

# Parental Involvement – Headteacher and Depute Headteacher Appointment Procedures

Response to the Scottish Executive consultation paper

February 2006

## About the Scottish Consumer Council

The Scottish Consumer Council (SCC) was set up by government in 1975. Our purpose is to promote the interests of consumers in Scotland, with particular regard to those people who experience disadvantage in society. While producers of goods and services are usually well-organised and articulate when protecting their own interests, individual consumers very often are not. The people whose interests we represent are consumers of all kinds: they may be patients, tenants, parents, solicitors' clients, public transport users, or simply shoppers in a supermarket.

Consumers benefit from efficient and effective services in the public and private sectors. Service-providers benefit from discriminating consumers. A balanced partnership between the two is essential and the SCC seeks to develop this partnership by:

- carrying out research into consumer issues and concerns;
- informing key policy and decision-makers about consumer concerns and issues;
- influencing key policy and decision-making processes;
- informing and raising awareness among consumers.

The SCC is part of the National Consumer Council (NCC) and is sponsored by the Department of Trade and Industry. The SCC's Chairman and Council members are appointed by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry in consultation with the Secretary of State for Scotland. Future appointments will be in consultation with the First Minister. Martyn Evans, the SCC's Director, leads the staff team.

Please check our web site at [www.scotconsumer.org.uk](http://www.scotconsumer.org.uk) for news about our publications.

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The SCC assesses the consumer perspective in any situation by analysing the position of consumers against a set of consumer principles.

These are:

### ACCESS

Can consumers actually get the goods or services they need or want?

### CHOICE

Can consumers affect the way the goods and services are provided through their own choice?

### INFORMATION

Do consumers have the information they need, presented in the way they want, to make informed choices?

### REDRESS

If something goes wrong, can it be put right?

### SAFETY

Are standards as high as they can reasonably be?

### FAIRNESS

Are consumers subject to arbitrary discrimination for reasons unconnected with their characteristics as consumers?

### REPRESENTATION

If consumers cannot affect what is provided through their own choices, are there other effective means for their views to be represented?

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## **Introduction**

The Scottish Consumer Council (SCC) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the proposals contained in the consultation paper.

The SCC aims to make all consumers matter, and has a specific remit to represent the interests of people who experience disadvantage. The aim of our education policy work is to ensure that the consumer interest is taken into account in policy-making and the development of legislative proposals. We have long been involved in discussions over parental representation in education.

SCC has been actively involved in the debate surrounding the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Bill. The consultation on parental involvement in senior staff appointments is an important strand of the parental involvement agenda.

In general, SCC agrees with the proposals for reforming headteacher and deputy headteacher posts to allow for greater local flexibility while ensuring that parents are involved throughout. However, we do not feel that the consultation paper articulated the reasons for parental involvement in the appointment process. Without clear understanding of reasons across the education authorities may fail to make use of the flexibility on offer. We suggest that there are a number of reasons for the strong involvement of parents in the appointments process:

- To ensure that parents feel that they have ownership over the appointment of senior staff and that their views are taken seriously. As the consumers of education, parents have a right to be involved in the appointment of senior staff who can have a profound effect on the ethos and success of the school.
- To ensure that the headteacher is responsive to parents and understands the importance of parental involvement in education. It is unlikely that parents would suggest the appointment of a member of senior staff who did not make reference to the importance of positive relationships with parents and the wider community.
- To ensure that the candidate is able to meet the needs of the school community (parents and pupils), as articulated by parents themselves. Parents are likely to have strong views about the type of skills required for senior staff within their children's schools, depending on the needs of the community. Involvement in appointments allows them to express these preferences and have them taken into account.

Before addressing the specific questions raised by the consultation paper, we would like to make a general point regarding training. The consultation paper raises the issue of training for parent representatives in the case of combined Parent Councils and for the Local Authority Panel members (if any such body is created). General training for Parent Council members who have been invited to represent the Parent Forum on an appointments panel, or who are

likely to be invited in the future, is not discussed. Independent training on the roles and responsibilities of appointment panels, and on involvement in the appointments strategy as a whole, is essential to ensure that parents can adequately and effectively carry out this role. We would also stress that this training must take place at the right time, for example when a staff change is being made. Training parents who are unlikely to take part in an interview process, or training them several years before an appointment comes up, is unnecessary and inefficient. Training courses should be available at short notice as they are required by parents.

The existence of training courses on appointments run by the Scottish School Boards Association shows a demand from current School Board members for such training. SCC would welcome a clear statement from the Scottish Executive signalling its intention to ensure that training is provided to Parent Council members. We would also suggest that consideration is given to joint training of all panel members, we are not convinced that parent members of appointment panels are the only members who would benefit from specialist training and believe that there would be great benefits to training all those involved together.

SCC has argued for a new National Parents Forum for a number of years. We have become concerned recently that the legislative changes will significantly affect the Scottish School Boards Association which, in the absence of School Boards, will effectively cease to exist. We would like to take this opportunity to reiterate our call for a new National Parents Forum to be established, which would be able to provide independent training and support to Parent Councils.

**Q1. Do you agree that the Parent Council should be consulted about the job specifications for the post of Headteachers or Depute, and the strategy for advertising the vacancy?**

SCC agrees with the proposals to ensure that Parent Councils are consulted about the job specifications for Headteachers or Depute Headteachers. With differences between communities in Scotland, job descriptions will be required to be tailored to specific schools to reflect that schools ethos and the challenges that it faces. During focus groups conducted on behalf of the Scottish Executive, parents noted that in these parents' experience, many teachers did not live in the community and leave the area when the school closes<sup>1</sup>. It is important that the views of local parents are reflected in job specifications.

The Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Bill proposes that Parent Councils are to be placed under a duty to consult with the wider Parent Forum. Guidance could suggest that members of the Parent Council consult as to the key qualities the Parent Forum would like to see in the job specification. This information would preserve the confidentiality of the

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<sup>1</sup> Making The Difference Research On Parents' Views Of Scottish Executive Proposals To Improve Parental Involvement And Representation In Schools (SCC, 2005)

appointments process but allow for a level of consultation with the wider Parent Forum.

However, given employment legislation and the duty of the local authority as employer, we agree with the Scottish Executive that the duty should be to consult with the Parent Council rather than any stronger duty being placed directly on Parent Councils.

We would welcome a duty to consult on the content of adverts for Headteacher or Depute posts. Parents may wish to comment on the wording of the advert and may have suggestions, based on their knowledge of the school and the local area, which could increase the attractiveness of the post.

**Q2. Do you agree that Regulations should entitle the Parent Council to be involved in any sift process?**

SCC agrees with the proposals. In particular, we welcome the approach taken whereby the Parent Council would be given the opportunity to take part in the sift process but does not have to. Parent Council members will be volunteers, it should be a matter for the Parent Council to determine whether or not they have the capacity to attend these meetings and if so, which Parent Council member will do so.

We would suggest that the Scottish Executive consider how best to ensure training is provided to Parent Council members who have been invited, or who are likely to be invited, to take part in a sift committee (see discussion on training in introduction).

**Q3. Do you agree that parental representation on the appointments panel should be obligatory? Should that take the form of a minimum proportion of the membership?**

SCC agrees with the aim of creating a more flexible system of appointments for senior staff, and allowing local authorities to tailor the size of appointment panels to better reflect the range of views required to be represented.

We welcome the commitment to ensuring that the appointments panel **must** include representation from the Parent Council for the school to which the appointment is to be made.

The consultation paper identifies a common difficulty in ensuring that members express the interests of the groups they are appointed to represent rather than individual interests. However, we are not convinced that regulating for a larger number of parents (2 in the example given) would guarantee that Parent Council representatives were acting in the best interests of all parents. Training for Parent Council members would help to minimise the likelihood of Parent Council members expressing only their own opinion rather than representing the interests of the wider Parent Forum. As mentioned in response to question 1 we would also suggest that consultation takes place with the wider Parent Forum on the key qualities that parents

would like to see included within the job specification. This would provide Parent Councils with information to allow them to better reflect the views of the wider Parent Forum.

The consultation paper notes that the Parent Council representative must have equal rights and responsibilities as others on the panel. We welcome this commitment but suggest that unless independent training is provided it is unlikely that all Parent Council members will feel confident enough to assert these rights.

**Q4. Do you agree that parental representation for school mergers or cluster arrangements should be drawn from a combined Parent Council?**

It is our understanding that combined Parent Councils will work as the Parent Council for 2 or more schools. We therefore agree that in the case of appointing a headteacher or depute for a cluster or merging school, the parent representatives should be drawn from the combined Parent Council. Given the flexibility allowed within the proposals, it may be beneficial for guidance to further explore this issue, in particular whether or not parent representatives from each of the affected schools should be invited to join the appointment panel.

**Q5. Do you agree that where a school does not have a Parent Council that representation should be drawn from the wider parent forum?**

SCC agrees that in cases where there is no Parent Council, the parent representative(s) on the appointment panel should be drawn from the wider Parent Forum. In this situation, we would suggest that the local authority, through school staff, asks for volunteers from the Parent Forum, rather than inviting the forum to decide on a nomination as the lack of a formal representative structure may mean that such collective decision-making is not possible.

**Local Authority Panel**

The Scottish Executive is also asking for views on the establishment of local authority panels to help develop parents' expertise in appointments and strengthen the process. In our considerations we have assumed that a local authority wide panel of parents would be in addition to having parents involved from the school in question or as a fall back in cases where no parents are nominated to take part from the school. We would question the value of involving a small number of 'expert' parents from other parts of the local authority over the involvement of parents directly affected by the appointment.

In a recent discussion paper, we raised the question of parental representation at local authority level, arguing that the current focus on school level representation has not adequately covered how this links to local

authority structures and procedures<sup>2</sup>. We therefore welcome the consideration of local authority representation within this consultation paper.

Whilst broadly supportive of this suggestion, we would like to make three further comments:

1. The development of statutory local authority level representation for parents in relation to appointments but not in relation to their rights as parents or parental involvement is at odds with the Scottish Executive policy of integrating services and provision. We would prefer to see local authority parent representative panels with a remit to discuss and represent views on anything of interest or concern to the parents in the area, mirroring the duty to be placed on school-based Parent Councils. However, we are aware that the type of 'panel' set up to discuss wider issues of interest to parents would differ markedly from that set up only for appointments. For example, parents may wish local authority representatives to be elected rather than appointed, and clear lines of accountability would have to be established. We believe that there is merit in further exploring how local authorities can engage parents at a strategic level.
2. The consultation paper does not include any discussion of how local authority panel members would be appointed or elected. Further consideration of this issue is required.
3. While we support the proposal of a local authority panel, we would welcome a stronger statement to the effect that local authority level parental representation on appointment panels **must** be in addition to Parent Council members drawn from the school in question.

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<sup>2</sup> Representing and Involving Parents: A discussion paper (SCC, 2005)