

NOTE OF MEETING OF NATIONAL PARENT FORUM HELD ON 21 NOVEMBER IN RADISSON HOTEL, GLASGOW

1. David Cameron (DC), outgoing President of ADES (Association of Directors of Education Scotland) welcomed parent representatives from 30 out of 32 of Scotland's local authority areas. He welcomed the setting up of the Forum and highlighted the important role that parents play in their children's learning. He indicated that there was a lot of goodwill towards the new Forum – he played a video message of support from Fiona Hyslop, Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning. He also referred to messages of support from ADES, HMIE, Scottish Parent Teacher Council and the Scottish Muslim Parents Association. He suggested that it would be important for the Forum to be pro-active in identifying its own priorities and agenda and not just being reactive to others' agenda.

2. The opening session of the day was facilitated by Ian Smith from Learning Unlimited. Ian ran an interactive 'getting to know you' session followed by an exercise in which delegates were asked to identify and agree their priorities for action. These priorities were grouped by themes as follows:

- Resources/funding
- Local/national policy
- Curriculum
- Communication
- Support for all children
- Training/support
- Learning and Teaching standards

These were explored further in discussion. Annex A gives a flavour of the issues identified under these themes.

4. DC highlighted the importance of the Forum establishing relationships at appropriate levels of Scottish Government and local authorities and being represented on key bodies discussing key issues such as Curriculum for Excellence. Delegates talked about how they wanted to be involved at the early stages of policy development as opposed to later at the consultation stage and the unique viewpoint they offered of representing children from the standpoint of parents. It was suggested that there should be representatives from both secondary and primary.. A show of hands indicated that this was roughly half and half from current representatives, with one representative from a Parent Council in a special school. It was suggested by one representative that the Forum should consider the need for representation from early years. DC asked the Forum to consider how it could be seen as representative and whether there was a need for other voices on the Forum. It was agreed that it was important that the Forum should have a proper constitution.

5. The delegates spent some time in group discussion considering their priorities, including some of the practical things that would need to be addressed so that the Forum could operate effectively. (See Annex B for some issues identified by the groups and paragraph 8 below for action points).

5. The Forum heard from Jonathan Sher, Director of Research, Policy and Programmes at Children in Scotland. Jonathan suggested that the Forum needed to identify its unique contribution, agree a common goal and the importance of leaving ego and self-interest at the door to work for the common cause. He recommended forming a relationship with Government which was like that of a critical friend. There were also other organisations to work with and who could offer expertise in specific areas. He warned of the pitfalls of confrontation in raising concerns and recommended lobbying via effective relationships and advised the meeting to steer clear of party politics by speaking to all parties. He suggested that it was important for the Forum to be as inclusive as possible. Above all, the Forum would draw its moral authority if it was seen to work for the interests of all children and young people, from the unique the stand point of parents.

6. In the afternoon, Neil Stewart, from Learning and Teaching Scotland gave a presentation to delegates on how GLOW, the national education intranet, could be used to support the work of the Forum. Delegates would be provided with their own password which would allow them to access a range of GLOW applications, including a National Parent Glow Group. They would then be able to share documents, exchange views through discussion threads between meetings, run surveys, have access to a range of linked websites, etc. In time, a decision would be required about who might facilitate/ coordinate GLOW for the Forum.

7. There was some discussion about how to share information with parents who are not formal members of the Forum and whether GLOW could be opened up to all parents with some residual capability to decide what remains confidential and what can be public. Longer term this would be possible as more local authorities provide parents with their own GLOW accounts. In the meantime, one representative suggested the Forum might want to consider how a Google Group might help sharing of information with the wider parent community.

8. David Cameron then led a general discussion on what actions the meeting thought would be required to be taken by the next meeting. The following action points were agreed:

Secretariat - Scottish Government officials were asked to consider a bid for a project support worker for the Forum to function as a point of contact, secretariat, administrator for GLOW, etc. (Depending on the outcome the Forum might also approach ADES and COSLA to see what support they could offer).

Chair for future meetings – it was agreed that it was too soon to agree a chair from within the Forum but that delegates would work towards this. In the meantime, David Cameron was asked to chair the next meeting.

Constitution - it was agreed to consider 2/3 models of how the Forum might be constituted

Statement of intent/mission statement – it was agreed that the Forum should consider a statement of intent defining its purpose and that this should be one of the first discussion threads through GLOW.

Representation – SG officials would table a paper on what committees/groups the Forum might seek to be represented on

Membership – delegates discussed the advantages and disadvantages of having alternate delegates attend meetings of the Forum. Would alternating delegates destabilise the Forum through lack of continuity? Or would the use of alternate delegates help ensure that each local authority was represented on a regular basis given the onerous responsibilities on parents? It was decided that core continuity with some degree of flexibility would best with the representatives responsible for briefing their alternative before the next meeting. Whatever the arrangements, DC suggested that the Forum would need to demonstrate openness and accountability if other parents were not to feel excluded.

Education funding – delegates expressed a wish for more information on the background to Scottish Government funding of education and local authority provision. SG officials agreed to prepare an information sheet on national funding to be distributed by December.

Government policies – it was agreed that it would be useful for the Forum to have knowledge of what Scottish Government policies were for the coming year. SG officials agreed to provide a paper on this.

Planning group – it was agreed that there should be a small group to help plan the next meeting, take forward actions, prepare an agenda, etc. A sheet was passed around for the names of volunteers and SG officials agreed to circulate this to delegates.

Future meetings

9. It was agreed that the first meeting of the Forum had been very positive. The Forum agreed to meet four times per annum with the ability to call more if required. The next meeting would be held on 6 March in Glasgow. SG would make the arrangements for the next meeting.

NATIONAL PARENT FORUM 21.11.09:
ISSUES IDENTIFIED BY GROUPED THEMES

Resources/funding

- Standards of school buildings.
- Funding.
- Legislative obligations.
- Finance/Admin.
- Answers on funding from Government versus Local Authority.
- Staffing Levels – including learning difficulties support plus classroom assistants.
- Staffing issues.
- Transparent funding.
- Security – buildings people etc. supervision.
- School Estate plus Capacity.

Local/National Policy

- Structure for timely involvement in policy at local level and national level.
- Parent voice.
- Disclosure requirements.
- Bureaucracy.

Curriculum

- Sharing ideas and best practice.
- Communication and transparency.
- Supported study (Secondaries) Quality & consistency of parent council.
- Funding.
- Senior staff recruitment.
- Assessment.
- Primary Curriculum - not enough 3RS.
- (Not) Customised Learning.
- National Qualifications.
- Middle of the road child – who's taking them forward.
- Curriculum for Excellence /National Qualifications.
- Curriculum for Excellence.
- Education keeping pace with the world.

- Curriculum for Excellence.
- Fear of future for our children.
- Quality and consistency of parent councils

Communication

- How to communicate our voice
- Simple communication.
- IT Communications
- E.A.L.- non English speaking children and parents.
- In all languages
- Reaching all parents

Support for Children

- Looking after all not just your own.

Training/Support

- Pressure!
- Training and support.
- Over – Whelming responsibilities!!
- Lack of time.
- Understanding the school improvement plans.
- Lack of confidence.
- Information.
- Parent support.

Teaching and learning

- Quality of Head Teacher
- Teacher performance.
- Class sizes.

NATIONAL PARENT FORUM 21.11.09:
THOUGHTS FROM AROUND THE GROUPS

Ethics

- Mission statement – children at centre
- See the different needs of children →leading to support for parents too.
- Show dignity.
- Figure out what we agree on, find a common ground and build on it.
- Engagement with all organisations

Constitution

- Have a valid voice, a seat at the table to be heard.
- We are representing the children, getting things changed in the interest of the children.
- Continuity Helpful
- “ No fee for parents/School etc “

Importance

- We have to be “important” not just coming across as being important
- Be involved with the process of policies from the start.
- Have a “say” in what goes into a policy before it comes into effect. “ To be heard even if not acted on”
- Talk to all parties – taking no sides

Strength

- Know what we stand for before we try to change things.

Power

- What we bring to the table – knowledge
- That’s where our power lies – caring for children.

Understanding

- Working behind the scene – getting what children need
- Policy- push through changes and fight for “all” children and their future.
- Communication plus listening plus sharing
- Proving support to children
- What we are here for is to improve the lives of children – what’s in the best interest for them
- To get information out about policies and what say parents have.
- Clearer guidelines for policies.

- National Guideline on disclosure for parents.
- National qualification policies

Communications

- Who are our audiences – parents and Parent Councils, government, local authorities, other parent groups
- Use of GLOW
- Explore Google groups, LA websites
- How do we share what is happening across 32 local authorities
- Dialogue between all national parent councils.

Actions

- Steering group for next meeting.
- Financial support.
- Secretary/admin.
- Chair – working towards a parent chair.
- Partners e.g. children of Scotland - gives us support etc.
- Primary and Secondary reps plus Early Learning and special needs learning.
- Logo? Name of the Forum?
- Parents taking part of being educated in policies.