

GIVING PARENTS A VOICE

Parental Involvement in Policy-Making

A study for the Research and Information on State Education Trust
by Maureen O'Connor

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RISE

The Research and Information on State Education Trust

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CONTENTS

A.	Introduction	5
B.	LEA Survey: England and Wales.	6
	i. Representation on Education Committees	
	ii. Governor, parent-governor and parent organisations.	
	iii. Who initiates organisation?	
	iv. Funding	
	v. LEA perceptions of participation	
C.	Case studies of from individual authority areas, to include:	9
	i. Representation and consultation procedures in selected LEAs.	
	ii. School initiatives	
	iii. The experience of parents' and governors' organisations.	
D.	LEA survey: Scotland	16
E.	LEA survey: Northern Ireland	18
F.	LEA survey: Others	18
G.	National initiatives	19
H.	Other research	21
I.	Overseas experience	25
	i. Ireland	
	ii. New Zealand	
	iii. Australia	
	iv. France	
	v. The Netherlands	
	vi. Denmark	
	vii. Germany	
J.	Summary of main findings and discussion	29
	Appendix	32

A. Introduction

The aim of this study was to provide comparative information to help inform discussion about how parents as a group should be represented in decision-making about education policy in the UK. The author was asked to gather information and write a summary of the existing models of representative parent or parent-governor organisation, including some assessment by participants of the institutions involved. There has been considerable study of parental involvement in educational activities with their own children and their teachers, but little of the introduction of so-called "parent-power" into the decision-making structure of education, or into how "parent-power" in the UK compares with what is on offer in other countries.

The project consisted of a survey by brief questionnaire of UK and associated education authorities which was used as a basis for follow-up interviews with local politicians, officials and parents' representatives in areas where there was evidence from the survey of relevant initiatives or well-developed parental involvement in policy-making. Interviews were also conducted with schools taking individual initiatives to involve parents in school level policy-making and with representatives of national school governors', parents' and parent-teacher organisations to obtain views on how they are or might in future be involved in national policy-making. A review of academic research into the relationship between parents and policy makers and the experiences of parents at all levels was made. Contact was made with parents' organisations in a number of overseas countries to facilitate international comparisons.

B. The LEA Survey

The project began with a survey of all Local Education Authorities in England, Wales and Scotland, the Northern Irish Library and Education Boards and the Education Authorities of Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man. 137 questionnaires were sent out. Replies were received from 83 authorities, a response rate of 60%.

The object of the survey was to collect basic information about the involvement of parents, and parents' and governors' organisations, in local education policy-making. The aim was to use the survey replies as a basis for more detailed inquiry wherever participation was evidently well-developed.

Within an overall response rate of 60% to the survey, there were variations among regions.

TABLE 1 Response Rates

	No.of authorities	Response	%
London Boroughs	33	22	66%
Metropolitan Boroughs	36	21	58%
English Counties	40	20	50%
Welsh Counties	8	4	50%
Scottish LEAs	12	7	58%
Northern Ireland ELBs	5	4	80%
Others	3	3	100%

i. Representation on Education Committees

The direct representation of parents on education committees as co-opted non-voting members was significantly higher in London than elsewhere. A number of respondents in Inner London made the point explicitly that this was a direct consequence of the now defunct Inner London Education Authority's policy of parental consultation and involvement being maintained in its successor boroughs. In London as a whole, boroughs of different political persuasions have parental representation on their education committees: the complete list of respondents consists of Bexley, Greenwich, Hammersmith and Fulham, Haringey, Harrow, Havering, Kensington and Chelsea, Lewisham, City of London, Merton, Newham and Southwark.

TABLE 2 LEAs with Parent Representation

London Boroughs	12	from	22 responses
Metropolitan Boroughs	1	from	21 "
English Counties	7	from	20 "
Welsh Counties	1	from	8 "
Scottish LEAs	0	from	12 "
Northern Ireland ELBs	1	from	4 "
Others	N/A		
Totals	22	from	77 "

Some London boroughs have retained ILEA-initiated Parents' Consultative Committees which elect education committee representatives. Others have education committee representatives elected by governors' organisations, and such representatives can be, but will not necessarily be, parents. The City of London, with its very small electorate, has an education committee member directly elected by parents. Haringey takes nominations from a range of community and parents' groups and the committee elects one nominee for cooption.

The other significant group of authorities with parental representation at education committee level is the English County Councils. The majority take nominations from the local federation of PTAs. Surrey has two governor committee members, chairs of primary and secondary boards respectively, elected by their fellow chairs, but not necessarily parents. A number of respondents indicated that although they do not yet have parental representation on their committees, the policy is under consideration following changes in political control after the 1992 county council elections.

ii. Parents', governors' and parent-governors' organisations

The National Confederation of Parent-Teachers' Associations (NCPTA) is regarded by some local authorities as representative of parents generally. The NCPTA has LEA-wide federations and some are involved in the nomination of parents' representatives to education committees. Responding to the RISE survey one chief education officer complained that although his authority was committed to parental participation at all levels, it regarded the absence of a local federation of PTAs as a significant disadvantage to their efforts and had approached the NCPTA nationally to complain about the lack of organisation. The survey asked authorities whether there were active organisations in their areas for governors generally or for parent-governors specifically - or both. A number of respondents reported that the establishment of such organisations was under active consideration. Others had, in some cases long established, consultative committees for parents generally.

TABLE 3 Representative Organisations

Organisations for	Governors	Parent-govs.	Consultative
London Boroughs	7	5	5
Metropolitan Boroughs	9	1	1
English Counties	9	-	3
Welsh Counties	2	-	-
Scottish LEAs	N/A	N/A	4
Northern Ireland ELBs	-	-	-
TOTALS	27	6	13

These results roughly accord with the number of groups discovered by the National Association of Governors and Managers for a meeting to discuss a national governors' forum in September 1993. They were able to list 24 groups in existence and another six in the course of being set up. They did not distinguish between groups for all governors and those for parent-governors. It seems safe to say that less than half of local authorities yet have any representative organisation for governors of any sort.

Two counties reported that local branches of NAGM served as governors' associations in their area. Some have governors' forums for various divisions of an authority or for various groups of governors i.e. primary, secondary. Some have more than one organisation: the London Borough of Haringey has a Council of Governing Bodies, a Black and Minority Ethnic Governors' Association and a Parent-Governors' Association. Newham has an Association of Parent-Governors and a Governors' Forum. Southwark has a Governors' Association and a Parents' Consultative Committee. Barnsley has a Chairman's Governors' Forum offering a termly meeting for all governors. Bradford has an Asian Governors' Network in each of its five districts, plus a Governors' Advisory Group. Further details follow in Section C.

iii. Who initiated the formation of such organisations?

The parents' consultative committees in some of the former ILEA boroughs have been kept in existence by

local authority decision. Boroughs with PCCs include those under Labour and Conservative control.

Governors' organisations have in some cases been initiated by groups of governors or parent-governors themselves, in one case through an LEA initiative, in some cases through the initiative of individual education committee chairs. In one case a successful governor initiative in one division led to the LEA promotion of similar organisations in the other four divisions of the county, using the governor-training network to call inaugural meetings.

Some LEAs have found consumer resistance amongst governors to a proliferation of bodies discussing the same issues. One London borough had its parent-governor organisation collapse in favour of a forum for all governors. Other attempts to set up governor organisations have encountered "meeting fatigue", particularly in rural areas where attending any forum involving groups of schools entails considerable travelling time. Parents and others willing to become involved in the management of their own local school are not always willing to extend that commitment to a wider arena.

iv. How are organisations funded?

The running costs of parents' consultative committees in the former ILEA boroughs are generally subsumed into the general education budget. Some governors' organisations are funded directly by the LEA, generally through its governor training or governor support services. GEST money is frequently quoted as a source of funds for governors' organisation on the premise that they are integral to the training process. Some governors' organisations are self-financing through a subscription from governing bodies. £10 a year seems to be a usual figure. Local authority subsidy may come indirectly through the provision of meeting rooms etc. LAMPAG (the Lambeth parent governors' organisation) is funded in part by a charity and employs its own administrator.

v. LEA perceptions of participation

The survey asked respondents to comment on how far parents' views were taken into account in policy formulation. One respondent complained that this question was "naive", presumably on the assumption that it would not be answered honestly. In spite of this, few responses gave an automatic "yes, of course", to the question. Most were more considered and in some cases disarmingly honest in their assessment of the extent of parental influence. Some authorities are dismissive of the need for separate parental representation other than through the normal democratic process. A number of respondents made the point that elected members of education committees were in many cases parents or grand-parents themselves, with the implication that that should suffice as a means of representing parents' views.

A number of LEAs confessed that parents' views were heard but did not necessarily carry much weight. As the respondent from one London Borough, well-known for carrying through policies which met widespread parental opposition, put it: "Parents views are always taken into account along with the views of others i.e. staff, local residents etc. But the council does not always come to a view that parents support." A North of England respondent commented even more bluntly: "Other than through the ballot box, very little account is taken."

At the other extreme, the London Borough of Westminster went to the trouble of commissioning a MORI poll of parents with the intention of feeding back the views which emerged to school governing bodies and to its education committee for policy development. Other boroughs with consultative committees of parents include their views in reports to committee. A county in the south west, where all parties and parents' groups had been extremely critical of Government policy in recent years, commented that it was a pity officials and politicians nationally did not take a leaf out of their book and listen more closely to parents' concerns.

Parental opposition to policy proposals is also conceded to be effective by some LEAs, if only in a negative sense. Protest at closure and reorganisation plans is widely held to affect policy, particularly at election times. The threat of "opt-out" initiated by parents is also conceded to have an effect on planning and budgetary issues. Some authorities have shelved plans to change the school day or the number of terms in the school year in response to parental objections. Another commented that elected representatives had been responsive to parental lobbying on budget issues.

It is clear, however, that parents as governors are generally in a stronger position as regards consultation than parents as members of PTAs or pressure groups. The implementation of LMS has seen a significant increase in training, support services and consultation meetings about specific aspects of policy for governors generally, and parent-governors have inevitably benefitted from this change. A number of authorities indicated that officers and or/committee chairs met governors' representatives regularly. Fewer said that they extended the same courtesy to federations of PTAs or other groups.

C. Case Studies from LEAs, Governors and Parents' Groups etc:

i. Representation and consultation procedures in selected LEAs.

1. HAMMERSMITH AND FULHAM

A London borough, formerly part of the ILEA, to the west of the capital, with a population of 150,000, six nursery schools, 39 primary schools, eight secondary schools and 10 special schools. The council is under Labour control.

Hammersmith and Fulham has both a Parent Governors' Consultative Committee and an All-Governors Forum. The former was established at the instigation of parent-governors under the ILEA and nominates one person for co-option to the education committee. The latter was established by the successor authority in 1990. The LEA also consults other parents groups on specific issues. The views of the PGCC are included in reports to the education committee and the views of parents are incorporated into reports when the future of a school is under review. An item under which parent-governors can raise their concerns is incorporated into the borough's standard agenda for governors meetings.

According to officials, the PGCC was initially a thriving organisation but attendance at meetings waned in the early 1990s, possibly as a result of the establishment of the Governors' Forum. The latter continues to be well-attended and there is some feeling that in a small authority one organisation may be sufficient.

2. HARINGEY

An outer London borough, to the north of the capital, with a population of 202,600, four nursery/pre schools, 81 primary schools, nine secondary schools and 5 special schools. The council is under Labour control.

Haringey has a wide-ranging procedure for co-options to its education committee. The borough approaches local community and parents' organisations to seek nominations. If there is more than one nomination from the groups consulted an election is arranged. The co-options include representatives of school governors, parents, community groups, special needs parents and two teacher representatives.

The borough facilitates a Parent-Governors' Association and a Black and Minority Ethnic Governors' Association through its Training Co-ordinator for Governors. There is also a Council of Haringey School Governors, an umbrella organisation initiated by governors specifically seeking a means of influencing policy. There is no direct grant aid for any of these bodies but some financial help with premises for meetings etc.

There is also regular consultation with the Central Council of Parent and Parent-Teacher Associations which meets regularly with the Parent-Governor Association in a Parents' Consultative Committee which includes the Leader of the Council, senior Education Services Committee members and officers.

The Director of Education Services concludes that "parents views are taken into account 'extensively if slowly'!"

3. NEWHAM

An outer London borough to the north-east of the capital with a population of 207,000, eight nursery schools, 69 primary schools, 13 secondary schools, one sixth form college and 6 special schools. The council is under Labour control.

Newham has three representatives of parents co-opted to its education committee. They are elected by and from parent-governors to represent parents of nursery and primary children, secondary pupils and pupils with special educational needs. This arrangement dates back to 1984.

The borough has an Association of Parent Governors, which is serviced by the Newham Parents' Centre, a unique organisation offering help and support to parents generally, including parent-governors. It is funded through a variety of official and charitable sources. The NAPG was established in 1977 as a support service when parents were first elected to governing bodies.

There is also a Governors' Forum for all governors serviced by the borough's Management and Governing Bodies Support Service. This was established by the Education Committee in 1990 as a means of enabling representative governors to meet Committee members and officers to discuss pertinent issues.

The authority also consults widely both formally and informally with parents' groups including Parents in Partnership, an organisation concerned with home-school cooperation for special needs children, and special interest groups such as the Asian Parents' Association.

4. KENSINGTON AND CHELSEA

A London borough, formerly part of the ILEA, with a population of 125,600, with 4 nursery schools, 27 primary schools, three secondary schools, one sixth form college and two special schools. The council is under Conservative control.

The Royal Borough has had one parent representative on its education committee since its inauguration as an independent education authority in 1990. The representative is elected by the Kensington and Chelsea Parents' Group which was initiated by parent-governors and is funded by grant from the LEA. Membership consists of all parent-governors and an equal number of non-governor parents from each school. The organisation evolved from consultative arrangements initiated by the ILEA and it meets with the director of education once a term. The borough has a separate organisation for chairs of governing bodies which is also consulted regularly on policy issues.

5. BEXLEY

An outer London borough with a population of 217,000 and one nursery school, 70 primary schools, 16 secondary schools, four special schools and one CTC. The council is under Conservative control.

Bexley has two parent representatives on its education committee nominated by the Bexley Federation of PTAs. One of these representatives also serves on two of the three education sub-committees. Provision for parental representation was made when the constitution of the education committee was revised in 1990. Previous representation for "a person with special knowledge and experience of education" dates back to 1985. There are no organisations for governors, a primary governors' group having been started and folded within a year. Officers meet regularly with the Federation of PTAs and from September 1993 the LEA is holding regular briefing meetings for parents on topics of major interest.

The LEA's Action Plan for 1993/4 includes the following: "To help parents play as full a part as they wish in the education of their children by:

- a) working with schools to provide information on what the school provides and how parents can help, particularly in the areas of basic literacy and numeracy;
- b) providing parents and older pupils with clear, simple and comprehensive advice on the educational opportunities available in the borough;
- c) simplifying the complaints procedure so that it is accessible to parents and can be used by schools as a means of self-improvement;
- d) enhancing the role of the Library service in providing educational information and resources for parents; and
- e) working with governing bodies to enhance all forms of communication and partnership with parents."

6. CITY OF WESTMINSTER

A London borough, formerly part of the ILEA, with a population of 185,000, with 42 primary schools, 8 secondary schools and three special schools. The council is under the control of the Conservatives.

The City does not have a representative of parents on its education committee and a parent-governors' forum collapsed in 1992 through poor attendance. Parent governors were included in a working group to consider special needs policy. There is a termly meeting with the authority for chairs of governors.

The City has a long-standing problem of loss of pupils through families opting for secondary schools outside the borough, particularly for denominational reasons. In 1993 the City commissioned MORI to conduct a survey of parents' and pupils' views on Westminster schools as part of its Education Review with the aim of assessing user satisfaction with the system and pin-pointing why so many families with secondary age children chose to send them to schools outside the City.

MORI found that the majority of parents and pupils were satisfied with the education provided by the City, with teaching standards, with extra help provided for pupils with special needs (including the gifted), with the range of subjects, the approachability of teachers and their opportunities to have a say in how schools were run. However, satisfaction rates amongst parents with children in City schools in the low 80% range were less good than in a national survey conducted four years earlier (93%) and also less good than those of parents who sent their children to schools outside Westminster (91%). The parents most satisfied with their children's education were those choosing Roman Catholic schools.

MORI identified eight areas of concern, with more concern expressed about some schools than others: discipline, teaching methods, homework, exam results, the cleanliness of buildings, extra-curricular activities, teacher feed-back to parents and communication with parents generally.

All schools were given the confidential results of the survey as it concerned their own schools. In addition the education committee put in place an action plan aimed at addressing some of the concerns raised by parents and monitoring progress. Two new posts were created to encourage increased effectiveness in schools and promote the ethos of partnership. The LEA intends to commission further surveys to monitor whether perceptions change as action is taken to rectify perceived defects in the schools. Schools are also being encouraged to seek feedback from pupils and parents as part of their development plans.

7. MANCHESTER

A Greater Manchester Metropolitan borough with a population of 457,000 with seven nursery schools, 131 nursery classes, 178 primary schools, 28 secondary schools, three sixth form colleges and 28 special schools. The council is under Labour control.

The City included six advisory member places on its education committee from the start of the 1993/4 municipal year. They will serve for one year and both the electoral process and the role of advisory members will be reviewed after a year.

The City is divided into three administrative districts and each district is represented on the committee by two governors elected at district consultative meetings of governors held in the spring term. It was hoped that one representative from each district would be a parent governor but in the event only one parent governor stood for election, although some of the other representatives have previously been parent governors and/or are parents.

The consultative meetings are chaired by members of the education committee. They are not regarded as policy-making bodies but allow direct contact between governors and elected members and officials. Candidates for the education committee advisory places were encouraged to prepare written statements about their candidature, which were circulated with ballot papers at the meeting. Only governors resident in the City were allowed to vote.

There are no other organisations for governors or parent-governors in the City but the authority involves governors closely in planning and monitoring their own training, provides Parent Education tutors in schools, and operates a Parents' Advice Centre and Shop for inner city parents and a citywide Parental Information Network. Consideration is being given to further initiatives to strengthen parental involvement at all levels of the education service.

In 1992 the City commissioned Emma Beresford, a secondary school teacher who had already undertaken some research into parental involvement in North America, to conduct a survey into parental involvement in the LEA's primary and secondary schools. One aspect of this research was to look at the effectiveness of the City's aim of increasing the participation of citizens in council services to ensure that the result of Government legislation was not simply to give more power to "the middle class articulate few".

Ms. Beresford's research found that there was a high level of awareness of the LEA's commitment to parental involvement, and that there had been parental input to policy-making on the 5-16 school system, on policy for the under-fives and, in individual schools, on the job description and specification for head-teachers. Parental involvement was also expected in school development plans. There had been a successful bid for Urban Aid money for work with parents of pre-school children in Moss Side and Hulme. Governor training in the City had been successful and comprehensive. She recommended that to make further gains, there should be a clear policy strategy on parental involvement and better co-ordination between different parts of the education service. She suggested that further research was needed into parents' needs and views on Manchester schools, interpreter services for parents should be made a priority and that the City should aim to hold a parents' conference to discuss educational issues.

8. BRADFORD

A West Yorkshire metropolitan district with a population of 472,000 and six nursery schools, 166 primary schools, 63 middle schools, 24 secondary schools and 15 special schools. The council is under Labour control.

Consultation with parents takes place almost entirely through the network of school governors. Each governing body in the City sends two representatives to an area Governors' Forum which meets at least once a term with education officers and each of which has a "link" councillor on education committee with whom they liaise. The chair and vice-chair of each Forum constitute a Governors' Advisory Group which meets regularly with education officers and elected members. One representative from each forum also has a place on education committee. The system is funded by the LEA. The agenda highlights issues which will come before governing bodies and education committee, taking two or three issues per meeting.

There is also an Asian Governors Network which was set up by the LEA governors' support service, with the help of Urban Programme money, as a result of requests from new Asian governors recruited in 1992. About 80 governors, including parents, meet regularly to discuss matters of concern. It is expected that the Asian governors will also seek representation on education committee.

9. KIRKLEES

A West Yorkshire Metropolitan district with a population of 375,500 and four nursery schools, 161 primary schools, nine middle schools, 26 secondary schools, nine special schools and one tertiary college. The council is under Labour control.

Kirklees Council has launched a New Deal for Schools policy which is overtly antagonistic to what they describe as the Government's notion that "competition and the unfettered operation of market forces are the way to empower the citizen and provide an effective education service". The initial phase of this policy was concerned with offering schools autonomy, choice and quality of service while encouraging them to remain within LEA control and benefitting from collaboration with the council and each other.

The second phase, launched in 1993, addressed issues of accountability, which the council believes is diminished by many recent reforms. The council has committed itself to opening up its decision-making processes to public influence and scrutiny. They plan to establish an Education Forum which will bring together representatives of parents, governors, head, teachers and non-teaching staff, pupils/students, the business community, religious groups and representatives of the Education Committee. The aim of the Forum would be to enhance local democracy by involving local citizens more directly in the process of planning and governing local education provision.

The role of the Forum initially will be to give these groups a voice and a formal means of consultation leading to advice to the Education Committee. It is envisaged that the Education Committee might in time become a smaller body, actively seeking and listening to advice from the Forum, as soon as the Forum has established its credibility as a genuinely representative body. Elected members and officers in Kirklees say that they do not under-estimate the potential difficulties in establishing an effective forum, ensuring satisfactory representation of diverse groups and ensuring clarity about its powers and the limits on its powers.

As a first step to seeking greater involvement by parents in policy-making the council has published *The Kirklees Parent*, a once-a-term glossy newsletter dealing with general educational issues and news of local schools. The authority also holds regular consultation meetings for parents on local issues and national topics such as the National Curriculum and the 1993 Education Act. There is no borough-wide organisation for parents or governors, but a governors' association is in the course of being established.

10. HAMPSHIRE

An English county with a population of 1,542,900 and four nursery schools, 580 primary schools, 98 secondary schools, six grant maintained schools, 48 special schools. The county council has no party in overall control.

The county has a Governors' Forum and is seeking to establish and fund divisional forums which can be independent of officers and head-teachers and organise their own training, development and organisation. The incoming "hung" administration is seeking a nomination from the County Forum to sit on the Education Committee.

Consultation used to take place between officers and the chair of the education committee and the local Federation of PTAs. The latter organisation no longer exists, and officers have developed private networks of parents, usually recommended by heads, to help with specific projects such as the up-dating of the

county's information on admissions. The lack of a representative organisation of parents is regarded as a serious disadvantage by officers.

The county has produced with parental help two high quality A4 size 22 page illustrated booklets *Your Child Starting School* and *Moving on to Secondary School* which are issued to parents during the year before a school start together with information on transfer procedures for the particular area of the county in which the family lives. Both booklets give information on the county's education service, the legal requirements of the system, how primary or secondary schools function, and emphasise partnership with parents and representation through governing bodies.

ii. School initiatives

1. ACLAND BURGHLEY SCHOOL, CAMDEN

Acland Burghley is a co-educational 11 - 18 comprehensive school in North London with 940 pupils. It serves a multi-cultural catchment area and has a strong tradition of excellence in the creative arts. It is also committed to involving parents as closely as possible in the work of the school. The main means of home-school communication is a fortnightly, high quality, desk-top-published newsletter which includes staff and pupil news, extra-curricular events, information on school policy and a lively noticeboard section. Issues in summer and autumn 1993 focussed on new members of the teaching staff, examination results, a campaign against racism following an attack which involved the friend of some of the school's students, and a Christmas appeal.

The main means of involving parents in policy discussions is through the parents' committee of each year group which works closely with the head of year. They arrange meetings to discuss matters of interest or concern during the year, and some have organised their own newsletters for parents of that year. This is a useful means of identifying gaps and inconsistencies.

There is also an annual day conference for parents, students and governors to discuss major issues of school policy. Recent discussions have looked at the role of parents in assessment, a home-school contract, and have helped to draw up a Code of Conduct for the school. Up to 120 parents have regularly attended these sessions. According to the head, Philip O'Hear, the involvement of parents is crucial to the development and success of individual policies, such as homework, equal opportunities, assessment, and to the development of a consensus on the school's values.

2. ASHLAWN SCHOOL, RUGBY

Ashlawn is a 1000-strong bi-lateral school for 12 to 18 year olds which has a strongly developed system of home school liaison. Parents are invited to four types of meeting with the school each year: parents' evenings of the traditional kind for feedback on progress in specific subjects; information meetings on aspects of educational and school policy e.g. the National Curriculum; meetings with tutors to discuss pastoral care and/or problems; "home-school link" meetings, of which there are three a year for every year group, which tackle general concerns about children and school policy.

The head has found that most parents worry about the same things - homework, bullying, uniform etc. - but all tend to imagine that they are unique in their worries. "They are greatly reassured to find they are normal." Where home-school link meetings arrive at a consensus on a particular aspect of school policy this is circulated to all parents. The school claims that relationships between parents and tutors have become much closer as a result of their particular approach to home-school liaison and that a number of aspects of school policy have been influenced by parental feedback and suggestions, from the design of an organiser for older students to approaches to work experience.

A document on *Resolving Homework Problems* set out the rationale for having homework, the ways in which pupils might be asked to undertake homework - research, reading, revising, retrieving information etc - and action points for pupils, teachers and parents, such as the maintenance of an accurate homework diary by all three groups, clear instructions and regular marking by teachers, sensible supervision by parents etc. Parents were also asked to contact form tutors if homework appeared to be presenting a problem.

iii. The experience of parents

This section of the report is based on interviews with 12 individuals involved as parents in some of the policy-oriented arrangements described elsewhere in the report. Some were willing to be identified, some of the more critical commentators were not.

The largest single group of parents now involved in policy-making of any sort is parent-governors. There seems to be general satisfaction with the level of representation for parents in county schools. In

voluntary schools there are complaints that parents are under-represented and that the churches can in some cases still be distinctly autocratic in their dealings with parents and teachers.

Other research has already shown that parent-governors' experience of their role can be somewhat mixed (see Section H below). This was confirmed by the parent-governors to whom I spoke. There was serious concern expressed that for one reason or another schools were not holding elections for these positions, with the strong inference that head-teachers who do not wish to have "difficult" parents on their governing body can manipulate the system to ensure that only congenial parents are nominated, if possible without the bother of an election.

This suspicion was to some extent confirmed by experience in the North-West of England where 13 local authorities paid for a video explaining the role of parent-governors and encouraging nominees to come forward. When an informal survey was made of how widely the video had been used by schools, it emerged that there had been a high number of elections in areas where the video had been shown, fewer where it had not, and that a significant number of elections were being held during the summer term, so disenfranchising the parents of in-coming pupils for up to four years.

There was also evidence of some antagonism towards parent-governors from all parts of the political spectrum with one Labour education committee chair ready to dismiss the video out of hand because "it would give his parents ideas above their station".

Another interviewee from London spoke feelingly of antagonism towards parent-governors from heads and political nominees on governing bodies (of both main political parties), of serious attempts to prevent issues being discussed, even those which, like appraisal, governors have a statutory responsibility to monitor, and of deep suspicion and hostility when an association of parent-governors was formed. "The politicians of all parties feel seriously threatened by participation. They fear that parents are going to get out of control. The trouble with this is that parent-governors get exhausted and eventually stand down. We have lost a number of very good governors that way."

An alternative view of the shortage of parent-governor candidates in some schools was that the amount of work now expected of parent governors is excessive and deters many volunteers. This was also cited as a reason for the fact that parent-governor / governor associations do not always survive long. The LEA Survey threw up comments on "meeting fatigue" amongst governors. A parent-governor in Inner London regretted the absence of representatives of the minority communities from many governing bodies, which he put down to language and cultural difficulties, particularly traditions which prevented women from some minority communities taking any active part in public life.

Keith Beck, an Oxfordshire governor involved in the efforts to establish a national forum for governors commented that power had been thrust upon governors and parents and that their "views" were currently being bandied about without any basis in fact. "It is essential that we have a representative voice which actually reflects opinions at the grass roots. The views of one or two people at national level is not good enough. Nor do we want to be consulted about policy only after the policy documents have been issued. We want to be consulted when policy is being formulated. Industry and commerce has learned that top-down policy-making is not effective. Governments should take note of that."

Apart from the strong residual antagonism in some areas to the very notion of parent-governors, those who were elected complained of isolation, poor communications, disputes with heads over their right to report back to their electorate and how that should be done, and the overwhelming task of dealing with the mountain of paperwork which now besets all governors. For this reason most welcomed the growing number of associations for parent-governors and/or governors generally, as a back-up to governor training, as an opportunity to compare experiences with governors from other schools and as a channel for making joint representations on issues of policy.

A co-opted member of an education committee representing governors generally spoke of the crucial role of governor-trainers in enabling governors to be effective. In his borough training had been excellent and governors had been involved in the selection of a replacement when the senior training official moved on.

A supportive view of local authority efforts in the field came from the chair of the Newham Association of Parent-Governors who believes that the existence of the association is vital to support parent-governors in their role and that it provides a useful means of enabling parents to handle the immense amount of information which now comes to governors. It also enables parent-governors to liaise with the parent representatives on Education Committee. Meetings are held a short time before the main Education Committee meeting in each cycle so that parent-governor views on agenda items can be fed into the system. "You do hear of areas where governors have difficulty in getting their voice heard. Not everything that

Newham does is perfect but we do feel that we can have our say and that it will be listened to."

A parent-governor of long-standing, nominated as parent representative to the education committee of a London Borough by the local parents' association, also complained of isolation in her borough-wide role. In her view it is not easy for an "ordinary parent" to sit on an education committee dominated by experienced and close-knit groups of politicians. The atmosphere can be intimidating, the views of parents may be seldom sought and initiatives on parental involvement taken without any consultation with the parent representative.

The problem of reporting back to those who have ostensibly elected you is even more acute than at the school level. Regular news-letters do not always reach those for whom they are intended if they have to rely on the good-will of LEA and schools for distribution. Knowledge of grass-roots views may be patchy even in a borough-wide parents' association. As others also said, the key to effective representation is effective communication, and that is not always easy for a sole parent representative on a large committee representing a wide geographical area.

Parent representatives with wide experience of education committee membership, pressure groups and a governors' association in Gloucestershire made the point strongly that views which conflict with Government policy are not welcome. The county has been involved a long-running dispute between all its political parties and central Government over its Standard Spending Assessment which the county believes militates unfairly against its schools. Parents groups have played a leading role in campaigning and in some of the research into how the SSA formula works, but there is a degree of cynicism about the effect of parents' views when they come into direct conflict with the makers of financial policy, local or national. Jan Smith, a seasoned campaigner in the area, comments that what parents want is involvement before decisions are made and clear accountability, whether from the LEA or the new Funding Agency for grant maintained schools. What they often get is politicians who still think that they know best.

D. LEA Survey: Scotland

Parental involvement in education in Scotland is organised in a different way from England and Wales. Since legislation in 1988, which followed the Education Reform Act in England and Wales but which differed significantly from it, Scottish schools may elect to have a school board. About 75% of schools currently have boards, the number fluctuating as boards are created and some are abandoned, mainly through lack of parental support.

School boards include elected parent representatives (the majority), teacher representatives and co-opted members of the local community. The head-teacher is not a member but may attend meetings as an adviser, as may officials of the Education Authority (EA) and the local councillor.

School boards have fewer powers than English and Welsh governing bodies, being responsible in the main for the allocation of capitation funds in consultation with the head-teacher. Boards are specifically required to promote contact between the school, its parents and the community, report annually to parents and encourage the establishment of a parent-teacher association.

The Scottish Education Department (SED) has a School Boards Support Unit, and published a termly newsletter for board members which more than half of the board members who responded to an SED questionnaire said that they found useful and interesting.

The survey returns indicated that no Scottish education authorities include parent representatives on their education committee. Co-opted members are confined to church and teacher representatives. Lothian Region does include parents on its Schools Appeals Committee and on the Appointment Committee for senior staff. Nominations come from the Federation of PTAs or from school boards where they exist.

Most EAs say they consult widely with school boards and with other parents' groups. Consultation with school boards, one region commented, "is almost automatic". Others have regular meetings with chairs of school boards and consult on all major policy items. The Borders EA sent a questionnaire to every family of a child who would be involved in the proposed testing and got a 100% response, which was relayed to the Scottish Education Department. Attempts to set up local organisations of school boards, however, have not generally been successful.

Nationally there are two parent representatives on the Scottish Consultative Council on the Curriculum which itself consults widely with all the interest groups in education, including parents. The Forum of Scottish Education was established in 1988 at the height of the debate on education reform. This provides an informal meeting place for all interest groups and meets roughly every six weeks.

Nationally there are three major organisations for parents. The Scottish School Boards' Association was established in 1991 and represents 800 schools out of about 2000 with established boards. Membership is growing. The SSBA is non-political, is funded by a grant of £5,000 from the Scottish Education Department and is increasingly being consulted by the SED, by the teachers' unions and by the Scottish Council for Educational Research.

The Scottish Parent-Teachers' Council has more than 700 school PTAs in membership and also reports growing interest in its activities. The SPTC is also consulted by officials nationally, and has been instrumental in persuading the SED to produce a video for parents explaining the 5 - 14 curriculum. The SPTC chair was a member of the working party on devolved school management, which has introduced a scheme significantly different from that in use in England and Wales as a result, SPTC claims, of parental pressure.

The third group, the Parents' Coalition, is a pressure group, now disbanded, which came into being during the campaign against the SED's test proposals for primary children. It claims credit for the radical changes eventually made in the testing procedures in Scotland. Its survey revealing deep parental dissatisfaction with the proposed testing regime is widely credited with changing ministerial minds on the issue.

It is clear that parental consultation is more deeply embedded in the Scottish system nationally than it is in England. The weakness of the school board system is its voluntary nature, with some heads reported to be determined to avoid having a board (and/or a PTA) and other boards failing from lack of interest amongst parents.

Nationally, the acceptance of parents' role in consultative procedures does not prevent some tensions between the different parents' organisations. Nor does it prevent ministers disliking parents' views when they do not accord with their own.

According to Diana Daly of the Parents' Coalition, once the organisation began to be vilified it recognised that the Government was worried about the scale of the parents' revolt. Parents' groups make the point strongly, though, that in Scotland opposition to some of the recent reforms did come from parents. It was not sparked off, as in England, by the teachers' organisations. They take some pride in the fact that this grass-roots reaction was successful in achieving some changes in national policy. It is significant, says Judith Gillespie of the SPTC, that its consultation on the reform legislation brought in 8,000 comments from a population of five million, while England could only draw 15,000 from fifty million.

E. LEA Survey: Northern Ireland

The survey indicated no direct representation of parents on NI Education and Library Boards, and only a minimal number of organisations for governors, initiated by governors themselves. Several Boards claimed that they did consult parents regularly on policy issues. Schools in Northern Ireland have similar arrangements for the election of parents to boards of governors as in England and Wales. Governors report annually to parents and parents have the additional right to seek a ballot of parents on whether their school should become "integrated" i.e. admitting children of all religious groups.

There is no province-wide organisation for parents. A Bangor-based organisation, Parents' Action Group in Education has been set up and is hoping to expand to include members from all over the province.

F. LEA Survey: Others

The island authorities of Guernsey, Jersey and the Isle of Man all made the point in response to the survey that they were not part of the UK education system and that as small communities consultation was very much easier than on mainland Britain. Education in the Isle of Man has been organised by a directly elected Education Committee for over 100 years. The sixteen members stand on an education platform and most are parents.

G. National Initiatives

i. Parent Governor regional conferences

In 1992 representatives of the National Association of Governors and Managers, the Campaign for State Education, Action for Governors Information and Training and the National Confederation of PTAs and a number of LEA governor training co-ordinators agreed on the need to discuss the links between parents and governors urgently. During March and April 1993 a series of nine regional conferences was held with four aims:

1. To enable governing bodies to work more closely with parents for the benefit of pupils;
2. To highlight the accountability of governors to the community;
3. To examine the role of parent-governors, in particular in helping governing bodies communicate with parents;
4. To promote communication between parents, governors and local and national government.

The conferences were all well-attended and the opportunity for discussion was widely welcomed by both governors and parents. In spite of different key-note speakers and workshops, the outcomes of the conferences were similar. The emphasis was on greatly improved communication throughout the education system so that schools have open channels to Government, LEA, the local community, local industry, the churches, governors, parents, staff, pupils and other schools. Conversely, a great number of barriers to effective communication were identified ranging from schools' assumptions about parental indifference through resentment of parental "interference" amongst heads and teaching staff to the formality of written information and meetings.

Looking specifically at communication between schools and LEAs, the conferences called for much more cooperation between parents and governors, supported where possible by the local authority, and more practical assistance for parents in fulfilling their role in education. Specific proposals emphasised the absolute need for good governor training, with an LEA co-ordinator, and the desirability of a central newsletter for governors and parents, joint training opportunities for governors, parents and teachers, an advice centre/telephone help-line for parents and governors, links between local parent and governor groups, the establishment of parent-governor associations where they do not exist, and the provision of more opportunities for parents and governors from different schools to meet each other.

ii. A National Forum of Area Governors' Groups

As this report has shown, there are an increasing number of governors and parent-governors associations coming into being around the country. The development of such groups and the possibility that they would work towards some sort of national voice for school governors have been specifically welcomed by schools' minister Eric Forth and local meetings have been attended by a senior civil servant from the DFE.

In September 1993 representatives of twelve such groups, five local authorities, the National Association of Governors and Managers, Action for Governor Information and Training and the National School Governors' Conference met in Birmingham to discuss the possibility of establishing a national forum for governors groups.

In discussion it emerged that most groups received some help from their LEA, methods of funding and organisation varied, but all had been driven by a sense of frustration with the increased responsibility that governors now found themselves carrying. There was a strong feeling that a forum was needed for sharing governors' concerns and influencing policy formation. It was agreed that governing bodies need: adequate information, a sharing of examples of good practice, relevant training, a meaningful position in the decision making process, empowerment that equates with the role of the governing body and a meaningful input into policy formation.

A national forum would need a firm base at the grass-roots and democratic representation and participation. It was assumed that if a country-wide association could be formed which truly represented

governing bodies and had a firm local structure, government and ministers would listen to its views.

The meeting considered the alternatives of setting up a completely new organisation or building upon the base already created by organisations such as NAGM and AGIT. There was no agreement on which course to follow but plans were made for further meetings.

iii CASE Conference - Accountable, Democratic, Responsive

This conference of CASE members and other interested individuals was convened to discuss what the Campaign regarded as worrying features of the present educational landscape. The president of CASE called for a review which would establish a framework of principles and values upon which educational decision-making could be based, for a review of the present constitution and powers of governing bodies and for the grassroots involvement of parents in educational decision-making.

Professor Ron Glatter of the Open University drew attention to a recent Gallup Poll which indicated that 77% of the public believed recent educational change had been brought in too quickly and without sufficient consideration.

Chris Tipple, director of education for Northumberland, assessed existing and proposed structures as accountable, democratic and responsive on the following basis:

	Accountable	Democratic	Responsive
LEA School Governors	to some extent	links to larger electorate	potentially
GM Governors	low	no	no (except to parents)
LEA	difficult now because of centralisation	yes	partially
Funding Agency	no	no	no
Central Government	yes, but education overshadowed in elections	yes	no

The conference concluded that there was a need for a "three-tier" system of educational policy-making: school governors, a democratic middle tier similar if not identical to the current LEA structure, and the national government level. It was not felt that the present system was perfect and modifications were suggested:

At governing body level: there could be a better balance of views, with a strengthening of teacher representation; the role of governors as guardians should be strengthened; structure should reflect function; the parental agenda should be taken seriously, not necessarily simply by being channelled through parent-governors.

At LEA level: governors should be co-opted to this level and there should be governor forums. School boards and funding agencies were not regarded as democratic or accountable alternatives. The roles of support, enabling and monitoring should be balanced against the role of consumer watchdog and children's champion. The LEA should be totally serious about partnership with parents.

At national level: the government should set standards of entitlement to resourcing and to representation. There was some support for a parent voice at national level by means of local parent-governor forums electing national representatives. There was also strong support for a General Teaching Council.

H. Other Research

Ever since the Plowden Report drew attention to the importance of parents' role in the education of children, schools, local education authorities and national governments of all political complexions have been involved in a variety of initiatives to help and encourage parents and schools to work closely together. For the purposes of this study of involvement in the policy-making process, the most significant events have been the 1986 Education Act which reformed school governing bodies in England and Wales, giving parents greatly increased representation, the Education Reform Act of 1988 which gave parents new powers of school choice, access to information and the possibility of balloting to opt out of local authority control, and similar legislation in Scotland which established (optional) schools boards with majority parental representation.

To some extent these developments have over-shadowed the slow, but consistent development of closer relationships between parents and teachers within schools which has been mainly concerned with the educational progress of individual children. As Sally Tomlinson says in the introduction to her paper *Home-School Partnerships*, for the Institute of Public Policy Research, a government which is concerned to raise standards for all pupils will concentrate on enhancing parental support, involvement and obligation to participate in their children's formal education. It will require all schools to make information accessible to all parents, involve all parents and build constructive partnerships. There is now sufficient research evidence to indicate that productive parental involvement is one of the prerequisites for an effective school and that cooperation between home and school can raise standards overall.

Tomlinson argues that this type of parental involvement, making sure parents are fully informed, involving them in learning and day-to-day activities and, informally, in school matters through a home-school association, sits naturally with parents' formal, and now legally sanctioned, involvement in school decision-making as parent-governors, at the annual parents' meeting and at higher levels of policy-making.

Recent legislation, though, Tomlinson points out, has concentrated only on certain aspects of home-school relationships. The emphasis has been on strengthening the parent's role as a "consumer" and "manager" of educational services, with access to statistical information, often of a comparative kind, on providing formal complaints procedures for the dissatisfied, and on the indirect "monitoring" of quality by means of the power the market gives a consumer to switch supplier. Tomlinson argues that the "market model" is more likely to limit the development of effective schools for all pupils than enhance it. More formalised home-school partnership schemes offer a more effective mechanism for raising standards.

There is serious concern amongst many professionals about the serious tension between these two approaches to parental involvement, partnership or consumerist.

The Conference of the National Home School Development Group in Nottingham in July 1992 crystallised the view that the new emphasis on what is measurable and the mountains of information being thrust at parents may separate and distance parents and teachers rather than binding them together in their common aim of assisting children's learning. "Thus schools produce more documentation than ever before - statistics about children's progress measured upon highly disputed tests, comparative data about overall results, also based upon disputed statistical practices, and interminable and impenetrable policy documents. Arguably this does more to distance parents from their children's education than it does to assist the development of a productive working relationship with the teachers and other professionals."

As recent legislation has been implemented it has been monitored and evaluated in England and Wales and in Scotland by a number of academics. In *Parents and Schools: Customers, Managers or Partners*, edited by Pamela Munn, a series of papers examines the new role thrust upon parents by recent legislation. Munn defines traditional parental involvement as concerned mainly with the well-being of the parent's own child. The involvement of parents as members of governing bodies or school boards, however, faces parents explicitly with the collective well-being of the whole school and all the children in it and gives them clearly

defined and substantial statutory responsibilities. This raises quite new questions of representation and accountability and may challenge traditional notions of home-school relations.

In *You won't get me involved - I'm a plumber*, in *Ruling the Margins*, Gerry Bailey argues that the consumerist model of parental involvement promoted by the government is more concerned with conflict than partnership. The implication of the government's *Parents' Charter*, he contends, is that parents should be armed for potential confrontation: "just look at the emphasis on complaints, much of current legislation begins to read like the script of "Watchdog" (a TV consumer programme). Perhaps the balance of power between teachers and parents has been unequal in the past, but will it really change through the imposition of consumer rights?" he asks.

In the same publication, Martin Hughes, in *Parents' views - rhetoric and reality*, questions whether recent reforms have been based on any true sense of what parents actually believe about the deficiencies of the education system. Two research projects at the University of Exeter School of Education indicate, as have other surveys by the polling organisations for various clients, that the great majority of parents are satisfied with the quality of their children's schools, that they place a high premium on good relationships between parents, teachers and children and on the atmosphere and "ethos" of the school, and a relatively low one on academic results, and that they do not generally regard themselves as "consumers" of education in any meaningful sense. Hughes concludes that parents should not be regarded as "dissatisfied customers" but more positively as "potential partners".

If this conclusion casts doubt on the validity of the views of some of those who freely claim to speak for parents, so too does work which indicates that when they have the opportunity of making their views known parents may speak with more than one voice. The National Home School Development Group concluded that parents were far from homogeneous and that to talk of "parents' views" may blur important differences and mask the variety of individual and sub-group perspectives. Stringent efforts needed to be made to make sure that particular groups of parents, especially ethnic minorities or families in poverty, were not marginalised.

The second role assigned to parents by recent legislation is that of school managers through their election to governing bodies and school boards. Politicians have complained that spokespeople from national parents' organisations are not representative because they are "professional parents", in the sense that they have become distanced from their supposed constituency and are making a career of being a parent representative.

Research indicates that parent-governors, who are certainly the most "representative" parents we have in the present system, tend to be from the articulate professional and managerial classes, and certainly in that sense unrepresentative of the population as a whole. A study in the south-west found that well over half were educated at private or grammar schools, that a majority held "traditional" views on schooling, and that they generally form close and productive relationships with the professionals in their schools. Even parents who tended to be highly demanding in their expectations of schools, did not in fact see themselves in an oppositional role to heads and teachers.

A survey by the National Foundation for Educational Research found that governing bodies as a whole were very well qualified, with 57% of chairs and 44% of governors having either a degree or professional qualification and with very few with no qualification at all. Half the governors, but only thirty per cent of the chairs, were female, and the proportion of governors from manual occupations and from ethnic minorities was very low.

Other surveys by the Inner London Education Authority and the National Consumer Council have also found serious under-representation of ethnic minorities on governing bodies. The NCC survey concluded that fewer than half of local authorities were taking positive action to recruit ethnic minority parents and that less than a third were aiming training specifically at this group.

Whatever their composition, an NFER study found that many governors regard themselves as akin to the board of directors of a company, with the head in the role of chief executive. There is evidence that governing bodies are deliberately recruiting members with specialist knowledge, such as accountancy or industrial relations, to enable them to cope more readily with the increased responsibilities of devolved management, a move which may increase the likelihood of governing bodies being dominated by professionals.

There is tension in a system which allows governors to claim that "they run the schools now", a sentiment which leaves the roles of governors without any specific management expertise, the head and the LEA all equally ambiguous. Joan Sallis, president of CASE, a member of the Taylor Committee which made the original proposals for bringing parents into school governance in 1978, and author of several books of

school governors, puts the relationship between the professionals and genuine "lay governors" differently. "Our society is governed by lay people. They have professional guidance at their elbow, they rely on professionals to carry out their policies in the most effective way, but most professionals, at least in this country, don't make policies. Schools are not unusual in being subject to community oversight."

But community oversight has to be effective, and there is much evidence to suggest that at least in regard to parent governors, it is not yet that. John Diamond of Edge Hill College of HE in Lancashire, made a study of parent-governors in Greater Manchester. His interviewees had no previous experience as governors and were not members of the professional or managerial class. Several points emerged from this study. Being a governor took up far more time than anticipated and put strains on the governor's family and friends. Inexperienced parent-governors took a considerable length of time, up to two years, to begin to feel confident in a role for which they were only elected for a four year term. They often felt marginalised by the head-teacher, particularly in relation to the appointment of staff and in financial decision-making. There were no clear lines of accountability to their electorate or regular contact with other parent governors in the school. Training was favourably received but most governors felt the need to meet governors at other schools on a regular basis to discuss matters of common interest. John Diamond concludes that if parent governors are to be effective it needs to be recognised that at present they do not necessarily have the status or support they need to function effectively.

Research by Michael Golby and Stephen Brigley in *Parents as School Governors*, based on work with parent governors in Devon secondary schools, came to similar conclusions. They found that parents initially felt out of their depth as governors and smothered in jargon and paperwork, although this feeling wore off as experience developed. The Devon governors also felt uneasy about how to discharge their responsibility to the parent body as a whole which had elected them. "Some feel at a loss to know how to go about representing parents and are occasionally thwarted and confused by governors' rules of confidentiality." Some doubted their right to represent the view of "the average parent" and most believed that parental apathy was a barrier to building up adequate links with the parent body.

The Devon governors also felt that the amount of training offered to governors was not adequate, although John Diamond's survey found a high level of satisfaction with training. It is undoubtedly the case that training varies in quality and quantity from one local authority area to another.

Ada Fordham in *School governor training: a trainer's perspective* in *Governor Training, Perspectives Post-ERA*, argues that there are three attitudes to governor training amongst LEAs: those unsympathetic to recent legislation who do not feel governors should or can take up the role assigned to them and therefore devote minimum resources to training; those who are afraid that governors will use their new power irresponsibly and destroy years of good practice and so aim training at taming rather than enabling governors; and those, often, though not exclusively, in more rural areas where governors have always had more influence, where the LEA is ready to embrace the idea of schools more directly accountable to the local community and carve out a new role for itself. She makes the point that with the introduction of Local Management of Schools the need for effective governor training becomes ever more important as governors are expected to take on many of the managerial functions of the LEA.

As has already been said, the best developed relationships between home and school emphasise partnership, and there is a strong body of opinion which argues that parents' dual roles as partners in their own child's learning and participators in policy-making, rather than being cast as critical consumers, are those which offer the most constructive means of raising standards of education. In *Parents and Schools: Customers, Managers or Partners*, Pamela Munn concludes that the parental voice opens up greater possibilities for school improvement than parental choice, which is not a practical proposition for many parents. There are already signs, she says, that the involvement of parent-governors, school board members in Scotland, and local and national federations of parents and governors have encouraged greater accountability at local and national level and begun to have an impact on policy.

Alastair Macbeth, in *How can home learning become part of our education system?* in *Ruling the Margins*, suggests that a better structure through which to bring these two aspects of parental involvement together, would be to involve individual parents in class parent-teacher associations - "small, friendly and educationally relevant" - with a parents' association representing parental interests at school level able to establish close links with parent governors on the one hand and the class PTAs on the other.

Starting with a concern to involve all parents, especially the under-represented ethnic minorities, in home-school relationships, Sally Tomlinson, in *Ethnic minorities, involved partners or problem parents*, in *Parents and Schools: Customers, Managers or Partners*, proposes that training should encourage teachers to consult, offer information to and involve all parents, especially those at present marginalised. And that all

schools should be required by statute to have a Home-School Association to which all parents automatically belong and which has the right to be consulted on educational matters. This body would liaise with governors but would itself be the statutory body to enable parents to become equal partners in their children's education.

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I. Overseas Experience

i. The Republic of Ireland

Ireland is going through a reform process intended, amongst other objectives, to increase the participation of parents at all levels of Irish education. Ireland has had parent representation on its schools boards of management since 1975 sitting alongside teacher representatives and the nominees of the patron (usually the Bishop) who are in the majority. The chair is usually held by one of the patron's nominees. Almost all primary and two-thirds of secondary schools are denominational.

In 1985 the National Parents' Council was formed, with government support, to take on the dual role of supporting parental involvement in the schools and contributing to national policy-making. The council has two tiers, primary and post-primary, and includes representatives of various parents' organisations representing different sectors of the system: primary, Irish language schools, denominational and non-denominational schools etc. Representatives from the Council are appointed by the government to other education bodies e.g. the Primary Education Review Body, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, each individual curriculum committee for primary education and the Committee on Special Education.

Ireland is currently (Autumn 1993) undertaking a major reform of its education system conducted with an unprecedented level of consultation. A Green Paper, *Education for a Changing World*, was published in the spring of 1992. More than 900 written responses were received by the government and they were followed by a series of seminars in different parts of the country to discuss the proposals for reform. Teachers' and parents' groups also organised responses to the Green Paper. In October 1993 a national convention was held in Dublin at which 42 interested parties made public presentations on the Green Paper to an independent secretariat of academics from Ireland and abroad. This was followed by private sessions to explore the possibilities for compromise in areas where disagreement had emerged.

The most difficult issue to be resolved appears to be the reluctance of the Churches to give up their majority on school boards of management in favour of a more equal distribution of places between parents, teachers and the patron's (usually a Church's) nominees. The representative of the National Parents' Council at the Convention made an impassioned plea for genuine partnership, "team-work and an active sharing of responsibility at all levels. Partnership and dominance cannot co-exist."

As well as the composition of boards of management, the right of parents to have a parents' association in all schools is under discussion. The Department of Education has been encouraging schools to establish parents' associations since 1985. A Circular in May 1991 requested school boards to call a parents' meeting with the object of setting up a PA where one did not already exist. A White Paper is expected early in 1994.

ii New Zealand

New Zealand reformed the administration of its education service in 1988/9 according to one Canadian educationist "by the earthquake method". The Department of Education and 10 directly elected local education boards were replaced at national level by eight agencies which provide services or advise the education minister.

Control of schools was given to boards of trustees. Members of the boards are directly elected by parents of children in each school, plus a staff representative, the head teacher and an elected representative of older students. The board must ensure that the school has a written charter of aims, purposes and objectives approved by the minister. The charter must include the national educational guide-lines and local goals and objectives.

The school board has a large measure of autonomy over the management of the school and its revenue budget, including the salaries of ancillary staff but excluding transport, major works and, so far, teachers' salaries. The boards generally seem to feel that the formula being used for funding is equitable. But some boards are finding difficulty in handling their new responsibilities and one has been dismissed for

incompetence. A National Curriculum is being developed but of a less prescriptive type than that in England and Wales.

The School Trustees' Association is intended to be a democratic forum for trustees, an advisory service for boards, and is contracted by the NZ government to provide services such as property management, payroll and personnel management etc. It is running into some difficulty in combining these roles. It is being suggested that two separate bodies are needed, one to provide services for boards, the other as a representative consultative and lobbying group.

There was enormous controversy over the NZ Treasury's proposal to delegate the funding of teachers' salaries to schools on an "average salary" basis, particularly in the light of its avowed intention to cut educational spending. There was opposition from trustees as well as from teachers' organisations. The change was widely regarded as a means of passing unpopular budget decisions to boards of trustees. It is also associated with the introduction of merit pay, the end of national conditions of service for teachers and the removal of the requirement for teachers to be registered. After a massive campaign by teachers and trustees, the government announced that it would not proceed with its delegation of salaries programme and that future changes would go for consultation.

Parents appear to have welcomed the directly elected boards of trustees, although some trustees are finding the work-load onerous and there is a fear that not enough nominations will be received when the next elections come round. After a study visit to New Zealand early in 1993, Diana Daly of the Scottish Parents' Coalition concluded that the consensus now favours the level of devolved power that has been achieved by the reforms, but that many parent trustees, who had started out with great good-will, were disillusioned both at the amount of time and effort expected of them and at having to cope with changing deadlines and priorities imposed by ministers out of touch with many basic issues.

iii Australia

School education in Australia is the responsibility of the States. Over the last few years most of the States have made changes in their legislation for school management and control, most of which have increased parental participation at some level, although curriculum matters have generally remained centralized.

Most have followed the lead of Victoria which more than fifteen years ago introduced school councils with wide powers to run schools, including, unusually, the power to appoint head-teachers. School board members in Victoria were offered training and specific efforts were made to involve less articulate parents. Over a period of time, parents from Victoria have moved into main-stream politics both in the State and federal legislatures, with considerable success. Other Australian states are now moving in the same direction. For example:

In Western Australia, parents' associations were legally banned from discussing the curriculum until 1988. The 1991 Education Act legislated for a Decision-making Group in every school. It consists of equal numbers of parents and staff, plus the principal and, if the students so decide, a student representative. Members of the local community may be coopted. The Groups are intended to allow participation in the formulation of the school's educational objectives and priorities. They are not able to hold accounts, employ staff or provide amenities. They are required to study, and if satisfied, endorse the school's development plan which is then submitted to the local district superintendent of schools.

In the Northern Territory, school councils take on many of the functions devolved to governors in the UK, and in some cases more. A school council consists of between 5 and 19 members, including the school principal, elected teacher representatives, a majority of elected parents. There is also provision for elected student representatives in senior schools, and for cooptions from the local community. The council is responsible amongst other things, for the school's budget, must develop, implement and review an Action Plan for School Improvement, oversee the buildings and grounds, and participate in the selection of teachers for promotion. It may if it wishes take on additional responsibilities, including running or leasing the canteen, employing some staff, administering contracts. It can advise on the implementation of education policy but only within guide-lines laid down by the NT ministry of education. It may never issue instructions to teachers or discuss complaints against them. Tasmania has a similar system of voluntary schools councils, with 30% of school currently having opted to elect one. Queensland has begun a pilot scheme on a similar basis.

South Australia also has a system of school councils with a majority of elected parents, staff and (older) student representation and membership for a nominee of the local MP, and for the local councillor. Councils have wide powers, including rights to acquire and dispose of real property and to borrow money to finance the provision of school buildings and facilities, subject to the approval of the minister, and to employ

non-teaching staff. The school principal is obliged to call a general meeting of the school once a year to elect members of the school council and to review the financial statement of the school accounts. School councils set the levels of fees which are chargeable in Australian State schools to help cover the costs of stationery, curriculum materials, school grounds maintenance etc.. However it is the school principal who is responsible to the State's director-general of education for the provision of quality education in accordance "with the curriculum and other policies and priorities of the Education Department of South Australia."

Since 1989, South Australia also has a policy for the promotion of participation by parents in schools. This puts the onus on schools to reach out to parents and encourage involvement in the education of their own children. They are expected to develop with parents and students a joint policy which develops the role of parents in school and in school decision-making.

Most schools in Australia also have a parents' or a parents' and citizens' association, with State Federations of these associations which are generally represented on policy-making bodies at State level. For example, the Queensland Council of Parents' and Citizens' Associations has members on three major policy-making bodies: the State Studies Management Forum, the State Resources and Administration Management Forum and the State Human Resources Management Forum. Nationally the Australian Council of State School Organisations is consulted by the federal government.

iv France

It is well-known that the French education system was traditionally highly centralised. This tradition has included two powerful national parents' organisations, one affiliated to the trades union movement and the other to the Catholic Church. Recent efforts to decentralise the French system have concentrated on school management and have met with mixed success.

Primary schools have always been managed locally, secondary school management was decentralised in the mid-1980s with the establishment of governing councils for the *lycees* with representation divided three ways: one third for the institution, to include the principal, deputy-head, bursar, a representative of the region and two co-optees; one third for the staff, seven teachers and three ancillary; and one third for the "consumers", five parents and five students. Its functions are administrative and budgetary. Schools also have class and inter-class committees of parents and teachers which can send recommendations to the school's teachers' council which makes the educational decisions for the school.

The councils elect a regional committee which is presided over by the *recteur* or by an official, depending upon whether what is being discussed is academic or administrative. There is also a national consultative committee which includes elected parent representatives, students from the lycees and from higher education and teachers. There is a statutory duty to consult and changes in the law are not valid unless proper consultation has taken place. The committee can propose amendments to legislation, but experience has shown that these may be ignored.

v The Netherlands

The Dutch constitution guarantees parents "freedom of education" which has led to a mixed system, with a minority of State or municipal schools and a majority of private schools, many of them denominational, but all funded equally by the government. Schools are governed by boards, most of which control a single school but which in the case of the municipalities may control many. Most board members are from the professional and managerial classes and tend to stay in office for a relatively short time. There are no requirements for board members but it is common in the private sector for a high proportion of parents to serve. The school boards, parents' organisations and teachers' unions have formed four "umbrella" organisations for the four main school "communities": public, Catholic, Protestant and non-denominational private. These are the normal channel for consultation between the government and the schools and have become very influential. Educational policy, however, is highly devolved, with the central government taking responsibility for financing the system, controlling standards through the school leaving examination; controlling qualifications and the maintenance of provision.

Legislation also guarantees parent and teacher participation in the day-to-day running of schools. "Councils of co-partnership" consist of elected parent, teacher and student representatives and have an advisory role.

vi Denmark

The Danish educational system is unique. The first paragraph of the Danish School Law states: "It is the Folkeskole's task, in cooperation with the parents, to ensure that children achieve...." This is achieved in schools which serve the 6/7 to 16/17 year-groups in classes which retain the same class teacher right through

a child's career and which are not streamed until the later years of "secondary" education and then only in four out of the twelve compulsory subjects. Parents are expected to be closely involved in their children's education throughout: they take part with teachers in an evaluation of their child twice a year, they must agree to their child "failing" a subject and to decisions on streaming in the older age-groups; they are encouraged to come to school and participate in lessons and consultation about children's problems by phone is common.

Parent participation is built into the school structure. Parents in each class elect four to six "contact parents" who normally serve for a two year period and work closely with the class teacher on home-school liaison. Each school also has a school board which is elected every four years on the same day for every school. The board consists of five to seven parents, one of whom takes the chair, two teachers, two pupils and the head-teacher, who is not allowed to vote. The school board makes decisions on educational structure, policies for home-school cooperation, for evaluation, for special events, the school rules, the budget and on teaching materials. It makes proposals to the local authority on curriculum matters and the employment of staff. It supervises the day-to-day management of the school.

Nationally the Parents' Association is regarded as a partner alongside the teachers' union (to which 95% of teachers belong), the association of local authorities and the Ministry of Education. Educational change must be achieved by a consensus in Parliament. A simple majority is not enough. A new Education Act in 1993 introduced a wider curriculum but with the emphasis on active learning without streaming. A test is to be introduced in year 9 which can either be repeated or taken at a more advanced level a year later at school-leaving age. Change in Danish schools is normally introduced after experiment in pilot schools and evaluation. The Act established a "council for innovation" with members recruited from the Parents' Association, local communities, pupils' organisations and the teachers' and head-teachers' organisations. The council will advise the minister on educational change.

vii Germany

Parents hold elected office at all levels of the education system in the German *Lander*, with slight variations on the basic system. This allows for class representation with the teacher on a class committee. Parents and older pupils hold equal numbers of seats with teachers on school boards in primary and secondary schools, ensuring that no one group can dominate. There is then a series of advisory committees at area, regional and national level where the Federal parents' council acts as an advisory group to government. This structure is funded by the various levels of government. There are also a range of parents' associations reflecting different interest groups: Protestant Parents and Teachers (BEE), Catholic Parents of Germany (KED), and the German Parents Association (KEV) plus some small regional and special interest groups. These groups are also consulted over policy changes but as one participant observes "when times are good and the money is flowing, the demands of parents are well heard. Nowadays we have to fight for everything."

J. Summary of Main Findings

1. In the UK there is no statutory provision for the involvement of parents at LEA level. Less than one third of LEAs have parent representatives on their education committees, with representation concentrated in the London boroughs and the English county councils. Procedures for appointing parent representatives vary: only one example of direct election by parents was found. Generally there was an election or nomination from another body, such as a governors' organisation or federation of PTAs. (Section B i.)
2. Just over a third of LEAs have representative and/or consultative organisations for governors, parent-governors and/or parents, with a reasonably even spread of organisations in different types of authority. (Section B ii).
3. Most such organisations have been set up on the initiative of governors or parents themselves, but most receive some assistance and/or funding from their local authority. Some LEAs have found it difficult to set up or sustain organisations for governors (including parent governors) because potential participants seemed to feel that they already have too many meetings to attend. (Section B iii).
4. A small minority of LEAs of all political complexions are enthusiastic supporters of parental involvement and are putting significant effort into encouraging participation. Others were doubtful about the value of parental input, although some acknowledged that parental opposition to policy proposals was sometimes effective in preventing planned action. (Section B v).
5. Interviews (Section C iii) were carried out with some parents who have participated in the various institutions for parental participation. These confirmed the findings of previous research (Section H) that some parents can feel isolated and powerless in governing bodies and education committees and may meet hostility from heads and political nominees.
6. The involvement of parents in school government through a governing body or council is now common in overseas countries and the proportion of parents is generally higher than in the UK system. (Section I).
7. At national level in the UK, there is no representative body to communicate parents' views to government at national level, as there often is abroad, although efforts are being made to construct a representative structure for school governors, which would include parent governors. (Section H ii).
8. In a number of other education systems - Ireland, New Zealand, Australia, Scotland, France, Netherlands and Germany - governments have established representative structures to communicate parents' views to government at various levels, including the national level. (Section I).

Discussion of Main Findings

The findings of this study shows that in the UK generally, but particularly in England and Wales, there is a gap between the rhetoric of "parent-power" and the reality of parent involvement in policy-making at school, local authority and national level. There are signs that we are in a time of transition, with patchy enthusiasm for parental involvement at all levels which is apparently growing.

Politicians have talked enthusiastically over recent years about "parent power". John MacGregor, briefly Secretary of State for Education, hailed grant maintained schools as "the Jewel in the Crown of parent power". The rhetoric, however, is very different from the reality. To take John MacGregor's own example: one can only assume that the power he refers to is the power parents have to ballot initially on a school's status. Parents do not retain power to change the GM school's direction, for example by changing

the composition of the governing body once it is established, or by voting to "opt back in" to LEA control.

As other studies have suggested (Section H), there is a real tension between the role of consumer allotted to parents by recent legislation and their desire for a more participative partnership with teachers, heads and politicians at all levels.

As representing parents at any level becomes more complex and demanding, it could increasingly deter less confident parents from coming forward unless they are given a great deal more support and training than they generally get now. If parent representatives are met with obstruction and hostility, as this survey suggests some are, then only the most persistent and self-confident will succeed.

It is not only this survey and other research which leads to the conclusion that parents want participation rather than "power". The main parents' organisations have arrived at similar conclusions. Joan Sallis, president of CASE, says she has little evidence that parent-governors want to run schools though "they do not want it to be a game of pretend either". Margaret Morrissey, ex-president of the NCPTA, claims that she has talked to thousands of parents and has not met one who claims to want parent power and who does not accept that the schools and the teachers are the professionals. "While they do not expect to be talked down to they do not expect to be able to go into schools and tell teachers how to do their jobs."

What parents evidently do want is involvement at the level of the individual child, and representation in policy-making, in other words, an educational partnership and a policy-making voice, rather than any sort of control. What this paper indicates is that they are beginning to gain both, but that there is still a long way to go.

There is little in the UK to compare with the equal classroom partnership the Danes offer parents, with regular democratic consultation on an individual and a class basis. Mechanisms for involving parents in policy-making through the election of parents to governing bodies in all schools in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and through school boards in most schools in Scotland are now in place. In some local authority areas they long predate the 1986 Act which made them statutory.

But that is all that is guaranteed and in practice even that level of statutory involvement may be diluted by lack of candidates willing to stand for election, lack of training for those who do, and the marginalisation of parent participants by head-teachers, other governors and/or LEAs. There is evidence from this study that parents are still at the mercy of the professionals and the politicians who, for different reasons, may not wish to hear the messages they are relaying.

One has only to look abroad, or even just to Scotland, as this survey has done, to see how much more committed many other countries are to genuine participation by parents both at the level of school government and through structures which allow a parental voice to be heard right up to governmental level. In other countries, from Australia to many of our partners in the European Union, there does not seem to be the deep suspicion of parental involvement which still permeates English, if not British, education.

Even so, as this study shows, there are signs of a slowly growing commitment to the involvement of parents in policy-making at school and local authority level as well as through the statutory representation of parents on governing bodies. Some schools are beginning to consult parents as a matter of course about educational and disciplinary issues in a coherent way. Some LEAs are beginning to show a real commitment to consulting parents widely on policy issues through the many different means that this survey uncovered. PTAs and parent-governors are pressing their case to be heard through local federations and associations and most are being taken seriously where they exist.

However, such manifestations of parent power are random, dependent very often on the energy of individual parents and the encouragement of individual professionals and/or politicians. Some have proved short-lived. All, including the statutory parent-governors, are liable to have their influence subverted, over-ridden or ignored by professionals and/or elected representatives who are of that mind. Channels of communication to allow open discussion and consultation between parents and "the system" are not guaranteed, even at school level. Most parental involvement at the policy-making level is a grace-and-favour sort of thing, liable to be discontinued when it suits the rest of the policy-making machine or ignored if it comes up with the answer the politicians do not wish to hear or comes from the "wrong sort" of parent.

There are many questions to be answered if the situation is to be improved. The first is the exact nature of parent representation in a democracy. It has been argued that there is no "parental view", but many views, and that therefore organisations which claim to speak for parents do not have any mandate to do so. Carried to its logical conclusion this argument would deny the possibility of any democratic structures at all in a country where governments are routinely elected on a minority vote.

As far as parents' organisations are concerned, the mandate is clearer the lower down the structure it is to be found, simply on the grounds that representatives can be in closer touch with their electorate. It seems

to be particularly perverse, therefore, to discover that there are still schools where difficulties are put in the way of parent-governors consulting with and reporting back to their parent body. It seems to be generally accepted that they are not delegates to be mandated, but this does not mean that the links between parent-governors and their electorate should not be clear and frequent, and facilitated by the school. This may be an area where some clarification of the law is needed to allow parent-governors to fulfil their role effectively.

There are other problems with the implementation of the 1986 Act on governing bodies. Some parent-governors do not feel they are receiving adequate training for what all say is an increasingly onerous job. In many areas, whole sections of the community are virtually unrepresented on governing bodies.

Even where the involvement of parents is being facilitated by local authorities, parent representatives on education committees also say they often feel isolated and are not necessarily closely in touch with what their supposed constituency is thinking.

Nationally there is no representative voice for parents or parent-governors which has so far proved acceptable to ministers, although the problem may be more to do with the unwelcome messages existing organisations offer than their genuinely undemocratic nature. DFE efforts appear to be concentrating on the establishment of an organisation for governors in general, bringing together the growing number of local governors' federations. Such an organisation would be a step towards a representative voice for parents, but those involved would need to be aware of the New Zealand experience where the School Trustees' Association was asked to provide services which LEAs currently provide here.

A national governors' grouping is not a substitute for an organisation of parents. The NCPTA is dismissed as unrepresentative because it includes teachers in its membership and has a minority of teachers on its national executive. Other groups campaigning for parents' rights, such as CASE, represent the views of their members and do not claim to speak for all parents. Other pressure groups spring up or die as personnel and issues change.

To make further progress it is probably necessary to accept that England (the other constituent parts of the UK have a different and less deferential tradition) is not a deeply democratic country and that there will often be an individual or a group anxious to prevent genuine grass-roots participation in any policy-making process. If it is desirable that the role of parents in policy-making is strengthened at school and local authority level, and if a strong parental voice is desired nationally, and clearly there are a number of organisations and individuals working within the system who believe strongly in these objectives, then a statutory structure may be needed to guarantee consistent and democratic change. Drawing on the experience of parents already involved in the UK as reported by this study, and on the experience of other countries where the democratic involvement of parents in policy-making is longer established, there are various possibilities which might be explored.

Appendix

The Questionnaire Mailed to 137 UK and Associated Education Authorities in May 1993

Representation of Parents in Education Policy-Making Questionnaire

1. Are parents represented in any way on your Education Committee or any of its sub-committees?
2. How are such parents elected/selected/appointed?
3. When was such representation introduced?
4. Does your area have an organisation or organisations for parent-governors specifically, or governors in general?
5. If so, how can they be contacted?
6. How was such an organisation(s) initiated?
7. How is it (are they) funded?
8. Do education authority officers or councillors consult parents' groups in any other way, either formally or informally?
9. In your view, to what extent are parents' views taken into account when formulating policy at authority level?