0	100	0	0	0	0.00	**1**
Individuals								
Parent/ carer	46	32	11	9	2	0	1.13	**128**
Other (individual)	64	18	7	4	7	0	1.29	**32**
Teacher	39	25	21	14	0	0	0.89	**28**
Other educational establishment staff	20	80	0	0	0	0	1.20	**5**
Elected representative	33	67	0	0	0	0	1.33	**4**
Non-teaching local authority employee	33	0	0	33	33	0	-0.33	**3**
Pupil	100	0	0	0	0	0	2.00	**2**
Total no. of respondents/score	**155**	**141**	**37**	**31**	**7**	**1**	**1.09**	**372**
% of respondents to question	42	38	10	8	2	0		

3.82 There was strong agreement that educational benefits should be the primary consideration in making a significant change to a school. Eighty per cent of respondents gave a positive answer with 38 per cent (141) saying that they agreed and 42 per cent (155) saying that they strongly agreed. Just 10 per cent disagreed (31 – 8%) or strongly disagreed (7 – 2%).

3.83 All respondent groups agreed with the statement with the exception of non-teaching local authority employees and the pupils' group (who gave a neutral response). There was strongest support among pupils and other education establishments but several respondent groups produced a score higher than '1'.

Question 7 (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?

3.84   Among those supporting the view that educational benefits should be the primary consideration, typical comments were that the education of young people should come first, that this is *"obvious"* and the key purpose of school provision. Many of those agreeing felt that educational issues rather than costs should guide decisions on the provision of rural schools.

> "Putting children and their needs at the heart of the policy is essential. It sometimes seems that children can get lost in the planning processes."
>
> (Kilmaronock Community Council)

3.85   COSLA felt that educational benefits should be central to decisions on school closure and should not be overshadowed by wider concerns about impact on the local community.

> "COSLA believes that educational benefit, attainment and achievement should be at the heart of decision making on school closures. For many campaigners against rural closures, it would appear that this has been lost sight of and closures have become more about the perceived loss to the community rather than a loss to the child in terms of educational opportunity."
>
> (COSLA)

3.86   Some respondents, notably local authorities, said that the educational benefits statement (EBS) is helpful in providing clarity and explaining the reasons for school closures.

> "...the educational benefits statement is a very positive aspect of the process involved in a proposal to close a school as it enables the Local Authority to outline clearly for all stake holders the educational advantages arising out of the proposal."
>
> (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar)

3.87   Many respondents that agreed that educational benefits should be the primary consideration noted that other important functions of the school should not be overlooked. These included the importance of the school to the community as a 'focal point' and a resource for non-educational uses. Some local authorities noted that financial considerations also have to be considered and that this should be done within the context of Best Value.

> "It is important that the educational benefits should be at the heart of any consultation. However, there are other factors such as Best Value i.e. finance and recruitment, efficient use of resources which also need to be considered."
>
> (South Ayrshire Council)

3.88   Several respondents, notably parents/ carers felt that in addition to traditional educational measures the wellbeing of children needs to be considered.

> "Educational benefits should include not only academic issues, but the wider well-being. Growing up in cohesive communities, based on rural schools, offers huge benefits to children."
>
> (Private individual, parent/ carer)

3.89   Perth and Kinross Council supported the approach on educational benefits but added that there needs to be scope for proposals to be taken forward on the basis that there is no educational *detriment*.

> "The educational benefit to pupils should always be paramount... However, it needs to be recognised that, in many cases, the situation will arise where there is no educational detriment and it should be possible for Local Authorities to progress proposals where this is the case."
>
> (Perth and Kinross Council)

3.90   There were a range of comments on the educational benefits statement. A number of organisations and private individuals raised concerns that local authorities use the statement to justify closure proposal rather than presenting an objective case.

> "Most of our concerns are not about the framework for the Educational Benefit statement as laid down in the Act or the Statutory Guidance, but about how it has been used in closure proposals. While the legislation (backed by the statutory guidance) is clear that the EBS should look at "likely effects" of a proposal, some Councils have chosen to use the title of Educational Benefit to justify only including claimed positive effects in proposal papers, rather than a balanced view."
>
> (Scottish Rural Schools Network)

3.91   Several respondents raised concerns that inaccurate statements have been used by councils and argued that there needs to be measures to ensure statements are based on robust evidence.

> "There needs to be clear guidance given to local authorities as to what arguments they are allowed to deploy in terms of educational benefit and what evidence they need to provide to support these arguments. Vague and un-quantified statements should be strongly discouraged. As an example, recent closure proposals have frequently made the argument that by closing a rural school the resulting savings can be distributed amongst the rest of the schools and thus benefitting everyone. Such arguments should only be allowed where such an effect is quantified and is actually significant."
>
> (Argyll Rural Schools Network)

3.92   Several consultees across respondent groups felt that there needs to be greater clarity on what constitutes an 'educational benefit' and some felt that the status of EBSs needs to be clearly set out in law.

> "The definition of "educational benefit" should be clarified and the legal requirement for there to be educational benefits should be clearly stated in law. Currently there is a question as to whether there does actually need to be any educational benefit or whether inclusion of an educational benefits statement alone is sufficient to fulfil this requirement of the Act."
>
> (Private individual, parent/ carer)

3.93   Among those disagreeing with the approach on EBSs, the most frequent comment was that the impact on the wider community needs to be considered in any proposal for closure.

3.94   Some felt that economic circumstances mean that financial benefits have to be given a priority particularly where educational standards can be maintained after closure – and where there are social benefits for the pupils.

Question 8 (a): Do you have any comments on how these factors have operated in practice?

3.95   There was some confusion over this question particularly among individual respondents. Many gave general comments on the consultation and decision-making process rather than focusing on how the three factors have operated in practice. And a number of respondents stated that they do not have sufficient experience of the process to make a detailed comment.

3.96   There was positive support for the three factors from ADES as well as North Ayrshire and Aberdeenshire Councils (although they felt that the process also needs to consider the impact of school closures in urban areas).

> "These factors have contributed effectively to the consultations which education authorities have undertaken since the introduction of the legislation. It is right and proper that the decision to propose a school closure is considered in the context of its impact on the community and the wider education authority area."
>
> (Association of Directors of Education in Scotland)

3.97   Overall, there was significant scepticism about the level of investigation of the three factors. This was the case across respondent groups but particularly among parents/ carers and parent/ carer organisations and others involved with schools that have been subject to consultation on closure. Many of these respondents felt that local authorities are looking to justify closure of schools and that these decisions are primarily financially driven rather than the three factors.

> "In my experience...there was very little consideration of any of these three factors. The proposals seemed to me to be driven by purely financial considerations, which themselves were based on some erroneous financial assumptions."
>
> (Private individual, MSP)

3.98   Some respondents felt that local authorities only pay 'lip service' to the three factors and use them as a 'checklist' to justify decisions. Respondents were particularly sceptical as to whether councils fully investigate alternatives to closure.

> "We have seen few examples where Councils have taken the requirements regarding viable alternatives to closure, or the impact on local the local community remotely seriously, despite the clear requirement to do so."
>
> (Scottish Rural Schools Network)

3.99   There was concern than local authorities do not sufficiently involve communities when considering the impact on communities and local circumstances.

> "These 3 factors were largely decided upon before consultation. Having been directly involved in the consultation process I felt (and I am not alone!) that there was no real consultation, the council paid lip-service to the procedure and left many rural communities reeling and damaged."
>
> (Private individual, parent/ carer)

3.100   Several respondents, including for example, COSLA and Argyll and Bute Council raised issues about clarity in terms of what is being asked for, and inconsistent approaches. Some felt that the use of the word 'viable' was unclear and subjective.

> "These additional factors have their part to play in examining the case for a school closure. However, while relevant, there seems to be some confusion and inconsistency in the way that the viability of alternatives to closure has been considered by Scottish Government. We are also uncertain whether in some instances these considerations have been placed above educational benefit statement in terms of importance by both campaigners and Scottish Government."
>
> (COSLA)

3.101 Some respondents were concerned that there seems to be no standard approach to investigating the factors or clear way to establish whether this work has been properly undertaken.

> "I am concerned that there appears to be no 'standard' metrics for showing that this has happened."
>
> (Private individual, resident and parent)

3.102 A number of respondents argued that the factors are not properly assessed as a result of poor planning or a lack of communication between council departments. One respondent felt that the wider issues resulting from a proposed closure should be considered through community planning.

> "If the education service is fully integrated within community planning then these issues should have been seen and discussed as part of community planning and a long-term approach agreed which really does incorporate all of those involved [...] The aim should be to move from a defensive situation of "saving our school" to a consideration of what is rational and fair in changing conditions. The present situation is too often an exercise in crisis management, short term budget pressures and not sound long-term strategic planning in partnership with communities."
>
> (Church of Scotland Standing Committee on Education)

3.103 The Association of Transport Co-ordinating Officers (ATCO) were positive that the consideration of transport and travel arrangements was working well.

> "The officers who have contributed to this response all report that in their Councils the liaison between the Education and Transport functions has worked well. There are examples of good practice in the departments working together to minimise the impact of change, including consideration of staggered school hours to reduce transport cost."
>
> (Association of Transport Co-ordinating Officers)

3.104 However, some respondents felt that investigation of transport issues has been inadequate, for example with authorities not properly considering the 'year round' travel issues. One respondent said that there is a lack of appropriate guidance on this topic.

> "Currently in Scotland there is no guidance or recommendations on what constitutes a safe or acceptable journey time to school. When considering the impact on travel and transport arrangements local authorities have only considered the cost of providing a bus without giving proper consideration to excessive journey times and their impact on educational attainment and welfare of the children."
>
> (Bunsgoil Gaidhlig Inbhir Nis Parent Council)

Question 8 (b): Do you have any suggestions for improvements or alternatives to the existing process?

3.105 Some of the respondents said that there is no need to amend the existing process but argued that the main issue is enforcement. These respondents felt that the approach is adequate so long as the process is followed by councils and the option of 'call in' by the Scottish Government is there as a safeguard.

> "We believe that the current requirements of the legislation would be adequate if implemented by those Councils currently failing to do so. It may be that still more explicit wording in the statutory guidance would help, but ultimately enforcement action through the call-in process is needed."
>
> (Scottish Rural Schools Network)

3.106 ADES and the local authorities that supported their answer agreed with the current process but added that "there should also be consideration of the impact of the continuation of the status quo in such processes".

3.107 Some respondents called for greater monitoring of the process and oversight from an organisation that is impartial on the proposed school closures.

> "Proposals should not be allowed to move to formal consultation before the conditions laid down in the Act have been properly met and the decision on whether or not they have been met should be made by a body other than the local authority. This may be a role for Education Scotland."
>
> (Barcaldine Primary School Parents Council/ Barcaldine Community Association)

3.108 Across respondent groups, there were calls for clear and openly available guidance on the processes that councils should follow ahead of the proposal and consultation phase.

> "One helpful improvement would be to have a mutually agreed document which details the processes that should be followed, prior to proposal and consultation. It might be helpful if there were also some guidance given as to what would be suitable methods and approaches for measuring impacts on the communities, travel and transport and also ways of demonstrating viable alternatives."
>
> (Private individual, resident)

3.109 Some respondents felt that the process would be improved with greater emphasis on economic impact studies in the preparation of proposals.

> Socio-economic studies should be done to check on how vulnerable the area threatened by school closure is before going into consultation and not only being undertaken when consultation process is almost over."
>
> (Private individual, parent/ carer)

3.110 There was a strong view, particularly among parents/ carers and parent/ carer organisations that the process needs to be more open and transparent. This included more openness on the evidence gathered when developing a proposal. Many respondents called for more engagement with the community when preparing proposals.

> "The process must be strengthened to ensure that Councils actually consult, it must not be a one sided 'tick box' exercise but a true two way dialogue to firstly look at alternatives before automatically accepting closure must be the best and only option worth considering."
>
> (Private individual, parent/ carer)

3.111 Some respondents argued that the process should be taken out of the hands of education authorities and handled (or overseen) by an 'impartial' body.

3.112 Other consultees felt that there needs to be more emphasis on preventative action to support schools before closure is threatened, for example taking action when school rolls are seen to be dropping.

> "I would very much like to see the Education Authority [...] actually take an interest when rural school rolls fall drastically and not wait for parents to bleed children away from a school because the authority has not addressed problems which have been brought to their attention within the school community."
>
> (Private individual, teacher)

3.113 Some respondents called for more standardisation and national oversight for the process. This included support for standard data gathering on schools and the development of national standards for acceptable travel times to school and transport arrangements. One organisation called for the adoption of guidance available for England on school travel.

3.114 Argyll Rural Schools Network argued that there should be a national plan for rural education and greater consideration of what best practice is in terms of rural education provision.

> A major part of the problem over rural school closures is that there has been no attempt to define what the educational provision in rural areas should be [...] The Scottish Government should conduct research to determine the requirement for rural school provision based on a combination of population density and size of an area so that a National plan for rural education can be developed that in turn leads to a statutory requirement for provision."
>
> (Argyll Rural Schools Network)

Question 9 (a): (Do you have any comments on how councils) make decisions about the school estate, including assessments of condition or suitability and how investment in school building is prioritised?

3.115 A frequent comment among respondents, and particularly parent/ carers, was that they did not know enough about the decision making process in relation to the school estate. And there were a range of general comments on schools investment that did not focus on how councils make decisions.

3.116 Most of the local authorities that responded to the question outlined their approach on decisions about the school estate and how they follow the criteria established by the Scottish Government. In explaining their approach, several councils commented that financial constraints mean that there may be a need to reduce establishments to improve quality elsewhere in the school estate.

> "Investment is prioritised on the condition and suitability scoring and will include the achievement of best value for the taxpayer. Investment in the school estate has included a range of improvements to rural schools and their communities, but it is impossible for all schools to benefit due to financial restrictions. This being the case, and where circumstances justify such approaches, it is sometimes necessary to reduce the number of establishments, but increase the quality of those that will remain."
>
> (North Ayrshire Council)

3.117 COSLA stated that prioritisation should be led by local authorities and Argyll and Bute Council felt that it is important for councils to have the authority to take strategic decisions on investment.

> "The majority of councils already follow asset management principles regarding school estate. It should be for councils to prioritise investment on school buildings based on corporate priorities and available resource."
>
> (COSLA)

3.118 Many parents/ carers, parents/ carers organisations and others felt that there needs to be greater openness.   This was principally due to concerns that assessment of school buildings could be used to justify school closure decisions. Some respondents were also concerned about the accuracy of information that has been produced in the past.

> "...information does not always seem to be accurate and small communities have had to challenge the council and in some cases actually provide the information that the council should have in order to be able to make these decisions."
>
> (Private individual, parent/ carer)

3.119 Many parents/ carers felt that the assessment process should involve more consultation with parents and community members.

> "Decisions should be evaluated transparently and in consultation with parents and the community."
>
> (Private individual, parent/ carer)

3.120 There was a feeling from a number of respondents that the assessment process is too closed and that inspections of buildings do not happen frequently enough. Some respondents argued that there should be more dialogue with head teachers in relation to the school estate. Several respondents felt that assessment should be conducted by independent auditors.

3.121 There was some concern about inconsistent practice in this area and the Scottish Rural Schools Network said that Government guidance is not being consistently followed by all councils.

Question 9 (b): (Do you have any comments on how councils) assess the capacity of primary and secondary schools?

3.122 The most frequent comment in response to this question was that there needs to be a more standardised approach across Scotland. Respondents from different stakeholder groups including local authorities, called for an agreed national standard on assessing capacity.

> "...it would be preferable if there was an agreed national standard on how this should be done. Because there is no standard approach, councils will continue to measure school capacity in different ways and occupancy levels can never be reliably compared between different Councils."
>
> (Falkirk Council)

3.123 However, some respondents were concerned about over-prescription and called for national best practice guidance to support the process.

> "Best practice guidance – drawing on work currently undertaken by ADES – would be helpful to achieve better and more consistent approaches to school estate planning across all local authorities. Schools/ local authorities are becoming more innovative in how the school curriculum is delivered. Moreover, they are dealing with the impact of class size regulations in different ways. An overly prescriptive approach would not be helpful."
>
> (Angus Council)

3.124 There was a strong sense that the process for calculating capacity needs to be reviewed to take account of modern practice in education. Some respondents said that the capacity calculation dates back to 1968 and needs updated in the context of the Curriculum for Excellence and current teaching methods.

> "Out-of-date figures are used for pupil capacity, not taking into account current pedagogical ideas – e.g. a classroom designed for a composite P1-P7 class should have more space per pupil than one of a single age class. Younger pupils need room to play actively without disturbing the concentration of older pupils. Percentage occupancy is not well thought-out or up-to-date."
>
> (Skerries Community Council)

3.125 SOLACE noted recent changes to classroom regulations and called for an agreed approach on capacity modelling.

> "The recent modifications to the 1975 Regulations to take account of changes in room layout, for example, to accommodate the need for ducting and cabling required by increasing demands for IT usage in classrooms, have been welcomed. An agreed approach to capacity modelling would also be welcomed."
>
> (SOLACE)

3.126 Some respondents including parents/ carers and teachers said that the approach to assessing capacity should not be short term in focus and should recognise that school rolls fluctuate over time.

3.127 Some parents/ carers felt that, in examples where there have been school closures, there has been inadequate assessment of wider capacity issues across schools in the area. These respondents were concerned that poor management of overcrowding issues at one school could result in closures at other schools.

3.128 Some respondents said that an assessment of capacity should consider wider issues in the area such as planned housing development and some argued that other potential uses of the school building need to be considered.

Question 9 (c): (Do you have any comments on how councils) manage and measure local information such as projected population numbers and pupil rolls?

3.129 Across the respondent groups there was general recognition that projection of population and school rolls can be a challenging task and "not an exact science". Several respondents noted that one family moving in or out of a small rural community could have a significant impact for the school roll.

3.130 Local authorities were generally confident that they are using robust processes and most emphasised that they are using a range of different information.

> "Education authorities take consideration of a number of factors when projecting pupil roll numbers, including:
> - Housing developments in the school's catchment area
> - Child births and birth rate trends
> - Placing requests into and out of the school and the trends of such pupil movement
> - Migration into and out of the school and the trends of this data
>
> Although not an exact science, it is believed that accounting for such factors results in the best projection data. The ADES Resource network is currently reviewing approaches to roll projections."
>
> (Association of Directors of Education in Scotland)

3.131 Among parents/ carers, parent/ carer organisations and others there was a mixed response on how well the assessment of future pupil rolls is undertaken. While some felt the projections are accurate others were concerned that projections do not take a sufficiently long-term view. Some parents/ carers felt that local projections are not taken sufficiently seriously in decision-making about rural schools.

> "There has been an overly mechanistic approach by the Council to applying cuts in direct relation to school rolls year on year without reference to longer term population projections. This has been incredibly short sighted given the upheaval of managing staff cuts and difficulties in recruiting staff."
>
> (Private individual, resident and parent)

3.132 Some respondents including local authorities said that there are inconsistent approaches taken by councils and that guidance and sharing of good practice would be beneficial.

> "..the methods used to calculate roll projections should be relatively similar across all local authorities and benefits may be gained from sharing good practice. This will be particularly relevant in smaller schools (which are more likely to be rural schools) where new housing, pupils per house, parental choice and school capacity will have a greater impact on school rolls...This should encourage regularly updated projections, at least annually."
>
> (Fife Council)

3.133 COSLA felt that councils could be encouraged to make more use of available local data.

3.134 Scottish Borders Council felt that there is too much reliance on planned housing development when making projections and that there should be more focus on other trends.

3.135 Some respondents said that there should be joint working at the local level with pre-school providers and organisations such as mother and toddler groups, to get a better picture of parental expectations and more accurate projected rolls.

Question 10 (a): How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the statutory consultation process currently applied by councils under the Schools Consultation Act?

Table 3.8: Distribution of Responses to Question 10(a)	% Very Satisfied	% Satisfied	% Neither	% Dissatisfied	% Very dissatisfied	% Don't Know/ NA	Score	Total No.
Organisations								
Parent/ carers' organisation	1	18	15	18	23	26	0.58	**74**
School	3	40	27	13	0	17	0.40	**30**
Community Council	0	18	45	0	23	14	0.32	**22**
Other (organisation)	20	20	27	7	13	13	0.31	**15**
Local authority	30	10	5	50	0	5	0.21	**20**
Professional body	40	0	0	60	0	0	0.20	**5**
Other educational establishment	0	38	38	25	0	13	0.00	**8**
Pupils' group	0	0	0	100	0	0	1.00	**1**
Individuals								
Parent/ carer	1	16	20	17	32	14	0.74	**122**
Other (individual)	4	11	32	18	25	11	0.56	**28**
Teacher	4	25	32	21	7	11	0.04	**28**
Other educational establishment staff	0	40	60	0	0	0	0.40	**5**
Elected representative	0	33	0	0	67	0	1.00	**3**
Non-teaching local authority employee	0	67	0	33	0	0	0.33	**3**
Pupil	0	0	100	0	0	0	0.00	**1**
Total no. of respondents/score	**16**	**70**	**84**	**67**	**74**	**54**	**0.36**	**365**
% of respondents to question	4	19	23	18	20	15		

3.136 Ninety-three per cent (365) of consultation respondents answered question 10(a) which asked to what extent they were satisfied with the statutory consultation process currently applied by councils under the Schools Consultation Act.

3.137 Of those who did respond, 38 per cent (141) were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. In comparison, twenty-three per cent (86) were satisfied or very satisfied. A further 23 per cent (84) said neither, and 15 per cent (54) said they didn't know.

3.138 There were differences between respondent groups. Parent/ carers organisations, community councils, individual parents or carers, other individuals and elected members were most likely to be dissatisfied. Schools, other organisations, local authorities, professional bodies and other educational staff were mostly positive about the statutory consultation process. Teachers were broadly neutral.

Question 10 (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

3.139 Ninety-two per cent of consultation respondents (360) answered question 10(b) which asked to what extent they were satisfied with the informal consultation councils sometimes undertake in advance of the statutory consultation under the Schools Consultation Act. Of those who did respond 42 per cent (151) were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. In comparison, 18 per cent (63) were satisfied or very satisfied. A further 23 per cent (82) said neither, and 18 per cent (64) said they didn't know.

Table 3.9: Distribution of Responses to Question 10(b)	% Very Satisfied	% Satisfied	% Neither	% Dissatisfied	% Very dissatisfied	% Don't Know/ NA	Score	Total No.
Organisations								
Parent/ carers' organisation	0	10	11	19	32	28	1.02	**72**
School	3	34	31	17	0	14	0.28	**29**
Community Council	0	5	38	10	24	24	0.69	**21**
Other (organisation)	0	33	27	20	7	13	0.00	**15**
Local authority	20	45	20	10	0	5	0.79	**20**
Professional body	33	17	17	17	0	17	0.80	**6**
Other educational establishment	30	13	50	13	13	13	0.29	**8**
Pupils' group	0	0	0	0	0	100	N/A	**1**
Individuals								
Parent/ carer	0	8	18	19	36	19	1.01	**121**
Other (individual)	4	4	25	25	29	14	0.83	**28**
Teacher	4	19	41	15	15	7	0.20	**27**
Other educational establishment staff	0	40	40	20	0	0	0.20	**5**
Elected representative	0	33	0	0	67	0	1.00	**3**
Non-teaching local authority employee	0	33	33	33	0	0	0.00	**3**
Pupil	0	0	100	0	0	0	0.00	**1**
Total no. of respondents	**9**	**54**	**82**	**64**	**87**	**64**	**0.56**	360
% of respondents to question	3	15	23	18	24	18		

3.140 There were different views between respondent groups. As with question 10(a), parent/ carers organisations, community councils, individual parents or carers, other individuals, and elected members were most dissatisfied. Schools, other organisations, local authorities, professional bodies, other educational staff were either positive about the statutory consultation process or mostly neutral. Teachers were slightly more negative than in response to question 10(a).

Question 10 (c): Do you have any comments on consultation under the Schools Consultation Act or how it could be improved?

3.141 Just over half of consultation respondents (54% - 212) answered question 10(c) which asked how consultation under the Schools Consultation Act could be improved. Many respondents – particularly individuals, and organisations representing parents and carers or community interests – outlined their own recent experience of the process. However, there were some common themes in the comments.

3.142 Some respondents were positive about their recent experience of consultation, saying they felt engaged.

> "Our local authority has actively sought our input and strongly recommended we respond, so we have taken the time to do that."
> (Andover Primary School Parent Council)

3.143 However, most individuals, parents and carers groups and community councils who commented were critical of their experiences or suggested improvements. In particular, many felt that decisions have often already been taken by the council, and that their views would not be listened to. A significant number felt they were not being provided with all the information they needed, or that the process was not transparent.

> "Councils do go through the procedures but there is a kind of "we know best" attitude in some cases and the continuing assurances that "it is not about saving money but what is best educationally" do not always ring true."
> (Private individual, former pupil of a rural school)

3.144 A number of respondents felt that engagement methods could be improved. In particular, they were concerned that some methods did not gather representative views; methods were not accessible for everyone; and that survey questions were sometimes off-putting or biased. A number also felt that more needs to be done to engage teachers and young people earlier and more effectively.

3.145 A number of respondents were very critical of the evidence base presented during consultations and used to justify decisions. It was felt that this information was difficult to challenge - even when they felt it was inaccurate. Some questioned the skills and understanding of council staff involved in consultation and decision making about the education benefits.

3.146 A number of respondents called for:
- greater transparency – both in terms of the decision making process and the evidence which informs it;
- improved methods to engage people – particularly young people and teachers;
- a willingness to listen and take views on board; and
- better information and support for parents and communities to engage in the consultation process.

3.147 A number of respondents felt that there should be greater independent adjudication in the process, particularly in relation to assessing the educational benefits.

3.148 Consumer Focus Scotland suggested that local authorities should support communities access external advice.

3.149 Some common issues were raised by local authorities and other organisations. In particular, a number of local authorities were critical of the long timescales involved in the consultation process. A number of other respondents were also concerned about this, as they felt it negatively impacted on pupils and families.

> "From this Council's perspective the principal concern is the length of time, which can be taken between the start of a consultation process to a final decision being taken."
>
> (East Ayrshire Council)

3.150 However, Consumer Focus Scotland called for longer consultation periods. There was also concern that the Scottish Government does not have clear timescales for its call-in process.

3.151 Several local authorities highlighted the significant resources required to undertake formal consultations on a range of issues. There was particular concern that extensive consultation was needed in relation to relatively small changes – such as changes to the catchment area or replacing older schools.

> "Currently there is one process for 'all relevant proposals'. There would be merit in examining a lighter touch statutory consultation process for issues such as catchment changes and variation in the nature of schools which are clearly supported by communities."
>
> (The Highland Council)

3.152 Local authorities called for greater definition of relevant consultees; the criteria for 'call-ins'; and the specific instances in which consultation is required. Some also called for greater account of the practical challenges involved in the process.

3.153 Some respondents recognised the difficulties in balancing views, and finding consensus.

"The difficulty is the tension between the very different starting points of those involved in any school closure process."
(Church of Scotland Standing Committee on Education)

3.154 Some, while supporting the Act, felt that it was not always being followed by all local authorities.

"We have seen a very wide range of quality in the closure proposals made under the Act . . . We believe that the poor practices that we have seen come not from any failing in the procedures laid down in the Act or the statutory guidance, but from failures to carry out consultations in either the spirit or the letter of the Act."
(Scottish Rural Schools Network)

Question 11 (a): To what extent do you agree or disagree with the role of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education under the Schools Consultation Act?

Table 3.10: Distribution of Responses to Question 11(a)	% Strongly Agree	% Agree	% Neither	% Disagree	% Strongly Disagree	% Don't Know/ NA	Score	Total No.
Organisations								
Parent/ carers' organisation	22	46	7	3	6	7	0.93	**72**
School	17	77	3	0	3	0	1.03	**30**
Community Council	23	50	23	0	0	5	1.00	**22**
Other (organisation)	33	20	13	20	7	7	0.57	**15**
Local authority	26	53	11	11	0	0	0.95	**19**
Professional body	14	29	29	0	14	14	0.33	**7**
Other educational establishment	22	67	67	0	0	0	1.11	**9**
Pupils' group	0	100	100	0	0	0	1.00	**1**
Individuals								
Parent/ carer	25	40	40	4	8	8	0.73	**118**
Other (individual)	10	48	48	0	3	17	0.75	**29**
Teacher	25	43	43	21	0	0	0.71	**28**
Other educational establishment staff	20	40	40	0	0	0	0.80	**5**
Elected representative	33	67	67	0	0	0	1.33	**3**
Non-teaching local authority employee	0	67	67	33	0	0	0.33	**3**
Pupil	0	50	50	0	0	0	0.50	**2**
Total no. of respondents/score	**80**	**176**	**48**	**19**	**18**	**22**	**0.82**	**363**
% of respondents to question	22	48	13	5	5	6		

3.155 Ninety-two per cent of consultation respondents (363) answered question 11(a) which asked the extent to which they agreed with the role of HMIE under the Schools Education Act.

3.156 Most of those who answered (70% - 256) either strongly agreed or agreed. A further 10 per cent disagreed or strongly disagreed, 13 per cent said neither and six per cent said they didn't know. Of all the respondent groups, professional bodies and other individuals were most likely to disagree or strongly disagree – although both groups were positive about the role overall.

Question 11 (b): Do you have any comments on how this requirement has operated in practice or how it could be improved?

3.157 Half of consultation respondents (52% - 206) answered question 11(b) which asked for further comments about the way the requirement operates in practice or how it could be improved. Compared with some other questions, there were relatively low numbers of substantive comments, with a significant number of respondents saying they didn't have direct experience or demonstrating a lack of understanding of HMIE's role.

3.158 A range of respondents, including parents/ carers and associated organisations, teachers, schools, and local authorities were positive about the role of HMIE. These respondents valued their independence, expertise and their focus on educational benefits. Many respondents reflected both on their role under the Act and their wider role in education.

> "HMIE are able as an outside agency, to give an informed view of the local school standards and grading."
> (Broughton Primary School Parent Council)

3.159 Some reflected that, in their experience, HMIE had been well involved in the consultation process, and developed a good overview of the educational aspects of proposals.

3.160 However, there were some concerns about how their role operated in practice. The main concern was that HMIE reports and assessments do not seem to influence decision making in the way they believed they should.

> "HMIE can judge a school to be outstanding. And then this school can be closed. So it doesn't seem like HMIE's role is given any status."
> (Private individual, parent/ carer)

3.161 Some suggested that HMIE should have a more powerful and influential role in decisions about school closures, and in developing educational benefit studies. It was suggested they might be responsible for wider engagement with communities parents and pupils, and provide an independent assessment of issues which are wider than educational benefits.

> "More weight should be given to the role of HMIE in this process."
> (Northmaven Community Council)

3.162 Some respondents were critical of the role of HMIE. In particular, some highlighted their concern that HMIE was not powerful enough or was too heavily influenced by the local authority and the information they provide. Some were concerned that a great deal depends on the individual inspector – while experiences were sometimes positive, some felt that HMIE did not always consult widely enough, understand or take account of the school needs in a rural setting.

3.163 Local authorities were mostly supportive of the role of HMIE, suggesting their expert advice is valuable in the decision making process. There was some concern that HMIE sometimes comment on non-education aspects and are involved in more routine decisions – such as changes to catchment areas.

Question 12 (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?

Table 3.11 Distribution of Responses to Question 12 (a)	% Strongly Agree	% Agree	% Neither	% Disagree	% Strongly Disagree	% Don't Know/ NA	Score	Total No.
Organisations								
Parent/ carers' organisation	36	45	8	3	3	5	1.16	**74**
School	23	60	7	7	3	0	0.93	**30**
Community Council	36	41	9	9	0	5	1.10	**22**
Other (organisation)	31	25	19	13	6	6	0.67	**16**
Local authority	0	10	20	35	35	0	-0.95	**20**
Professional body	17	33	0	17	33	0	-0.17	**6**
Other educational establishment	22	44	11	11	11	0	0.56	**9**
Pupils' group	0	100	0	0	0	0	1.00	**1**
Individuals								
Parent/ carer	44	33	14	3	1	5	1.22	**122**
Other (individual)	45	17	17	10	3	7	0.96	**29**
Teacher	43	29	14	7	4	4	1.04	**28**
Other educational establishment staff	20	60	0	20	0	0	0.80	**5**
Elected representative	67	0	33	0	0	0	1.33	**3**
Non-teaching local authority employee	33	0	0	67	0	0	0.00	**3**
Pupil	0	100	0	0	0	0	1.00	**1**
Total no. of respondents/score	**133**	**130**	**45**	**29**	**17**	**15**	**0.94**	**369**
% of respondents to question	36	35	12	8	5	4		

3.164 Overall, there was strong agreement with the role of Scottish Ministers and their call-in powers under the Schools Consultation Act. Seventy-one per cent of respondents gave a positive answer with 35 per cent (130) saying that they agreed and 36 per cent (133) saying that they strongly agreed. Thirteen per cent gave a negative response with eight per cent (29) disagreeing and five per cent (17) strongly disagreeing.

3.165 The level of agreement was strongest among parents/ carers, parent/ carer organisations, elected representatives and community councils each with average scores ranging from 1.10 to 1.33.

3.166 The most negative response came from local authorities with 70 per cent stating they disagreed or strongly disagreed, and an average score of -0.95. The views of professional bodies were more diverse and produced a moderately negative score of -0.17.

Question 12 (b): Do you have any comments on the call-in process or how it could be improved?

3.167 A frequent comment among those supporting the call-in process was that it represents an "essential safeguard" on the assessment of closure proposals. Several respondents felt that it is important to have a body other than education authorities providing oversight and scrutiny.

> "This provides a checks and balances approach to this process and ensures that Councils follow the appropriate procedures correctly. If Councils follow the proper course of action then there should be no fear about a call-in power."
>
> (Moray Council SNP Group)

3.168 Some parents/ carers said that they would like to see involvement of Scottish Ministers in the process as a matter of course. And some argued that the call-in process should be used for education authority decisions other than proposed school closures.

3.169 There was more concern about the call-in process from local authorities, professional bodies and other respondents. The main concern, particularly among local authorities, was that the process may undermine local decision making.

> "The Education (Scotland) Act 1980 places a statutory responsibility on local authorities to provide adequate and efficient education for the young people in its area. This Council believes that the call in process removes an element of local accountability for an education authority to determine how to deliver this responsibility."
>
> (East Ayrshire Council)

3.170 There was particular concern that the Scottish Government may be influenced by political considerations rather than focusing purely on whether the council has undertaken due process. Some respondents suggested that the call-in process should involve an independent non-political body. There were also concerns that the Scottish Government is less able to base decisions on local knowledge and understanding.

> "While the 'call-in' procedure gives a mechanism by which a closure consultation can be reviewed if it appears to be flawed, this 'call-in' could be viewed as too political and thus review of a consultation by an independent panel which in turn reports to Scottish Ministers would remove any perceived political bias."
>
> (Private individual, parent/ carer)

3.171 Several respondents said that there should be more openness in the call-in process. Respondents felt that there should be detailed information in the public domain explaining why a decision was called-in by the Scottish Government and clear explanation of their ultimate decision on closure.

3.172 A number of respondents, and particularly parents/ carers, were concerned about the timescales involved in the call-in process. Many felt that the call-in process occurred too late and some noted that pupils may have already been relocated when the process starts.

Question 13 (a): Are you satisfied with the guidance to local authorities under the Schools Consultation Act?

Table 3.12: Distribution of Responses to Question 13 (a)	% Very Satisfied	% Satisfied	% Neither	% Dissatisfied	% Very Dissatisfied	% Don't Know/ NA	Score	Total No.
Organisations								
Parent/ carers' organisation	1	15	19	11	1	52	0.09	**73**
School	3	37	30	0	0	30	0.62	**30**
Community Council	0	27	23	14	0	36	0.21	**22**
Other (organisation)	14	7	43	14	0	21	0.27	**14**
Local authority	15	55	20	10	0	0	0.75	**20**
Professional body	17	33	50	0	0	0	0.67	**6**
Other educational establishment	0	38	50	0	0	13	0.43	**8**
Pupils' group	0	100	0	0	0	0	1.00	**1**
Individuals								
Parent/ carer	3	15	32	12	4	33	0.03	**117**
Other (individual)	11	11	32	7	7	32	0.16	**28**
Teacher	7	33	30	0	0	30	0.68	**27**
Other educational establishment staff	0	0	60	0	0	40	0.00	**5**
Elected representative	0	33	33	0	33	0	-0.33	**3**
Non-teaching local authority employee	0	33	0	33	0	33	0.00	**3**
Pupil	0	0	100	0	0	0	0.00	**1**
Total no. of respondents/score	**17**	**78**	**104**	**32**	**9**	**118**	**0.26**	**358**
% of respondents to question	5	22	29	9	3	33		

3.173 There was a limited response to this question that produced a balanced outcome in terms of the level of satisfaction with the guidance. A third of those responding to the question (118 – 33%) answered 'don't know/ not applicable'. A similarly large number answered 'neither satisfied nor dissatisfied' (104 – 29%).

3.174 Of the remainder, more respondents were satisfied than dissatisfied. Twenty-seven per cent of question respondents gave a positive answer with 22 per cent (78) saying that they were satisfied and five per cent (17) saying that they were very satisfied. Twelve per cent gave a negative response with nine per cent (32) saying that they were dissatisfied and three per cent (9) saying that they were very dissatisfied.

Question 13 (b): Please explain your answer, and provide any comments on how the support and implementation of the Schools Consultation Act could be improved?

3.175   A very frequent answer to this question, particularly among parents/ carers and parent/ carer organisations, was that the respondent did not have sufficient knowledge of the guidance to comment. Some respondents, including parents/ carers as well as school staff, expressed concern that information on the consultation process is not made available to them.

3.176   Many of the local authorities were positive about the guidance typically stating that it is clear and reflective of the legislation.

3.177   However, across respondent groups there were concerns that the guidance is open to interpretation and there was scepticism (particularly among parents/ carers) that the guidance was not always being followed.

3.178   Several respondents called for a review of the guidance to make it clearer and less open to interpretation. Some respondents felt that the guidance should be clearer on how education authorities consider alternatives to school closure, and the educational benefits statement.

3.179   Some respondents felt that there is a need for better monitoring of the consultation process and greater accountability rather than any amendment to the guidance.

3.180   Falkirk Council suggested that a 'Schools Consultation Toolkit' should be produced with checklists, templates and good practice examples. South Ayrshire Council said that there needs to be additional guidance included which covers denominational schools and links to the relevant legislation. They said that at present there are two sets of guidance which are not related.

Question 14: 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?

3.181   A number of local authorities highlighted the tension between their obligation to deliver Best Value and the Schools Consultation Act.   They felt that the former placed an onus on them to develop asset management strategies to increase the efficiency of the school estate. Conversely, the latter presumed against school closures on the grounds of costs or efficiencies. Angus Council proposed that a revised Schools Consultation Act should make direct reference to a local authority's legal duty to secure Best Value.

> "Best value supports the equality of opportunity, many small schools cannot achieve this. The Council is required to deliver best value across all of its services, including education. This is not always consistent with retaining all rural schools regardless of falling pupil rolls, education benefits and equality of provision."
>
> (Shetland Islands Council)

3.182 Others such as the Education Institute of Scotland felt that it was difficult to apply Best Value principles in relation to the provision of rural education. However, they also recognised that there could be consequential pressures on other parts of a local authority's education provision.

3.183 COSLA and Scottish Borders Council suggested that Best Value duties can best be discharged by taking a holistic view of the long term impacts of decisions on the whole of the public sector. They felt that the focus should be on the impact and implications of changes in education in a remote school location on local communities and pupils. However, they also argued that the recent moratorium on school closures in rural areas may have overlooked over-provision within schools in larger rural towns, preventing local authorities from delivering their duties in terms of Best Value by being able to plan the delivery of services in the most cost effective way.

3.184 The Highland Council suggested that current legislation provides an appropriate framework for developing a balanced strategic view.

3.185 SOLACE and South Ayrshire Council looked to the Commission to examine ways in which rural education can be delivered within a Best Value context. They highlighted the importance of genuine engagement with rural communities to explore the potential for rationalising assets and shared service delivery. They suggested that rural primary schools could become the focus for the delivery of a variety of services, and proposed that specific funding be made available to support a rationalisation process.

3.186 While recognising a tension between Best Value and the Schools Consultation Act, the Church of Scotland Standing Committee on Education felt that this could be constructive if discussed through Community Planning structures within a broader context of what communities' value rather than just school closures.

> "Best value needs to be a debate about things that are difficult to quantify yet have a financial consequence. There is rarely the space, the resources, or the vision to enable that difficult journey to be taken by communities."
>
> (Church of Scotland Standing Committee on Education)

3.187 A number of individuals questioned the definition of Best Value. Some suggested too much focus was placed on purely financial issues, rather than taking a broader view.

> "I feel Councils are using the Best Value argument to justify school closures by making reference to finance. Best value considerations are not restricted to cost as it also gives specific regard to quality, equal opportunity requirements, the achievement of sustainable development and places an emphasis on the customer, not just the bottom line."
>
> (Private individual – parent/ carer)

3.188 Other private individuals felt that educational issues and the needs of pupils should be the overriding issue for consideration.

Question 15: Do you have any other comments on the funding issues around delivering rural education?

3.189 There was a diverse range of comments from participants. However, a number of themes were apparent.

3.190 Some private individuals felt that greater resources should be allocated to education generally, whether in urban or rural locations.

3.191 Respondents across groupings drew attention to the current funding arrangements. Some felt that they lacked transparency, and were sometimes misunderstood or misinterpreted in debates over the future of schools. ADES and others suggested that part of the outcome of the work of the Commission should include recommendations on the clarity of the Scottish Government's Grant Aided Expenditure (GAE) indicators for rural schools.

3.192 The Highland Council and Argyll and Bute Council felt that the current funding regime was unhelpful for rural authorities. They argued that it did not take sufficient cognisance of the costs associated with operating a rural school. They suggested that there should be a tiered weighting to reflect pupil numbers in a small school, and a sliding scale rather than the current cut off. One private individual proposed that, as very remote rural schools catered for a tiny proportion of the overall school population, a new system of funding should be developed to cater for their needs rather than seeking to amend the existing one.

3.193 However, a very small number of private individuals in rural areas felt that the GAE provides a fair distribution of resources. And one head teacher/ parent in a rural school felt that decisive action is required to address the over capacity and reduce the number of schools.

3.194 A number of respondents suggested that the wider benefits of rural schools in terms of community sustainability needed to be factored into any funding considerations. They argued that the role of rural schools was different to those in populated areas, and this needed to be taken into account.

> "Funding small rural schools is more expensive than larger urban schools, but they must be considered in the wider context of supporting rural communities and the contribution that they make to rural life and the wider economy."
>
> (South Ayrshire Council)

3.195 SOLACE and others felt that, if rural schools were being retained for other than educational reasons, then this should be recognised in the provision of additional resources to local authorities.

3.196 Some private individuals and community organisations highlighted opportunities for reducing the running costs of rural schools by devolving budgets to head teachers. Some argued that an authority wide approach to procurement was inappropriate, and more should be done to make use of local skills and services. They suggested that this would lead to a reduction in the running costs of schools, lead to a reduction in the use of transport, and provide economic benefits to fragile communities.

3.197 A number of private individuals and community organisations felt that rural schools should be viewed as community assets, having multiple uses. They felt that there were opportunities for maximising the use of existing facilities, and recognising this in any funding arrangements.

3.198 Others highlighted the potential opportunities of using school estates as income generators. Specific examples were given by some organisations of the ways in which income could be generated. These ranged from generating renewable energy to utilising tourism opportunities during holiday periods. Some of these suggested that there was potential to give communities a much greater role in the running of schools, to ensure that these opportunities were harnessed.

> "...innovative ways have to be looked at to deliver rural education in remote communities, involving partnerships with communities and using the school estate as income generators."
>
> (Private individual, parent/ carer)

Question 16: Do you have any comments on the links between rural education and the preservation, support and development of rural communities?

3.199 The vast majority of private individuals and most community organisations responding identified rural schools as being at the heart of sustaining a vibrant community. Many identified a rural school as being central to rural life. They identified a range of economic and social benefits rural schools brought to the communities they served. Some asserted that, without a local school, fewer families would move into or remain in a community, leading to population decline and accentuating demographic imbalances. Others highlighted the link between rural education and local heritage and culture being preserved.

> "A rural school can also be a key factor for both population retention and encouraging inward migration to the community."
>
> (Moray Forum)

3.200 The Scottish Rural Schools Network reinforced this view arguing that research has demonstrated the links between rural sustainability and local, high quality education provision. They suggested that, as the links included community activities and facilities, the benefits went well beyond the families of pupils. The Network cited evidence from the Royal Society of Edinburgh's 2008 Inquiry into the Future of Scotland's Hills and Islands as demonstrating the availability of locally based schools to be a key issue in retaining and developing viable communities. They expressed concern that some local

authorities proposing school closures suggested there was no evidence of a link between community sustainability and school provision.

3.201 Other private individuals highlighted that rural schools on their own will not sustain a community. They drew attention to the interplay with other factors such as economic activity as also being important detriments in attracting and maintaining people to live in rural communities.

3.202 These views were reinforced by SOLACE and a number of local authorities. They indicated that they had no evidence to support the view that a school keeps a community vibrant. They felt that factors such as employment, housing and transport links were far more significant than a local school in sustaining a rural community.

3.203 A number of local authorities identified communities that had never had a school or had experienced school closures in the past where they suggested there was no evidence of a lack of vibrancy or adverse affects on community development as a result. They argued that growth had occurred in some communities without schools and declined in others with schools. They also drew attention to the impact placing requests could have on school numbers rather than local demand.

3.204 However, the Argyll Rural Schools Network felt that areas that do thrive following school closures have other sustaining advantages. They suggested that every community is different and the impact of a school closure on the wider community has to be assessed in its own right.

3.205 East Ayrshire Council suggested that proposed school closures were often a response to changing demographic circumstances and not the determinant. Shetland Islands Council felt that responsibility for sustaining communities cannot be the sole responsibility of an education service.

3.206 A small number of private individuals also suggested that the link between rural schools and the development of rural communities was overstated. One referred to a personal experience of a small school closing but the community continuing to thrive, despite pupils having to travel to another school.

3.207 Angus Council felt that the extent to which a rural school is central to the life of a particular community will vary. They highlighted a number of factors including the location of the school to other community facilities; the proximity of the school to other settlements; the extent to which a school was being used by a local community; and the nature and location of the communities served.

3.208 Caledonian Economic Ltd. went further and suggested that to have a rural school of a viable size to safeguard its future was a more positive factor for the communities served than a number of smaller schools whose existence were regularly reviewed as a result of population changes. The Highland Council suggested that the focus should be on considering how groupings of

community resources such as schools can sustain services without the necessity of there being a school in each historically established community.

3.209 ADES and some local authorities drew particular attention to the role of schools in remote rural communities. They acknowledged the link between the provision of a school and the sustainability of that community as vital.

3.210 The Improvement Service undertook a literature review and found that "international evidence is ambiguous" on the impact of school closures on the sustainability of rural communities economically and demographically. They found that there are varied conclusions drawn in different contexts with "all conclusions being tentative rather than definitive". Looking at statistical evidence in Scotland, they found no clear correlation between school closures and demographic or economic trends. They found that in terms of population data and economic activity there was no reason why there should have been an increase in school closures in 2010 "if it was driven solely by demographic or economic decline". Given the empirical ambiguity, the Improvement Service acknowledged that the decisions of education authorities are based on local educational contexts and 'best value' considerations for the resourcing of all services.

Question 17: 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?

3.211 A number of respondents across groupings referred the Commission to reports and responses prepared as part of local authority consultations on school closures.

3.212 Some suggested that there was a need for specific research to be undertaken on the links between rural schools and the communities they serve. They argued, and sometimes referred to anecdotal information, but suggested that systematic research based evidence was required. Others cited specific examples which they suggested could be used as case studies by the Commission.

3.213 Specific research identified included:
- Scottish Development Centre for Mental Health, in association with SCF and OPM**.** Building Community Wellbeing: An Exploration of Themes and Issues – Project Summary Report. The Scottish Executive 2003
- Satsangi M. Gallent N. Bevan M. The Rural Housing Question. Community and Planning in Britain's Countrysides. The Policy Press. 2010
- Lyson T.A. Journal of Research in Rural Education. Winter 2002, Vol. 17, No. 3
- A Charter for Rural Communities: The Final Report of the Carnegie Commission for Rural Community Development. Carnegie UK Trust 2007
- Sher Jonathon P. et al. Rural Education in Urbanised Nations: Issues and Innovations. An OECD/CERI Report, Westview Press. 1981

- The Sum of the Parts – The Development of Integrated Community Schools in Scotland. HMIE
- The Scottish Episcopal Church Rural Communities Report, 2010
- The report of the Education Committee to the 1999 general Assembly of the Church of Scotland
- The Scottish Churches Rural Committee's Rural Futures report, 2009
- The Scottish Government's Determined to Succeed initiative
- Prof. Topping, University of Dundee. Fife Peer Learning Experiment as reported in Time Higher Educational Supplement Scotland. 14.04.11.

3.214 In addition, the Improvement Service provided a detailed literature review of the impact of school closures on rural communities.

3.215 A range of organisations and publications were also identified as being able to contribute to the evidence base including:
- Carnegie Trust
- Arkelton Centre for Rural Development
- Rural School and Community Trust
- International Rural Network
- Journal of Research in Rural Education
- Sustainable Rural Programme
- Lifelong Learning for Rural Europe.

Question 18: Please tell us if you have any other comments on the delivery of rural education that you would like the Commission to consider?

3.216 COSLA noted that the debate on the delivery of rural education and schools has been almost unique in creating division between communities, local authorities and the Scottish Government. They suggested the division was not caused by the drafting of the Schools Consultation Act but "something more fundamental". They felt that the Commission needed to get to this underlying cause. Their view was it represented a clash between rights and responsibilities. They accepted that councils need to carefully listen to and weigh up different opinions, to achieve the best interest of education locally. In some cases this will result in school closures.

> "In the end not everyone will be able to get the result they wanted from individual closure decisions, but for the good of education in Scotland and for the best use of the public pound, the Commission must do all it can to remove the negativity and distrust from the process."
>
> (COSLA)

3.217 The Education Institute of Scotland noted that, in the Call for Evidence document, comment was made about concern over the operation of the Schools Consultation Act. They sought clarification of what evidence there was to support this. They suggested that the existing legislation was robust, with a clearly defined set of principles and processes. They felt that key to its

success was the ability of local authorities to effectively implement the guidance issued.

3.218 Many private individuals and others reiterated the advantages they felt that rural schools had to offer. A number argued that there should be a presumption in favour of retaining rural schools.

> "We think that the education provided in the best of our rural primary schools is distinctly different from that provided in other schools. In the best of our rural primary schools, education is delivered in a landscape and across the generations in a community."
>
> (Caledonian Economics Ltd.)

3.219 One community organisation suggested that the Schools Consultation Act should be strengthened so that local authorities have to take account of the wider impact of rural schools and not just focus on educational benefits when considering the future of schools. Another private individual suggested that there should be special status for schools where there are no other community facilities.

3.220 A small number of private and community organisations felt that local communities should have the option of running their schools. One private individual proposed that responsibility for education should be transferred from local authorities and administered nationally.

3.221 A few private and community respondents felt that there was need for viable working alternatives to sustain rural schools to be considered. The Scottish Rural Schools Network raised concerns at the narrowness of the debate. They suggested that, in addition to ensuring that the Schools Consultation Act is properly enforced, the Scottish Government has a role to undertake research and provide practical guidance to local authorities in implementing the Act.

3.222 A few respondents highlighted the need for a multifaceted and joined up approach to rural development policy by local authorities and the Scottish Government.

3.223 However, one local authority contended that there are questions surrounding the educational benefits to children attending a school with few pupils. They and others felt that use of resources and assets had to be taken into account when deciding the future of schools, unless the funding arrangements changed to support schools with very small rolls to ensure equality of access to educational outcomes. And one private individual felt that decisive decision making was required to address over capacity.

3.224 SOLACE and some local authorities highlighted that responsibility for delivering education lies with local authorities. As democratically elected organisations accountable for the services they deliver, these respondents argued that it should be for local authorities to determine the best way to deliver education in their areas.

3.225 ADES and some local authorities argued that it would be more equitable if schools located in urban and rural locations were subject to the same consultation process. They suggested that the current approach was an 'all or nothing' one, and there would be value in allowing the option for temporary closures in more remote locations.

3.226 One community council suggested that the consultation process needs to be simplified, given the finite resources available in communities to respond. They proposed any consultation process should be independently conducted and, once concluded, should not be reopened for a number of years.

3.227 Some respondents suggested that more requires to be known about the long term outcomes for children in different educational environments, and further work should be done in this area.

ANNEX ONE: CONSULTATION RESPONDENTS

Parent/ Carers Organisations
Achahoish Primary School Parent Council
Achiltibuie Primary School Parent Council
Airlie Primary School Parent Council
Alness Academy Parent Forum
Andover Primary School Parent Council
Annan Academy Parent Council
Argyll Rural Schools Network
Auchterhouse Primary School Parent Council
Balfron Primary School & Nursery Parent Council
Barcaldine Primary School Parents Council and Barcaldine Community
Association
Bell Baxter Parent Council
Bernera School Partnership
Blackness Primary School Parent Council
Borrowfield Primary School Parents R Us
Brae High School Parent Council
Bridgend Primary School Parent Council
Broughton Primary School Parent Council
Cannich Bridge Primary School Parent Council
CarGenbridge Primary School Parent's Association
Carloway Parent Council
Carmyllie Parent Council
Cawdor School Parent Council
Closeburn Primary School Parent Council
Craignish Primary School Parent Council
Crathes School Parent Council
Crossroads School Council
Cullivoe Parent Council
Eassie Primary School Parent Council
Edzell Primary Parent Council
Elgol Primary School Parent Council
Eoligarry Primary School Parent Council
Eriskay School Parent Council
Farr Primary and Nursery School Parent Council
Ferintosh Primary School Parent Council
Garlieston & Sorbie Primary Schools Parent Council
Glenbarr Primary School Parent Council
Glenluce Prmary School Parent Council
Gowanbank Primary School Parent Council
Grantown Grammar Parent Council
Humbie Parent Council
Inchinnan Primary School Parent Council
Keiss School Parent Council

Kemnay Academy Parent Council
Kinlochbervie High School Parent Council
Kirkcudbright Academy Parent Council
Leswalt Primary School Parent Council
Lionel School Parent Council
Lochaber High School Parent Council
Lochnell Primary School Parent Council
Lunnasting Parent Council
Luss Primary School Council
Melvich Parent Council
North Bute Primary School Parent Council
North Roe Primary School Parent Council
Pairc School Parent Council
Parent Council of St Joseph's Primary School, Milgavie
Parent Council, Bunsgoil Gaidhlig Inbhir Nis
Sanday Community School Parent Council
Scalloway Parent Council
Scourie Primary School Parent Council
Sgoil Shiaboist Parent Council
Shelibost School Parent Council
St. Mungo Parent Council
St. Bride's Primary School Parent Council
Stacathro Primary Parent Council
Stenness Community School Action Group
Stenness Community School Parent Council
Tayvallich Primary Parent Council
Tealing Primary Parent Council
Thornliebank Community Council
Tobermory High School Parent Council
Tong Primary School Parent Council
Torridon Primary School Parent Council
Tundergarth Primary Parent Council
Uig Parent Council
Ullapool High School Parent Council

Schools
Aith Junior High School
Ardnamurchan High School
Arran High School & Lamlash Primary School
Canonbie Primary School
Colliston Primary School
Crathes School
Dalry Nursery Class, Dalry School
Dunbar Grammar School
Duncow Primary School
Gargunnock Primary School

Hottsbridge Primary School
Humbie Primary School
Johnshaven Primary School
Kinlochewe Primary School
Leverhulme Memorial School & Nursery Class
Macduff School
Moniaive Primary School
Mount Cameron Primary, Nursery and Gaelic Department
North Row Primary School
Palnackie Primary School
Papa Westray Primary School
Sanday Community School
Shelibost Primary School
Springfield Primary School
St. Mungo Primary School
St. Peter's Primary School
St. Margaret's RC Primary School
Stromness Academy
Wallace Hall Primary School

Community Councils
Arran Community Council
Aultbea Community Council
Croftamie Community Council
Delting Community Council
Dyke Landward Community Council
Gordon & Westruther Community Council
Graemsay, Hoy & Walls Community Council
Hunters Quay Community Council
Jura Community Council
Kilmaronock Community Council
Luing Community Council
Muckhart Community Council
Northmaven Community Council
Rosewell and District Community Council
Scalloway Community Council
Sherries Community Council
Springfield Community Council
Stenness Community Association
Strathaven Community Council
Tingwall, Whiteness and Weisdale Community Council
Wester Loch Ewe Community Council
Whalsay Community Council

Other Organisations
Bord na Gaidhlig
Caledonian Economics Ltd
Care and Learning Alliance
Children in Scotland
Church of Scotland Standing Committee on Education
Consumer Focus Scotland
Improvement Service
Kinlochleven High School Associated School Group
Methodist Church
Moray Council Labour Group
Moray Council SNP Group
Moray Forum
National Day Nurseries Association
Sandness Community Development Group
Scottish Churches Rural Group
Scottish Council of Jewish Communities
Scottish Episcopal Church
Scottish Rural Schools Network
Scottish Women's Aid
Strathclde Partnership for Transport
Turriff North cluster small schools
West Harris Trust

Local Authorities
Aberdeenshire Council
Angus Council
Argyll and Bute Council
City of Edinburgh Council
Comhairle nan Eilean Siar
East Ayrshire Council
East Dunbartonshire Council
East Renfrewshire Council
Falkirk Council Education Services
Fife Council Education Service
North Ayrshire Council
North Lanarkshire Council
Perth and Kinross Council
Scottish Borders Council
Shetland Islands Council
South Ayrshire Council
South Lanarkshire Council
Stirling and Clackmannanshire Councils
The Highland Council
The Moray Council
West Lothian Council

Professional Bodies

Association of Directors of Education Scotland
Association of Headteachers and Deputies in Scotland
Association of Transport Co-ordinating Officers
COSLA
Education Institute of Scotland
National Association of Small Schools
Scottish Land & Estates
SOLACE Scotland
VOICE

Other Educational Establishments

Bananas Playgroup
Bower Busy Bees
Catholic Education Commission
Langside College
Madras Family Centre
Scotland's Rural Colleges
The Open University in Scotland
University of Glasgow, School of Education
Villa Kindergarten

Pupils' Group

Highland Youth Voice Portree High School

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