 **30th September**

**Radisson Blu Hotel**

**80 High Street, Edinburgh**

1. **Present**

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| Tony Rafferty | Aberdeen City |
| Colm O’Riordan (Deputy) | Aberdeen City |
| Bob Jones | Aberdeenshire |
| Sheona Craig  | Clackmannanshire |
| Jill Sloan | Dumfries & Galloway |
| Mel McGill (Deputy) | Dumfries & Galloway |
| Mary O’Connor | Dundee City |
| Joe McLachlan | East Renfrewshire |
| Alison Bowyer | Edinburgh City |
| Margaret Leitch | Falkirk |
| Carrol Herbertson | Fife |
| Joanna Murphy (Chair) | Glasgow |
| Owen Derrick | Inverclyde |
| Barrie Sheppard | North Lanarkshire |
| Charlotte Harrison | Orkney |
| Jason O’Flynn | Perth & Kinross |
| Debbie Newlands | Renfrewshire |
| Morag Leslie Smith  | South Ayrshire |
| Cheryl Burnett | South Lanarkshire |
| Clare Carroll (Deputy) | South Lanarkshire |

**Apologies**

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| Ann MacDonald | Comhairle an Eileanan Siar |
| Jim Campbell | East Ayrshire |
| Gordon MacDonald | East Dunbartonshire  |
| Saddah Aziz | East Lothian |
| Simon Cunningham (Deputy) | East Renfrewshire |
| Richard Porter (Deputy) | Glasgow |
| Fergus Weir | Highland |
| Alex Dunbar | Moray |
| Heather Grossart | North Ayrshire |
| Fiona Nicholson (Vice Chair) | Shetland |
| Eric Lumsden | West Lothian |

**Also in attendance**

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| John Swinney | Education Secretary and Deputy First Minister, Scottish Government |
| Fiona Robertson | Director of Learning, Scottish Government |
| Craig Flunkert | Scottish Government |
| Amy Harron | Scottish Government |
| Kit Wyeth | Head of the National Improvement Framework Unit |
| Ralph Donaldson | Scottish National Standardised Assessment |
| Jacqueline Horsbourgh | Scottish National Standardised Assessment |
| Beata Kohlbek | Currie High School, Edinburgh |
| Clair Halliday | NPFS Admin  |
| Joan Mackenzie (Minutes) | NPFS Admin  |

**2. Open Conversation: John Swinney, Education Secretary and Deputy First Minister & Fiona Robertson, Director of Learning, Scottish Government**

* Joanna welcomed everyone from Scottish Government.
* John Swinney (JS) thanked NPFS and said a lot had happened since the launch of the National Parent Forum’s review of Parental Involvement at Drummond High School. For example: National Improvement Framework (NIF) – parents are an essential part of the education system and they are open to what that space can look like. JS confirmed that Scottish Government is keen to hear from parents and are committed to taking forward the recommendations from the National Parent Forum’s review.
* In the wider education framework, JS stated that there were three principles to the reform agenda:

1. Regional collaboratives. Enhancing collaboration between local authorities is needed because not all local authorities are able to provide added value.  The Scottish Government are working with COSLA to develop a regional collaborative agreement which will aim to secure improvement in education.  By the end of October, regional collaboratives should be up and running.  There will be an audit at the end of January and then every six months.

In terms of the regional improvement agenda, JS confirmed there has been agreement with local authorities in 6 collaboratives - they have approved plans and there is a workforce plan.  The agenda has been shared with government and they await the approval.

2. School empowerment. There has been a lot of innovation to meet needs through Pupil Equity Funding (PEF). The introduction of the PEF is positive, although the principle of devolving decisions means that its implementation may not always be perfect in every single instance. JS agreed with reps that some LAs are exerting more control and influence on the detail than is appropriate. JS confirmed that Scottish Government will legislate to embed the school empowerment agenda, and that the National Parent Forum’s proposals to strengthen parental involvement will be included in the Bill.

3. Strengthening of the teaching profession. There are recruitment challenges. There are more places [for training new teachers] but not all of them have been taken up. There are shortages in specialisms and in general, which is an international problem. JS confirmed that Scottish Government is looking at the attractiveness of the profession and considering whether we have all of the right routes for progression?

JS concluded by stating that there will always be a contested debate about education but that he sees a lot of excellent practice and we need to allow Curriculum for Excellence to take its course.

Discussions with reps followed, including:

*Pupil Equity Funding (PEF)*

* An NPFS rep suggested that guidance for schools is required to ensure the measures will have an impact on the attainment gap. Some concerns were also raised about certain LAs retaining too much control (for example, several instances where PEF funding has been used to promote teachers).

JS confirmed that there is no blanket prohibition about PEF being used for promoted posts if there is sound justification but it should be based on the principle of additionality – adding to core funding/provision rather than replacing what should be core provision.

JS said the NPFS should make use of the government channels available, such as contacting officials who lead on PEF (or via parental involvement policy lead Craig Flunkert) with any concerns. This should include the provision of examples where local authorities may be departing from the guidance.

It was generally acknowledged that schools may not always get funding decisions correct and some mistakes are an acceptable part of the process. JS stated that many head teachers are positive about the additional flexibility and resource but there is understandable apprehension about making effective use of the funding. There is always going to be a role for guidance and assistance from Scottish Government and local authorities.

An NPFS rep asked that we “cut teachers some slack” if they make the odd mistake with the funding, that it will be a learning process.

*Education and Teacher recruitment*

* An NPFS rep commented that there is some frustration with the Strategic Board for Teacher Education because the individual members of the board are overly focused on their own agenda. For instance, the rep disputed the case made by a teacher’s union that the only issue is pay. It was noted that it is difficult to gauge the main reasons for the problems in recruiting teachers as responses differ between organisations etc. Some say the shortage is due to pay and others say it is more about working conditions and work/life balance i.e. the extra pressure and workload imposed on existing teachers due to the shortage of new ones.

JS said he was worried about the inaccurate negative media and political narratives on Scottish education, which could put people off from becoming teachers. Users of education rate it as 85%; whereas observes rate it as 65%. He stated that there has been a great breadth of achievements and we need to get that message across. It was noted that the International Council of Education Advisers (ICEA) visited Scotland the previous week and, whilst they had cautionary words on specific issues, their view overall was a very positive one.

JS also mentioned that the PISA league tables were misleading – there is a growing realisation from those at the top of the league tables [e.g. Singapore] that they have “won the wrong race” and that it’s better to encourage adaptive people rather than telling them what they need to know.

In response to a statement that there should be a bigger push on teacher numbers, JS said the number of Initial Teacher Education places had increased but it’s clear that there are challenges in filling all of those places. He raised the 12 new routes into teaching and the need to ensure quality at the same time as addressing the number of teachers.

An NPFS rep mentioned the financial burden for someone changing careers and completing a year of teacher training, with a suggestion that bursaries could be offered. Other obstacles were also raised, such as the requirement for English teachers to have N5 Maths and the barriers to overseas teachers gaining approval to teach in Scotland.

JS said the Scottish Government would look into bursaries and other flexible ways that do not compromise quality. It was noted that GTCS and local authorities also have a responsibility to take action. JS also referenced the GTCS database of all registered teachers, both practicing teachers and retired, unemployed and employed in other roles. He confirmed that he has asked GTCS to take more proactive steps to locate individuals in these circumstances and to explore what could entice them to return to teaching roles.

In response to a specific example of difficulties in entering teaching jobs in one local authority area (Scottish Borders), JS stated that councils should be taking all necessary steps to recruit teachers. He asked the NPFS to provide the precise details of the example raised, and that he would ensure that officials followed up with the local authority.

*Consultation by Scottish Government*

* It was commented that the recent consultations on governance and fair funding posed questions on issues where very few parents have the knowledge and expertise to comment. The importance of having secure meaningful engagement for the consultation process was raised. It was suggested that the consultations were on the “wrong level” and the volume was very high. JS noted that official consultation documents could be difficult to access and that additional, targeted discussion designed around the needs of the user group in question could be more effective, citing the “Excite-ed” process for the governance review which involved young people.
* There was also a concern raised that pupils in more affluent areas will miss out and that perhaps there should be a baseline funding for all.

JS said the funding consultation was to look at issues / disparity and find out if there was a better / fairer way to do it. PEF is “an additional component” as there is a need for targeted funding, with more direct resource to tackle long-term problems.

*Regional improvement agenda*

* It was noted that the regional improvement agenda is well thought through but a question was raised over monitoring the shared agenda and accountability across local authorities.

JS confirmed that the performance of the collaboratives will be monitored, with external assessments of progress after six months and 12 months to ensure momentum.

*Mental health & wellbeing*

* Issues around mental health and wellbeing were discussed and concerns were raised over anorexia, self-harm, social media bullying and the rise of HIV, as well as anxiety about exams One NPFS rep commented that there is a lack of funding for school counselors.
* Concerns were also raised over sex education in schools and how sexual behaviour is portrayed in social media. There was a general discussion over the understanding of consent.
* The role of CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services) was also raised, as it is important to support the entire family and teachers are not qualified to do this.

There was a general consensus that wellbeing is essential to enable a child/young person to learn. JS said the pace of change in society is a challenge but the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) is equipping young people to deal with an ever-changing world.

JS said there are many challenges for mental health and acknowledged the work of CAMHS, saying it would take time to meet the increase in referrals. He confirmed that the intention is to try to minimize the number of cases that go to CAMHS through offering support and help at earlier stages in the journey; and that we need nurturing schools and communities. He referred to the focus on wellbeing and its central role in achievement. JS made specific reference to a recent very positive example of Lindsay Watt, head teacher at Castleview Primary in Edinburgh, and her emphasis on the importance of developing a “school family”, as well as the work of the Street Theatre Group.

JS referred to the Review of Personal and Social Education and the work of the Inclusive Education working group.

He also mentioned that PEF funding can be used for professional school counsellors and family liaison officers – looking after wellbeing and getting young people into school can help close the gap.

*School clothing grants*

* An NPFS rep referred to inconsistencies with the funding mechanism and criteria for school clothing grants across local authorities. The amount offered differs as well as the minimum income for eligibility. This is resulting in parents going without food.
* It was suggested too that use of the free school meal ratios for PEF is also flawed.

JS acknowledged the difficulties with using free school meal ratios to determine the PEF allocations but that this was the most useful measure available at the moment. He confirmed, however, that he is open to ideas for a better means of agreeing eligibility. In relation to school clothing grants JS confirmed that the criteria adopted is currently a matter for individual local authorities to determine but that he would look into the issue of variation. Joanna Murphy also referred to the work of the local authority Parental Officers Network to try to standardize clothing grant rates.

*Additional Support Needs (ASN) / Additional Support for Learning (ASL)*

* It was commented that progressing the presumption of mainstream is a very live issue with legislation around ASL. Several areas of concern were raised:
- impact on children that do not require additional support. If the main focus is on ASL others can get ignored: “How can you pull them up while recognising the needs of others?”
- training for teachers so they can identify and satisfy the needs of each child: “You can’t presume mainstream until staff can deal with it.”
- some mainstream schools have a very high ratio of complex ASN children because professionals recommend them for their expertise in ASN and parents want to move their children there.
- impact of disruptive behavior, bullying and the need for social and emotional support as well as learning support was also raised.
- availability of support staff (perception is that this resource is reducing within schools but JS stated that the statistics “held up” for support staff).

There was a general acknowledgment that there is support for mainstreaming if it is done effectively. JS acknowledged that it was a complex issue and invited NPFS reps to contribute to the consultation activity on mainstreaming.

It was noted too that Education Scotland are working on their corporate plan and there are opportunities to be included in the process.

*Other topics covered in the open discussion:*

* Languages 1+2. Broadening the policy – variability along curricular models. There is no progress in languages through school – a certain level is achieved in primary but secondary sometimes start from scratch.
* Parental engagement with those with limited English – there are online translators and LAs can provide them. PEF can be used - JS said reps could advise their schools to take this suggestion to their LA as an identifiable need.
* Maths Week Scotland – an NPFS rep noted that the first Maths Week Scotland was very successful, and that secondary maths teachers in particular were enthused by the positivity and enthusiasm generated by the initiative.
* Joanna Murphy noted the work of the International Council of Education Advisers (ICEA) and asked if the NPFS could be involved in the next ICEA visit.

***Further discussion with Fiona Robertson, Director of Learning, Scottish Government***

Following JS’s departure, there was further round table discussion with Fiona Robertson (FR).

Discussion focused on:

* Teacher retention issues and the need for better quality continuing professional development for existing teachers.
* The need to develop better career pathways for teachers.
* Frustrations amongst foreign language teachers who want to teach in Scotand but are prevented from doing so by restrictive registration and qualification requirements.
* Difficulties in engaging with education for parents for whom English is an additional language as well as parents who use British Sign Language (BSL).
* Extensive discussion on additional support needs and the Scottish Government’s “mainstreaming consultation”. FR noted that there is progress being taken forward on this issue and that the initial ASL legislation has been very important. She noted the increasing numbers of children with additional support needs and often greater complexity in those needs. She said that it is important that national policy is supporting access to support and to effective training and additional resources for teachers. An NPFS rep noted the need to keep an eye on the children “in the middle” and to address so-called lower level additional needs as well as the “high end” needs. They referred to the importance of support staff and learning assistants and the challenges presented by reductions in the number of support staff. Noting the extensive discussion on this issue during DFM’s slot and her own slot, FR confirmed that Scottish Government would be happy to convene an additional focused discussion on the question of Additional Support Needs and mainstreaming.
* The issue of mental health in schools and the need to ensure effective support is in place. FR noted the impact of the film “Resilience” and the increased focus on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). It was commented that the film should be viewed by policy officials, MSPs and others to raise their awareness of ACEs

ACTIONS:

* NPFS to follow up with Scottish government to convene a discussion between NPFS reps and the relevant Scottish Government policy leads (Laura Meikle and team) on concerns around the presumption of mainstreaming.
* NPFS to provide Scottish Government officials (David Roy) with further details re. the Scottish Borders teacher recruitment issue.
* Scottish Government officials to consider the extent to which there is variation across local authorities in the eligibility criteria for school clothing grants.
* Scottish Government officials (Judith Tracey) to ensure that NPFS are provided with an opportunity to meet and discuss with the ICEA when they next visit Scotland.

**3. Minutes and Matters Arising**

* The minutes for the previous Forum meeting were proposed and seconded by Debbie Newlands (Renfrewshire) and Alison Bowyer (Edinburgh).
* Joanna asked that reps to contact the office if they require additional copies of the Review.
* The NPFS Conference will be on Saturday, 10th March in a venue in the central belt. The DFM will be the keynote speaker.

ACTIONS:

* A group will be set up with the following reps who have children in assessment years: Mary (P7), Joe (P7), Tony (S3), Jason (P7), Margaret (P1&P7), Jill (P7), Joanna (S3), Mel (P7), Clare (P7), Joan (P7).
* Office - Distribute information on N5 changes and timeline again (as provided by Andy Bruce after last meeting).
* All reps - promote the NIF survey.

**4. Kit Wyeth, Head of the National Improvement Framework (NIF) Unit,**

 **Ralph Donaldson & Jacqueline Horsbourgh, Scottish National
 Standardised Assessment (SNSA)**

* Kit Wyeth gave a presentation on the development of the National Improvement Framework and the roll-out of the new standardised assessments. (This presentation was made available in full so has been sent out separate from these minutes.)

Discussions included:
- whether there is a need for NIF to be reviewed on an annual basis as there can be too much consultation at times.
- issues around measuring the attainment gap
- problems of using Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) and postcodes.
- communication problems and issues. The NIF Unit will do more to get communications out, including encouraging local authorities and schools.

* Ralph Donaldson gave a presentation on the design of the Scottish National Standardised Assessments (SNSA), comparing the old with the new and giving an overview of the advantages of the new standardised assessments. Jacqueline Horsburgh then went on to present the outputs and reports.

Discussions included:
- reps were concerned that parents and/or the media could request results under the Freedom of Information Act (FOI) and put too much weight to the results, without taking the other measures into account.
- training, which had started already (Phase A: working the system and Phase B: interpreting the results and other assessments bought in).
- issues over comparing a child to their classmates and against a national average. Many reps felt strongly that the presentation of placing a child on a spectrum of high/medium/low was unnecessary and thought this information could be communicated much more sensitively. Although the material is geared towards teachers, there was a concern that parents and/or the child could see this at some point. Joanna was particularly disappointed that this graph was still in place, as she had previously communicated these concerns at the NIF Strategic Group.

**5. Reps National Work Roundtable**

* The reps provided a quick update, mentioning events where they were looking for support:
- University workshops on literacy are looking for parents to attend. (Clare)
- Feedback on Fair Funding is required. (Office)
- Daily Mile school case study (Charlotte - Barrie agreed to arrange this)
* There are already two agenda items for the next meeting:
- Clair will be going over the requirements of the new data protections legislation.
- Liam Stevenson and Jordan Daly, Time for Inclusive Education (TIE).

ACTION:

* Joanna recommended that reps have a look at the TIE website in advance of the next meeting.

**The next meeting will be on Saturday 18th November 2017 (Glasgow).**

**Vacancies**

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|  | Angus |
|  | Argyll and Bute |
|  | Borders |
|  | Moray |
|  | Midlothian |