

connect backchat

Issue 155 Winter 2021/22

Connect AGM and Annual Lecture 2021



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0131 474 6199



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Connect works with parents and educators to support parental/family engagement and to improve children's learning and lives.

Connect's financial year runs 1 August to 31 July; this year, we held our AGM 2020-2021 and Annual Lecture on 18 November 2021. We were delighted to finally hear *Kind to Minds: Supporting Children and Young People's Mental Health*, a talk by Toni Giugliano of the Mental Health Foundation in Scotland. This had been postponed twice because of COVID-19. The excellent lecture, which calls for a preventative approach, helping young people (and all of us) to gain the skills and confidence to look after their own mental health. You can watch the lecture [here](#) - it's great!

For Connect and our fantastic parent group Members, the AGM and its supporting documents provide a chance to review our work and what's happened in Scottish education in the course of the year. The Annual Report and the summary of accounts are available [on our website](#).

It's fair to say that 2020-21 was another uncertain year, dominated by COVID-19. Nurseries and schools re-opened but many restrictions and impacts on pupils and their families remain. The Annual Report gives you an overview of the year. Key achievements for Connect were:

- celebrating the end of the Partnership Schools Scotland pilot with a research report from Stirling University and a collation of success stories
- going fully digital with our services for Members and our new online Connect Family Engagement Academy
- over 1500 parents/carers attending 52 live online Information Sessions
- four important parent/carers surveys with almost 2000 responses, enabling us to share parents' voices with national and local government, schools and partners
- campaigns on SQA assessments and the need to factor in personal circumstances, digital exclusion, hardship, and more.

In this issue: Parent/Carer Survey Reports, blogs from Iain Nisbet and SCQF plus next term's Information Sessions

You are receiving Backchat as part of your Connect Membership. Please update your group's contact details [here](#).

connect
supporting partnerships in education



Festive Greetings from Connect!

The Connect team wishes everyone a peaceful festive season. We're all hoping for a less bumpy 2022, but no matter what, the Connect team will be there to support parent-run groups and to speak up for parents/carers with children in education. One thing we can all be sure of is that 2022 will bring change - hopefully for the better! We'll do our best to push for improvements for all of our children, young people and families.

Survey Updates from Connect!

A massive thank you to everyone who took part in our surveys this term. We summarise the findings below.

Connect's Parent/Carer Survey Report: How's It Going? Autumn 2021

There were **431** responses from parents/carers in **28** local authorities to our Autumn survey. You can read our full report, our calls to action and many parents' comments [here](#). We will be campaigning on the issues raised in the New Year. Key findings are:

- Scottish Government COVID-19 guidance for schools is being interpreted differently across local authorities and schools, with lots of inconsistencies eg about events, school trips, visits, lunch arrangements, access to water
- parents' evenings/consultations are not happening in every school. Parents have a legal right to be involved in their child's education and this must be respected
- school-home communication remains problematic in some schools. Some parents say they feel shut out of their child's school or nursery life
- signposting parents to mental health support and services is still not taking place in many schools
- remote learning is not consistently provided when young people are absent
- the majority of respondents say they have not received information on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child from their school.

Education Reform Surveys

A massive thank you from Professor Ken Muir (and of course from us!) to those of you who took part in Connect's Education Reform surveys. These were:

- *Reflecting and Recognising Young People's Skills and Achievements in Secondary Schools* which asked about course options for young people in schools, continuous assessment, external exams, whether three consecutive years of exams were too much for young people and more; and
- *Involving Parents in School Inspections and Improvement* which looked at the role of parents and Parent Councils in school inspections and school improvement.

Data from the surveys, a consultation response and the Connect survey reports were all submitted to Professor Muir. You can read Connect's consultation response and the two survey reports [here](#).

Whilst parents inevitably have diverse views, the great news is that the vast majority of parents want a secondary school experience and qualifications system which is inclusive, reflects the achievements of all young people and is tailored to the needs of individuals. The majority of parents did not think exams were fair for all young people, they thought three years of exams was too much for young people. They are also very keen to see a greater role for parents/carers in the school inspection and improvement process. Parents have so much to offer school communities.

Thank you again for all your help! The Early Learning and Childcare (1140 hours) survey report will be published very soon!



Connect Information Sessions: Live Online

Get organised for 2022! Members, you are warmly invited to book your free places on Connect's useful live online Information Sessions.

Click the name of the Information Session below to reserve your place:

- [Parent Council Essentials – Mythbusters!](#): 25 January 2022, 8-9pm
- [Money Matters for Parent Groups and Treasurers](#): 1 February, 8-9pm
- [Organising Social & Fundraising Events](#): 8 February 2022, 8-9pm
- [Role of Chair, Treasurer, Secretary for Parent Groups](#): 24 February 2022, 8-9pm (please note: this is a Thursday, not the usual Tuesday.)



New Format and Refresh for some Information Sessions!

You'll notice some refreshed live online Information Sessions above - we're running *Parent Council Essentials* in a new, more interactive format with a quiz and we're combining specific sessions for office bearers into one session, so those considering or taking on these roles can think about how office bearers collaborate and share their volunteer workloads!

Scottish Education Now

Education Reform: Professor Ken Muir's report and recommendations on education reform, including the reform of the Scottish Qualifications Authority and Education Scotland, is due to be published in early 2022.

Incorporation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC): While the UK Supreme Court upheld the challenge that the original Bill went beyond the remit of the Scottish Parliament, the Scottish Government has said it remains committed to incorporating the UNCRC into law as much as possible. We expect to see movement on this in 2022.

Disclosure/PVG: We are still waiting to see how changes to the Disclosure/PVG scheme will affect parent groups, and will continue to work with Disclosure Scotland on this in 2022.

GIRFEC – Assessment of Wellbeing statutory guidance: the Scottish Government is consulting on the *Getting it Right for Every Child* (GIRFEC) guidance which sets out how the eight wellbeing indicators are to be used to assess the wellbeing of a child or young person. Connect will submit a response early next year.

Hello to two new wonderful Connect colleagues...

We're pleased to introduce you to two new members of the Connect team! Marion Healey-Smith has joined us as Membership Officer and Diane Delaney is our new Associate Trainer. If you join our Information Sessions next term, you will probably meet one or other of them!

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Q & A with... Iain Nisbet, Education Law Consultant

This is the first in an occasional series asking education campaigners and experts for their views on what needs to change in Scottish education. Iain Nisbet is a well-respected legal expert in education, and in particular, in additional support needs. We asked Iain for his follow-up thoughts on Angela Morgan's *Additional Support for Learning Review*.

Connect: *What would you like to see happen in the next five years?*

Iain: From an education law point of view, I would like to see some changes to the Co-ordinated Support Plan (CSP). The criteria for who gets one are complicated and don't always make sense. There has also been a sense that the focus has switched to the Child's Plan (even though there is no statutory basis for that). The result is that very few pupils have a CSP, and that number is shrinking, at the same time as the numbers of pupils with additional support needs is growing. A system more like the Education and Health Care Plan in England or the new Individual Development Plan in Wales would be better, in my view. A change in the way the presumption of mainstreaming works in law would be beneficial as well. At the moment the legal duty on authorities is that children will be sent to mainstream schools (subject to some exceptions). I think the focus there is wrong. I would prefer to see the duty on authorities to make sure that all local, mainstream schools are accessible and inclusive for all pupils.

Connect: *We know families and young people can't wait for the slow changes and policy cycles. Are there any changes that can be made immediately to benefit young people? If so, what are these?*

Iain: Many of the factors identified by Angela Morgan in her report actually don't require much in the way of policy or legal change. Even in the context of stretched budgets, school staff who understand, are willing to learn and committed to doing the best for your child go a really long way. Even when difficult situations arise, a trusting relationship between home and school really makes a difference. We are at a point where a number of policy reviews are at the point of reporting eg the CSP review is due to report fairly soon. So the Additional Support for Learning Review shouldn't be seen as the starting point for a new policy cycle, but rather as a well timed boost which came at the mid-point (or later) of a policy cycle which was already underway.

Connect: *How do you think the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) will benefit children and young people with ASN?*

Iain: A lot of the relevant sections from the UNCRC have already been included within domestic education law. For example, the requirement in the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000 for education to be directed to the development of the personality, talents and mental and physical abilities of the child to their fullest potential is lifted directly from Article 28 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. There is a huge symbolic importance to the incorporation, of course. In addition, I think that the Convention rights may well be relied upon in cases involving the use of physical restraint on pupils, children who spend lengthy periods without education, and that sort of thing. Mainly, however, the hope is that it leads to a sea-change in the way people perceive children as rights-holders and start to view the education system through that lens. We have moved a long way from the idea of state education being primarily a parental right, of which children were the passive beneficiaries, but the journey is not complete yet, either.

Connect: *What do you think makes change and improvement happen? What keeps you motivated?*

Iain: At a local level, individual members of staff can make a huge positive difference to the pupils within their class/school/caseload. Individual legal cases can make a difference as well. To the family in question, obviously, but they can also have a wider impact. A novel case on an important question of principle or practice can lead to changes within that education authority – or even nationally – which has a knock-on effect for hundred or even thousands of pupils. Although I practice in a very narrow area of law, the variety is endless. Each case is a real life family committed to securing the best outcome for a child with additional support needs. To be part of assisting in making those outcomes a reality is a real privilege, and the feeling that you are helping these families is definitely a motivator.

This article also appears [on Connect's website](#).