



72nd Annual Report 2019-2020

Connect is a trading name of Scottish Parent Teacher Council
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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 family 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 and support services;
- **working in partnership** with organisations and individuals in the educational and wider Scottish community, to build awareness of, and support for, family engagement 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, in 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

The lockdown in Scotland because of COVID-19 in March 2020 led to an almost instant change to the way Connect works and delivers its services. From delivering training and support by telephone and face-to-face by a largely office-based team of staff, the focus shifted to online communication by a team of home workers. Within weeks, Connect was delivering online Information Sessions to Members and adapting our communications and policy work to support the reality of lockdown for families around Scotland. While it had always been our intention to strengthen our online offer, COVID-19 catapulted the organisation into a new reality to which the Board and staff have adjusted with creativity and commitment. We have worked hard to support parents/carers and parent groups in these difficult times and we will continue to do so.

Our Projects

Making Parents' Voices Heard: Connect's Lockdown Surveys

Our parent/carer COVID-19 surveys were crucial to enabling us to support parents, families and our Connect Members. With over 8000 in-depth responses across the two surveys up to 31 July 2020, we were able to respond quickly to the rapidly-changing situation - thanks to all the fantastic parents and carers who took part in the surveys. We worked hard to make sure parents' voices were heard. Our first lockdown survey, *How Are You Doing?*, asked families how they were managing during April 2020. We wrote an interim report, to urgently flag up the challenges families were facing (ill-health, money worries, the stress of juggling work and doing school work at home, the lack of equipment for learning, SQA qualifications, and more).



We shared this, and the subsequent report, with policy-makers and politicians. Read the final report [here](#).

Our second survey in May/June 2020 asked parents for their views on 'blended learning' (the proposal to do school work at home with some time in school too); we also asked for an update on how families were doing. There were nearly 8000 responses. Many of these set out the acute difficulties families were dealing with - similar to the first survey, but becoming more difficult and unsustainable for many. The local authority 'blended learning' proposals - in many cases involving hardly any time in school - caused much upset for families. Read the survey report and 'asks' [here](#).

The 'asks' from our surveys continue to form the basis of our campaigning work. COVID-19 has exposed the significant inequalities in our society from food poverty, to digital exclusion, to the frequent failure to consider and support children and families with additional needs. We will work hard to campaign for improvements in the coming years, including pushing for action on the findings of Angela Morgan's

Review of Additional Support for Learning. Read about our Manifesto and accompanying Pledge at the end of this report.



Partnership Schools Scotland

2019-20 saw the final year of the Partnership Schools Scotland pilot, which has had funding support from Skills Development Scotland. The abrupt closure of schools due to COVID-19 also ended our work in a way which was disappointing. However, the team at Stirling University started their research into the impact of parental engagement in 'surprising' schools - ie those which are doing better than anticipated. While COVID-19 halted the research for a while, it was not abandoned and it restarted later in the year. We look forward to sharing the results of this important work.

Our Projects *continued*

Professional Learning

In 2019-20, our Professional Learning programme comprised three modules, *Engaging Families in Children's Education*, *Family Engagement for School Improvement* and *Evaluation - Assessing the Impact of Family Engagement*. We successfully piloted *Challenges to Parental Engagement - a Teacher Enquiry Approach*, and ran *Working with your Parent Council*. Input continued from our consultants, George Gilchrist and Dr Janet Goodall. Connect Trainer Dorothy Hooper delivered our modules, along with George Gilchrist and Eileen Prior. We ran them on **19** occasions with **237** participants from across Scotland.

An ambitious programme for spring 2020 had to be cancelled because of COVID-19. Intensive work to move our modules online (which had always been part of our plans) began in earnest to develop for the Connect Family Learning Academy. Our professional learning is highly-regarded - **96%** of participants rated nine different aspects of the modules as '**8 or above**'.

'Best CPD course I have ever been at'
'All the information is practical, relevant, easy to follow and adapt in school'
'Great opportunity for professional dialogue with other teachers/practitioners'
'I thoroughly enjoyed the selection of activities, pace of sessions and content'
'I liked the framework of ideas'
'Well-organised and useful.'

Membership & Member Services

We continue to work hard to deliver services to meet our Members' needs. Our membership remains consistent (*see right*), with the majority of Scotland's local authorities taking out group membership for their Parent Councils as a key part of their parental engagement strategy.

In 2019-20, we created themed packs of our leaflets for ease of use, as part of our plan to streamline and review our website. We continue to develop the website; we had **3406** registered users as at August 2020.

We began the year with our usual mix of face-to-face and online Information Sessions. After schools closed in March 2020, we quickly moved all of our Information Sessions online. We delivered live, new and relevant sessions to support parent groups in COVID-19 times such as how to hold online meetings. These reached more parents in more parts of Scotland than ever before, and were greatly appreciated as an opportunity for parent groups to refresh their activities and make contact with one another. We also organised Information Sessions with other organisations such as *respectme*, Child Poverty Action Group Scotland and Place2Be, in response to what parents told us about their worries and concerns in our lockdown surveys (*see over*).

In 2019-20, we welcomed **969** parents (up by almost 500 on 2018-19!) to our Information

	1 Star	3 Star	4 Star	Grand Total	2018 to 2019
Club/ Group		15	3	18	18
Individual	4			4	8
Parent Council	N/A	1672	59	1731	1706
Corporate				25	24
Grand Total	4	1776	114	1919	1926

Sessions, **335** face-to-face and **634** online. Member schools hosted **28** face-to-face sessions in **15** of our group member local authorities; Connect hosted **38** live online sessions, and reached parents all over Scotland. Feedback remains overwhelmingly positive.

Feedback from Information Sessions

'Thanks for the session, really informative and great active chat. Really shows the value in us being able to share information and practice with each other'
'Really informative. Made me more confident to hold our first online meeting!'
'Really good ideas about how we can provide more info online for our school. Thank you very much, I will definitely be signing up for more.'

Supporting Parents and Parent Groups

Connect offers its Members a wide range of publications and opportunities for support and information-sharing. These have proven vital to Connect's ability to support Members during COVID-19 and include:

- email (info@connect.scot)
- monthly eNewsletters (**3406** subscribers)
- our termly newsletter Backchat (**1034** by email)
- Facebook (**2941** followers)
- surveys (*see overleaf*)
- Twitter (**8246** followers - up 2000 on the previous year)
- our annual Members' Leaflet
- leaflets and resources on our website
- a regular eNewsletter for educators
- a dedicated Twitter feed for educators to support their professional learning (**1226** followers, up 500 on the previous year).

All figures in bold are as at August 2020.

Social Media

Social media became an essential tool for cascading information via Parent Councils and schools, as well as directly to parents during 2020. The dramatic increases in Connect's followers demonstrated parents were

hungry for information in this time of crisis. As well as providing factual information and links to key Scottish Government advice, we also shared links to local authority websites (on a Connect webpage) for those needing urgent help. Our webpage of links to mental health support and daily Facebook posts for 'no-stress' learning activities at home were also part of our offer to families.

Our Facebook post launching our second lockdown survey (which asked parents about the much-derided 'blended learning' proposals) reached an audience of 20,197.

Another post, reporting First Minister Nicola Sturgeon's statement that some blended learning proposals were 'unacceptable' reached 13,710. These were Connect records.

Press and Publicity

In 2019-2020, we were involved in many print and broadcast news stories. In the first months of school closures, we appeared in over 20 media outlets. Topics covered included: our surveys, online learning, remote learning, school uniform, blended learning proposals, delays to the

delivery of 1140 hours of free early learning and childcare, responses to news stories about schools closing and then re-opening. We used the findings from our three parent/carer surveys to inform these responses as we tried to make sure parents' voices were heard.

Leaflets and Resources for Parents & Parent Groups

After our extensive leaflet review in summer 2019, our focus has been to continue to create themed resource packs which are easy to use. Some of these were further updated to sit alongside our online Information Sessions which became so important and well-attended from April 2020. We now have packs such as *Money Matters*, *Equality and Fairness Pack*, *Parent Council Essentials Pack* and more.



Policy

In terms of policy, Connect responds to key consultations, runs campaigns on particular issues and takes part in Scottish Parliamentary committee inquiries. To support this, we gather parents' views and experiences, primarily through surveys. In 2019-2020, we received over 10,000 responses in total across all our surveys which were on the following topics:

- Out of School Care
- Children and Young People's Mental Health and the School Community
- Snap Survey: United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)
- Snap Survey: Energy Drinks
- Parental Involvement and Engagement (x4)
- Parent/Carer Survey: *How Are You Doing?* (Lockdown April 2020)
- Parent/Carer Survey: *Next Steps (Back to School) and How Are You Doing Now?* (Lockdown May/June 2020).



Consultations and Calls for Evidence

Connect responded to the following consultations and calls for evidence:

- Scottish Government consultation on Parental Involvement Act - Statutory Guidance
- Scottish Government consultation on Early Learning and Childcare - Statutory Guidance
- Scottish Government consultation on ending the sale of energy drinks to children and young people
- Scottish Government consultation on incorporation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)
- Scottish Government's Out of School Care in Scotland - a draft framework for consultation
- Johann Lamont MSP's Proposed Disabled Children and Young People (Transitions) (Scotland) Bill (Members' Bill)
- GTCS Professional Standards and Professional Code
- Care Inspectorate Consultation on a draft quality framework for early learning and childcare services (daycare of children, childminding and out of school care)
- Scottish Parliament Education and Skills Committee call for views on school counselling
- Scottish Parliament Education and Skill's Committee call for views on the Disclosure (Scotland) Bill.

You can find these responses on our website www.connect.scot



Our staff team and board members are invited to take part in a wide range of consultation events and reference or advisory groups. During 2019-20, these included Scottish Government groups:

- National Action Plan on Parental Involvement and Engagement Steering Group
- National Working Group on Guidance, Training and Support Materials - Parental Involvement and Engagement
- Volunteering in Schools National Working Group
- Early Learning and Childcare Statutory Guidance Refresh Working Group
- Learning Together National Network
- Audit Scotland Advisory Group - Improving Outcomes for Children through School Education
- Recording and Monitoring Bullying Incidents in Schools (RAMBIS).

We were also on the GTCS Professional Standards Strategy Group.

In addition to formal consultation from Scottish Government, the Scottish Parliament and a range of other bodies, we are regularly asked to comment on many documents and proposals relating to education. We worked with different organisations on diverse topics:

- Cross Party Group on Children and Young People
- Cross Party Group on Shared Parenting
- Disclosure Scotland on the Disclosure (Scotland) Bill
- Convenor Lindsay Law gave evidence to the Education and Skills Committee on the Disclosure (Scotland) Bill
- Angela Morgan's Additional Support for Learning Review.

Although all events were cancelled from March 2020, prior to this we attended and spoke at the following conferences and workshops:

- Scottish Learning Festival 2019
- Scottish Parliament Witness Diversity Stakeholder Workshop.

We also worked with the following organisations to bring information to parents and carers during lockdown:

- SQA on qualifications
- Place2Be on mental health and wellbeing
- Skills Development Scotland on young people's next steps
- Enquire on additional support needs
- Child Poverty Action Group Scotland on money worries
- Respectme on cyberbullying.

Our Executive Director, Eileen Prior, is a member of the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) Advisory Council and continues to participate in online meetings. Eileen is also a member of the BBC's Education Broadcasting Council for Scotland.

Staff and Directors

There were no changes to the staff team during 2019-2020, except for the fact that everyone found themselves working from home suddenly in March 2020. The office was quickly packed up and staff were set up for home-working. The team adapted really well, finding new ways of working together and gathering new skills to deliver more of our services online.

The Connect Board welcomed three new Directors during the year.

The staff team and the Connect Board have worked tirelessly throughout this difficult time, demonstrating commitment, versatility and creativity as everyone faced new challenges.

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**
- **National Network of Partnership Schools**
- **Scottish Child Law Centre**
- **Royal Society for the Encouragement of the Arts, Manufacture and Commerce**
- **Association of Chief Officers of Scottish Voluntary Organisations**
- **Children in Scotland.**

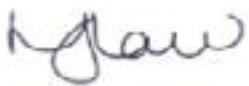
In conclusion

Although COVID-19 has changed so much in our lives, at Connect the small staff team and the volunteer Directors continue to work hard on behalf of our Members and all parents, children and young people. The team adapted quickly, with families' needs at the forefront of their work, after the first lockdown in March 2020.

As parents/carers were forced to take up the reins of trying to make sure school work was being done by their children at home, early in the pandemic it became clear that family engagement in children's learning has never been more important. Our surveys provided a crucial insight into what this looked like for thousands of families across Scotland. Some families thrived in the first lockdown, some really struggled. We took up the cause of those who were struggling, sharing the survey findings so Scottish Government and local authorities could understand and improve families' circumstances. For a significant minority of parents/carers, communication from schools/nurseries was an area that needed improvement. For families with children with additional support needs, life was especially hard: 'I feel abandoned', wrote one distressed parent. Unfortunately, our subsequent surveys showed there was only marginal improvement in communications. Most importantly, it was clear that families already disadvantaged in our education system and wider society, became more disadvantaged.

Our mission - to make family engagement in children's learning and school lives as good as it can be - continues with renewed vigour. Our [Manifesto](#) sets out our stall for change and improvement: trust relationships between home and school are essential for the benefit of children. Our [Pledge](#) invites politicians, policy-makers, parents, partner organisations to commit to the family engagement agenda. We can't 'Get it Right for Every Child' unless we 'get it right for every family'.

Thank you to all our staff and Directors for their continued commitment and passion, to all of our partners and colleagues who work with us and support Connect in many different ways, but most of all thank you to the parents up and down Scotland who have pushed through in the most difficult of times.



Lindsay Law
Connect Convenor



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