

**Issues and Options  
for the Formation of a  
National Parent Body  
in Scotland**

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## **CONTENTS**

<b>Context</b>	<b>page 3</b>
<b>Remit and Approach</b>	<b>page 3</b>
<b>Summary</b>	<b>page 3</b>
<b>The Development of a new National Parent Body</b>	<b>page 6</b>
The Current Circumstances	page 6
A Single National Parent Body in the Future	page 6
Possible Roles for a Future National Parent Body	page 7
Promoting Parent Interest in the National Scene	page 7
Forming a National Parent Body Steering Group	page 8
SPTC and SSBA in the Process	page 9
<b>APPENDICES</b>	
<b>Appendix One – List of Consultees</b>	<b>page 10</b>
<b>Appendix Two - The Shape and Character of a New National Parent Body for the Future</b>	<b>page 11</b>
Providing Representation	page 11
Supporting Parents Locally and Nationally	page 11
Providing Information and Advice Services to Individual Parent	page 12
Providing Public Liability Insurance	page 13
Legal Form of Organisation / Charitable Status	page 13
Independence	page 14
Membership Eligibility	page 14
Governance	page 15
The Role of Employees in Governance	page 15
Capacity	page 16
Financing	page 16
<b>Appendix Three – A Summary of the Survey Results</b>	<b>page 18</b>

## Context

1. During the passage through the Scottish Parliament of the Bill which became the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006, the Minister for Education and Young People gave an undertaking to offer assistance to stakeholders in a quest to form a national parent body in Scotland suitably reflecting the advances sought in the involvement of parents in children's education. At this time, Ministers acknowledged the benefits of having such a body able to comment upon and influence national policy and support the new Parent Councils. The policy and legislation envisage Parent Councils having much more fully developed and diverse ways to support schools and children's learning than the school boards which they replace. A national parent body in future ought to reflect that change.

2. Therefore, in October 2006, the Scottish Executive commissioned Greg Brown to independently facilitate discussions with a range of stakeholders on the formation of a new or evolved national parent body for Scotland.

3. This report to Scottish Ministers offers an account of the relevant issues and options recommending a process for the establishment of an entirely new body to promote parental involvement and influence at national level to complement the new legislation.

## Remit and Approach

4. Through working with a range of key stakeholders, the role was to

- facilitate discussion and identify issues around the formation of a national body to represent, support and advise Parent Councils
- meet with key groups, gather views and bring key stakeholders together to discuss possible ways forward for a national body
- report to Ministers setting out the views of stakeholders, summarising key issues and making recommendations for next steps.

5. In undertaking the task, facilitation was initially focused on assisting stakeholders to identify and develop areas of consensus on such matters as role, capacity, membership, governance, independence, and financing. Options were then considered for a process to develop a national body for parents, capable of combining the expertise within the existing two national bodies and new interest from Parent Councils.

6. While many different stakeholders have a legitimate interest in the representation and support of parents at national level, at the core of this facilitation process lay the basic premise that it is ultimately for parents to decide what type of body they require.

7. All consultees are listed at Appendix One and are thanked for their generous assistance to date. Most work was undertaken with the current two national bodies, the Scottish Parent Teacher Council (SPTC) and the Scottish School Board Association (SSBA)\*. A postal questionnaire survey of school boards was carried out jointly with SSBA. With assistance from SPTC, a very similar survey of PTAs in their membership was also undertaken. A summary of key findings from the 276 respondents appears in Appendix Three. (\*It is recognised that, at the time of writing, SSBA had just changed their memorandum and articles of association to become the Scottish Parent Councils Association. However, in this report, they will continue to be referred to as SSBA because it is the relevant name at the time views were being gathered from stakeholders.)

## Summary

8. Broad support exists for there being one national parent body in the future. No rationale for the continued existence of both of the current national bodies has been offered by any consultee.

9. Further work led by parents is required to determine its detailed shape and character. In particular, parents newly involved through the promotion of Parent Councils must have the opportunity to play a full part in what emerges.

10. However, some degree of consensus exists as gleaned from survey evidence from parents currently active in school boards and parent teacher associations and other stakeholders to allow the following framework to be advanced for further consideration:

- A body promoting parent involvement with three main roles: to represent parents, support the development of local parents' organisations and provide advice and information to individual parents
- A company limited by guarantee, possibly with charitable status, or a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation, under the control of its members
- A body with core membership among local parents' organisations and possibly organisations or agencies with education policy and practice responsibilities, replicating at national level the partnerships so highly valued at local level
- A body governed mainly by parents with support from school staff and key figures in education at national level
- A body having a capacity equal to the opportunities and challenges of this new era for parental involvement
- A body sustainably resourced for its role.

11. A great deal more work is required by interested parents, with support, to develop and refine this framework, for example with regard to:

- different possible ways of discharging the representational and development support roles
- the scale of the advice and information role for individual parents
- the aptness and need for charitable status
- the particular configuration of membership eligibility, and the most appropriate ways to replicate partnership at national level
- the precise composition of a board of directors, and other related structures helping link local and national together
- an appropriate capacity to deliver roles effectively
- building up a stable income sufficient to discharge the roles.

12. Many alternative routes exist to form a national parent body for the future. The recommendations which follow are believed to offer the best prospects for a successful outcome.

13. A new body is required to bring together the experience some parents already have of working at national level with substantial new parent interest attracted through its systematic promotion. The process would be open to all interested parents on an equal basis with the focus of effort on the needs arising from the new legislation. Ministers are recommended to support and provide resources for a process to enable such an organisation to be set up. Those resources fall into two parts: the promotion of parent interest in the national scene, and the support of a steering group established to form a new body.

14. This recommendation is based on the current lack of prospects of the two existing national bodies working together to establish a single body for the future. However, it is recommended that Ministers leave open the possibility that they do come forward jointly to participate in forming a new body.

15. A carefully phased process would have to be set in train to create a new body. This would involve the promotion of a much greater level of interest among parents and be followed by the establishment of a steering group. A steering group would settle the details of role, constitution and initial financing and formally bring a new body into being. The aim would be to have on the steering group a mix of experience alongside the considerable new parent interest emerging from the current promotion of parent councils. The steering group would test its thinking among parents more widely during its work.

16. Work with parents at local authority wide level is an essential component of a successful outcome at national level. Local authorities are recommended to give this attention using recognised community development techniques and integrate their work with similar efforts at national level.

17. The remainder of this report provides more detailed consideration of the issues summarised here, a full discussion of issues and options for the shape of a new national parent body and a summary of the survey results.

## The Development of a New National Parent Body

### The Current Circumstances

18. A dual system of local parental involvement has existed in Scotland for many years. Parent teacher associations and parents associations are long standing means of fostering contact between schools and parents to the benefit of schools and children's education. With the introduction of school boards in 1988 with their prescribed functions, parent teacher associations usually became more focused on fund raising activities.

19. This dual local arrangement is echoed at national level by two parent bodies, the Scottish Parent Teacher Council (SPTC), with PTAs and other parents' groups as members and the Scottish School Board Association (SSBA) with school boards as members.

20. The promotion of Parent Councils is changing this picture. The implementation of the new legislation is being seen in two different ways at local authority level. Where Parent Councils are seen as straight replacements for school boards, the dual local arrangements seem set to continue in most cases, at least for the time being. Where Parent Councils are understood and promoted as a more flexible and inclusive approach to local parent involvement, they are often replacing both school boards and PTAs. Over time, the dual nature of local parental involvement may become less common and gradually wither.

21. Aside from their different membership bases, the two current national parent bodies have strongly overlapping roles in representing and supporting parents and their local organisations. Each has its own style of operation and there is little evidence that they work together. At the time of writing, they are separately preparing to recruit Parent Councils into membership, highlighting their roles and services to members. Stakeholders involved in education policy and practice at local authority and national levels have suggested that the dual arrangements for parent representation in the future would lack credibility.

22. Among those involved in local parents' groups at present, there appears to be limited interest in participation at national level.

### A Single National Parent Body in the Future

23. Organisations representing education policy makers and practitioners strongly support the emergence of a single national body for the future. Among survey respondents, almost universal support exists for the emergence of one national parent body. Both current national bodies agree with the proposition that only one national body is needed in the future, but have their own perceptions of its realisation.

24. The development of a future national body, controlled by parents, ought to have parents at the forefront of any processes to bring it about. The following are considered essential features of the process:

- The continuing involvement of experienced parents
- The attraction of parents not previously involved
- Wide debate taking place on options
- Greatly increased parent interest in the national picture, with a sufficient pool of interested parents to lead the work
- A process open to interested parents throughout, with regular efforts made to reach more parents and ascertain their views and preferences
- The focus of effort directed to the needs of parents in the future
- Resources made available to support the process.

25. A majority of survey respondents (58%) wanted to see the current two national bodies work together to form a single national body for the future. A further 25% preferred to see a fresh start made to set up something new. Little support (14%) emerged for either SPTC or SSBA to go forward on its own as the national parent body for the future.

26. The circumstances in which the two existing national bodies came into existence and operated are quite different from the new parental involvement environment now opening up. Reflecting developments at school and local authority level, any future national body should take a leading role in promoting parental involvement in children's learning. This will require a more substantial scale of operation than exists at present. Any evolution of either of the existing national bodies into a single national body for the future would entail a radical change from the scale and character of their current operation, and is a poorly supported option.

27. It was not possible to bring SPTC and SSBA together during this facilitation to explore areas of consensus or difference on the shape and character of a national parent body for the future. There appears to be no imminent prospect of the two bodies working together, despite a majority of survey respondents wanting to see the pursuit of this course.

28. From the foregoing considerations, it is recommended that an entirely new national body is set up by interested parents, in which newly interested parents would have the same status and form of involvement as those parents associated with either of the existing bodies. The aim behind the recommendation is to ensure that any new national body focuses fully on the future and parents' wishes, needs and views. Ministers are asked to support this approach and the recommendations which follow to realise it.

### **Possible Roles for a Future National Parent Body**

29. There is broad consensus about the main roles of a national body for the future in terms of representing parent opinion, supporting local parents' organisations and advising individual parents. In the survey findings the first two roles were considered to be the most important. A future national body ought to consider carefully the scale of its role in advice to individual parents. A comprehensive approach would create a considerable undertaking. It may be unnecessary to duplicate existing alternative sources of advice for parents available both locally and nationally, even although not controlled by parents.

30. In contrast, no consensus emerged about a future national parent body incorporating the provision of public liability insurance into its role. On one hand insurance provision might be valued by a national body to attract membership and boost income, and on the other be felt to obscure real levels of support for and engagement with a national body. This is an issue for a new national body to resolve given these strong but opposing considerations.

### **Promoting Parent Interest in the National Scene**

31. Increasing the degree of involvement of parents at national level presents a major challenge, but one which must be addressed for the successful emergence of a national parent body fit for purpose in the future. The continuing promotion of parental involvement at local level must be integrated with the stimulation of interest in the national scene.

32. There are some very promising developments in parental involvement at local authority wide level. It may at first be seen by parents as more remote from school and the immediate interests of their own children, but it does offer scope for dialogue with education policy makers and practitioners, who make decisions affecting the education of children across a whole local authority area. These developments provide a vital stepping stone to considerably increased parent interest in the national scene and the capacity to take part effectively. It is therefore recommended that, where this practice has not yet been developed, local authorities consider ways to promote parental involvement at authority level in future.

33. Promotional activity at local authority level would need to be increased to include discussion about the need for a national parent body for the future and its shape and character. Parts of this report may

be found useful in this regard. Such work could be complemented by stimulating discussion about children's learning related to national educational policy developments.

34. It is recommended that Ministers make resources available for a limited period to create a small team with appropriate skills and a remit to promote parent interest in taking part at national level. A flexible option for building up this team might be the 'Field Team' model used already by the Scottish Executive during the promotion and implementation of the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006. This model provided a core resource, whose size could be varied depending on the specific tasks required at any given time.

35. It is recommended that local authorities support the work of this national team by integrating some of their local parental involvement activities with its work. Where no parental involvement activity is being generated at local authority level, the national team could consider setting up reference groups to provide this intermediate step between school and national levels.

36. It matters a great deal how parental involvement is promoted and supported. In the current phase of initial promotion of Parent Councils, the most positive results correspond to the use of recognised community development techniques.

37. The community development approach would embrace all activities which help local parents' organisations and individuals taking part in them to develop their knowledge and skills in the task. For example it could include information and advice, learning opportunities in effective group working, team building, communication/interpersonal skills, knowledge of education policy options, explorations of creative ways to contribute to children's learning jointly with schools and reflection on broader issues relating to the overall well being of children.

38. Examples of current good practice in community engagement and support already exist within local authorities. Not all local authorities apply this approach to the area of parental involvement, but where they do, greatest progress can be seen. More widespread use of community development support would facilitate more innovative approaches to joint work between parents and schools towards enriching children's learning experiences.

39. The proposed national team, as it undertakes its work, should form a demonstration of community development techniques.

### **Forming A National Parent Body Steering Group**

40. The formation of a steering group would follow from the promotion of parent interest already described. Once sufficiently widespread interest has been established among parents, a national parents' conference is suggested to consider issues and options and establish the steering group.

41. In addition to conference invitations to all Parent Councils and PTAs, the event should also be promoted specifically among parents active at local authority level and in any reference groups established. Particular effort should also be made to encourage under represented groups of parents to take part.

42. Appendix Two of this report could be used in the conference to help tease out the various issues and options regarding role, membership, governance, independence, capacity and financing.

43. It is difficult to predict in advance how many parents would wish to take part in a steering group, but beyond 25 members, it could become unwieldy. Should interest exceed this number, an approach could be taken that devolves specific tasks among sub-groups, for example to work on the following

- Drafting memorandum and articles of association (if a company limited by guarantee) or a constitution (if a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation)
- Considering capacity required and resources, and



- Considering ways for a national body to engage with wider parent opinion and education policy makers and practitioners.

44. Ministers are recommended to fund part time development and administrative support for a steering group and the legal advice it will need. Initially an 8 month period should be allowed, with the option of a 4 month extension into the early life of a newly created body to allow it time to appoint its own staff. The steering group would also have to have access to legal advice on constitutional, employment and certain organisational matters. It is further recommended that bodies such as Learning and Teaching Scotland (LTS), the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES), the Scottish Network for Parental Involvement in Children's Learning (SNPICL) and the Scottish Executive offer early engagement with the steering group to explore mutual expectations and ways to enable parents to take part in policy reviews and developments during their full course.

45. It is vital that the steps taken towards the formation of a new national parent body and its emerging shape and character reflect the wishes of interested parents. It is also vital that the steering group operates independently from the Scottish Executive and that parents involved at all levels lead the process of deciding on their new arrangements. For this reason staff facilitating the work of the steering group should be chosen by the steering group itself. The same would apply to sourcing legal advice.

46. From the point that a new body is established, it would have an independent existence, develop according to its own perceptions of its needs and form relationships with other stakeholders in children's learning.

### **SPTC and SSBA in The Process**

47. It is implicit in the process described above that all interested parents taking part should have the same status in it. Parents should be encouraged to bring their own knowledge and expertise to the process rather than be selected to represent the views of any one organisation. It is recommended that SPTC and SSBA encourage their parent board members to become involved on this basis. The two bodies should also consider how their current staffs and resources could contribute to the process.

48. It is also recommended that SPTC and SSBA explore options for promoting consensus on the way forward for a national parent body for the future. This should include considering marketing membership jointly, making clear the interim nature of this. Joint marketing would essentially mean offering options to join one, the other or both organisations. Membership of both could be offered at subscription levels at a sum less than that of individual memberships, made possible by larger numbers of members.

49. Alongside the main recommendations of this report, Ministers are encouraged to consider any jointly presented proposal from SPTC and SSBA for an alternative process leading to the formation of a new national parent body. If Ministers are minded to follow this course, they should make clear that any proposal could only be considered if it complied with the essential features of a satisfactory process listed at paragraph 24 above.

## **Appendix One – List of Consultees**

Scottish Parent Teacher Council (SPTC)

Scottish School Board Association (SSBA)

Schools Boards – through survey

Parent Teacher Associations in membership of SPTC – through survey

Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES)

Scottish Network for Parental Involvement in Children's Learning (SNPICL)

Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA)

Scottish Consumer Council (SCC)

Children in Scotland

Sense Scotland

Learning and Teaching Scotland (LTS)

Educational Institute for Scotland (EIS)

Association of Headteachers and Deputies in Scotland (AHDS)

Headteachers Association of Scotland (HAS)

Parenting Across Scotland

CERES

Who Cares Scotland

Scottish Executive Parental Involvement Implementation Team

School Board Officers Network

Sandra Martin, Parent and Pupil Participation Officer, Fife Council

Diane Cherry, Parent Participation Officer, Falkirk Council

Anne Morton, SSBA Consultant

Stephen Phillips, Burness LLP. Solicitors

## Appendix Two - The Shape and Character of a New National Parent Body

This part of the report provides further detail on the following - discharge of roles, legal form of organisation, membership eligibility, governance, independence, capacity and financing for a new national body for the future. It will be of practical value to parents taking part in forming a new national body as well as other stakeholders whose contributions are crucial to a successful result.

### Providing Representation

Education policy makers and providers consulted have drawn attention to expanding opportunities for parents to influence and bring forward their concerns about education. For a national body to be credible with them, any opinions it advances will have to be seen to be well informed and genuinely reflective of the opinions of Scottish parents. This poses two major challenges for a national parent body in future

- The scale of task to provide information, foster debate among parents and gather parent opinion on a routine basis, and
- The likelihood that parent opinion may diverge considerably on many issues.

The contrasting outlooks of a national parent body striving to represent “Scottish parents” as opposed to narrowly representing members’ concerns have both been encountered. They lead to differing approaches to the representational role. They would also result in different levels of credibility and influence.

Some recognition exists among those consulted of the need for inclusiveness, particularly of parents who feel ill-equipped to take part in national activity or who feel excluded from current structures. How this might be dealt with has not been explored in this facilitation task. The Scottish Network for Parental Involvement in Children’s learning (SNPICL), Sense Scotland and the Scottish Consumer Council (SCC) raised this issue and they may be able to offer advice, as well as other organisations with this interest.

These and similar organisations in education encounter parent opinion in their work, but none want to undermine the role of a national parent body in representing parent opinion. They may, however, want to be valued as a source of parent opinion and consulted accordingly.

If the full range of opportunities to promote parent opinion in education is to be taken up by a national parent body, the scale of work must be recognised as beyond the scope of voluntary representatives alone. A considerable contribution would be needed from the body’s professional staff and accountability mechanisms would then become important to ensure the authenticity of views advanced.

In undertaking its representational role, a national parent body must decide upon the breadth of issues within its compass. This may be confined to school education policy and practice or extend to a holistic view of children’s learning and general wellbeing. Consultees offering views generally felt that a national body should take very a broad interest in children’s learning experiences.

Many consultees and survey respondents seek to replicate at national level the highly valued partnerships between parents and educators in evidence at local level. This has implications for the identity and character of a national body. The body is wanted for its ability to represent parents’ interests to education policy makers and providers. This requires an organisation fully under parent control where parents have the space to figure out where their interests lie and how to pursue them. However, a body which incorporates education policy makers and practitioners could dilute this. Many parents, however, feel a need to have advice from the latter while deliberating.

### Supporting Parents Locally and Nationally

Effective support for parents derives from responsiveness to local need. As touched on earlier (page 8, paragraph 37), development support is also needed to foster parental involvement at both local authority and national levels.

Local promotion of Parent Councils already demonstrates a direct link between development support and the emergence of increased numbers of parents willing to take part. In general, collective parental involvement will depend on adequate ongoing development support.

Support of various styles is supplied by most local authorities to the current school boards. The implementation phase of the parental involvement legislation has seen heightened levels of support for parents as education authorities discharge their duty to promote Parent Councils. Under the new legislation, local authorities will be required to help parents with the operation of Parent Councils.

Provision of development support by local authorities, as long as the role is understood primarily in educational rather than administrative terms, has the strengths of local presence – staff knowing the interested parents, the schools and the authorities' approaches to education policy and delivery. This support would be targeted at parents active at school and local authority level.

A national parent body will need to decide on the scale of development support it wishes to offer subject to available resources. Clearly such support would assist effective parent involvement at national level. It could also be utilised at local level, as a complementary source.

Development support provided by a national parent body may also offer some tangible strengths. These would include

- user control – the type of people using the service also control the service, already a proven model in the voluntary sector
- the potential to become a centre of excellence in the particular skills involved, if sufficient numbers of staff act in this capacity
- offering wider and national perspectives; and
- being independent from education providers.

Complementary inputs from local authorities and a national body would deliver the strengths of each and could be optimised through joint working. This would attract more parents to take part at national level and facilitate parent interest in the wider policy and practice issues upon which a national parent body would advance opinions.

It is recommended that a new national body undertakes to provide development support services to promote national parental involvement. This would complement local authority provision and ensure strong links between local and national parental involvement work. The gains would include the capacity to facilitate discussion on relevant topics and gather parent opinion, prior to the body taking forward parents' views to educational policy makers.

### **Providing Information and Advice Services to Individual Parents**

Beyond the current two national parent bodies, a range of sources of information and advice for parents already exists. School staff, school heads and the educational authority are the obvious local sources. They are supported by specialist national and local voluntary organisations such as the Enquire national helpline for parents, Children in Scotland and Sense Scotland, as well as a variety of local voluntary organisations.

This begs the question, what gaps in existing provision require a contribution from a national parent body? Indeed it would be difficult for a national parent body to replicate the specific knowledge within each local authority of its own specific policies and practices, as well as the specialist expertise of the wide range of national and local providers.

While a two thirds majority of survey respondents wanted to see a national parent body providing an advice and information role to individual parents, there were many respondents hesitant about this or opposed. A major service might well be deemed either beyond likely resources available or poor value for money where it mainly duplicated quality provision by others. On the other hand, capacity may be

developed to cover the needs of parents who want a reliable source of advice about their rights and options independent of education policy makers and providers.

A national body will hold views about many educational issues. Would it be able to provide impartial information and advice irrespective of its policy platform? The body would need to be explicit about its approach. SSBA has suggested any advice and information to individuals should be impartial and could be ensured by staff with the role working to a recognised code of conduct. Were grant provided to finance or part finance this service, it is likely that the body would have to show how it would ensure impartiality.

### **Providing Public Liability Insurance**

The need for public liability insurance by Parent Councils and other local parents' groups depends on the activities they undertake and where they are undertaken. In some circumstances the owners of premises (for example local authorities) may have insurance which covers the sorts of activities of organisations letting them. Joint activities between schools and parents' groups may also be covered by local authorities' insurance provision. It is ultimately up to local parents' groups to clarify any need for public liability insurance and take steps to secure it. It would of course greatly assist local parents' groups if the right sort of insurance were conveniently available.

Discussion took place with stakeholders on whether or not a national body should be involved in some way in offering public liability insurance to its members, with widely differing views emerging.

It is not unusual for national voluntary organisations to take a role in making acquisition of suitable insurance easy for their local member organisations. It meets a need and can become an added attraction of national body membership. Further, scope exists for competitive premiums through bulk purchase and surpluses earned can assist with the body's running costs.

An opposite view was expressed that a national parent body's roles have nothing to do with the supply of insurance and that those primary roles may be compromised or obscured by over prominence of insurance supply in the work of the body.

It is recommended that a new national body considers the issue of providing public liability insurance, teasing out the different degrees to which it could become involved.

No views have come forward suggesting other substantives roles for a national body than those described in this report.

### **Legal Form of Organisation / Charitable Status**

A substantial voluntary organisation like a national parent body would require a legal identity distinct from its members and the individuals serving on its governing body. This essentially means some form of incorporation is required. A company limited by guarantee offers a tried and tested model. Indeed, both current national bodies use this model. No particular benefits appear to accrue from consideration of the alternative of an industrial and provident society. The governing body of a company limited by guarantee would be a board of directors elected by its members.

A simpler option might be a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO), provided the body were to be a charity. An SCIO offers incorporation and regulation by the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR) without the additional burden of registration with Companies House, required of a company limited by guarantee. The governing body of a SCIO would be a board of charity trustees. Detailed regulations for SCIOs have not yet been finalised, although it is expected that any new charities formed from around the start of 2008 would be able to consider this model.

Charitable status may confer image, possible rates relief, tax treatment and grant worthiness benefits on a national parent body. The roles described in this report would probably meet the tests applied by the OSCR. However, it would be unsafe to assume that charitable status would be available to a body which saw its remit in terms of a narrow focus on its members' interests rather than wider public benefit from the discharge of its roles.

If a new national body adopted the legal form of a company limited by guarantee, it would exist as soon as a number of interested people subscribed to a memorandum and articles of association, lodged them with Companies House and OSCR, and received a certificate of incorporation from Companies House. The subscribers are the first directors of the company. Subscribers could be some or all of the steering group members or people acting for some Parent Councils who wanted to become members from the outset. Following incorporation, a membership could be built up and a first annual general meeting would bring the body into full democratic operation at a suitable stage. A broadly similar process is required for a SCIO, but its constitution would be lodged only with the OSCR. Companies House would not be involved.

## Independence

Those consulted recognised the need for a national parent body to be independent of undue influence on its affairs by others. For both parents and education policy makers and providers it amounts to more or less a pre-condition of authentic representation of parent opinion.

Independence comes through parent control of the national body and by avoiding compromise arising from conditions attached to funding. Consultees have varying perceptions of the degree of intrusion likely to result from the national body's acceptance of public funding. Where a national parent body is disposed to accept public funding, it would need to satisfy itself about any obligations arising directly from it and to what extent, if any, independence of view or action is compromised.

## Membership Eligibility

Two forms of membership are common in voluntary organisations – 'ordinary' and 'associate'. 'Ordinary' applies to members who would have rights to vote in general meetings and to elect and become directors. 'Associate' is a form of membership suited to organisations and/or individuals who support the aims of an organisation but have more of an advisory role in its governance and policy direction.

It seemed evident to almost all survey respondents that both Parent Councils and PTAs should be eligible for membership, although the surveys did not seek to distinguish which forms of membership were most appropriate. SPTC and SSBA also favour both types of local organisation having membership, seeing this as an appropriate way to ensure inclusion. While it may be perceived that Parent Councils will typically be more involved in local representation than PTAs, both types of organisation would have legitimate expectations to influence a national parent body's approach to development support and information provision.

There are mixed views about any other forms of school based activity groups being eligible for membership.

Almost half of survey respondents want to see membership extended to local authorities and national organisations with a role in education, again echoing the desire for partnership being embodied *within* the national parent organisation. In contrast, some respondents felt care is needed not to compromise independence or parent control, nor allow party political agendas to creep in. A minority saw membership eligibility being extended to others with an interest, including churches.

Some exploration of the use of associate membership may help settle an approach to bringing valued partners into the national body in a way which does not dilute parent control. This could be compared to the alternative approach of striving for good working relationships with other partners rather than attempting to embed them in the membership of the national organisation.

If there is growth in the numbers of parent groups operating at local authority level, as seems likely, a form of membership for those groups may be felt appropriate. The only views received on this so far, from SSBA, indicate a preference for associate membership, so as not to duplicate Parent Councils' membership eligibility.



## Governance

It is widely accepted that the governing body of a national parent organisation should ensure parent control. This cannot be guaranteed solely by ordinary membership being restricted to local parents' organisations as they will often include school staff as members. If no restrictions were placed on staff being nominated for the board of directors, they could in theory form a sizeable proportion of the board. Eligibility rules could provide for parent only nominations. Otherwise, local parents' organisations would be relied upon to nominate mainly parents for election to the governing body.

A board of directors comprising a majority of parents but including some school staff and key figures in education at national level proved by far the most popular board composition "formula" chosen by survey respondents. In response to this, it would seem simplest to settle a formula for the numbers of each type of board member in the articles of association and devise election rules to deliver it, rather than leave it to chance.

Perhaps the simplest of all options would be the election of the parent board and for it then to appoint or co-opt the school staff and key national education figures. This option would allow flexibility in the way education policy makers and providers contribute to the work of the board, as experience accumulates.

In considering co-options, a board may consider, for example, nominations from

- ordinary member groups of participating teaching staff
- national organisations with associate membership
- key figures from national bodies whom parents may particularly want to influence or utilise for advice.

If the non-parent board member role is perceived as advisory, voting rights may not be appropriate.

Linked to those considerations, feedback from local level suggests a strong aversion for formality and elections among many participating parents. Formulations which allow all interested parents to take part appear popular. This may be more difficult to replicate at national level. Basic democracy can hardly avoid some provision for elections. If board size were large, elections might prove less likely since an excess of nominations over board places would be needed to provoke election procedures. On the other hand a large board may be unwieldy. To some degree, this could be countered by much of the work being devolved to sub-committees.

Beyond an electoral process among members before an AGM, the option of further board members elected from volunteers from the "floor" of the AGM could be considered. This would also help where pre-AGM nominations happened to be low.

Some consultees favour elections which produce a board of parents well spread out across Scotland. SSBA has offered a perspective with local authority level forums playing a role in election processes.

It seems sufficient for present purposes to try to settle basic principles and a broad picture of board composition, leaving the detail until articles of association are being prepared. So far, key issues include:

- Governing body having a practical size
- Some preferring a geographical spread of board members
- Some regional aspect, possibly linked to deployment of field staff
- Simplicity and the avoidance of off-putting formality
- How education policy makers and practitioners are represented.

## The Role of Employees in Governance

Where an organisation exists to represent and provide services to an interest group the distinct roles of staff and the board of directors should be clear. In a company limited by guarantee based on a membership, the membership would have overall control through the board of directors. Essentially, staff would work under the direction of the board, although senior staff may have a strong role in running the organisation: advising the board and representing the organisation in relationships with various

partners. A sophisticated relationship is required between those senior staff and the board of directors to ensure that, on one hand, work carried out and views represented properly reflect board requirements, and on the other, makes optimum use of the capacity afforded by employing professional staff.

SSBA has offered views in keeping with this perception, emphasising the decision making role of parents on the board of directors.

## Capacity

In seeking to attract attention for its views, a national parent body would be operating in a highly professional and “crowded” environment of education policy and practice.

Information dissemination, promoting debate widely among parents, holding policy events and occasional surveys may all contribute to the veracity of opinion expressed on behalf of parents. This has capacity implications.

The case has been put that development support capacity within the national body can complement that provided locally and offer a distinct contribution.

The scale of advice and information service to individual parents required from a national body remains very unclear.

A picture is emerging of a national body requiring capacity significantly in excess of that residing in the two current national bodies.

It is no easy task to arrive at an appropriate staffing level and configuration to deliver the desired roles. A pragmatic approach may be to make a well-judged step change from current national body capacity, within a realistic judgement about financing options. Experience could inform subsequent revision. A steering group may want to think about a capacity based on say, a chief officer, two policy research and development staff, 6 field development staff, one desk based information officer and two administrative staff, a total of 12 staff. A broad brush estimate of the annual running costs of such an organisation might be £600,000. If a period of say 2/3 years were taken to build up to this target capacity, progress could be made cautiously in line with available resources.

## Financing

Alternative sources of finance to run a national body should be explored, including a mix of income from several sources.

Membership income is an obvious source. Reliance on membership income provides a spur to recruit, which sits well with a body aspiring to a representational role. It may also be perceived as an income source which does not compromise independence. To create the kind of capacity discussed in the last section, membership fees would need to be higher than set by the current national bodies by a factor of about ten, an unrealistic prospect.

Local authorities are likely to fund membership fees in many cases. Their willingness to fund significantly higher membership fees than now, in times of considerable stress on local government finances, may be influenced by the credentials and performance of a new or evolved national parent body in the future. This suggests that any moves in the direction of higher membership fees should be gradual.

Money raising activities with positive outcomes for children, parent/school partnership and organisational development already form part of the local parent involvement scene. It may be worth exploring how a national parent body could replicate this, perhaps with the focus of activity among clusters of members at local authority level. Development staff could potentially co-ordinate such activities as part of their role.

Charging for services would need to be fully explored as a source of income. Events may offer some scope for charging fees for participant attendance. They might be for example conferences, information sessions or policy briefing sessions. Local authorities providing development support to local parents'



groups could either provide learning events directly or outsource them. A national parent body could be well placed to deliver a wide range of learning experiences, if suitably staffed. As with all spending by local authorities, value for money judgements would be made about any events/services offered by a national parent body. This issue is linked to the potential for a national parent body to become a centre of excellence in the provision of events and activities supportive of parent involvement.

Were a strong case developed for it, some neighbouring local authorities may be persuaded to share some or all of the costs of national parent body field staff operating in their area, as an option for discharging part of their obligations to support Parent Councils.

Earning commission from the supply of public liability insurance could potentially contribute to overall income, as discussed earlier.

A national parent body may wish to explore the option of central government funding, either in relation to set-up or ongoing costs. In doing so, it would want to consider how any successful application might be perceived in terms of its independence from government and its standing with parents and stakeholders. Equally, the national body should expect central government to take account of the role of its funding in contributing to the overall objective of parental involvement, as well as value for money considerations.

Transitional funding may be viewed as money required to help introduce major change. It would be for the Scottish Executive to clarify what it may support with transitional funding. However, it is suggested that the criteria are likely to include, in addition to the two stated in the previous paragraph, that

- the transitional process is inclusive and open to the participation of all interested parents
- tangible benefit to a transition to a new or evolved national parent body would accrue from the funding and would be in doubt without it, and
- the funding would be applied to work for which no other source of funding was readily available.

For both national and local government new demands for resources are never easy. However, they may have high expectations of a national parent body's capacity to deliver reliable parent opinion and help consolidate parents' collective involvement at local level. Funding facilitation, legal advice and administrative support for a steering group would be an early example of the type of transitional support which may be required.

Grant providers will typically expect any applying organisation to maximise income from other sources rather than operate from grant funding alone. This suggests that a national parent body with significantly increased capacity would have to look to a mixed package of income sources. Mixed funding also offers a hedge against a sudden change in any one source of income. Further work and debate would be needed to develop a viable mixed funding package.

Whatever funding mix is sought, stability of overall income levels would be an important organisational goal.

## Appendix Three – A Summary of the Survey Results

A full compilation of the survey returns is available on request from Greg Brown.

The survey of school boards produced 226 returns and the survey of PTAs in membership of SPTC produced 50 returns.

1. Rate of returns, approx 3% from SPTC members and 8% from school boards. Fairly low interest in national body but relatively greater among school boards than PTAs.
2. In general, being from a school board background or a PTA background played little part in how respondents answered the questions. (Put another way, school board and PTA respondents had similar views on the questions).
3. Among respondents, almost universal agreement to the need for a national body in the future.
4. Very limited support (14%) for either current national body going on to develop their role as a national body on their own.
5. Majority support for SPTC and SSBA finding a way to come together to form one national body for the future (58%). This was also the percentage in each of the surveys.
6. A quarter of respondents preferred to see the formation of an entirely new national parent body, with all actively interested parents invited to take part in forming it.
7. Almost universal support for Parent Councils being eligible for membership of a national body, with almost as much support for PTAs also being eligible. Mixed views about other school based activity groups being eligible for membership.
8. Strong minority support for each of local authorities (47%) and national organisations with a role in education (46%) being eligible for membership, with additional comments suggesting that their role would be advisory/supporting rather than decision making.
9. Fairly low levels of support for other interested individuals to be eligible for membership, but a wide range of views expressed about this and a wide range of others suggested.
10. Low levels of support for a “parents only” governing body, but almost universal support for parents forming a majority. By far the most favoured option (72%) for governing board composition was “A majority of parents, with some school staff and key figures in education at national level”. Only 4% chose “A majority of parents with key figures in education at national level”.
11. A wide range of others have been suggested for inclusion in a governing board by a relatively small minority of respondents.
12. A majority of respondents felt on the whole that both existing national organisations performed well (PTA survey term used) or effectively (school board survey term used). However, views were mixed and many were unsure, especially with regard to advice and information services to individual parents.
13. A wide range of examples of appreciated services were listed. Being kept informed and getting information and advice about legislation and national educational matters was widely appreciated, including on recent developments in parental involvement.
14. Almost universal support was shown for both representation and support being roles for a national body. Opinion was equally divided between those respondents who regarded a national body’s representational role as most important and those who regarded support to local parents’ organisations as most important. Two thirds support was registered for national body’s role to include advice and information to individual parents, with others were unsure or opposed to this

role. The surveys did not attempt to tease out the scale of role which should be established on this.

15. Many additional comments were received on matters not directly raised in the questions. Common among them were preferences for a body to be non-political and properly representative of parent opinion. Some specifically expected parent views to be canvassed before being represented. Many other comments would be of interest to those in leading positions in a national body with regard to how it approaches its work and communicates with members.