



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Finance and Public Administration Committee

Douglas Ross MSP
Convener
Education, Children and Young People Committee

13 December 2024

Dear Douglas

Schools (Residential Outdoor Education) (Scotland) Bill

As you are aware, the remit of the Finance and Public Administration Committee (the Committee) includes scrutiny of Financial Memorandums (FMs) for Bills. As such, the Committee has been examining the estimated costs of the Schools (Residential Outdoor Education) (Scotland) Bill.

The Committee ran a call for views on the FM between 3 July and 4 September 2024 and received 9 responses, which have been published on Citizen Space¹. The consultation was followed by an evidence session with the Member in charge, which took place on 19 November².

The Member in charge then wrote to the Committee on 2 December³, providing further information on the financial implications of the Bill.

According to the most up to date figures, as provided in the Member's letter of 2 December, total costs of the Bill's provision are estimated to range from:

- £20,908,273 to £34,696,611, with a median estimate of £27,802,443 in year 1,
- £21,926,740 to £36,771,757 (with a median estimate of £29,349,248) in year 2 and
- £21,735,361 to £36,073,584 (with a median estimate of £28,901,050) in year 3 and beyond.

In her letter, the Member confirmed that “the likely annual cost of the provisions of the Bill will be at the upper end of those projections”.

The responses received to the Committee's consultation consider that the FM underestimates some of the costs associated with the provisions of the Bill, particularly in relation to staff, potential increases in the costs charged by outdoor education centres, transport, and costs associated with supporting pupils with additional support needs.

¹ [Published responses for Schools \(Residential Outdoor Education\) \(Scotland\) Bill: Financial Memorandum - Scottish Parliament - Citizen Space](#)

² [Meeting of the Parliament: FPA/19/11/2024 | Scottish Parliament Website](#)

³ [Letter from Liz Smith MSP to the Convener of 2 December 2024](#)

Contact: Finance and Public Administration Committee, The Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP. Email FPA.committee@parliament.scot. We welcome calls through Relay UK and in BSL through Contact Scotland BSL.

During evidence, staff pressures have emerged as a key stakeholder concern in relation to the FM. Submissions received highlighted that currently teaching staff support residential trips on a voluntary basis, and the FM does not provide estimates for staffing costs or take into account potential overtime payments, relying instead on the continued “goodwill of staff”⁴.

In their submission, COSLA highlight costs related to “the necessary changes to contractual terms and conditions for staff and the associated administrative burden and potential for increased salary costs in relation to making this a mandatory obligation, as well as additional staffing resource required”.

We also note the evidence your Committee received which highlighted that should the Bill pass in its current form, the teachers’ unions would seek to open up discussions with the Scottish Negotiating Committee for Teachers on renegotiating teachers’ terms and conditions, given the Bill relies on the willingness of teachers and support staff to support the trips.

During the evidence session with the FPA Committee on 19 November, the Member in charge responded to these concerns stating that the evidence she had heard from individual teachers, people who work in the sector and some local authorities “shows that a lot of teachers are very keen to try to participate in this kind of thing without it having major implications”. Despite this, we remain, however, concerned by the potential indirect costs that could arise (and not currently costed in the FM), should teachers’ contracts be renegotiated as a consequence of requirements in the Bill.

Written submissions received by the FPA Committee also highlight potential increases in the costs charged by outdoor centres as well as costs for outdoor centres to update their centres to comply with additional standards that may be set out in guidance issued by the Scottish Ministers under the Bill, which may have been understated in the FM.

COSLA’s submission also highlights the impact that inflation, demand and the location of schools and centres will have on the overall transportation costs, along with the additional costs that would arise in order to allow children and young people with complex needs to benefit from residential outdoor education.

Our scrutiny of the FM highlights remaining lack of clarity in relation to the potential costs of food, clothing, training, insurance and equipment, administrative costs and potential impacts on small rural schools, alongside the cost of supporting pupils with complex needs.

Related to this, we note a general lack of data on current provision of outdoor education and on schools’ own transport facilities, which hinders the ability to obtain clear estimates for these costs. We therefore welcome the Education, Children and Young People Committee’s plans to gather more statistical data and invite you to pursue further detailed information on current outdoor education provision and existing facilities, including schools’ access to transport.

In the absence of this data, we would also highlight comments made by COSLA and the Association of Directors of Education Scotland (ADES), suggesting that the requirements in the Bill are accompanied by a “need to undertake annual review to ensure the costs assumed in any funding formulae are still relative, and take account of provider rates changing, particularly linked to supply and demand”⁵.

⁴ Dumfries and Galloway Council submission

⁵ ADES submission

In light of these concerns, the Committee explored, during the evidence session on 19 November, the potential models that could be used to fund the provision of outdoor education.

The Member in charge suggested using a public trust model, whereby the Government would work with other partners to provide support to send young people on residential outdoor education. Rethink Ireland was mentioned as a potential funding model that could possibly be replicated in Scotland.

The Member's letter of 2 December provides further information on how Rethink Ireland operates in practice. In her letter, the Member states her view that, although "the precise nature of the governance of such a trust would be for the Scottish Ministers to decide", "a model along the lines of Rethink Ireland, whereby government, business and the voluntary sector work together, along with philanthropic bodies and individuals, to provide the necessary and sustained funding and means to enable every school pupil to do one week's residential outdoor education during their school career, could work very effectively in the Scottish context".

Inspiring Scotland and the Ernest Cook Trust were also highlighted as potential models to be used for funding outdoor education, alongside the pupil equity funding.

The Committee believes there is merit in exploring the feasibility of alternative funding models, including the use of a trust similar to Rethink Ireland, and invites you to pursue this matter further, including seeking the Scottish Government's view in relation to how such a trust would operate.

Lastly, we note the FM does not set out any costs or savings for parents. However, anecdotal evidence suggests the Bill may result in savings for those parents who currently contribute to the cost of outdoor residential education. In light of the requirement that the Scottish Ministers fund residential outdoor education, with no parental contribution towards this cost, it is reasonable to conclude that the Bill will lead to savings for those parents.

We would invite the Education, Children and Young People Committee to consider, as part of your wider scrutiny of the Bill, the evidence received by this Committee on the FM, and to pursue further detail from the Member in charge on the Bill on the matters highlighted in this letter.

Yours sincerely,

Kenneth Gibson MSP
Convener