

Education Reform: A Consultation on the Provisions of the Education Bill

Connect is a long-standing independent parents' organisation and the only Scottish charity which is dedicated to supporting parental engagement in education. We provide membership services to Parent Councils and PTAs, as well as offering advice and information to individual parents/carers about any aspect of the education of their child or the wider education system.

We support education professionals in developing their skills and understanding around effective partnership working with families and the wider community through online professional learning via the Connect Family Engagement Academy. Our evidence-based approaches reflect both the recognised significant role of families in the learning of their children and young people, and the stated policies and legislation which pertain in Scotland.

We welcome the opportunity to comment on the Scottish Government's proposals for the replacement of the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), and for reforming education inspection.

Establishment of a New Qualifications Body

In [our response](#) to Professor Muir's consultation on education reform, we argued against the idea of creating a new body which is both responsible for curriculum and assessment, fearing this would replicate the flawed model we have had where SQA effectively dictated the curriculum in Senior Phase. We wish to repeat our views that the new qualifications body:

- must be different in ethos, leadership, and lines of accountability if different outcomes are to be achieved. We cannot simply rebrand the same organisation and organisational values and practices.
- should include representatives of all key stakeholders, not just primarily teachers, with genuine commitments to better engagement, especially with young people and their families, and an openness to improvement.
- must include mechanisms and requirements for openness and responsiveness to young people and parents/carers, a requirement to work with others with a focus on young people and an open-door policy for concerns, complaints, issues, suggestions for improvement etc.
- must have a genuine and sharp focus on inclusive and meaningful qualifications, awards and achievements offer from the new body which ensures all young people (and those undertaking qualifications throughout their lives) are able to succeed, develop skills and have a positive attitude to lifelong learning.
- must do much more to celebrate and value awards and qualifications to ensure a parity of esteem to instil enthusiasm in learners and parents for this even wider range of qualifications.

While we are glad to see the consultation document recognises that pupils and students should have meaningful roles to influence decisions made by the new body, we are disappointed to see that it does not explicitly mention parents and carers in this section. They

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are only alluded to when referring to a dedicated charter for pupils, students and their 'advocates.' Parents' and carers' role as champions and advocates for their children must be recognised, and their views should also be sought, and opportunities created to influence decision-making. So much more must be done to inform parents about the wide range of qualifications and awards (which need to be offered in schools too) so we can move away from this outdated idea of 'Highers as the gold standard'. The new body must work with business and employers to reflect contemporary and future skills needs and to share the messages about relevant options with young people and parents.

Cultural change is vital. We believe institutional defensiveness and a focus on 'the system', and those who work in it, rather than on those who are the purpose of our education system have been major barriers to improvement and change at every level. The new organisation must be more accountable than its predecessor, engaging meaningfully with all those who have a stake in education and young people's learning, which includes parents and carers, and especially to give space to those voices not usually heard. We recognise that qualifications are relevant at all stages of life, but Connect's focus is parental engagement in education which is primarily to the age of 21.

The priority must be how to achieve the outcomes for young people. The redesign should be examined a) in the light of how and why the new organisation and its qualifications offer will benefit young people b) how does the new organisation and what it offers sit with the UNCRC c) how the shared endeavour of helping young people to progress and develop will be supported by working with education settings, young people, their parents and carers, business and employers, higher and further education, those providing apprenticeships etc.

Reform of Education Inspection

Regarding the proposals for legislation to establish a HM Chief Inspector of Education for Scotland in law, who could have primary responsibility for setting the schedule, frequency and focus for inspections instead of Ministers as under the current system, we are concerned about potential political appointments. The inspectorate must be independent of other national education bodies and of Scottish Government to carry credibility.

We are pleased to see that the priority issues identified by the consultation paper highlight the importance of parents and carers having confidence in the inspection system and that they should be involved in inspections. When we surveyed parents on inspection for our response to the Professor Muir review, we found that parents/carers and families want and need to be much more involved in school inspections and in the improvement process. Parents want openness and transparency in discussions about improvement with the school/nursery and with the inspection; they are key partners in wanting what's best for children and young people and want to support schools in being the best that they can be. We repeat our findings here:

- **The families at nurseries and schools should feel involved and listened to in the inspection process.**

97 per cent of resonances either agree or agree strongly.

- **Families' views should lead to positive change and improvement.**

97 per cent of resonances either agree or agree strongly.

- **Families should be involved in the work to improve learning after the inspection has happened**

81 per cent of resonances either agree or agree strongly.

- **Independent, external school inspections are important as a way of improving children's experiences and learning**

86 per cent of resonances either agree or agree strongly.

- **Parents/carers and young people should be able to share their views openly with the inspection team.**

98 per cent of resonances either agree or agree strongly,

- **Parents/carers and young people should be able to share views and experiences on an ongoing basis with inspectors, not just at inspection times**

80 per cent of resonances either agree or agree strongly.

- **There should be more and different ways to feed into the inspection, and the improvement process e.g. video conferences, focus groups/workshops (online/face-to-face), paper or online questionnaires, community-based or led events.**

88 per cent of resonances either agree or agree strongly.

- **Parent/carers views should be more clearly factored into inspection reports and school improvement plans.**

85 per cent of resonances either agree or agree strongly.

- **After the inspection, there should be events and opportunities to share the findings and involve families in the next steps in improvement.**

94 per cent of resonances either agree or agree strongly.

- **Inspection should be an integral part of ongoing school improvement, not a standalone event.**

88 per cent of resonances either agree or agree strongly.

Parental involvement and engagement in school inspections and improvement must be genuine and meaningful. The inspectorate must give much more weight and due respect to parents' and young people's contributions as a core part of improvement, not an add-on or tick-box exercise, and these contributions should be ongoing and integral to improvement as an ongoing process. Part of this should be to have paid inspectors, not volunteer lay people, fully involved in hearing parents' views, always with a focus on improvement and learning. Having volunteer lay inspectors speak to parents gives out a very poor message about the lesser value of parents' views and parental engagement.

At Connect, we believe that children and young people thrive when schools take a whole school community approach in everything they do, involving community partners in supporting families and understanding that schools are community leaders and a crucial gateway for families and children and young people to support and information on health and

wellbeing, finance, social services and more. Schools are community hubs, and we would like this to feature more strongly in inspections.

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