

PE1711/L

Petitioner submission of 21 May 2019

We believe that the responses from local authorities to the Petitions Committee largely reinforce our evidence to the Committee in March, specifically, that the provision of first aid training in schools is at best patchy, and largely dependent on the enthusiasm of individual staff and teachers. This cannot be seen as a satisfactory situation.

Only eleven out of thirty-two Councils provided any response at all, and of these only four (Glasgow, Argyll and Bute, and – to some extent – North Ayrshire and East Ayrshire) positively evidenced any concerted effort to deliver first aid training. Several (Stirling, Perth and Kinross, and South Ayrshire) did express interest in doing more, and a couple (South Lanarkshire and North Ayrshire) made reference to the British Heart Foundation campaign on CPR in schools.

Two Councils – Glasgow, and Argyll and Bute – appeared to be engaging seriously with the subject of first aid. In Argyll, around 60% of schools are delivering, but there are significant challenges. The Council raise some important questions about the resource implications of training teachers at a time when support staff numbers are being reduced.

Both Glasgow and Argyll and Bute are making use of support from other agencies, both charitable and statutory (e.g. Scottish Ambulance Service) to deliver first aid training to as many pupils as possible. This is admirable, but the responses also illustrate the difficulties with that approach:

- Both Councils have used British Heart Foundation Heartstart but for funding reasons many resources (including online) have been withdrawn;
- Glasgow has still only been able to cover a small number (24/138) of their schools;
- Glasgow also mention free British Red Cross workshops, and although these will be valuable, the difficulties in organising these for every school and class are obvious.

Summary

While a small number of Councils are doing their best, it is clear that it is currently a lottery whether Scottish pupils (primary or secondary) receive any form of first aid training.

We stand by our position that teachers themselves are the best people to provide training, for the reasons we gave to the Committee: primary pupils are most receptive to listening to their class teacher, research evidence suggest that teachers are just as effective as medical professionals and other specialists, and it is simply far easier to schedule training as part of the regular school curriculum. That said, we absolutely do understand the resource constraints that schools are working with, and aim to accommodate these as far as possible. We anticipate that with access to suitable resources, by training a maximum of two teachers per school for a few hours every

three years, we can cascade first aid training to every pupil within a reasonable timescale. Our Chief Executive, Stuart Callison, will meet with The Educational Institute of Scotland in the near future to discuss these issues and seek their support.

We would also like to trial our suggested approach with a supportive local authority, as a demonstration project to identify any practical difficulties and hopefully show what may be possible, and are willing to help underwrite the financial costs of so doing.

That said, we believe that the Scottish Government's current position, that first aid training is simply a matter for individual local authorities, is not sustainable or justifiable at a time when Council finances are under such extreme pressure. By adopting our proposals, and ensuring that Scottish pupils are provided with the skills to save a life, the Scottish Government could make a significant contribution to improving public health at little cost. Indeed, it's likely that no other measure exists which could demonstrate the same impact.