

VIEWS ON A NATIONAL REPRESENTATIVE BODY FOR PARENT COUNCILS

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Executive Summary

Background

This research has been commissioned by the Scottish Government with the aim of identifying the views of the newly formed Parent Councils and other relevant organisations on the shape and character that a national body might take to represent the views of Parent Councils.

The research comprised of:

- Survey by questionnaire of all Parent Councils
- Depth interviews with 8 key stakeholders
- 4 discussion workshops held with parents

491 responses were received to the questionnaire. This represents a response rate of 20% of the Parent Councils in existence and was evenly spread across type of school, rural / urban environments and socio/economic circumstance.

Context

The Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006 heralded a change from school boards to new Parent Councils. This raises a question as to how best these new bodies can be supported.

Support and advice for parents and Parent Councils is available from a number of organisations including the Scottish Parent Teacher Council (SPTC), the Scottish Parent Council Association (SPCA) and local authority Parental Involvement Officers. The wide range can however mean that it is difficult for parents to identify the best source for a particular problem.

Opinion varies on the urgency to develop any national body. Some see this as pressing whilst others think it can be allowed to develop over time. Whilst networking is starting to be established, there is a need to facilitate communications between Parent Councils.

Current Parent Council Activity and Support Received

Fundraising was the most commonly mentioned activity by far. Representing the parent view and communicating primarily with parents were also key.

Parent Councils currently get support across a range of issues but primarily in relation to encouraging parental involvement (71%); keeping up to date with educational policy (69%); insurance issues (58%), networking; (55%) and running meetings (51%). Less help is provided in relation to accessing grants (25%), sharing best practice (24%), identifying other groups to work with (15%) and setting up and managing a blog (8%).

Parent Councils receive support from a wide range of sources. The most significant by far is the LA, the single biggest source of support in 15 of the 24 activities researched. The school community collectively (senior management team, staff and school) are the second biggest source followed by the SPTC.

The local authority is particularly active in providing support in relation to representing parents but the school, SPTC, LTS/Parentzone and (to a lesser extent) SPCA are also active here. SPTC plays a prominent role in representing parents' views to Scottish Government. The local authority also helps significantly with administration and networking, whilst the SPTC are recognised as helping to share best practice and assisting with insurance and Disclosure Scotland issues. Help with activities comes from a very wide range of sources but most notably the local authority and the school with the SPTC being especially active in supporting fundraising. Communication with parents remains by comparison a lightly supported area with help coming mostly from the school community but also from the local authority. Parent Councils rely heavily on the local authority for acquiring knowledge with lesser contributions from the school management team then SPTC, LTS/Parentzone and SPCA.

Future Parent Council Activity and Support

Unprompted, activities where Parent Councils would seek support in future –

- Fundraising
- Encouraging more Parental participation,
- Finding ways of examining ideas/proposals and
- Networking.

A relatively low response on this suggests some uncertainty about their forward programme.

When prompted, Encouraging Parental Involvement (62%) and How to Promote links with the wider community (61%) stood out. With a further 45% interested in accessing the views of the parent forum this suggests that Parent Councils are grappling with the problem of how best to engage with their parent forum. Half of Parent Councils also listed help with Accessing Local Facilities/Resources and Keeping Up to Date with Educational Policy.

Parent Councils generally feel that most of the areas for which they currently receive relatively high levels of support will still need to be supported in future.

Activities where their anticipated future needs exceed current provision are:

- Setting up and Managing/Maintaining a Website/Blog
- Promoting Links with the Community
- Sharing Best Practice
- Accessing Local facilities/Resources
- Accessing Grants
- Identifying other Groups to Work with.
- Representing Parents to Scottish Government

Need for a National Body

Of those who did express a view, 79% are in favour of a national body. This view was largely consistent across the sample. The key reason given was that this will provide a body that will **represent Parent Councils and parents at national level and give them a voice.**

Of the 88 parents who believe there is no need for a national body, 22% assert that SPTC/SPCA already fill that role; that the existing support is sufficient (16%) or that the priority is the local agenda and not the national one (18%).

There is a concern that all Parent Councils should have access to the same levels of support.

Role of a National Body

Representing parents' views at a national level stands out as the clear priority.

Stakeholders stress that the national body must have as its focus the interests of all parents but there is considerable debate concerning how to achieve this.

Diversity of interest is one reason why some say that it is not possible to represent the views of all parents.

It is recognised that issues must necessarily be prioritised and dealt with over time and a national body should be proactive in setting the agenda. A bottom up approach was advocated to ensure that it is parents' issues that do get identified.

Suggestions for *accessing the views of all parents* include:

- Having special interest groups represented
- Undertaking specific planned research
- Using intelligence gathered from advice lines etc.

Evidence was seen as important when speaking on behalf of parents especially when in debate with professional educationalists.

There is a desire to see some clarity on the issue of *insurance* provision. Discussion with stakeholders suggested that LA decisions to purchase bulk membership of SPTC have affected the current landscape of parent representation quite significantly. Should it prove necessary, the expectation of parents' discussion groups was that the insurance issue should be resolved and paid for nationally.

The national body would require to have a *lobbying* role and there is considerable interest in it being able to exert *influence over the local authorities* who are seen to be providing variable levels of support across the country.

Opinion differs as to whether the national body should *provide help and advice* solely through Parent Councils or be available to individual parents. Some feel that it should simply *provide a signposting role* identifying other expert sources of advice.

A significant role is anticipated in *helping Parent Councils to network*. In the first instance at least, parents in particular saw regional forums as the route to improved networking. Electronic media should be fully exploited to aid networking.

Key Principles

A national body should be a membership organisation but there is less agreement on how to achieve this. Many believe there should be an automatic right of access by Parent Councils.

Membership should be confined to Parent Councils. It was deemed important that parents retain control and some felt that other organisations or individual experts might be co-opted or have associate status but should not have voting rights. Similarly, advisers should be co-opted but restricted to a separate advisory group and not form part of the core national body.

The majority view of both parents and other key stakeholders is that funding should be provided from central government and that this should not compromise

independence if sensible safeguards were in place and maintained. Independence was crucial.

Nearly half of parents felt the remit should be wide and relate to the overall well being of each child. Some stakeholders disagreed, preferring a broad definition covering all aspects of a child's learning but not overall well being because of concerns about diluting the effort.

Geographic representation from across Scotland was expected on the board or council of the national body but no firm agreement on numbers. This was seen as important with a desire to avoid central belt bias. There are different thoughts on whether it is necessary for each of 32 local authorities to be represented or whether representation from 8 regions would suffice.

The clusters of Parent Councils that are now emerging were seen as a foundation on which a national body might be built. Some advocate one or two layers between Parent Councils and a national body corresponding to local authority and/or regional levels which would interact with the local authorities and provide representation to a national level.

There was a concern to ensure that the body remains in touch with its grass roots and that there should be mechanisms to avoid hijacking by quasi-political activists who have a particularly strong voice.

All were in agreement that salaried staff would be required to support the volunteers on the board or committee of the national body. Stakeholders suggested a staffing level ranging from 3 to 20 dependent on remit and structure.

Engagement

Engagement was seen as difficult generally. However with over a third (36%) indicating willingness to be a delegate to a regional event and a quarter (25%) being prepared to be delegated to a national conference there appears to be a credible level of interest at this stage in engaging with development of a national body.

Lack of *time* is the main barrier to engagement, being mentioned by 66% of all responding. The *distances involved* in Scottish geography and *travel/ transport* arrangements were mentioned by 37% rising to over 60% from remote rural or remote small towns. 21% mentioned cost (35% in rural areas).

Proposals to mitigate barriers include:

- Meetings in different parts of the country
- Video conferencing / web casting (possibly using GLOW)
- Training to build confidence
- Giving responsibility and taking views seriously
- Good chairing of meetings
- Use of email
- Shared transport scheme to help get people to meetings
- Attention to hospitality when people have travelled distances

The majority would expect all expenses, including childcare, to be met but no honoraria.

Next Steps & Recommendations

There is a much repeated imperative that the national body must not be imposed from above. This gives support to an approach that in the first instance would emphasise fostering the development of Parent Council networks and indeed Parent Councils themselves. The resulting infrastructure should then allow structures to emerge which fully reflected parents' requirements.

There would be a need for a funded interim body to take this forward, providing the interim encouragement and refining proposals for the medium term which anticipate Parent Council requirements. This would alleviate the concerns of those who are reluctant to sign up without knowing the detail. The interim body would also resolve the insurance issue, input to developing use of electronic media and promote greater consistency across LA's. Ideally the existing experience of those within current support organisations would not be lost in this transition.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Background

- 1.1 Parent Councils were established in August 2007 and at present 92% of all schools have a Parent Council. These replaced the School Boards.
- 1.2 Historically there have been two key organisations that represented parents to schools each with national bodies that represented views at a National Level These were:
 - the Scottish School Boards Association and
 - the Scottish Parent Teacher Council (SPTC).
- 1.3 The Scottish School Board Association has now been replaced by the Scottish Parent Council Association (SPCA) but the SPTC, which was originally established to represent the Parent Teacher Associations, still exists.
- 1.4 These two bodies do overlap in representing and supporting parents and Parent Councils.
- 1.5 It has been seen as important that the Parent Councils themselves determine what the next steps might be in the development of any national body. To aid this, the Scottish Government have commissioned this research to gather the views of Parent Councils and other organisations representing parents on the formation of a national body to represent the views of the Parent Councils.
- 1.6 This survey is the first to be undertaken across all Parent Councils. To date no information exists at a national level to determine what stage of development Parent Councils have reached nor any evaluation of the Parent Councils.

Aims and Objectives

- 1.7 The key aim of this research is:

To seek the views of the newly formed Parent Councils and other relevant organisations on the shape and character that a national body might take to represent the views of Parent Councils.

- 1.8 The more detailed objectives of the research are;
 - To determine whether Parent Councils wish to see a national body formed to represent their views at a national level.
 - To seek views on what form such a body would take including amongst others its main role, its functions, its composition etc.
 - To identify the key principles that might underpin the development of a national representative body.

Methodology

1.9 There were three key strands to the methodology adopted.

- A survey of all Parent Councils
- Depth interviews with 8 key stakeholders
- 4 discussion workshops held with parents

Survey

1.10 A questionnaire together with a letter explaining the reasons for the survey plus a briefing paper were sent to the chairs of all parent councils. A reply paid envelope was included. Since no single database of all chairs of Parent Councils currently exists they were sent by post addressed to the chairs at each school address. They were sent to all state schools, including all primary schools, secondary schools and special schools. Independent schools were excluded from the survey.

1.11 In addition, the questionnaire and associated documents could be accessed from the home page of the parentzone website. This allowed an electronic version to be available if Parent Councils wished to forward copies to their members. Questionnaires could be returned by post or electronically.

1.12 In total 2606 questionnaires were sent out in early November 2008. A final date for return was set at 31 January 2009. It is estimated that 92% of schools have Parent Councils. In total 491 responses were received to the questionnaire. This represents a response rate of 19% of those sent out and 20% of the number of Parent Councils thought to be in existence. The data from this survey have a sampling error of +/- 4% on a finding of 50%¹.

1.13 The response rate will have been affected by a number of factors, including:

- It is not clear at this stage how many of the Parent Councils that have been set up are yet active.
- There will be a proportion that will not have had a meeting within the time period of the survey.
- The distribution mechanism for the questionnaires was dependent on the mail reaching the Parent Council chair via the school at the appropriate time.

1.14 All of these factors would have affected the response rate. Every effort was made to give opportunity to respond. Reminders were sent via the Parental Involvement Officers at each local authority who assisted by encouraging Parent Councils in their areas to respond.

1.15 The responses provided a good spread across both rural and urban Scotland.

¹ At a 95% level of confidence

Table 1.1: Urban /rural indicator

| | % of responses | % of questionnaires sent out |
|------------------------|----------------|------------------------------|
| Accessible rural areas | 19 | 18 |
| Accessible small towns | 10 | 8 |
| Large urban areas | 25 | 28 |
| Other urban areas | 25 | 25 |
| Remote rural areas | 16 | 16 |
| Remote small towns | 6 | 4 |
| <i>Base</i> | <i>491</i> | <i>2606</i> |

There was also a good spread of response from both primary and secondary schools

Table 1.2: Type of school

| | % of responses | % of questionnaires sent out |
|-------------|----------------|------------------------------|
| Primary | 79 | 82 |
| Secondary | 20 | 14 |
| Special | 3 | 5 |
| <i>Base</i> | <i>491</i> | <i>2606</i> |

Depth Interviews

1.16 Depth interviews were undertaken with the following organisations

- Scottish Parent Council Association
- Scottish Parent Teacher Council
- Consumer Focus Scotland
- Parenting across Scotland
- ENQUIRE
- Scottish Catholic Education Service
- Scottish Parental Involvement Officers Network
- Church of Scotland

1.17 Each interview was undertaken in person. Typically interviews lasted between 90 minutes and 2 hours. All were audiotape recorded and transcriptions made.

Discussion Workshops

1.18 Four discussion workshops with parents were held, two in Dundee and two in Glasgow but open to attendance from across the country. Two events took place in the mornings and the remaining two in the evenings with the aim of finding times that would be convenient for all parents. Members of Parent Councils were invited to attend. Parental Involvement Officers across local authorities sent out the invitations to Parent Councils electronically.

1.19 In total 59 parents took part with between 9 and 20 attending each of the events. 16 local authorities were represented providing a good geographical spread. The discussion aimed to move the debate on from what was covered within the questionnaire onto issues such as:

- Membership
- Funding
- Independence
- Primary Role of a national body
- Involvement of parents
- Inclusivity
- Breadth of remit

1.20 The discussion also took place at a time when some of the Parent Councils are not yet well established, whilst others were well established and well informed. The variation in their stage of development impacted on the discussions of general principles.

Structure of this report

1.21 The following chapter examines the context within which this research sits. It provides some information relating to the current situation in more detail identifies what support is currently available to parents and to Parent Councils.

1.22 Chapter 3 explores the activities that Parent Councils are currently engaged in, the advice and support that is seen by Parent Councils to be provided and where that support is provided from.

1.23 Chapter 4 examines the activities that Parent Councils hope to undertake for which they feel they need more advice and support. It also considers the issues that they would like to get further support and advice on in the future.

1.24 Chapter 5 aims to measure the perceived need for a national body and explores the reasons given for taking a view either in favour of a national body or against having a national body.

1.25 Chapter 6 examines the role that Parent Councils feel a national body should be taking including examining the priorities for such an organisation and how some of these roles might be best achieved.

1.26 Chapter 7 examines the findings of primarily the qualitative aspects of this study to explore some of the key principles that might underpin the development of any national body. This includes a discussion on issues such as: Membership/Funding/Independence, Breadth of Remit, Structure, Governance and Capacity.

1.27 Chapter 8 looks at the issues surrounding engaging Parent Council members in a national body.

1.28 The final chapter draws together some of the key findings and considers the next steps that might be taken in the development of a national body.

2 CONTEXT

- 2.1 This chapter sets the scene for the research. It describes the existing position, highlights some current issues and identifies currently available support.
- 2.2 The views expressed in this chapter are those of the key stakeholders. Among other headings, they provided their views on
- what support parents and Parent Councils require to fulfil the aspirations held for them in the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006,
 - what their organisation currently does to support parents or Parent Councils
 - what major gaps they identify within the advice and support available to parents.
- 2.3 It is as yet unclear what effect the introduction of Parent Councils has had. No evaluation of Parent Councils has yet been undertaken.

Engagement

- 2.4 Parents want the best for their children, but they need help with how they can best support them. There is a view held that some parents do not wish to be engaged with their child's school or Parent Council but another view is that parents simply do not know enough about how to go about that. Opportunities must be created both for Parent Councils and for parents. Parents must first become aware that their views are seen as important, are valued and can be represented to those who make decisions on our behalf, i.e. they must be made aware of the positive consequences of becoming engaged with Parent Councils and any national or regional body that represents them.
- 2.5 Some feel that there is a need to ensure improved representation across those parents who do engage. There has tended to be a strong middle class bias, which has been off-putting to others in some instances. There are concerns about the difficulties involved in getting representation for parents who are disadvantaged in some way and often feel that they have little to offer.
- 2.6 Significant effort has already been put into trying to get parents to engage. There are a number of home/school workers although they are commonly found in more deprived areas. It is recognised to be particularly difficult to engage those parents who are vulnerable or disadvantaged. This is where home school partnership initiatives are seen as especially important.
- 2.7 Parents need to be given the confidence to engage either just with their own child's learning or wider engagement with their child's school or Parent Council.
- 2.8 Representation for parents has traditionally been low profile at best with education professionals having a much stronger voice through their professional bodies. It is seen by some stakeholders that this imbalance needs to be addressed.

Advice for parents

- 2.9 There are a number of organisations already in existence offering advice to parents. Advice and support for additional support for learning is also available. However the number of organisations means that it would be a significant task just to map them. One of the issues is simply identifying what is the best place for parents to go if they do have a problem.
- 2.10 The SPTC and SPCA provide advice by phone. This is central to much of what they do by providing grass roots intelligence on issues currently affecting parents.
- 2.11 Given that the pool of parents keeps changing as new children join and leave schools, there is a constant need to provide and refresh information to parents.

Timing

- 2.12 There are mixed views on the timing of any developments in relation to further support for Parent Councils or the development of any national body. One view is that Parent Councils are still in a very formative phase and will want to develop in their own ways and that the required support should be allowed to develop over time. This is already beginning to happen as some Parent Councils move into making contact with other Parent Councils.
- 2.13 The contrary view is that some Parent Councils need more direction and support to help them know what it is that they are expected to be doing. This view sees a more urgent need to provide a structure and support for Parent Councils as well as efficiency benefits.
- 2.14 The legacy of the PTAs and the school boards can result in some trying to run the new Parent Councils along similar lines as the precursor organisations.

Identifying issues

- 2.15 Parent Councils cannot tackle all issues immediately. There is a need for them to be able to identify the issues and prioritise them.

Networking

- 2.16 Networking is starting to become established. Some are very formal e.g. the Consultative Committees with Parents run by local authorities which allow parents to question LA officials. Others are parent led and less formal e.g. Edinburgh Parent Council Network. Sometimes local networks are set up around a particular issue such as local authority budget cuts and then evolve.
- 2.17 There is a clear division apparent here namely top down (the Consultative Committee) and bottom up (the local networks). The latter are more flexible and are identifying their own issues for attention.
- 2.18 There are also regional liaison groups being set up in some parts of the country. These have a wider geographical base and are less formal.

- 2.19 As part of networking, there is a need identified to facilitate communications between Parent Councils. E-mail and web based mechanisms clearly make this much easier now than hitherto. However the lack of a database of e-mail addresses for all Parent Councils is a significant barrier to easy communications. The SPCA have created dedicated e-mail addresses for all Parent Councils but know that many have not set them up or use them.
- 2.20 Schools are now complex organisations particularly the larger ones and they need to connect with other organisations such as the local authority, which can also be complex. Efforts are needed to build connections across the whole range of services including health and children's services as well as education.
- 2.21 The Catholic Education Service have been involved in diocesan meetings of Parent Councils for Roman Catholic (RC) schools to identify the key issues, what support they would find helpful and what their role might be.
- 2.22 Networking is one means of raising awareness of issues and of building confidence. Parent Councils can feel quite isolated and see themselves solely as having a role to play within their own particular school but no more than that. Bringing people together can help them to see a wider role.

Training

- 2.23 Training was also identified as a need.
- 2.24 Local authorities are now providing more training themselves than hitherto. Previously much training was provided by the SPCA but this is not being purchased by local authorities due to their lack of status as the national body.

Support for Parent Councils

- 2.25 Support is available from either of the two organisations currently representing Parent Councils – the SPTC and the SPCA as well as a variety of other organisations. They also receive support from LA Parental Involvement Officers. In addition a National Parental Involvement Co-ordinator seconded through LTS is a key channel of communication and there is a Parental Involvement team at the Scottish Government.
- 2.26 Newsletters are provided by each of SPTC and SPCA as well as a termly newsletter for Parent Councils from the National Co-ordinator. Conferences are also arranged by many of the support bodies. These all raise awareness of issues and help to share good practice across Parent Councils.
- 2.27 The Catholic Education Service also offers advice and have prepared a one off publication that was sent to members of RC Parent Councils through schools and parishes.
- 2.28 LA Parental Involvement Officers support Parent Councils by encouraging parents' learning, sharing information/good practice and arranging seminars, workshops and conferences. They also send regular information by email and newsletters. Many of the Parental Involvement Officers have developed their own mailing lists of Parent Council chairs and can use this as a medium for

communication. This is not however consolidated nor is it available outside the local authority. For those Parent Councils who do not have email access, communication must go through the head teacher.

2.29 Some LA's have bought insurance for their Parent Councils, either directly via an insurance company or (more commonly) by bulk membership of the SPTC, which offers insurance as part of the membership package. Additional funds have been given to Local Authorities to help support Parent Councils. Some chose to spend this money by paying insurance on behalf of Parent Councils to help Parent Councils get started. Others expect Parent Councils to make their own arrangements.

Key Findings

- Parental views should be heard as well as those of education professionals.
- More needs to be done to support Parent Councils to engage with the wider parent forum and improve representativeness.
- A number of other organisations providing advice to parents also exist. It can be difficult to identify the best source for a given problem
- Views on the urgency for setting up a national body differ. Some see this as urgent whilst others think it can be allowed to develop over time.
- Networking is starting to be established. There is a need to facilitate the growing communications between Parent Councils.

3 CURRENT ACTIVITIES AND SUPPORT PROVIDED

- 3.1 Parent Councils are relatively new and are at different stages of their development. Parent Councils were asked to indicate what their current activities were. Current activity is very varied and is likely to reflect the differing stages of development. This was an open-ended question with no prompts.
- 3.2 Responses were categorised to help provide an outline of current activity and Table 3.1 identifies all activity categories mentioned by 2% or more Parent Councils on their first mention.

Table 3.1 Current activity of Parent Councils

| <i>(Base = 491)</i> | First mention |
|---|---------------|
| | % |
| Fundraising | 26 |
| Playing back what the parental view is to any interested party | 13 |
| Communicating – mainly to parents | 11 |
| Broad reference to supporting the school | 5 |
| Co-ordination with school staff. Implies some proactivity | 5 |
| Pushing through what has agreed to happen | 4 |
| Monitoring and lobbying the LA | 4 |
| Specific issues associated with running the school | 3 |
| Emphasis on improving how the school/parent body see each other | 3 |
| Promoting participation by parents in school related activity | 3 |
| Identify what it is that is required | 3 |
| Support of / helping school staff | 3 |
| Forum to probe ideas . proposals | 2 |
| Specific participations/ management of events | 2 |
| Simply describes schedules of meetings | 2 |
| Monitoring/ development of schools own policies | 2 |
| Close co-operation with teaching staff | 2 |
| Rehearses the broad strategic aims of Parent Councils | 2 |
| BASE=491 | |

- 3.3 It is clear that much of Parent Councils' current activity relates to fundraising and this was the most commonly mentioned activity by far. Issues such as representing parents' views are mentioned much less. However after fundraising, representing the parent view and communicating primarily with parents are the main current activities. Supporting the school, co-ordinating with school staff, implementation of agreed actions, and promoting participation by parents in school related activities and monitoring and lobbying the local authority are in the next range of activities being undertaken by Parent Councils.
- 3.4 Parent Councils were able to indicate up to four activities in this question and were asked to present them in order of priority. The pattern which resulted for second, third and fourth mentioned activities was in practice only slightly different from that set out above but did bring the following additional activities above the 1% threshold:

- Working with the wider community
- Point of contact for parents allowing co-ordination / consolidation
- Participation in local Parent Council network
- Appointment of senior staff

3.5 The full set of results is shown in Appendix 1.

3.6 It must however be remembered that Parent Councils are in early stages and these activities may well change with time.

3.7 The questionnaire listed a range of activities that previous research indicated were possible activities. Parent Councils currently receive support from a range of sources on a number of different issues. The following table lists the activities for which advice and support is currently provided.

Table 3.2 Issues for which advice and support is currently provided

| <i>(Base = 491)</i> | | % |
|-----------------------------------|--|----|
| Representing Parents | Encouraging parental involvement | 71 |
| | Accessing views of the parent forum | 46 |
| | Responding to consultations | 46 |
| | Representing parents views to Scottish Government | 35 |
| Communicating with Parents | Writing / circulating a newsletter | 43 |
| | Providing accessible communication to ALL parents | 37 |
| | Engaging with parents of prospective new pupils | 34 |
| | Setting up and maintaining a website | 32 |
| | Setting up and managing a blog | 8 |
| Acquiring knowledge | Keeping up to date with educational policy | 69 |
| | Learning about other sources of information and advice for parents | 49 |
| | Understanding how LA education departments work | 40 |
| Administering | Managing insurance issues | 58 |
| | Running meetings | 51 |
| | Managing Disclosure Scotland issues | 45 |
| | Interviewing skills | 41 |
| Activities | Raising funds | 41 |
| | Accessing local facilities / resources | 37 |
| | Organising events | 34 |
| | Promoting links with the community | 34 |
| | Accessing grants | 25 |
| Networking | Networking with other Parent Councils | 55 |
| | Sharing best practice across Scotland | 24 |
| | Identifying other groups to work with | 15 |

3.8 Unlike the previous question, this list was prompted and given that support and advice are provided for some of these activities it does suggest that they are being undertaken or considered - even if not to the front of people's minds.

3.9 The majority of Parent Councils responding are getting help in encouraging parental involvement (71%) and keeping up to date with educational policy (69%). Over half are getting help with insurance issues (58%), networking with other Parent Councils (55%) and running meetings (51%).

- 3.10 Areas where there is less help provided include accessing grants (25%), sharing best practice (24%), identifying other groups to work with (15%) and setting up and managing a blog (8%).
- 3.11 There was some variation between primary and secondary schools. Secondary schools were more likely to be interested in advice and support in engaging with prospective new pupils than were primary schools (47% compared to 31%). Writing and circulating a newsletter was also more likely to be mentioned by secondary schools (50% compared to 41%) as was representing parents' views to Scottish Government (43% compared to 33%). Large urban schools were more likely than average to get help with engaging parents of prospective new pupils (44% compared to 34%) and to get help in providing accessible communications to all parents (46% compared to 37%).
- 3.12 Primary schools appeared to be getting more support in relation to accessing grants than were secondary schools (27% compared to 19%).
- 3.13 Schools in remote rural or remote small towns are more likely than average to get help in accessing local facilities.
- 3.14 Parent Councils receive support from a wide range of sources. The source of support for each activity was sought. To ease description, the results have been rationalised into 25 main sources. A full list as shown in Appendix 2.
- 3.15 The extent of each source across the various Parent Council activities is shown in Appendix 3. The most prominent feature is the extent to which Parent Councils depend on LA's for support. LA's are the biggest single source of support in 15 of the 24 activities.
- 3.16 The commentary in the following paragraphs is based only on sources registering 5% or greater mentions against a particular activity. This simplifies the analysis to 16 sources of support but it is important to remember that a much wider range of supporting entities exists. Indeed a number of smaller rural schools went to lengths to stress how they relied successfully on broadly based support from the local community.
- 3.17 As it should already be clear that the school community overall is critically important in supporting the work of their Parent Council. It was felt worthwhile to show the constituent elements separately (Senior Management Team (SMT), staff, school) where the data supplied by Parent Councils allows. It should be noted however that this probably underestimates the contribution from the SMT as some Parent Councils will simply have used the term "school" to refer to anyone attached to the school.
- 3.18 Collectively, the school community (excluding the Parent Council itself) provides overall support equivalent to about 70% of that provided by the LA's and almost 80% as much again as does the SPTC (the third largest single source of support).

Representing Parents

3.19 Parent Councils acknowledge a significant amount of support across those activities which are directed at Representing Parents. This varies however, with support to *Encourage Parental Involvement* being twice as evident as that for *Representing Parents Views to Scottish Government*.

Table 3.3 Support in relation to representing parents

| Representing Parents | mentions of support | LTS | PZ | SPCA | SPTC | SMT | school | PC | LA | SG |
|--|---------------------|-----|----|------|------|-----|--------|----|----|----|
| | <i>no.</i> | % | % | % | % | % | % | % | % | % |
| Encouraging parental involvement | 350 | 5 | 17 | 9 | 16 | 13 | 16 | | 54 | |
| Accessing views of the parent forum | 227 | | 11 | 8 | 10 | 11 | 21 | 8 | 38 | |
| Responding to consultations | 228 | 5 | 8 | 7 | 19 | 11 | 11 | 8 | 45 | 5 |
| Representing parents' views to Scottish Government | 170 | | 6 | 16 | 34 | | 6 | 6 | 31 | |
| <i>Average for Representing Parents</i> | <i>243.8</i> | | | | | | | | | |

3.20 LA's provide the single greatest amount of support in this area and their support is spread fairly evenly across the activities.

3.21 Both SPTC and SPCA are active here also. The two organisations are perceived as achieving their greatest impact when it comes to *Representing Parents views to Scottish Government* - most especially SPTC which marginally exceeds LAs on this activity.

3.22 Support from SPTC is roughly twice that from SPCA across each activity. Only on Accessing Parents Views does SPCA approach the same impact as SPTC.

3.23 The school including SMT is however a greater source of support for most of these activities than either SPTC or SPCA. (The exception being Representing Parents views to Scottish Government.)

3.24 Excepting Representing Parents Views to Scottish Government (dominated by SPTC/LA/SPCA), LTS/Parentzone provides a notable contribution on the other activities and just slightly more than that from SPTC.

Communicating with Parents

3.25 The least amount of support is acknowledged in the activities related to Communicating with Parents. In particular, little support is recorded to *Set Up and Manage a Blog*.

3.26 The school community dominates in providing this support with contributions recorded from SMT, staff and the school generally. Its support is especially important in *Writing/Circulation of a Newsletter* - the only activity in this area where Parent Councils report support greater than the overall average – and

Engaging Parents of New Pupils where understandably it monopolises the support recognised.

Table 3.4 Support in relation to communicating with parents

| Communicating with Parents | mentions of support | PZ | SPTC | SMT | Staff | school | Parent Council | parent | LA |
|---|---------------------|----|------|-----|-------|--------|----------------|--------|----|
| | no. | % | % | % | % | % | % | % | % |
| Writing/circulating a newsletter | 210 | | | 6 | | 15 | 5 | | 7 |
| Setting up and maintaining a website | 155 | | | 10 | 8 | 34 | 8 | 6 | 26 |
| Setting up and managing a blog | 38 | | 8 | | 11 | 24 | 13 | 13 | 24 |
| Providing accessible communication to ALL parents | 180 | 8 | 8 | 16 | 7 | 24 | 10 | | 22 |
| Engaging with parents of prospective new pupils | 167 | | | | | 18 | 38 | | 7 |
| <i>Average for Communicating with Parents</i> | 152.6 | | | | | | | | |

3.27 The LA's approach the School's contribution in respect of *Website, Blog and Accessible Communication to ALL* but are still well short of the contribution from the wider school community.

3.28 *Setting up and Managing a Blog* or a *Website* also draw support from the wider parent body suggesting the possibility of local DIY. Support from SPTC and Parentzone is much less in this area with small contributions to *Providing Accessible Communication to ALL Parents*, and (by SPTC only) to *Setting Up/Managing a Blog*.

Acquiring knowledge

3.29 Parent Councils acknowledge the greatest level of support in this area. Most especially this is the case in terms of *Keeping Up to date with Educational Policy* and *Understanding How LA Departments work*.

Table 3.5 Support in relation to acquiring knowledge

| Acquiring knowledge | mentions of support | LTS | PZ | SPCA | SPTC | SMT | School | Parent Council networks | LA | Sc Govt |
|--|---------------------|-----|----|------|------|-----|--------|-------------------------|----|---------|
| | no. | % | % | % | % | % | % | % | % | % |
| Keeping up to date with educational policy | 341 | 9 | 13 | 7 | 20 | 28 | 14 | | 53 | 6 |
| Understanding how LA Education departments work | 194 | | | | 6 | 19 | 7 | | 68 | |
| Learning about other sources of information and advice for parents | 242 | 5 | 21 | 10 | 25 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 29 | |
| <i>Average for Acquiring Knowledge</i> | 259 | | | | | | | | | |

3.30 The LA contribution is especially evident on both those activities and unsurprisingly most of all on the latter where only the SMT/school and a small contribution from SPTC are also recorded. Significant contributions to *Keeping*

Up to Date are however acknowledged from the school, SMT, SPTC and to a lesser extent SPCA, Parentzone/LTS and Scottish Government.

3.31 Parent Councils draw more widely for support in respect of *Learning about other Sources of Information/Advice*. LTS/Parentzone, SPTC and the LA's all support Parent Councils to broadly the same extent. SPCA's support on this is rather less and comparable to that from the school including SMT. A small amount of support is gained from other Parent Councils.

Administration

3.32 By contrast, while there is a similarly high level of support for the internal administration of the Parent Council, only five significant sources are reported and even this is only true for a single activity with the others drawing on fewer.

Table 3.6 Support in relation to administrative tasks

| Administrative Tasks | <i>mentions of support</i> | SPCA | SPTC | SMT | school | LA |
|---|----------------------------|------|------|-----|--------|----|
| | <i>no.</i> | % | % | % | % | % |
| Running meetings | 250 | | 6 | | 8 | 28 |
| Interviewing skills | 202 | | | | | 76 |
| Managing Disclosure Scotland issues | 219 | 5 | 23 | 9 | 16 | 37 |
| Managing Insurance issues | 286 | 8 | 43 | | 6 | 44 |
| <i>Average for Administrative Tasks</i> | <i>239.2</i> | | | | | |

3.33 Again the LA is predominant, and this is true across all activities with a monopoly of support for *Interviewing Skills* in particular.

3.34 SPTC and the LA's share top billing for supporting *Managing Insurance* and *Managing Disclosure Scotland* issues. SPCA contributes much less support on both these activities.

3.35 Only on *Managing Disclosure Scotland* does the school offer substantial support when (together with its SMT) it's contribution slightly exceeds that from SPTC.

Activities

3.36 The Activities undertaken by Parent Councils draw on less support from other organisations - but quite broadly. *Fundraising* in particular cites nine significant sources - the largest number for any single activity and this is the only activity where the level of support is above the overall average.

3.37 This is also the only area where the support contributions from the wider Community and its Elected Representatives register significantly (to *Access Facilities*, *Access Grants* and *Promote Links within the Community*) and where specific mention of PTAs registers as some schools maintain a separate PTA and Parent Council with fundraising explicitly delegated to the PTA.

Table 3.7 Support in relation to Activities

| Activities | mentions of support | SPTC | PTA | SMT | staff | school | Parent Councils | parent | Community | other schools | LA | elected reps |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------|------|-----|-----|-------|--------|-----------------|--------|-----------|---------------|----|--------------|
| | <i>no.</i> | % | % | % | % | % | % | % | % | % | % | % |
| Accessing local facilities/resources | 183 | | | 9 | | 20 | 7 | | 9 | | 49 | 7 |
| Raising funds | 202 | 23 | 10 | 5 | 5 | 14 | 14 | 7 | | 5 | 16 | |
| Accessing grants | 122 | 10 | | 7 | | 6 | 6 | | | | 35 | 5 |
| Organising events | 167 | 16 | | 7 | | 18 | 10 | | | | 11 | |
| Promoting links with the community | 166 | | | 7 | | 23 | 9 | | 15 | | 15 | 5 |
| <i>Average for Activities</i> | <i>168</i> | | | | | | | | | | | |

3.38 LA's are especially prominent in respect of *Accessing Local Facilities* and *Accessing Grants*. Their contribution to the other activities is much less, if still significant. But taken together, the school community plays almost as great a support role as LAs and fairly evenly spread across all activities (bar *Accessing Grants*).

3.39 Unsurprisingly Parent Councils note a greater support role for themselves in this area than in any other.

3.40 SPTC is the leading support organisation on *Fundraising* but also makes a notable contribution to *Organising Events* and, to a still lesser extent, *Accessing Grants*.

Networking

3.41 Networking is the second least supported area with a level and pattern which is only just higher than that acknowledged for *Communicating with Parents*. It may reflect a transitional stage as Parent Councils extend their networks. Parent Councils acknowledge especially little support in *Identifying Other Groups to Work with*.

Table 3.8 Support in relation to networking

| Networking | mentions of support | LTS | PZ | SPCA | SPTC | SMT | school | Parent council | Parent council networks | LA |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------|-----|----|------|------|-----|--------|----------------|-------------------------|----|
| | <i>no.</i> | % | % | % | % | % | % | % | % | % |
| Networking with other Parent Councils | 270 | | | | 6 | | | | 11 | 57 |
| Sharing best practice across Scotland | 117 | 9 | 13 | 9 | 33 | | | | | 24 |
| Identifying other groups to work with | 74 | | | 5 | 8 | 5 | 9 | 8 | | 20 |
| <i>Average for Networking</i> | <i>153.7</i> | | | | | | | | | |

- 3.42 Currently support for this evolution arises mostly from the LA's but SPTC registers a substantial contribution on *Sharing Best Practice*. LTS/Parentzone is also acknowledged against this activity as, to a lesser extent, is SPCA.
- 3.43 Unsurprisingly Parent Council Networks register on *Networking with Other Parent Councils* making a smallish contribution as yet, relative to that provided by the LA's but still almost twice as much as SPTC - the only other contributor to this activity.
- 3.44 *Sharing Best Practice* is fairly lightly supported. This may reflect the stage of evolution which Parent Councils have reached as well as reluctance on the part of some Parent Councils to devote limited available capacity to anywhere beyond their local school.
- 3.45 Least supported of all activities in this area (and second least overall across all areas) is *Identifying Other Groups to work with*. The LA contribution here, while largest of any supporting body, is relatively light, with a trickle of smaller contributions from the school/SMT, SPTC, SPCA and the Parent Council members themselves.

Key Findings

- Most commonly mentioned current activities
 - Fundraising
 - Representing the parent view
 - Communicating (primarily with parents).
- Greatest level of support currently received
 - Encouraging Parental Involvement (71%)
 - Keeping up to date with Educational Policy (69%)
 - Insurance issues (58%),
 - Networking with other Parent Councils (55%)
 - Running meetings (51%)
- Least supported activities tend to be those related to Communicating with Parents (especially through digital media), Accessing Grants, Sharing Best Practice, and Identifying Other Groups to work with.
- Wide variety of sources of support with LA being single greatest source for 15 out of the 24 activities researched.
- Collectively the school community is the biggest source of support in all activities to do with Communicating with Parents and also in Raising Funds (jointly with SPTC), Organising Events and Promoting Links with the Community.
- SPTC is single biggest source in Sharing Best Practice, Representing Parents to Scottish Government, Raising Funds (jointly with the school community) and Managing Insurance (jointly with the LA).

4 FUTURE ACTIVITIES AND SUPPORT

4.1 Parent Councils were asked if there are any other activities that they would like to undertake in the future that they would need more support and advice to do. Here again this was an open-ended question with no prompts. Parent Councils could indicate up to four activities and were asked to present these in order of priority. Appendix 4 shows a full set of all activities with a response of 1% or more.

Table 4.1 Desired Activities for the future requiring more support and advice

| | First mention |
|---|---------------|
| <i>(Base=491)</i> | % |
| Fundraising | 8 |
| Promoting participation by parents on school related activity | 7 |
| Forum to probe ideas/ proposals | 7 |
| Participation in local Parent Council network | 5 |
| Simply describes schedule of meetings | 5 |
| Benchmarking | 3 |
| Wider ranging, business style reviews of school activity | 3 |
| Monitoring and lobbying LA | 3 |
| Communicating – mainly to parents | 3 |
| Appointments of senior staff | 3 |
| Broad reference to supporting school | 2 |
| Monitoring / development of schools own policies | 2 |
| Specific activity on improving the curriculum | 2 |
| Specific participation / management of events | 2 |
| Not stated | 42 |

4.2 Fewer Parent Councils replied to this question than did to the question on current activity with some 42% providing no response at all. This suggests that there is some uncertainty concerning what they might be doing in the future.

4.3 Of the activities that are mentioned, fundraising does come up again and it is clear that this is seen as an ongoing activity for Parent Councils. However much the remaining activities start to focus on issues relating to encouraging more parental participation, finding ways of examining ideas and proposals and networking.

4.4 Second third and fourth mentions again made little difference to the picture though it did bring the following issues above the 1% threshold:

- Specifically referring to activities outside of curriculum
- Pushing through what has been agreed
- Working with the wider community

4.5 Parent Councils were then asked using a prompted list, on which issues they would like further support and advice in the future.

Table 4.2 Issues where Parent Councils wish support and advice in the future

| | | % |
|----------------------------|--|----|
| Representing Parents | Encouraging parental involvement | 62 |
| | Accessing views of the parent forum | 45 |
| | Representing parents views to Scottish Government | 47 |
| | Responding to consultations | 35 |
| Communicating with Parents | Writing / circulating a newsletter | 45 |
| | Setting up and maintaining a website | 41 |
| | Setting up and managing a blog | 43 |
| | Engaging with parents of prospective new pupils | 27 |
| | Providing accessible communication to ALL parents | 26 |
| Acquiring knowledge | Keeping up to date with educational policy | 50 |
| | Learning about other sources of information/advice for parents | 48 |
| | Understanding how LA education departments work | 27 |
| Administering | Running meetings | 42 |
| | Managing Insurance issues | 38 |
| | Interviewing skills | 27 |
| | Managing Disclosure Scotland issues | 22 |
| Activities | Promoting links with the community | 61 |
| | Accessing local facilities / resources | 50 |
| | Accessing grants | 38 |
| | Raising funds | 39 |
| | Organising events | 18 |
| Networking | Sharing best practice across Scotland | 47 |
| | Networking with other Parent Councils | 40 |
| | Identifying other groups to work with | 28 |
| Not stated | | 12 |
| Other | | 7 |
| <i>Base = 491</i> | | |

4.6 The most common area to want further support and advice on was how to encourage parental involvement (62%) with a further 45% interested in accessing the views of the parent forum. This suggests that Parent Councils are grappling with the problem of how best to engage with their parent forum. It is interesting to note that nearly the same proportion (61%) were also interested in how they can promote links with the wider community.

4.7 There is clearly a desire to be as informed as possible about what is available to them to support with large proportions interested in keeping up to date with educational policy (50%), learning about other sources of information and advice (48%) and sharing best practice across Scotland (47%).

Changing Support Requirements

4.8 To assess where gaps might arise the survey responses on future needs were compared with those for current support provision. Table 4.3 groups activities according to the level of support they currently receive and the level of support they expect to need in future. It also shows the change in the number of mentions of support made by Parent Councils i.e. the difference between future level desired and current level received.

4.9 In general terms, those activities already enjoying higher than average support do not feature appreciably more strongly in terms of future support expectations. This includes all of the headings previously grouped under

Administration. As it seems unlikely that Parent Councils want less support, the sense is that on headings like *Managing Disclosure Scotland* Parent Councils are satisfied that the existing provision is adequate.

4.10 Two activities (*Accessing Grants* and *Identifying other groups to work with*) which currently receive lower than average support attract greater interest for future support but still remain lower than average in terms of perceived future support requirements. The LA's provide the main support currently in these areas with SPTC, SPCA, the wider school and Elected Representatives all being drawn upon also.

| Low Current Support level High Future Support Desired | Change in mentions | High Current Support Level High Future Support Desired | Change in mentions |
|--|-------------------------------|---|-------------------------------|
| Setting up and managing a blog | 172 | Writing/circulating a newsletter | 9 |
| Promoting links with the community | 132 | Access views of the parent forum | -5 |
| Sharing best practice across Scotland | 116 | Learning about other sources of information and advice for parents | -7 |
| Accessing local facilities/ resources | 64 | Running meetings | -43 |
| Representing parents' views to Scottish Government | 60 | Encouraging parental involvement | -48 |
| Setting up and maintaining a website | 48 | Networking with other Parent Councils | -73 |
| | | Keeping up to date with educational policy | -94 |
| | | Managing Insurance issues | -99 |
| Low Current Support level Low Future Support Desired | Change in mentions | High Current Support Level Low Future Support Desired | Change in mentions |
| Accessing grants | 63 | Raising funds | -11 |
| Identify other groups to work with | 62 | Responding to consultations | -55 |
| Engaging with parents of prospective new pupils | -35 | Interviewing skills | -71 |
| Providing accessible communication to ALL parents | -53 | Managing Disclosure Scotland issues | -113 |
| Understanding how LA Education departments work | -62 | | |
| Organising events | -77 | | |

4.11 It was noted earlier that while schools are the single biggest contributor, *Setting up a blog* draws on a variety of sources for current support. One reading of this is that Parent Councils find themselves improvising.

4.12 To a lesser extent this pattern also shows for *Setting up and Managing a Website* and the two activities are clearly closely related. *Sharing Best Practice across Scotland* is perhaps the next step from establishing the Parent Council networks themselves (which Parent Councils feel are already well supported). One of the mechanisms for achieving this will be to use web-enabled channels.

4.13 It is not known to the research team what the plans are for any rollout of GLOW and what transitional measures there might be to encourage standard layouts

etc advance in order to facilitate navigation by other Parent Councils. But a number of Parent Councils are hopeful of a beneficial impact.

- 4.14 SPTC, LTS/Parentzone, SPCA and of course the LA all have a role in providing current support to *Sharing Best Practice*. Given that this is currently seen as being at a lower than average level of provision, there may be capacity challenges if there is a demand for this support role to be expanded.
- 4.15 Similar observations can be made about *Representing parents' views to Scottish Government* where support is again provided currently from the same organisations albeit from a higher existing level.
- 4.16 Parent Councils anticipate a substantially greater need for support to *Promote links with the community*. Survey responses anticipate this moving from a less than average supported activity to having the second highest requirement of any activity for support (after *Encouraging Parental involvement*). The school itself is seen as the major current support source for this together, of course, with smaller contributions from the community itself and the LA.
- 4.17 The same sources feature in providing support to *Access local facilities/resources* which is the final activity in this category. In this case, though, the LA presence is stronger than the school's or community's

Key Findings

- Unprompted, activities where Parent Councils would seek support in future –
Fundraising
Encouraging more Parental participation,
Finding ways of examining ideas/proposals and
Networking.
- Prompted, the most common area for further support –
Encourage Parental Involvement (62%),
how to Promote links with the wider community (61%)
- The majority of activities currently receiving greater than average support would still need relatively high support levels in future.
- Activities where anticipated future support needs exceed current provision are
Setting up and Managing/Maintaining a Website/Blog,
Promoting Links with the Community,
Sharing Best Practice,
Accessing Local facilities/Resources and
Representing Parents to Scottish Government.
- Increased support is also sought for Accessing Grants and Identifying other Groups to Work with.

5 NEED FOR A NATIONAL BODY

5.1 Support for a national body was high. Of the total sample 66% agreed that there should be a national body, 18% disagreed, 13% did not have a view and 3% did not respond to the question.

5.2 Of those who did express a view, 79% are in favour of a national body.

5.3 This view was consistent across the sample. It did not vary significantly by type or by size of school nor by the level of free school meals. Nor is there much variation across the urban/rural dimension though there is a slight bias in favour of a national body from remote areas (83%) and the large urban areas (85%) and the least favour (at 70%) coming from accessible small towns.

5.4 Those who did express a view were asked to provide a reason for that view. They could provide more than one reason.

Reasons for a national body

5.5 The key reason in favour of a national body is that Parent Councils want a body to **represent Parent Councils and parents and give them a voice**. This was mentioned by over a quarter (26%) of all who think there should be a national body. A further 11% feel that one voice will be more likely to be heard.

5.6 There are also a number looking for a level playing field. There is a concern that all Parent Councils should have access to the same levels of support. This would suggest that membership fees might be a barrier to achieving this goal. There are also concerns that some schools received better support than others either due to their school's attitude to Parent Councils or due to the range of support from local authorities. A National body is seen as one means of ensuring that all have access to similar levels of support. 10% mentioned a body that would co-ordinate and consolidate issues such that there is more uniformity across all schools whilst a further 13% wanted a one stop shop for information and advice such that everyone gets the same. 1% specifically mentioned equality for schools or an even playing field.

5.7 A National body was also seen as one way of bringing Parent Councils together such that they can learn from each other. 10% were looking for a national body to aid sharing of best practice and the promotion of networking.

5.8 The importance of having a national body which is independent and unbiased is also raised here (7%). This is seen as crucial to the success of the national body and is discussed in greater depth in Chapter 7.

5.9 There is some reference in replies to the existing organisations - SPTC and SPCA. 3% feel that the SPTC are already undertaking the role of the national body and therefore that a national body is in fact the status quo. Another 1% express the hope that the two existing bodies will merge.

5.10 Although mentioned by only 3% there is some dissatisfaction with the existing bodies and for them a single national body would represent a fresh start.

Table 5.1 Reasons for wanting a national body

| | % |
|---|----|
| To represent parents/PCs / give them a voice | 26 |
| One stop shop for advice / information – so everyone gets the same | 13 |
| Improve support / advice | 12 |
| One voice is better/ stronger / louder | 11 |
| Co-ordinate/ consolidate issues / uniformity across all schools | 10 |
| Share best practice/ ideas / promote networking | 10 |
| An independent unbiased body | 7 |
| To influence policy /lobby the government | 6 |
| 2-way communication with govt / communication link with them | 3 |
| SPTC should do this / already do it now | 3 |
| Dissatisfied with present system to two bodies | 3 |
| Consultation with parents | 1 |
| Merge existing bodies | 1 |
| Would mean equality for schools / parents / a level playing field | 1 |
| Raises the profile and motivates | 1 |
| Diversity | 1 |
| Improved communication | 1 |
| A filter for efficiency | 1 |
| Other | 9 |
| Not stated | 6 |
| <i>Base = 324 i.e. all agreeing there should be a national body</i> | |

Reasons why there is no need for a national body

5.11 Table 5.2 lists the reasons why there is no need for a national body. The main reason, mentioned by over a fifth of those who see no need for a national body, is that they feel that SPTC/SPCA already fill that role (22%) or that the existing support that comes via SPTC/ SPCA or the LA is sufficient (16%). A further 18% believe that the priority is the local agenda and not the national one.

Table 5.2 Reasons why no need for a national body

| | % |
|---|----|
| SPTC/ SPCA already fill the role | 22 |
| local agenda is the priority | 18 |
| Existing support from SPTC/LA/ others is sufficient | 16 |
| Bureaucracy / spend money elsewhere | 11 |
| Too much diversity for it to work | 10 |
| People don't have time or energy for more | 3 |
| A regional body would be better | 3 |
| Independence in doubt (govt funded) | 2 |
| Yet another layer of structure / level of hierarchy | 2 |
| No need / can't see any advantage | 2 |
| Prefer other existing alternatives | 2 |
| Concerns about national body | 2 |
| Other | 5 |
| Not stated | 7 |
| <i>Base = 88 all who don't agree that there should be a national body</i> | |

5.12 There are also concerns expressed by 11% that this will result in more bureaucracy and that the money would be better spent elsewhere.

5.13 One in ten of those who do not want a national body feel that there is too much diversity for it to work i.e. it is not possible to represent **all** parents.

Key Findings

- **Of those expressing a view 79% are in favour of a national body.**
- This view is largely consistent across the sample.
- Key reason for wanting a national body –
Parent Councils want a body that will **represent Parent Councils and parents and give them a voice.**
- There is concern to ensure that all Parent Councils have access to the same level of support.
- Main reasons for not wanting a national body –
 - SPTC/SPCA already fill that role (22%);
 - Existing support from SPTC, the LA or others is sufficient (16%)
 - Priority is the local agenda and not the national one (18%).

6 ROLE OF A NATIONAL BODY

6.1 Based on previous research, the questionnaire identified seven potential roles for a national body and asked Parent Councils to put these in order of priority. Table 6.1 shows the mean ranking. **Representing parents' views at a national level stands out as the clear priority** followed by *Supporting the Development of Parents' Organisations at a Local Level* and then *Researching & Promoting Parents' Interests*.

Table 6.1 Priority given to potential roles of a national body

| (BASE = 491) | Mean ranking (1=highest : 7=lowest) |
|--|--|
| Representing parents views at a national level | 2.27 |
| Supporting the development of parents organisations at a local level | 3.38 |
| Researching and promoting parents interest | 3.89 |
| Enhancing communications among Parent Councils | 4.34 |
| Encouraging networking between all parent interest groups | 4.73 |
| Signposting to other sources of advice | 5.01 |
| Providing information and advice to individual parents | 5.59 |

6.2 Enhancing Communications among Parent Councils, Encouraging Networking between all Parent Interest Groups and Signposting to Other Sources of Advice follow in that order but are relatively close together.

6.3 Providing Information and Advice to Individual Parents is rated significantly behind the others. Some Parent Councils explicitly assert that this is their task.

6.4 Possible roles for a national body were discussed at all depth interviews and at LA workshop discussions with parents. Discussion workshops proposed the following main roles:

- Channel of influence with two way communication
- Proactivity on educational issues as well as responding to initiatives
- Early engagement to ensure participation in development of policy
- Consulting widely using participatory methods
- Campaigning or lobbying – The voice of parents
- A source of support to Parent Councils
- A source of information and advice

Priorities from other stakeholders focus on

- Listening to parents and representing them.
- Supporting Parent Councils
- Setting up local authority forums
- Providing information and advice
- Sharing good practice
- Feeding information back to LA or central government
- Recognising the fundamental importance of the parent as primary educator
- Engagement and reaching out to all parents

6.5 The rest of this chapter discusses these headings more fully setting out the views of stakeholders and workshops but using the 7 headings of 6.1 as the framework. Where there was no consensus but only a prevailing opinion, this is reported and the contrary opinion indicated. Only when relevant is a contributor identified.

Representing parent opinions at national level & Researching parents interests

6.6 One of the key issues for stakeholders is that **the national body must have as its focus the interests of all parents**, no matter whether they are members of a PTA or a Parent Council. The Parent Councils represent the parent forum, i.e. all parents within the school and in turn the national body represents the Parent Councils. It is the parents who must be central to all that is done. Feeding back to government how policy functions in practice was seen as very important.

6.7 Both stakeholders and parent workshops discussed how to achieve the aim of representing the views of all parents so as to ensure inclusivity. It was generally thought to be inappropriate for a national body to represent the views of only a segment of parents. The general view is that it requires ongoing systematic effort to supplement the mainstream (and represented) view with those from other segments. However there would be challenges in this. Indeed some were of the view that it was simply not possible.

6.8 Ensuring representation from every group on the board of a national body itself was not seen as possible. This is of course quite different from representing the views of a wide range of interests. It was however thought possible to provide effective channelling of special interest issues into a national body.

6.9 Representing all groups within the overall parent forum requires considering those who are disadvantaged in any of various ways e.g. by geography, urban/rural, socio-economic group, faith. Different organisations would commonly have their own areas of interest that they wanted to ensure were represented. For some, geographic representation was important so representation from each of the 32 local authorities was seen as key. For practical purposes it was suggested that the 32 could be amalgamated into larger areas. The key point was to ensure coverage of all parts of Scotland.

6.10 This sheer diversity of circumstance is one reason why some say that it was not possible to represent the views of all parents.

6.11 There remains a further problem that minority views can sometimes be heard and not those of the mainstream. Minority views can sometimes be put very forcefully. A balance needs to be found within the diverse opinions that exist.

6.12 The key point was that the needs of children should be the common factor and that this should define the role of a national body. As and when specific issues arise or when problems are faced by several schools (for example in areas which have a high incidence of children for whom English is not their first language), then these might be dealt with by co-opting or referring to specific agencies and bodies or those who represent minority groups. What must be

recognised is that not everyone will have the same view and it will never be possible to satisfy everyone but that compromise and finding the middle road will be necessary for a national body to be effective.

- 6.13 One view was that the national body would need to actively research the views of some parents who were less likely for whatever reason to become involved. This would provide strong, reliable and robust evidence of any views provided at a national level. More vulnerable or disadvantaged groups could be accessed by this means and their views included. They would then have a role to co-ordinate that information and feed it back to policy makers.
- 6.14 Another view was that helplines and the ongoing provision of advice can be used to collect data and this intelligence used to identify the issues of concern to parents. An advantage is that of immediacy through direct contact with those parents impacted by the issue. It depends on good root cause analysis and the assumption that the parents who make use of helplines etc are representative.
- 6.15 The advantage of research is that findings can be segmented by differing groups. It is however recognised that it can take time and effort to engage with what is commonly described as “hard to reach” groups and it can be difficult for Parent Councils to put in that amount of resource. The national body should offer advice and support on how to access the views of these more difficult groups. Further, web based mechanisms now have potential to make research and consultation with Parent Councils much more cost effective.
- 6.16 There is concern that research in disadvantaged areas, which are already the subject of much research, will cause the same people to be approached and potentially duplicate. It was suggested that a role exists to agree priorities for any research programme so as to manage the imposition on the parent body.
- 6.17 It is suggested that in other parts of the world there may be stronger parent representative bodies and this may be worth investigating further.
- 6.18 For all that it is recognised as a difficult task, without a national body, how would parents’ views be heard? It is important that the parents’ voice is heard strongly and it is difficult to see how that might be achieved without some body taking on the responsibility to represent that view. Parents are seen as a group which is under-represented at a national level and especially so compared to education professionals. A national body would help redress that balance. To undertake this role well, the national body would need adequate resourcing.
- 6.19 There is a role of responding to government consultations. This was qualified by the view that it should not be left solely to government to identify issues for consideration but that the national body should also have a stake in this.
- 6.20 Informing parents as part of any consultation was also discussed. There are challenges in informing parents about issues to help them develop their own views. There are concerns about potential information overload whilst others argue that it is important for information to flow in both directions.

- 6.21 One suggestion is for information to cascade through council level to school level allowing local nuance to be applied before final dissemination. The web could be used to ease this. All schools have web access and Parent Councils should have access to this if not at home. Information would need to be summarised for parents. A national body would have a role in filtering/distilling information so that parents could readily and efficiently absorb it.
- 6.22 However one warning was that parents will only seek information about issues that interest them and will not want to be told what they should know.
- 6.23 It was also suggested that the national body would require to become the natural first port of call if information is required. Establishing this would take effort and time. There are many places where parents can currently go for information and there was some merit in having a single authoritative place where parents can access information. There is some confusion at present amongst Parent Councils as they receive information from a number of different sources and it is difficult for them to know which has authority.
- 6.24 One stakeholder advocates a PR exercise to promote such a national body.
- 6.25 To undertake this role well it is important that the national body is not “*too cosy with the educational structures and directorates*”. It was suggested that as a nation we are too ready to defer to the state. The body must be able to talk to government in a critical but positive manner and not as a client talking with a paymaster. In other words it is essential that, when representing parents, the body is visibly independent of government.
- 6.26 There was also discussion about the role that advisers may have. There is a danger that parents may defer to education professionals. This can happen at a Parent Council level with the head teacher and could easily happen at a national level if education professionals have a role on the board or committee. Generally the view was that advisers should be co-opted but restricted to a separate advisory group and not form part of the core within any national body.
- 6.27 The body would need to have some clout. The government would require to have good reasons to take the views of this body seriously.
- 6.28 The issue of liaising with the press was also raised. It can be very difficult for a national body when asked for a quick comment on a current issue. There needs to be a balance between ensuring the view is representative and having an organisation that is so bureaucratic that it can't express a view on anything.
- 6.29 In summary, suggestions include:
- Having specific interest groups represented
 - Undertake specific planned research
 - Using intelligence gathered from in-house advice lines etc.

Supporting the development of parents' organisations at a local level

6.30 Offering advice and guidance in relation to the development of Parent Councils was seen as an advantage of having a national body.

Insurance

6.31 The issue of insurance provision arose frequently. There is concern that it has become such a large issue affecting the development of a national body. Some local authorities arranged this for all their schools via bulk membership of SPTC in the first year of Parent Councils to get them started and after that, it would be up to individual Parent Councils if they wish to continue. Others will still be funded by bulk membership. The local authorities are therefore potentially deciding which organisations the Parent Councils should be members of because of the insurance requirement and not based on the needs of Parent Councils. These decisions have been taken upstream of the Parent Councils themselves and have significantly affected the landscape of parent representation.

6.32 There remains uncertainty as to whether Parent Councils are covered by their local authority insurance policies or even whether they require cover. As voluntary organisations PTA's did need insurance but school boards never did. There is a lack of clarity concerning Parent Councils. Government has provided local authorities with advice on this to the effect that decisions on insurance need to take account of local circumstances and the activities undertaken by Parent Councils.

6.33 Most local authorities and Parent Councils take a cautious approach and take out insurance. Some Parent Councils remain unsure as to whether they have insurance or not. Clear guidance is required on this issue including whether or not they are covered by the local authority's own policies.

6.34 A further perspective is added by SPTC who feel that by acquiring insurance a Parent Council can assume an entirely different relationship with its LA. It allows Parent Councils to do what they like without having to ask the LA if any particular item is covered or not.

6.35 Parent discussions indicated that a national body could ensure appropriate insurance was in place for all. They expected it to be funded by the national body.

Disclosure Scotland

6.36 Support has also been provided in the past on issues relating to Disclosure Scotland and the SPTC were noted by a number of organisations for being instrumental in resolving the requirements relating to Disclosure Scotland.

Training

6.37 Training for Parent Councils is now undertaken to a much greater extent by the local authorities themselves. Some local authorities provide less funding to Parent Councils but do provide training. As a result demand for training from

the SPCA has reduced markedly. SPCA argue that they can develop training more efficiently but that they are not being recognised by the local authorities as a training provider due to their lack of status as 'the national body'.

6.38 One of the parent groups felt that there might additionally be training provided for teachers as part of their CPD to ensure that they understand the role that the Parent Councils has and can therefore support it properly.

Other support to the development of Parent Councils at local level

6.39 Other support that might be required includes:

- Training for those who are uncomfortable or unfamiliar with the web
- Development of e-newsletters
- Conferences
- Sharing best practice
- Development of a constitution
- Networking

6.40 Managing forums or online discussions was also raised. But one organisation felt they could present a distorted picture unless they were well moderated. Without this they can easily accumulate information which is not factual, out of date or plain misleading. It can be time consuming to manage this.

6.41 LA Parental Involvement Officers currently provide much of the support role but they often have other roles to perform also. Learning and teaching Scotland have a national co-ordinator who works with the LA Officers. There may sometime be a potential conflict of interest with the local authority providing a support role and it may be preferable for some elements to be provided by a national body. Parents also raise issues when they discover that some local authorities provide more support than others. This causes frustration for those Parent Councils who feel they are poorly funded.

Discussion with parents put considerable emphasis on a national body being able to exert influence over the local authorities to ensure appropriate support to the developing Parent Councils.

6.42 There are examples of poor support provided by local authorities and of liaison between secondary schools and feeder primaries being blocked by head teachers. There are also examples of local authorities or schools charging Parent Councils for the use of rooms for meetings as if they were private functions. By contrast others report excellent support from both schools and their local authorities. A national body would give Parent Councils the opportunity to escalate an issue if it could not be resolved at a local level.

6.43 In essence, some Parent Councils feel that a national body would be able to hold local and national government to account.

6.44 Whilst support in all of these things was welcomed there was concern about becoming overly bureaucratic and falling into the trap of focussing on the process while losing focus on its primary aim to express the parental view.

6.45 Concerns were expressed at one of the discussion workshops about the power that a national body might have over individual Parent Councils. Would it, for example, be possible for the national body to overrule a Parent Council? Might it deal with complaints about a Parent Council and arbitration become one of its roles? In turn this highlighted the importance of Parent Councils being clear on their own role and the view was taken that it was not the job of Parent Councils to get involved in issues between individual parents and the school.

Providing information and advice to individual parents

6.46 Advice from a national body to Parent Councils was agreed by everyone. There was more debate on whether it should also give advice directly to individual parents or only through Parent Councils.

6.47 Some thought there was a danger that parents wouldn't initially go through their local Parent Council with issues then being escalated without seeking local solutions. Concerns were expressed about getting embroiled at an individual level and how difficult it might be to sustain individual advice and support. The role could develop to such an extent that the national body effectively provided free legal advice. It is clear that a line needs to be drawn at some level.

6.48 There is also much good support and advice currently available to parents and it would not be possible to provide a helpline to cover every conceivable problem a parent might have. There are already excellent expert helplines in relation to, for example, additional support for learning, bullying or parenting advice. So part of the role would be to provide signposting to the most appropriate expert source of help. However one was concerned that parents do not just phone up only to be told to phone someone else.

6.49 One means of helping is to provide a frequently asked questions page within a website. This might provide appropriate signposting.

6.50 There are parents who can become quite desperate for help and it would be inappropriate to refuse help. The SPTC saw their day-to-day contact with individual parents as a key strength and as a building block of their entire relationship with parents. Both parents and the organisation benefit through deeper understanding of the issues that are currently affecting parents.

6.51 Another felt that the national body providing such help should work closely with the local authorities to try and understand both sides of any issue and learn lessons from parent problems.

Researching and promoting parents interests

6.52 It needs to be recognised that parents have unique insight into their own child's learning, most especially in respect of special needs

6.53 There was a strong view that **a national body should be proactive**. It was seen as a role for the national body to identify issues important to parents and to develop or investigate these further including influencing policy at its earliest developmental stage.

- 6.54 One means of addressing this might be to use research. Another is to gather intelligence via calls to in-house help and advice lines. This requires skills and capacity to ensure that data collection and analysis is carried out effectively.
- 6.55 A bottom up approach was advocated to ensure that parents' issues do get identified. It is seen as important that the agenda is not imposed by any external body e.g. government or local authorities, but is the parents' own. The national body would require to have a lobbying role. It is also recognised that issues would have to be prioritised and scheduled.
- 6.56 There has to be a process of ensuring that issues are not taken on simply because of who 'shouts loudest' and a process must be in place to check the representativeness of any issue. But it is recognised that it is not always easy to get parents to identify issues until there is a problem.
- 6.57 Not all are in favour of a national body taking on a role to research parents' views. Either way, if they were to undertake a role of this nature it would be essential to work in partnership with other organisations working within similar fields of interest to avoid duplication.
- 6.58 Another felt that whilst they would certainly have a role in proactively setting the agenda, they could commission research and did not need the internal capacity to undertake that themselves. Actively researching views was described as a job for professionals and not for a voluntary body.
- 6.59 The education field has a strong provider interest with very informed professional groups and it will take people who are robust, informed and confident to put forward the parent view. Evidence was seen as important when speaking on behalf of parents and particularly as this will sometimes involve disagreement with the professional educationalists.

Encouraging networking

- 6.60 Clusters of Parent Councils are now beginning to emerge and this is a key means of sharing good practice and creating a stronger voice for parents to engage with the local authority. Where they exist they appear to be working quite well. Parents who do not have access to these locally are keen to find out more about how they work and how they might be set up within their own areas. Many felt that there was a **significant role for a national body in helping Parent Councils to network**.
- 6.61 It is felt that there is no easy means of contacting each other.
- 6.62 One view is that with all schools now having websites, each Parent Council could be linked into that. This view holds that the head teacher should see the parents' part of the school website as valuable and would therefore support it.
- 6.63 School intranets such as GLOW were also thought to have significant potential for inter-school communication. While not yet fully operational the hope is that it can also be used for parent groups to communicate.

6.64 At least initially, parents saw regional forums as the route to improve networking.

6.65 One felt that whilst a national body could help with networking, individual Parent Councils could do a lot for themselves. One of the existing national bodies felt that it was not part of their role to help people to get together.

Other roles

6.66 There needs to be some mechanism for holding any national body to account. An appropriate system should be built into its constitutional arrangements. There may be an international role for liaison with and learning from other national parent organisations. Web-based technologies should ease this.

6.67 One group felt that the national body could have a role in resolving the disparities between schools and local authorities or when there is a lack of clarity about procedures.

Key Findings

- Representing parents' views at a national level stands out as the clear priority.
- Key issue for stakeholders is to focus on the interests of all parents. Opinions differ on how this might be achieved. Some argue that it is not possible.
- Suggestions for accessing the views of all parents include:
 - Having specific interest groups represented
 - Undertake specific research
 - Using intelligence gathered from advice lines etc.
- Evidence was seen as important when speaking on behalf of parents especially when in debate with professional educationalists.
- Geographical representation is seen as important and especially avoiding central belt bias.
- Opinion differs on whether this is required at local authority level or whether regional representation would suffice.
- Desire to resolve the issue of insurance provision. The current arrangement has significantly affected the landscape of parent representation.
- Parent workshops expect that the national body would pay for insurance.
- Emphasis on being able to influence LA's to provide more consistent levels of support across the country.
- Opinion differs on whether national body should provide support only through Parent Councils
- Some favour a signposting role identifying other expert sources of advice.
- A national body should be proactive. A bottom up approach is advocated to ensure that it is parents' issues that are identified.
- The national body requires to have a lobbying role.
- Issues will have to be prioritised and scheduled.
- National body has a significant role to help Parent Councils network. At least initially, parents see regional forums as the route to improved networking. Websites and GLOW could all be used to aid networking.

7 KEY PRINCIPLES

7.1 This chapter explores some of the key principles around which a national body might be structured. The findings come from workshops with parents and discussions with key stakeholders. They address the inter-related issues of membership, independence and funding before moving on to discuss breadth of remit, structure, governance and capacity.

Membership

7.2 The majority of parents and other key stakeholders believe that a national body **should be a membership organisation.**

7.3 There is less agreement on how that membership should be achieved. Many are of the view that if you are a Parent Council then membership of the national body for Parent Councils should be automatic. There was a view expressed by many that there should be no or negligible fee attached to membership. Parents in particular supported no fees.

7.4 A number of advantages of membership were identified. Having a high proportion of Parent Councils within a membership was seen as giving the organisation strength. Actively choosing membership and participation in a national body would give strength to its collective voice. Its power would be proportional to the number of Parent Councils that chose to join.

7.5 One view is that paying a fee and actively joining an organisation lends it greater credibility, value, sense of ownership and is likely to result in greater participation. It gives choice as to whether to be a member or not. Membership also improves the organisation's independence and validates the fact that the organisation speaks for its membership, thus making it more of a force to be reckoned with. Actively becoming a member also allows members an exit strategy if they are dissatisfied.

7.6 There were however significant disadvantages to paying fees. One view was that the responsibility for paying fees should not be placed upon the local authorities as this tends to produce variation across the country. **It was important that all Parent Councils have access to the same services provided by a national body.**

7.7 Some tried to reconcile the conflict between wanting membership fees yet being accessible to all. One proposal is for services to be provided to non-members in the hope that they would join after seeing the benefits. This however seemed at odds with the argument that fees enhance perceived value.

7.8 Another view is that membership fees should be so low that the added value by being a member would be sufficient to make it nonsense not to join.

7.9 In the past some local authorities have paid for membership for the Scottish School Board Association and some local authorities are currently paying for membership of SPTC for their Parent Council members in order to access their

insurance services. The logic set out above concerning freedom of choice and the value associated with making an active decision are undermined by this.

- 7.10 There is a cost and administration attached to the collection of fees and one view is that collecting fees would be neither cost-effective nor would it contribute to increased participation or involvement.
- 7.11 Some will struggle to actively join anything due to cost. Additionally the wealthier Parent Councils generally in better areas can afford to pay thus disadvantaging those in poorer areas. Differential pricing is not deemed practicable. There is a deep concern that the very active, middle class parents predominate thus making the organisation unrepresentative and easily hijacked. It can focus on the interests of active members rather than focussing on the wider interests of all parents.
- 7.12 For these reasons there is a strong view that **there should be an automatic right of access to a National Parents Body**. It may be feasible to require formal registration in order to belong to it. A widely held view was that if a Parent Council exists then it should have a right of access to information, support and advice from a national parent body. By having a membership fee the organisation would risk excluding some, most likely those who were in more disadvantaged areas.
- 7.13 Another view was that the National body should not exist solely to service its members but rather to represent the wider interest of all parents.
- 7.14 There were a number of suggestions aimed at finding a middle ground. One suggestion was that if it were government funded then one option to exercise freedom of choice would be to allow Parent Councils to actively opt out if they wished. Others felt that this was not necessary and all Parent Councils needed to do if they did not wish to be part of the national body would be not to engage with it. Either would ensure that the choice resided with each Parent Council.
- 7.15 Some tried to find a compromise position between paying membership fees and ensuring services of a national body were available to all. A few felt that there was a need for a fee but that it should be very low and that the services provided should provide demonstrably greater value than the cost. Having some fee even if token was important to some.
- 7.16 There was also some discussion primarily with the organisations interviewed about whether membership would be confined to Parent Councils. There are a number of other organisations who have a mixed membership, often in the form of associate membership. There is a view that it may be possible for other organisations to be members of the national body but the general view is that they would have no voting rights nor attend the AGM. There was a clear view that Parent Council members should remain in control.
- 7.17 Teacher representation on the national body was also discussed especially with regard to the benefit of having a parent who is also a teacher. Parents who were also teachers should not be excluded from participation in a national body and indeed may bring some benefits.

7.18 The option to co-opt associate members (e.g. groups, organisations or experts) as and when needed would provide a route for accessing support and advice but without any voting rights which might otherwise dilute the control of parents. It was felt that this reflected the way that Parent Councils themselves operate where the head teacher has a right to attend as an adviser.

7.19 There was also some discussion as to whether individual parents could be members of a national body. Whilst it would be feasible to have an individual membership for parents, individual parents within a national body would ideally be members via their Parent Council.

Funding

7.20 The majority view of both parents and other key stakeholders is that **funding should be provided from central government.**

7.21 Disadvantages of Government funding were:

- Potential to limit the body's independence or their perceived independence
- Potential to make an organisation lazy if it gets funding automatically

7.22 Advantages of membership fees were:

- Power of exit
- Value for money
- High level of 'ownership'

7.23 Whilst membership fees were one answer, it was recognised by many that fees alone would never provide sufficient funding. Some of the parent discussion groups indicated that subscription levels would likely be too high, uptake would then likely be very low and time spent collecting funds would limit effectiveness. Further, constantly trying to raise funds diverts focus from the role that the national body is set up to have and makes it difficult to plan ahead.

7.24 Other possible sources of income could come from:

- Government grants,
- Grants in relation to community development,
- Selling training and conferences (to local authorities)
- Differential charges to organisations/professionals to attend conferences etc.

7.25 The SPTC, who currently receive funding by offering insurance to members, feels that this mechanism allows independence. They value this highly. They believe that there may be other services that a national body could provide for a fee to members e.g. training.

7.26 Currently there appear to be significant variations in the way that individual Parent Councils are funded via their local authorities and in turn this will affect the ability of some Parent Councils to pay membership fees.

- 7.27 There are also significant variations in the amount of fund raising undertaken locally. Some Parent Councils find this very difficult. Some involve pupils in this activity to a greater extent than others. Sharing good practice on fund raising activities was seen as a further advantage of having a national body.
- 7.28 An initial reaction to funding by central government is often that it would be difficult to maintain independence. The question was raised as to whether the body could be critical of government if this was seen as ‘biting the hand that feeds’ and therefore possibly jeopardising the relationship. However, the alternatives to government funding were seen to have huge drawbacks.
- 7.29 Parent workshops concluded that funding the national body by central government was the only viable option and as vital. It was also seen as logical since Parent Councils are in fact already funded by local authorities. However if central government was to fund, there would need to be cast-iron agreements in place to ensure autonomy, including independence of local government.
- 7.30 In the view of some parents central funding would also put pressure on local authorities and bring to an end what some see as ambivalence toward local authority forums.
- 7.31 There was some discussion about the scale of funding required. This would depend on the capacity of the body and what its roles might be. There was acknowledgement that costs could be considerable if paid staff, running costs etc were all taken into account. Nevertheless, the view was expressed that substantial financial backing would be appropriate to enable a national body to function effectively and if the role of Parent Councils, with the support of a national body, was to bring about real change.
- 7.32 There were further comments by parents that within the current political climate, with the aim of cutting back quangos, there may be real concerns about costs and the willingness and ability of government to meet these costs.
- 7.33 Unfavourable comparisons are often made between the funding for Parent Councils and similar bodies within health. One suggested reason for this is that parents are not the direct consumers of the education being provided.

Independence

- 7.34 All believed that independence was crucial to the success of any national body. Parents felt that without independence, the national body could not be the voice of the Parent Councils and would effectively be no more than a government subgroup or quango and be driven by the government’s own agenda.
- 7.35 Independence from local government was also seen as being very important.
- 7.36 Most believe that independence can be achieved whilst being funded from central government.**
- 7.37 Independence does not come solely from the source of funds but also from:
- ensuring at the outset that the constitution is written to ensure independence

- appropriate governance to ensure agenda determination by parents not government
- longer term assurances of funding
- speaking out when required and having integrity to do so
- representing parent views accurately

7.38 Parents gave examples of bodies funded by government but functioning independently. This included tribunals. Despite the wish for a national body to be independent they felt that both central government and local government could work together to make the work of a national body more effective.

7.39 However others argue that the source of funding will significantly affect independence or at least perceived independence. A view held by some of the organisations was that, to ensure independence, funding should come from more than one source.

7.40 As noted above parent workshops debated how different funding mechanisms might affect independence. Overall, the alternatives to government funding were seen to have huge drawbacks and funding by central government seen to be the least of all evils which should sensibly be balanced by various steps to ensure independence.

Breadth of remit

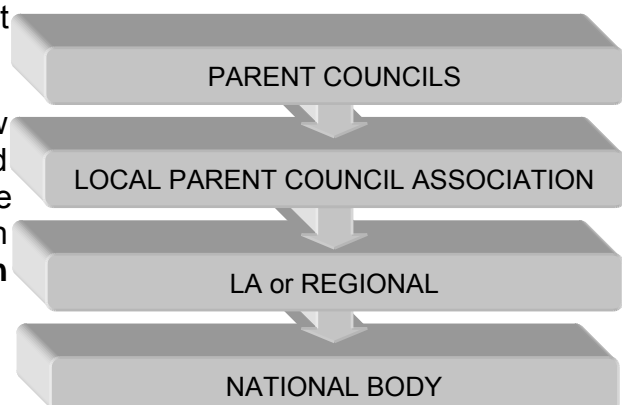
7.41 There is some debate as to the breadth of remit that a national body might have. Parent Councils were asked to indicate how wide they felt it should be. Nearly half felt that **it should relate to the overall well being of each child**. Only 23% felt it should relate to issues concerning the school alone. Still fewer (10%) felt it should relate only to issues relating to the wider learning of each child. Workshop discussions with parents tended to reinforce these views.

7.42 Interestingly the views of the other stakeholders tended to disagree. The majority of stakeholders take the view that the national body should have a remit covering all aspects of a child’s learning both within and outwith of school but should not consider all aspects of the child’s well being. They argue that while there is an increasing tendency to view a child’s development holistically, too broad remit might dilute the focus on school and learning. This view held that there are already many other organisations representing issues relating to the wider aspects of children’s well-being and development.

Structure

7.43 Whilst the structure of the national body was not specifically tabled as a topic within the discussion workshops it inevitably arose.

7.44 Clusters of Parent Councils are now emerging on a sub-national basis and these more local groupings reduce the effect of the barriers discussed in Chapter 8. **Regional representation**



was seen as important by parents, with the regions feeding into the national body with a management board made up of regional representatives. For example, a four-tier model was proposed by one of the discussion groups.²

- 7.45 There was a strong feeling that representation from all areas should be assured and particular concern to avoid over-representing Edinburgh or Glasgow. It was also important that meetings were not confined to the central belt.
- 7.46 There is a view that any national body would have to work hard to get the views and involvement of those in more outlying areas and that innovative use of communication was key to this.
- 7.47 The option to resource outreach workers was discussed by a few. The majority did not see this as necessary suggesting that it would be more appropriate and more effective to provide such support through the local authority.
- 7.48 One or two meetings yearly that all Parent Councils could attend was proposed.

Governance

- 7.49 Issues relating to governance were only briefly discussed with stakeholders. They were not intended as part of the agenda for parent discussions but inevitably issues relating to governance did arise and were then discussed. This study can only advance the subject of governance a little. The associated issues will require further discussion.
- 7.50 There is some debate as to how formal a process is required to appoint Parent Council members to the national board or committee.
- 7.51 The SPCA would like to see 32 elected board members with geographical representation for each of the 32 local authorities.
- 7.52 The issue of representativeness across the country is a prerequisite. But the logistics of a board with 32+ members together with the fact that time, travel and cost were cited by Parent Councils as the main impediments to participation present serious challenges to the practical operation of such a body.
- 7.53 One compromise proposed might be not requiring all 32 local authorities to be represented but to adopt the regions³ used for Scottish Parliamentary elections and have two representatives from each. This would give a board of around 14, plus an independent chair, which was seen as a better number to work with. Parent workshops suggested that a workable number of 15 would be a maximum to stop it becoming a 'talking shop'.

² An example of a Local Parent Council Association might be a secondary school cluster.

³ This was estimated in discussion at 7. There are 8 regions of Scotland used for the Scottish Parliamentary elections.

7.54 Many parents disliked elections for the previous school boards and this is no longer a requirement for the current Parent Councils. Selection of people to serve a national level may not lend itself so well to such informality.

7.55 No agreed solutions were put forward to overcome the question of elections but one proposal was for a representative to be sent and that this might vary from meeting to meeting. There is a view that there can be a representative without having to have an election. This might result, for example, from adopting a regional structure whereby the chair of that regional body would be the representative on a national body. (The question of election/appointment would then be devolved to the regional level.)

7.56 The number of directors required was also mentioned by a few. SPTC have a maximum of 20 directors although typically only around 12 are active. Within this there are some teachers although the majority are always parents.

Capacity and Staffing

7.57 All were in agreement that salaried staff would be required to support the volunteers who would form the board or committee of the national body. They would ensure that the national body could effectively and efficiently carry out its role. At a minimum they would undertake administrative tasks.

7.58 Stakeholders were invited to give their thoughts on staffing. Opinion varied from 3 to 20. Several staff roles were identified –

- Manning helplines
- Research
- Website management
- Office management

The exact number of staff would depend on whether these roles were deemed consistent with the national body remit and whether the resource was in-house or managed service.

7.59 There was also some discussion as to whether the chairmanship of the national body should be a full time elected or appointed post. It was suggested that the role of the chair needed to be both independent and elected, but that clear differentiation between the role of an elected individual and a full time official was necessary.

Key Findings

- A national body should be a membership organisation.
- Opinions vary on how to achieve membership. Options include -
 - automatic right of access to ensure access by all
 - membership fee to ensure sense of ownership
 - nominal fee to maximise incentive to join/stay
- Membership should be confined to Parent Councils.
- Essential that parents retain control. Other organisations or experts can be co-opted or possibly have associate status but should have no voting rights.
- Advisers should be co-opted but restricted to a separate advisory group and not part form part of the core national body.
- The majority view is for **funding to be provided from central government.**
- Independence is essential
- Most consider **independence can be achieved whilst funded by government.**
- 50% of parents feel the remit **should cover overall well being of each child.**
- Stakeholders disagreed, arguing that it should address the wider learning of the child only.
- **Regional representation was seen as important by parents,** and a desire to see geographic representation from across Scotland on the board.
- There is no agreement on the size of board or council.
- Clusters of Parent Councils are seen as a route to developing parental representation structures.
- Some favour a 3 tier or 4 tier structure so as to interact separately with the local authority and at a national level.
- All were in agreement that salaried staff are required to support the volunteers who would form the board or committee of the national body.
- The balance of in-house resourcing and externally commissioned work would be determined by the detailed remit and the most cost-effective means of dispatching that.

8 ENGAGEMENT

- 8.1 Stakeholders, discussion workshops and individual survey returns all referenced the difficulties in engaging members of Parent Councils in organisational structures beyond their own school. All bodies who have experience of national level organisations have faced this issue. For this reason an overly structured and bureaucratic means of selecting members to take on responsibilities must be avoided.
- 8.2 Of those who replied to the questionnaire, over a third (36%) would be willing to be delegated to a regional event and a quarter (25%) would be willing to be a delegate at a national conference. This suggests a high level of interest in becoming involved further in a body that represents parents at a level beyond their own school.
- 8.3 There was greater interest from secondary or from special schools than from primary schools. This contradicts conventional wisdom on relative interest in participation.

Table 8.1: Willingness to be a delegate

| | Primary | Secondary | Special | Total |
|---------------------|---------|-----------|---------|-------|
| | % | % | % | % |
| Regional event | 35 | 43 | 44 | 36 |
| National Conference | 23 | 30 | 31 | 25 |
| <i>Base</i> | 388 | 96 | 16 | 491 |

- 8.4 Parents attending one of the four discussion workshops held in Glasgow and Dundee indicated a high level of interest in engaging further and some had travelled considerable distances to participate. Engagement is an issue on which some strong opinions are held.
- 8.5 There is a strong view emerging that parents wish to be engaged at a local level be that within a cluster of schools or more commonly at a local authority level. Given the simultaneous needs to engage with each local authority's Director of Education as well as with central government together with the trend towards Parent Councils meeting within local networks a route suggested is to encourage establishment of and access to local authority forums and from that select delegates to represent at a national level.

Barriers to engagement

- 8.6 Parent Councils were asked what were the barriers to parents getting involved at a national level. Table 8.2 lists the barriers identified to parents getting involved at a national level. Unsurprisingly *time* or rather lack of it is the main barrier being mentioned by 66% of all responding.
- 8.7 Scotland is a large country with difficult geography and the *distances involved and travel and transport* arrangements all make engagement at a national level more difficult. This was mentioned by 37% but rose to over 60% amongst

those from remote rural or remote small towns. Associated with this is the cost of travel. Over one on five (21%) mentioned the cost, rising to 35% in remote rural areas.

- 8.8 Busy lives and other commitments from work and family are also issues that prevent people from becoming more engaged. A quarter of all responding mentioned other commitments of this type.
- 8.9 Childcare is a further issue mentioned by 14%. This is much more of an issue at primary level than secondary (16% compared to 1%) but even more so for special schools where 31% of Parent Councils mentioned childcare as an inhibiting factor.
- 8.10 There remain a proportion of people (9%) who feel that the focus of attention should be on the local issues and not on the national and this too becomes a barrier to engaging at a national level. This rises to 22% amongst those who disagree that there should be a national body.
- 8.11 Lack of confidence (7%) and lack of experience/expertise (6%) were also mentioned.

Table 8.2 Barriers to getting involved at a national level

| <i>(Base = 491)</i> | % |
|---|----|
| Lack of time | 66 |
| Distance / travel/ transport | 37 |
| Other commitments – work/ family | 25 |
| Cost of travel | 21 |
| Childcare | 14 |
| Priority is local issues | 9 |
| Apathy/inertia/Level of commitment required / Can't even get parents involved a local level | 9 |
| Lack of confidence | 7 |
| Lack of experience, expertise / Too much jargon | 7 |
| Doubt its effectiveness / won't make any difference | 4 |
| Lack of relevance | 3 |
| Lack of information | 3 |
| Difficult to find representative group / Bias towards central belt / large schools | 2 |
| Too much bureaucracy/ formality | 2 |
| Timings / unsuitable times of meetings / Advance notice is needed | 2 |
| Think it will be hijacked by busybodies / interest groups | 1 |
| Feeling that someone else will do it | 1 |
| Other | 8 |
| None | 1 |
| Don't know | 10 |

- 8.12 There were many other reasons given with concerns about apathy, bureaucracy, lack of belief that it will achieve anything or that it may be hijacked by particular interest groups. Whatever national body does emerge should make best efforts to avoid these barriers either by virtue of its constitution or by ongoing vigilance.
- 8.13 There were some concerns expressed that if a very rigid structure develops requiring representatives from say each of the 32 local authorities it may be

difficult to get sufficient people willing to take on these roles. One solution would be to have fewer fixed geographical boundaries whilst still ensuring that all parts of Scotland are covered.

- 8.14 One of the Parental Involvement Officers by contrast felt that there were parents who were very keen to become involved.
- 8.15 Getting the right people to play a role in the national body, however, was seen as difficult. Parents who want the best for their children would most likely want to be active locally and giving time to a national body would create conflict for some, especially as it takes them away from spending time with their own children.
- 8.16 There is a widely held view that whilst parents are keen to become involved at primary level, there is less enthusiasm at secondary level. This was not borne out within this survey (see Table 8.1) which shows proportionally more parents from secondary school indicating a willingness to become involved.
- 8.17 There was also comment from one of the stakeholders about the need to include all parents, for example those whose first language is not English, or who have a disability.
- 8.18 Equally there was a concern that such a body is likely to attract activists who are political and who have a particularly strong voice. There needs to be some mechanisms for ensuring that the body remains in touch with its grass roots.

Supporting engagement / Overcoming barriers

- 8.19 Support for volunteers to a national body was discussed with stakeholders. Some feel that some training might be required whilst another view is that much can be learnt 'on the job'. However, if, for example, a member was asked to give evidence at the education committee it would be helpful to have some guidance on procedure. Others also mentioned buddying or mentoring.
- 8.20 If there is to be a helpline available then whoever is manning such a service should be provided with support.
- 8.21 The majority would expect all expenses to be paid but generally no honorariums. Involvement should not incur costs for the individual. It was however recognised that there are other costs beyond just travel costs e.g. childcare, and a modest sum in recognising these might be appropriate.
- 8.22 When people come a distance to a meeting, ensure that they are provided with some food. These small details are important. Another thought that the national body might pay for members to attend conferences.
- 8.23 One suggestion from the Church of Scotland representative was that support from employers should be given to allow parents to attend meetings.
- 8.24 Having a well designed website could enhance communication and be used to network effectively and disseminate good practice/solutions to problems. Web-based forums as well as clustering of schools would allow issues and

problems, e.g. transport issues, that are common to many to be addressed collectively.

8.25 Communication via the web would also support the involvement of parents in their children's education giving them access to learning plans. Again it was emphasised that this would place a requirement on the local authorities to co-operate – especially important for those who have had difficulties with lack of support locally. A good website could also be used for disseminating and developing an understanding of policy e.g. Curriculum for Excellence – explaining about and involving parents in these policies and educational developments. Some of this is already available via the Parentzone website.

8.26 Discussion on involvement also covered the wider difficulties entailed in getting parents to participate. It was felt that involving parents, whether at Parent Council or national level, should be more on the basis of "Can you help?" rather than "Can you join?" i.e. ask parents to contribute such support as they are able to.

8.27 Good communication, in clear plain English, was needed to say what is involved and to overcome the barriers that people put up if they are not clear as to what is being asked of them. Leaflets (in other languages as well as English) could be produced by the national body.

8.28 A suggestion to alleviate the conflict of priorities between devoting time to the local and national agendas was to expand the pool of people available to volunteer.

8.29 It was felt that good training would help overcome confidence issues, e.g. training in how to participate, how to consult, how to represent views and how to run meetings etc.

8.30 One felt that the first few years of the national body would be critical in setting the scene as it will send out messages of how the body runs. It will be important to get good people on board who are genuinely consultative, representative and open.

8.31 Some other measures to mitigate barriers include:

- Having meetings in different parts of the country
- Video conferencing / web casting using GLOW
- Giving responsibility
- Taking views seriously
- Having a good chair who runs meetings to time and covers everything
- Use email to communicate and keep people in touch if they miss meetings
- Providing a shared transport scheme to help get people to meetings

Other comments

8.32 The questionnaire offered an open space for Parent Councils to provide any additional comments. This allowed the opportunity to engage on any topic whether or not raised within the closed questions of the questionnaire.

8.33 45% of all Parent Councils chose to comment. They were very wide ranging with some quite lengthy indicating significant deliberation. Summarised in Table 8.3, these comments give some indication of the aspirations, concerns or frustrations that Parent Councils have on the question of a national body.

Table 8.3; Other comments received by Parent Councils

| <i>(Base = 491)</i> | % |
|--|----|
| Must be independent of LA and Scottish Government | 6 |
| Do it | 6 |
| Worried about wasting money / thoughts on funding | 5 |
| Emphasise support role | 4 |
| Concerns re limited nature of Parent Council time and availability | 4 |
| More important to put effort into local needs | 4 |
| Important at present to build at area/ regional level | 4 |
| SPTC should be the national body | 3 |
| Use internet/ video to save costs | 3 |
| Keep things as they are | 3 |
| Provides a voice for parents | 2 |
| SPTC do a good job | 2 |
| Combine SPTC and SPCA | 2 |
| Representation for parents | 2 |
| Worried might be taken over by elites or quasi-political elements | 2 |
| Resource adequately | 1 |
| Express in easily understandable terms | 1 |
| Don't do it | 1 |
| There is a diverse range of Parent Councils | 1 |
| Appalled at perceived in-fighting | 1 |
| Needs strength to fight government | 1 |
| Running out of time | 1 |
| We are a small school | 1 |
| Build on what we have – don't reinvent | 1 |
| Organise Parent Councils according to their interest | 1 |
| Confused by current variety of national bodies | 1 |
| Should be about improving communication | 1 |
| Ensure no-one is left out – e.g. geography | 1 |
| Comment / query on questionnaire itself | 1 |
| Need to know more | 1 |
| Ensure LA is properly engaged with proposals | 1 |
| Cost to Parent Council representatives | 1 |
| Keep it tightly focussed in the first instance | 1 |
| Scepticism | 1 |
| Provide more training | 1 |
| Ongoing concerns about the lack of parental interest | 1 |
| National parents body to provide information / advice | 1 |
| Elect National Parent Body members | 1 |
| Need to be convinced on benefit case | 1 |
| Is it meaningful for our context | * |
| Reasons to think it may not work | * |
| Status Quo is just unacceptable | * |
| Worried will aggravate bureaucracy | * |
| Won't commit | * |
| Have a clear written constitution | * |
| Other | 2 |
| No comment | 55 |

Key Findings

- Engagement is seen as difficult.
- However healthy proportions would be willing to be delegates. Of respondents, this is 36% for regional events and 25% for national events i.e. 7% and 5% of the Parent Council population.
- *Lack of time* is the main barrier being mentioned by 66% of all while *distance, travel and transport* arrangements also feature heavily as barriers to engagement.
- Measures to mitigate barriers include:
 - Meetings in different parts of the country
 - Video conferencing / web casting using GLOW
 - Giving responsibility
 - Taking views seriously
 - A good chair who runs meetings to time and covers everything
 - Email to communicate/maintain contact when they miss meetings
 - Shared transport scheme to help get people to meetings
- There is concern about attracting strident activists with a quasi-political agenda.
- A mechanism to ensure that the body remains in touch with its grass roots is required.
- The majority expect all expenses to be paid but generally no honorariums.

9 NEXT STEPS

Context

- 9.1 There are concerns expressed by parents that the initiative for a national body is perceived by some to be coming from government and that the body will become a 'top down' body rather than emerging from the Parent Councils and the developing local authority forums.

Timing

- 9.2 The question of timing and whether or not this was the right time to embark upon a national body was important in workshop discussions. Parent Councils collectively are still in their infancy. Some saw an interim step of creating local authority groups, albeit with different support systems, as a potential route. It was suggested that the in-between stage may provide a foundation for a national body to emerge.
- 9.3 It was seen as difficult to jump immediately to a national body. There will be a need in the earliest stages to clearly define the remit for the national body and develop structure for it.
- 9.4 One felt that it was easier to get engagement if there was an issue that everyone could get behind. Others just wanted people to 'get moving and to stop talking' and to get this issue resolved.
- 9.5 Whilst some suggest delay, others feel that the issue of a national body is an urgent one and that Parent Councils need support and leadership. The fact that there is such a strong support for a national body overall suggests that something should be established earlier rather than later. The development of some Parent Councils was seen as being hindered by resistance from head teachers and staff and it was felt that having a national body might foster that partnership which is essential if Parent Councils are to work effectively.
- 9.6 It was also suggested that there should be provision within the constitution to change the structure as this evolved in the early stages. A contrary view was that the effectiveness of any national body might be hindered in its very earliest stages until it was clear what a national body looked like and had shown what it could do. 'One step at a time' with the possibility of setting up a representative body in the initial stages was proposed as a way forward.

Promoting regional forums

- 9.7 While LA forums do appear to be developing, Parent Councils recognise that there is a significant variation across local authorities. Some are better at engaging with parents than others. If it is accepted that the route to establishing a national body is to base it on regional/local authority clusters then greater consistency across local authorities is an important step.

9.8 Consumer Focus Scotland have taken the view that there should be a requirement placed upon the local authorities to consult and engage with parents. They had hoped that local authorities would be required to bring Parent Councils together and that this would be mandatory and not just voluntary.

Existing bodies

9.9 There is significant appreciation recorded in both the survey and the workshops of the work of the two existing bodies (SPTC and SPCA). There is also a view that establishing Parent Councils had been undertaken to introduce a new way of thinking and that there is a need to keep looking forward rather than to the past. Ideally a national body would combine the evident strengths of both. It was felt that these strengths should be brought to the table in the process of making a new start.

Consultation on next steps

9.10 Given the difficulties still being faced by schools in establishing Parent Councils and forums, participants were cautious about how best to pursue the establishment of a national body. This suggests an approach which in the first instance emphasises fostering growth and development of Parent Councils at local level.

9.11 Central to this is the need for a universal and effective method of communication which allows Parent Councils to network between each other, share ideas and support each other where they have common problems.

9.12 Emphasising the need for a national body to function as a 'bottom up' rather than authoritarian 'top down' body, it was felt that such a developmental approach would make it more likely that a national body would emerge in a way that would more effectively meet the needs of parents and Parent Councils.

9.13 A suggestion from one of the parents workshops was to set up some loosely formed national support group, without giving it the status of a national body, able to co-ordinate immediate needs of Parent Councils and forums such as communication, would provide the interim support.

9.14 Many respondents also felt that meetings and group discussions allowing for people to come together to brainstorm solutions as well as providing the opportunity to network were valuable.

Conclusions

9.15 There is strong support for the setting up of a national body. Some broad principles have emerged which will inform the structure and role of a national body and these include:

- Support for a national body is high and is consistent across the different groups including type of school, urban/ rural/ disadvantaged areas etc.
- The body should be independent of government and the local authorities

- Central funding should be provided. Independence can be maintained whilst being funded from central government
- It should be a membership organisation
- There should be automatic right of access to a National Body
- All Parent Councils should have access to the same services provided by a national body
- The body should relate to the overall well being of each child
- Parent Council members should be in control of the national body. Parents to have votes. Ability to co-opt associate members/organisations as required.
- Some regional representation is important but not necessarily at local authority level. Must avoid central belt bias.
- Salaried staff will be required to support the work of the National Body. The extent of this will depend on the final roles that are decided.
- The National Body should have some authority to ensure it is listened to.
- Role:
 - Strong agreement that priority is to represent parent views at a national level
 - Focus of national body should be on all parents
 - Have a role in disseminating information. Would have a role in filtering information and distilling it to a level that parents could absorb
 - National body should be proactive / set its own agenda and have a lobbying role on behalf of parents
 - Facilitating communications / supporting networking and ensuring parity of support across Scotland.

9.16 Insurance should not be such an influencing issue. At minimum there should be clarification on exactly what insurance is required. Ideally any insurance required should be provided for all Parent Councils via the national body.

9.17 Web based technology should be developed and facilities provided to ensure that Parent Councils have access to electronic communication. It is necessary to enhance networking, share good practice, disseminate information, produce e-newsletters and allow schools to communicate with each other.

9.18 A model that allows for a multi-tier structure, a small number of elected representatives and possible elected chairperson, with full time support staff was proposed by one of the parent groups. This should be consulted on further with wider parent groups.

9.19 Questions remain in relation to:

- Timing – whether there is a need to do something now or leave it till later
- Is there a need for an interim arrangement?
- Should the national body have a research capacity?
- Should the national body provide advice and support to individual parents?
- How it would interact with the many other bodies giving advice and support to parents?
- How the national body would interact with the local authorities and what each would do?

- Whether it should have a role in resolving issues arising between schools and local authorities.
- Whether Parent Councils could opt out if there was automatic membership or simply choose not to engage.
- How other non-parents / other organisations would be involved. Co-option / associate membership without voting rights?
- Scale of funding which in turn is dependent on the capacity of the body and what roles it might have?
- How the board / council should be selected?
- How many council members there should be?

Recommendations

9.20 There is a strong preference for a bottom-up approach. It is recommended that as a next step, possible models of a national body be developed and that regional meetings be held to seek parents views and to select representatives who would be willing to form an interim steering group to establish a national body.

9.21 Discussions should include all key stakeholders with parents taking the lead.

9.22 Funding should be provided to establish regional or local authority forums and to establish an interim national council. Funding should also be available to provide for the development of communication mechanisms and any administrative assistance required at a national level.

APPENDIX 1 Parent Council Current Activities

Parent Councils were asked to indicate what their current activities were. Current activity is very varied and is likely to reflect the differing stages of development. This was an open-ended question with no prompts. They could indicate up to four activities and were asked to present them in order of priority.

Responses were categorised to help provide an outline of current activity. This Appendix identifies all activity categories mentioned by 2% or more Parent Councils.

Table 3.1 Current activity of Parent Councils

| | First mention | Second mention | Third mention | Fourth mention |
|---|---------------|----------------|---------------|----------------|
| | % | % | % | % |
| Fundraising | 26 | 20 | 11 | 7 |
| Playing back what the parental view is to any interested party | 13 | 8 | 5 | 4 |
| Communicating – mainly to parents | 11 | 9 | 8 | 4 |
| Broad reference to supporting the school | 5 | 6 | 4 | |
| Co-ordination with school staff. Implies some proactivity | 5 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| Pushing through what has agreed to happen | 4 | 4 | 3 | 2 |
| Monitoring and lobbying the LA | 4 | 5 | 3 | 2 |
| Specific issues associated with running the school | 3 | 4 | 1 | |
| Emphasis on improving how the school/parent body see each other | 3 | 2 | 2 | 1 |
| Promoting participation by parents in school related activity | 3 | 4 | 3 | 2 |
| Identify what it is that is required | 3 | | 4 | 3 |
| Support of / helping school staff | 3 | 3 | 1 | |
| Forum to probe ideas . proposals | 2 | 3 | 1 | |
| Specific participations/ management of events | 2 | 7 | 4 | 3 |
| Simply describes schedules of meetings | 2 | | | * |
| Monitoring/ development of schools own policies | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Close co-operation with teaching staff | 2 | 3 | 1 | * |
| Rehearses the broad strategic aims of Parent Councils | 2 | - | - | * |
| Specific activity on improving the curriculum | 1 | 3 | | |
| Specifically referring to activities outside curriculum | 1 | 2 | 3 | 1 |
| Wider ranging business style reviews of school activity | 1 | 2 | 2 | 1 |
| Activity related to how children get to and from school | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| Promoting the school/ PR for school | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| Working with the wider community | - | - | 4 | 3 |
| Point of contact for parents allowing co-ordination / consolidation | - | - | 2 | * |
| Participation in local PC network | | | | 2 |
| Appointment of senior staff | | | | 2 |
| Others | | | | |
| Not stated | 3 | | 7 | 65 |
| <i>Base=491</i> | | | | |

APPENDIX 2 Full list of sources of support

| | | |
|--|---|------------------------------------|
| learning teaching scotland | national mtg | via partnership coy |
| NLC | councillor | local press |
| GLOW | local councillor | local partnership |
| parentzone | councillor | Gateway |
| scottish Parent Council assocn (SPCA) | MP | learning community |
| scottish parent teacher council (SPTC) | MSP | CHI |
| scottish network for parental involvement in childrens learning (SNPICL) | elected members | hall committee |
| school snr mgt team (SMT) | local authority | Employers |
| new headmistress | Parental Involvement Officer | local CVS |
| email (via SG, HT) | parental involvement unit (PIU) | family/friends |
| DHT | LA schools service | liaison worker |
| DepHT | council | Scotcip |
| mgt tm | QIOs | liaison worker |
| SMT | Parent/Pupil Participation Devt Officer | local cttees |
| school staff | Service Mgr | police |
| school secy | LA parent officer | IT companies |
| in-house | LA parent training | web/IT companies |
| teaching staff | Active Schools Coordinator | web design coy |
| teachers | CEC | external company |
| librarian (support) | parent support worker | commercial sponsor |
| PA | educn dept | via partnership coy |
| secretary | LA Parent officer | Other |
| school generally | LA (newsletter) | info pack |
| within our school | SSO | Tiletta |
| small scale locally | clusters of Parent Councils | Project |
| school via Groupcall | CCWP | written form |
| Friends of the school | PC liaison mtgs | general mtgs |
| school association | Area PC network | high level of EAL students |
| former pupil | East Neuk PC | bingo teas etc |
| parents evenings | Area PC forum | done independently |
| support to input to website | EPCN | not always successfully |
| transition | LA PC forum | various literature |
| school brochure | peer groups | Insurance coy |
| pupils | WL PC network being established | health visitor |
| pupil council | Glasgow PC forum | none required |
| Parent Council | secondary school network | word of mouth |
| PC members | WL PC network being established | Courses |
| coopted PC members | ENPC | home/school partner |
| cooptees | Fife Area forum | majority of parents not interested |
| PC member | WL PC mtg | provided with consultation paper |
| chair | forums | national surveys |

| | | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------|
| clerk | other Aberdeen PCs | E4 education |
| school board | consultative groups | Tbd |
| initiative | regional mtgs | PCF |
| parents | institutions | PSA mtg |
| parents | HSP | materials provided |
| skilled parent helpers | CRBS | Run mtgs |
| parent forum | care commission | small scale locally |
| parent forum mtgs | LearnDirect Centre | web-based |
| parent who is teacher elsewhere | Disclosure Scotland | websites |
| parents evenings | PSG | internet resources e.g. GLOW |
| individual parent on Comm Ptrship | NHS | minutes available on school |
| Cttee | HMIe | website |
| forums | PSG | grantfinder |
| PACE | wider community | parent teacher assocn |
| other schools | local business | w. Fundraising |
| cluster support HT group | family/friends | fundraising |
| 2 other schools (remote) | small community | Curriculum for Excellence |
| scottish govt | school companies via PC | church |
| ScGovt | already a community high school | Priest |
| SG toolkit | community learning workers | charities |
| ScExec | local knowledge | Lottery |
| welcome pack | ILC | volunteer bodies |
| govt leaflets | local community support body | charity project |
| Parents as Partners pack | community assocn | SCVO |
| parents conference | | VAO |

Appendix 3 Support provided to each activity by different sources

Data shown as “Base” is number of mentions of support received for each activity. Figures against each source are percentage of that base. Only cells with 5% or more are included.

| | Base | LTS | PZ | SPCA | SPTC | PTA | SMT | staff | school | PC | parent | community | PC networks | other schools | LA | SG | elected |
|--|------|-----|----|------|------|-----|-----|-------|--------|----|--------|-----------|-------------|---------------|----|----|---------|
| Representing Parents | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Encouraging parental involvement | 350 | 5 | 17 | 9 | 16 | | 13 | 4 | 16 | | | | | | 54 | | |
| Accessing views of the parent forum | 227 | | 11 | 8 | 10 | | 11 | | 21 | 8 | | | | | 38 | | |
| Responding to consultations | 228 | 5 | 8 | 7 | 19 | | 11 | | 11 | 8 | | | | | 45 | 5 | |
| Representing parents' views to Scottish Government | 170 | | 6 | 16 | 34 | | | | 6 | 6 | | | | | 31 | | |
| Communicating with Parents | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Writing/circulating a newsletter | 210 | | | | | | 6 | | 15 | 5 | | | | | 7 | | |
| Setting up and maintaining a website | 155 | | | | | | 10 | 8 | 34 | 8 | 6 | | | | 26 | | |
| Setting up and managing a blog | 38 | | | | 8 | | | 11 | 24 | 13 | 13 | | | | 24 | | |
| Providing accessible communication to ALL parents | 180 | | 8 | | 8 | | 16 | 7 | 24 | 10 | | | | | 22 | | |
| Engaging with parents of prospective new pupils | 167 | | | | | | 18 | | 38 | | | | | | 7 | | |
| Acquiring knowledge | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Keeping up to date with educational policy | 341 | 9 | 13 | 7 | 20 | | 28 | | 14 | | | | | | 53 | 6 | |
| Understanding how LA Education departments work | 194 | | | | 6 | | 19 | | 7 | | | | | | 68 | | |
| Learning about other sources of information and advice for parents | 242 | 5 | 21 | 10 | 25 | | 5 | | 5 | | | | 5 | | 29 | | |
| Administering | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Running meetings | 250 | | | | 6 | | | | 8 | | | | | | 28 | | |
| Interviewing skills | 202 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 76 | | |
| Managing Disclosure Scotland issues | 219 | | | 5 | 23 | | 9 | | 16 | | | | | | 37 | | |
| Managing Insurance issues | 286 | | | 8 | 43 | | | | 6 | | | | | | 44 | | |
| Activities | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Accessing local facilities/ resources | 183 | | | | | | 9 | | 20 | 7 | | 9 | | | 49 | | 7 |
| Raising funds | 202 | | | | 23 | 10 | 5 | 5 | 14 | 14 | 7 | | | 5 | 16 | | |
| Accessing grants | 122 | | | | 10 | | 7 | | 6 | 6 | | | | | 35 | | 5 |
| Organising events | 167 | | | | 16 | | 7 | | 18 | 10 | | | | | 11 | | |
| Promoting links with the community | 166 | | | | | | 7 | | 23 | 9 | | 15 | | | 15 | | 5 |
| Networking | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Networking with other Parent Councils | 270 | | | | 6 | | | | | | | | 11 | | 57 | | |
| Sharing best practice across Scotland | 117 | 9 | 13 | 9 | 33 | | | | | | | | | | 24 | | |
| Identifying other groups to work with | 74 | | | 5 | 8 | | 5 | | 9 | 8 | | | | | 20 | | |
| TOTALS | | 33 | 97 | 84 | 31 | 10 | 18 | 35 | 33 | 11 | 26 | 24 | 16 | 5 | 81 | 11 | 17 |
| Average | 198 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

APPENDIX 4

Parent Councils were asked if there are any other activities that they would like to undertake in the future that they would need more support and advice to do. This was again an open-ended question with no prompts. Parent councils could indicate up to four activities that they were asked to present in order of priority.

Desired Activities for the future requiring more support and advice

| | First mention | Second mention | Third mention |
|---|---------------|----------------|---------------|
| | % | % | % |
| Fundraising | 8 | 5 | 2 |
| Promoting participation by parents on school related activity | 7 | 4 | 2 |
| Forum to probe ideas/ proposals | 7 | 6 | 2 |
| Participation in local Parent Council network | 5 | 4 | 2 |
| Simply describes schedule of meetings | 5 | 2 | 1 |
| Benchmarking | 3 | 2 | * |
| Wider ranging, business style reviews of school activity | 3 | 3 | 2 |
| Monitoring and lobbying LA | 3 | 4 | 1 |
| Communicating – mainly to parents | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| Appointments of senior staff | 3 | | |
| Broad reference to supporting school | 2 | | |
| Monitoring / development of schools own policies | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| Specific activity on improving the curriculum | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| Specific participation / management of events | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| Specifically referring to activities outside of curriculum | | 1 | * |
| Promoting the cause of active parental engagement in their child's learning | | | |
| Identify what is required | | | * |
| Childcare | | | |
| Pushing through what has been agreed | | 2 | 2 |
| Working with the wider community | | 2 | 1 |
| Not stated | 42 | 66 | 82 |

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