

## **NOTE OF NATIONAL PARENT FORUM SCOTLAND MEETING HELD IN RADISSON HOTEL, GLASGOW ON SATURDAY 6 MARCH 2010**

### **In attendance:**

Tony Rafferty, Aberdeen  
Reid Hutchison, Aberdeenshire  
James Ewens, Angus  
Ken Wyllie, Argyll and Bute  
Fiona Black, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar  
Kiran Oza, Dundee  
George Jamieson, Dumfries & Galloway  
Gerry McTiernan, East Dunbartonshire  
Joseph McLachlan, East Renfrewshire  
Tina Woolnough, Edinburgh  
Neil Smith, Falkirk  
Joanna Murphy, Glasgow  
Dr Moira Tregaskis, Highland  
Billy Gibson, North Ayrshire  
Stuart Clark, Perth & Kinross  
Steven Whalley, Scottish Borders  
James Hutton, Shetland  
John Rice, South Lanarkshire  
Iain Ellis, West Dunbartonshire  
David Mitchell, West Lothian

**Apologies:** Rosalie McCluskey (East Ayrshire), Steven Wood (North Lanarkshire), Mary Taylor (Fife), Barclay Milne (Stirling), Charlotte Harrison (Orkney), Glen Miller (Inverclyde), Marie Meechan (South Ayrshire).

### **Welcome and introduction**

1. David Cameron, education consultant and former President of ADES (Association of Directors for Education Scotland) welcomed delegates to the meeting in his role as facilitator for the day. He reflected on how the Forum had already begun to make a difference since its inaugural meeting in November. Several of the members had contributed to consultations or represented the Forum at events, on various working parties or groups, such as the government's Class Size Review group. The Forum's existence was acknowledged in the invitation to provide a representative to represent the interest of parents on the General Teaching Council for Scotland.

2. He expressed the view that further opportunities for representing parents' interests would become available as new developments in education were taken forward, such as Skill Development Scotland's review of its information, guidance and careers support for young people. He suggested that the Forum would need to develop an agile and flexible approach to be able respond quickly, creatively and positively to a wide range of developments. At the same time, it would need to consider its own priorities and be able to strike a balance between its willingness to respond to others' initiatives and the demands on its own members time and commitments.

3. Lorraine Sanda, National Parental Involvement Co-ordinator, gave a brief update on changes since the Forum meeting in November. These included a change of Education Minister, although she indicated that Michael Russell, the new Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning was keen to maintain his predecessor's encouragement of the Forum. Lorraine also reported that her own post was being continued for a further year, although now based within the Scottish Government Education Directorate. She also reflected on how the Forum was making greater use of GLOW to communicate between members and she reiterated David Cameron's point that the Forum was becoming more visible to the key players in Scottish education. She welcomed two representatives from SCVO (Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations) as observers and indicated that discussions were being held with SCVO on providing support over the next six months which would give the Forum time to consider what its needs and ways of working would be.

4. Forum members noted the continuing development of Curriculum for Excellence and the debate over the possibility of a delay to introduction of implementation of national qualifications. It was reported that Cabinet Secretary would take a decision on this following advice from the April CfE Management Board meeting. Several Forum members reported on the varying degrees of implementation at local level and how this was an evolving process. Accepting the need for detailed planning, there was however concern that momentum should not be lost and that, if CfE was really in the interests of children, with better teaching and learning, then it would be best if there was no unnecessary delay. The Forum also took the view that the voice of parents' should be heard at the CfE Management Board

5. After discussion, the Forum agreed to the following statement:

“The National Parent Forum Scotland urge the Management Board for Curriculum for Excellence to maintain momentum towards implementation. We recognise the need to ensure that detailed preparation is made, but we believe that Curriculum for Excellence offers better opportunities for Scotland's learners. There should be no unnecessary delay.

We feel that the voice of parents is missing from the Management Board's discussions and ask that we be represented on that group.”

6. The Forum members proceeded to group discussion on what had been happening since their last meeting in their own areas. In feedback the following key points were made:

- Need to build from the bottom up; work still needed to get structures right from school/school cluster, to local authority level, and National Forum
- Is Forum premature - is there a danger of over centralisation since local discussion is where most parents are at?
- Need to look at accountability - how delegates selected and how they report back
- Different models across the country – need to learn from each other
- Some authorities have no area/local structures in place
- National Forum can help share practice and knowledge of different models
- Need to collect information on what picture looks like across the country, what relationships there are between parents and directors of education locally
- Issues around campaigning and tensions with schools
- How do we interest/involve more parents

- Need to encourage local authorities to share more policy papers with Parent Councils

7. In summing up this section, David Cameron suggested that, since many decisions taken at a national level have consequences at local level, it could save time and resources if the parent voice was heard more at national level. For representation to work effectively at all levels, it was important to combine local parental involvement with national strategic aims and priorities.

### **Constitution**

8. The Forum considered a draft constitution that had been prepared by Stuart Clark from Perth and Kinross and had been posted on GLOW. David Cameron invited the Forum members to consider whether the draft provided the basis for an acceptable constitution to be ratified on the day, or whether it provided the basis for a working document to be amended and ratified at a future meeting.

9. During discussion the following points were raised:

- Agreed that name should be National Parent Forum Scotland
- Term 'Executive Committee' should be replaced with 'Leadership Team'(LT)
- Include reference to number of LT members 'up to a maximum of x (number to be agreed)
- Need to be clear about relationship between Leadership Team and wider Forum so that no-one excluded from decision making
- Might need further consideration on length of terms of office
- Paragraph 12 – suggested that the draft be changed to reflect the fact that, in its first year, constitution could be amended at any time by Forum and at Annual General Meetings in subsequent years

10. After a full discussion it was agreed that the draft constitution be accepted as a working document which was sufficient to enable the Forum to organise itself and its activities, but that amendments would be considered over the coming months ahead of an annual conference later in the year when the constitution could be ratified.

### **Education funding**

11. The Forum heard a presentation from one of its members, Joe McLachlan, from East Renfrewshire on how education in Scotland is funded. This covered the 'block grant' arrangements between UK and Scottish Governments, consultations between SG and COSLA (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities) on distribution of SG grant to local authorities, and subsequent devolved expenditure from local authorities to school head teachers. Joe covered the timescale for annual discussions and negotiations, differences between fixed and variable elements of expenditure and how local authorities built up their budgeted expenditure before identifying what funding was available for any new activity. He also indicated that, while local authorities still awaited information for 2011-12, all the indications were that budgets would be extremely tight in coming years.

12. Forum members shared their experiences of what they saw happening at local level and discussed the possible role of the Forum in contributing to the debate on education funding. It was reported that services across the country were under pressure, with particular

groups, such as EAL staff, learning assistants, etc. being particularly vulnerable. Contributions to the discussion combined the need for a sense of realism in considering education's share of expenditure and any tightening of budgets with the ability to present reasoned contributions on behalf of parents, while retaining a campaigning and lobbying role, as necessary. It was noted that the Scottish Parliament Education and Life-Long Learning Committee was currently taking evidence from interested parties on education funding and it was agreed that the Forum consider how they might make their views known to the committee. It was also suggested that the Forum may wish to approach ADES and COSLA for further information and discussion.

### **Forum roles**

13. Three members had indicated their interest in becoming Chair of the Forum – Stuart Clark, James Ewens and Gerry McTiernan. Following discussion between the three, James agreed to withdraw his name. Following short presentations from the two remaining candidates Stuart was elected as Chair. The Forum agreed that Gerry and James would be vice-Chairs and that all three would liaise closely on taking forward the Forum's interests between meetings. The appointments would be interim to allow the Forum to further consider its structure, constitution etc leading up to an AGM in September 2010.

14. Expressions of interest had been received from around 10-11 members of the Forum to take on other roles within the Forum. It was agreed that these and any others received would be considered by the new officers.

### **Next steps**

15. It was not possible within the time available to discuss a number of issues. These included a Mission statement for the Forum, representation on a number of working groups and a draft paper on support from SCVO. The Forum officers would consider these.

16. Forum members were informed that SG would be inviting comments shortly on a parents' leaflet on recent legislative changes to consultation on school changes/closures. There was also an opportunity for more parents to put forward their views through Glow on Additional Support Needs. A glow meet, accessible through the Forum Glow site, would be held on 24 March (details available from [Jennifer.macdougall@ltscotland.org.uk](mailto:Jennifer.macdougall@ltscotland.org.uk))

16. The next meeting was scheduled for Saturday 5 June and representatives would be emailed about the venue.