



supporting partnerships in education



74th Annual Report 2021-2022

Connect is a trading name of Scottish Parent Teacher Council
Mansfield Traquair Centre, Edinburgh EH3 6BB

t: 0131 474 6199 e: info@connect.scot  [ConnectScot](https://www.facebook.com/ConnectScot)  [@connect_scot](https://twitter.com/connect_scot)

The Scottish Parent Teacher Council is a Company Limited by Guarantee, Company No SC151086
Scottish Charity No SC019168

Connect's Mission

Connect's mission is to support the development and maintenance of high quality parental engagement in children's learning and school lives. We will achieve this by:

- **sustaining Connect** as a robust, parent-led, independent membership organisation with a focus on research and evidence-based development
- **working with parents and carers** to build their confidence, knowledge and skills so they feel able to engage in the way they wish, with their child's school and wider education services
- **working in partnership** with organisations and individuals in the educational and wider Scottish community, to build awareness of and engagement with parental involvement and its benefits for children, families and communities.

Connect's Values

We are a membership organisation committed to treating all Members and stakeholders with **respect, honesty and integrity**.

- The Directors and staff work tirelessly and passionately to create productive, creative partnerships which support **positive educational outcomes for all young people**.
- We engage with our employees respectfully and flexibly, supporting their learning and progression and **encouraging their enthusiastic involvement** in the development of the organisation.
- We support parents and carers to be **involved in the way that is right for them**: with their own child's learning; the local school; local authority or at national policy level.
- We are committed to **equality and dignity** for all parents, carers and children.
- We utilise **evidence and research** to advance our work and to support policy and practice.

Convenor's Report

We had all hoped that 2021 to 2022 would see a return to more normal, COVID-free times but it was not to be. In terms of parental involvement and engagement in the lives of schools, parents in many schools were welcomed back into school buildings or grounds during the summer term. However, Connect's June 2022 survey of parents' and parent groups' access to schools clearly showed that some schools were still not inviting parents back in, even though, by that time, all national COVID restrictions had been lifted.

It was apparent during the course of 2021/22 that parent groups were increasingly fed up with the limitations of online parental engagement. Parents and parent groups were keen to get back to more traditional face-to-face and in-person activities, to enhance children's experience of school and to play their part in building a sense of school community.

Our Year

Parents' Voices

Connect continued to support its Members, encouraging parent groups to keep going and to find new and different ways of helping parents to feel informed about, and engaged with, the life of their child's school. We regularly updated the content of our weekly live online Information Sessions and our many website resources to reflect the ever-changing COVID-19 guidance for schools. This helped parents and our Members to navigate the complexities of the COVID guidance.

Through Connect's surveys of parents/carers, through our live online Information Sessions and through our email and social media channels, parents continued to share their concerns, successes and ideas with us.

It became clear as we started 2022 that parent groups were desperate to focus on 'getting back to normal'. Connect pressed Scottish Government for parents to be allowed back in to school for face-to-face meetings if they needed these. As guidance finally changed and softened, we saw a wide

variance in how, when (and if) schools allowed parents to have face-to-face meetings with staff. Our surveys also showed that communications had improved, but not everywhere.

Connect also pressed for parents to be allowed to attend events in school grounds and for parent groups to be able to run events in school grounds or after school hours, as events were now possible in the community.

Digital Connect

Our small staff team continued to work from home, delivering much of our support for Members digitally in different ways. Work on building an online platform to enable self-funded Connect Members to update their contact details and pay memberships was completed. The gradual increase in phone calls to our helpline during the summer term suggested that events were increasingly taking place.

Back to Business

Like parent groups, Connect began preparations for more 'back to normal' parental engagement experiences for families. We ran a new, discussion based Information Session called 'A Problem

Shared...'. The theme of this was how to re-energise your parent group. We were aware that some Parent Council and PTA members had struggled to keep going during COVID, whilst others had delivered amazing support to their communities but were now exhausted. It was likely that there would be a turnover of parent volunteers on Parent Councils and PTAs.

Our enquiries from Members increasingly were about how to recruit new volunteers, whether job sharing office bearer roles was possible, how to amend constitutions and so on. We will continue to support Members with this into 2022/23 and beyond.

As many schools re-opened for families in May and June 2022, we supported parent groups to keep going, to inspire one another, to share ideas and to enthuse other parents with the wonderful possibilities of being involved in children's learning and school lives. Parents and parent groups are very generous in sharing their experiences with one another, through Information Sessions and the closed Facebook group, *Connecting Parent Groups* - we are keen to develop this further.

Our Year *continued*

Professional Learning

Connect's professional learning modules were delivered through the Connect Family Engagement Academy. Two cohorts embarked on the *Influencing Family Engagement for Improvement* module for Education Scotland's *Excellence in Headship* programme, with **26** sign ups.

The Foundation module ran with two cohorts and a total of **12** sign ups. There were **195** new registrations on the Family Engagement Academy during the course of the year - clearly interest is there, but we know teachers continued to juggle multiple pressures, as the ongoing challenges of COVID-19 impacted on the uptake and completion of modules.

Connect made efforts to create and deliver shorter, twilight courses for teachers and educators in the summer term but these did not take off as we had hoped.

Our session for school leadership teams, *Working with your Parent Council*, ran four times and was attended by **85** educators.

Feedback remains positive:

- Improvements are being made and post-COVID, we have a lot of the tools with which to move forward
- A very thorough module which deals with robustly evaluating family engagement in family friendly ways
- So many things were helpful!

Membership & Member Services

Active engagement by our Members in our services continues to grow. We are delighted that **25 out of 32** of Scotland's local authorities now take out full Connect Membership for all their Parent Councils, as a clear commitment to parental engagement and involvement. Membership figures increased year on year - a real achievement considering that many parent groups were limited in their activities because of COVID-19. The new Associate Membership offer was taken up by one local authority.

In 2021-2022, we revised and refreshed our resource packs on our website on a regular basis, to keep up with the ever-changing COVID landscape. These packs tie in with the themes of our live online Information Sessions. Planning for a new website is now underway, with the focus on user friendliness and meeting Members' needs. The website had **4240** registered users as at 31 July 2022.

All Information Sessions were online because of COVID-19. In 2021-2022, we welcomed **645 attendees** from **29** local authority areas to **29** Information Sessions. As well as our **15** topic-based Connect sessions, all were welcome to our session with Place2Be which introduced their new website for parents.

Parent group members really appreciated the Information Sessions as a chance to share tips

and ideas, giving the Connect team lots of positive feedback. We asked participants what they felt they had learned:

- I'm a new deputy chair. I came away feeling more confident in the support Connect offers. Thank you
- I have put forward successful fundraising plans
- We are now trying to establish a rep from each year, and set dates for the year
- Good to hear ideas from Connect and other PCs
- Great ideas for reaching out to new families and fundraising ideas during restrictions
- I was particularly interested in what was working for other PCs. So real life examples are good
- I found the whole format very effective.

Type of Membership	2021 to 2022	2020 to 2021
Clubs/ Organisations	20	16
Individual	6	2
Parent Councils	1782	1716
PTAs	83	85
Grand Total	1891	1819

Communications

Connect's different communications platforms were the lynch-pin of Connect's work during COVID restrictions. Members have long had access to a wide range of publications, opportunities for communicating and ways in which to gather information and advice. These really made a difference in sharing vital information about school restrictions as quickly as possible between 2020 and 2022. Connect's communications with Members and partners include:

- email (info@connect.scot)
- monthly eNewsletters (**2996** subscribers, up over 300 on 2020/21)
- our termly newsletter *Backchat* (**1247** direct recipients plus circulation via local authorities and our enewsletters)
- Facebook (**3371** followers)
- our closed Facebook group *Connecting Parent Groups* (**350** members)
- surveys (see overleaf)
- Twitter (**10,568** followers - up over **500** on the previous year)
- our annual Members' leaflet and Pack
- resources on our website
- a regular eNewsletter for educators

- a dedicated Twitter feed for educators to support their professional learning (**1603** followers).

**Figures in bold are as at 31 July 2022.*

Social Media

Both Facebook and Twitter remain strong social media platforms for Connect as key methods for sharing information with parents/carers, parent groups and partners. Our followers continue to grow. The growth in followers of our main Twitter feed suggests that more parents, parent groups and schools are using Twitter. We often get tagged when a school is proud of some aspect of their parental engagement and we share these posts to promote good practice! The closed Facebook group for Connect Members, *Connecting Parent Groups*, also goes from strength to strength, as parent groups share information and support one another.

Press and Publicity

It was a quieter press year in 2021/22, after the maelstrom around school closures in 2020/21. We were involved in over 30 media stories on:

- our own surveys



- the digital divide
- online learning
- the removal of COVID restrictions
- SQA arrangements
- Scottish National Standardised Assessments for P1s.

We contributed to stories run by BBC Scotland, the Herald, Times Educational Supplement Scotland, the National, the Scotsman, Bauer Radio and more.

Leaflets and Resources

The Connect team continues to review and refresh our themed resource packs; these are shared at Information Sessions, through social media and are available [on our website](#). These resources will be front and centre of our new website which will make them easier to find.



Policy and Surveys

How does Connect form its policy positions? We ask parents/carers! We do this through our parent surveys, by gathering views and ideas from our Members and partners, by listening to what Members tell us in our live online Information Sessions, in emails and via our helpline. Interaction with Members through our social media platforms helps us with this too. We take these diverse views and experiences to the Scottish Government, the Scottish Parliament, local authorities and the many organisations and bodies involved with education in Scotland.

In 2021-2022, we ran nine parent/carer surveys (numbers of responses in bold):

- Residential Outdoor Education (**322**)
- Parent-Run Events and Parent Access to Schools (**339**)
- Health and Wellbeing in Schools (**402**)
- Early Learning and Childcare and 1140 hours 2021 (**112**)



Parents' Voice



connect
supporting partnerships in education

- Reflecting and Recognising Young Peoples' Skills and Achievements in Secondary Schools (**211**)
- Involving Parents in School Inspection and Improvement (**159**)
- How's It Going? Autumn 2021 (**432**)
- Snap Survey on SQA Appeals 2021 (**24**)
- Snap Survey on Pupil Equity Funding and parent involvement (**9**)

You can read reports on these surveys [on our website](#).

Consultations and Submissions

We took part in the following Scottish Government consultations in 2021-22:

- Getting It Right For Every Child Refreshed Practice Guidance and Assessment of Wellbeing
- Education reform consultation on behalf of Professor Ken Muir, Independent Advisor to the Scottish Government.

We submitted evidence to the Scottish Parliament's Education and Skills Committee on:

- the Scottish Attainment Challenge.

We made a submission to the General Teaching Council of Scotland Consultation on Registration Rules too.

Our staff team and board members are invited to take part in consultation events and reference or advisory groups. During 2021-22, we worked with:

- the Scottish Parliament Cross Party Group on Children and Young People
- the Scottish Parliament Cross Party Group on Shared Parenting
- Disclosure Scotland to look at the implementation and the impact on parent groups of the Disclosure (Scotland) Bill
- Parenting Across Scotland and Together to inform parents on the incorporation of the UNCRC
- Louise Hayward's Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment
- Practitioner and Stakeholder Advisory Group on Reform of Education Scotland and the Scottish Qualifications Authority.

Executive Director Eileen Prior sits on the BBC Education Broadcasting Council for Scotland.

Connect: Moving Forward

There were a number of significant changes at Connect during 2021/22. Three wonderful new staff members joined the team - Membership Officer Marion Healey Smith, Associate Trainer Diane Delaney and Executive Director Patrick McGlinchey, who formally took up his post on 1 August 2022, having shadowed Eileen Prior from mid June onwards.

We said a grateful goodbye to Jen Graham, Training Officer, Dorothy Hooper, Trainer, and Eileen Prior during 2022. The latter two familiar Connect faces retired, whilst Jen moved on to pastures new. We were able to celebrate the leavers' contributions to Connect and to parental engagement with low-key staff gatherings when COVID restrictions permitted.

We were delighted to welcome Marion, Diane and Patrick during the course of the year and were pleased to build in handover periods to ensure all our services to Connect Members continued to run smoothly. Mission accomplished!

As we look to 2022/23, and as we hopefully emerge from the worst effects of COVID, we're planning a survey of our Members to make sure our services meet our Members' needs.

We're participating in the Scottish Government's National Discussion on Scottish education and we'll be working hard to make sure parents' voices are heard at all levels of Scottish education. Work continues on the Hayward Review into qualifications and assessment. Connect is playing a key part in helping parents to engage with the sometimes confusing and jargon-filled national policies and consultations.

Also in the pipeline is Connect's Strategic Framework for 2023 onwards. It will reflect our current [Connect Manifesto](#) which runs until 2026. Its four themes focus on the importance of parents and carers in children's learning, the role of parents in improving schools/nurseries, the importance of good relationships between families and schools/nurseries and fairness, kindness and access for all children and young people in our education system.

We look forward to working with you in the coming year.

Staff and Board

We've outlined staff changes above.

There was some movement on the Connect Board too. We are grateful for the time and commitment of three departing volunteer Directors - Clare Marshall, Veronica Watson (our Treasurer for a number of years), Fiona Gray and also Fiona Piper.

Tracy Lundie joined the Connect Board as a new Director, bringing fresh skills and experience to the mix. A massive thank you to all our volunteer Directors!

Our Memberships

Connect as an organisation, and individual members of the team, are members of a number of organisations for the benefit of our Member parents and the charity. These include:

- **Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations**
- **Association of Chief Officers of Scottish Voluntary Organisations**
- **Children in Scotland.**
- **Scottish Child Law Centre.**



In conclusion

To some extent, 2021-2022 felt like the year of 'hanging on in there' as we all continued to face uncertainty and upheaval because of COVID-19. We know some Parent Councils and PTAs thrived but others struggled, when so much of the fun and team-working of volunteering was negatively impacted.

However, we all began to look forward to brighter times by the summer term - many of us were scarcely able to believe that normal activities in schools might again be possible! If you managed to keep your parent group going through thick and thin, that is a real achievement. We know it has been difficult for many. We also know that parents and carers are as interested in their child's nursery and school lives as ever. We must take what we learned during COVID, keep the good things and make improvements where these are needed.

At Connect, we are hugely grateful to all of those who took part in our parent/carers surveys - these are a key part of enabling the Connect team to campaign on behalf of parents and to make sure parents' voices are heard. Thank you to all the Connect Members who got in touch and kept us informed about the challenges they faced - you kept us going too!

As Convenor of Connect's Board of Director/Trustees, I would like to thank the Connect staff team for all their hard work on behalf of parents and carers. A big 'thank you' too to my fellow Directors, all of them volunteers and all of them passionate about parental engagement.

We are all looking forward to change and improvement in Scottish education. As Education Scotland and the Scottish Qualifications Authority are replaced in the coming months and years, as the National Discussion on Scottish education concludes and the Hayward Review on qualifications and assessments completes, we feel optimistic that at last Scotland is really focussing on a child-centred education system. This means children and young people's health and wellbeing, their learning and achievements are at the heart of education, with their parents and carers by their sides as their advocates and champions.



Lindsay Law
Connect Convenor



supporting partnerships in education

Connect is a trading name of Scottish Parent Teacher Council

Mansfield Traquair Centre, Edinburgh EH3 6BB

t: 0131 474 6199 e: info@connect.scot  **ConnectScot**  **@connect_scot**

The Scottish Parent Teacher Council is a Company limited by Guarantee, Company No SC151086, Scottish Charity No SC019168