Many quango bosses earn more than Scottish Ministers

A report out today has highlighted that The Scottish Government spends a third of its budget, nearly £12bn, on quangos which are then run by bosses earning more than some Cabinet Ministers.

Reform Scotland the independent non-party think tank has issued the results of its research which shows that at least 19 of the leaders of these organisations earn as much as the First Minister, while the CEO of Scottish Enterprise earns twice as much as the Finance Secretary. The group has always pushed for more transparency on the delivery of public services. A quango is defined as a 'quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisation' and is therefore delivering public policy "at arm's length" from the government say Reform Scotland who recommend that all quangos should be abolished.

What the research goes on to state is that these salaries may of course be justified, but since these are not truly public sector bodies they are not accountable in the same way. The think tank believes that the way the bodies are run is not accountable or transparent.

Commenting, Reform Scotland's Research Director Alison Payne said:

"It may well be the case that the salary for a particular Chief Executive is justified, although, it is difficult to argue that any public sector salary should be higher than that of the person running Scotland, the First Minister.

"However, the key problem is the use of quangos which are neither fully democratically accountable nor fully independent of government leading to a lack of transparency and accountability over their activities, including the level of salaries paid."

Reform Scotland believes that most quangos should either be re-integrated into government departments, meaning that ministers would then be accountable for their decisions, or else moved to independent bodies which would contract transparently with government, with the public holding government accountable for performance against those contracts.

Alison Payne continued:

"Whilst there have been efforts made by the Scottish government to cut the number of quangos, they have failed because they have been piecemeal and focussed on the wrong target. They have looked at the functions of the different bodies and tried to simplify or merge them to reduce waste and bureaucracy. This ignores the real problem. It is not what quangos do, but the way that they do it that is the fundamental problem.

"Scotland needs to end its love affair with quangos and build democratic accountability through transparency. This would introduce greater clarity and openness into the political process in Scotland and make those who are spending taxpayers' money more accountable to the people."

You can download a copy of the report here.