

Summary of the HPCP Annual Conference 2018

Saturday 17 November 2018, Highland Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness

- 1. Attendance.** Approximately 45 parents attended, representing about 35 Schools and 15 Associated Schools Groups (ASGs). At least another 12 schools had sent apologies.
- 2. Welcome and Introduction.** With no HPCP Chair in place, and the Vice Chair overseas and thus unable to attend, the HPCP Secretary (Mark Gunn) chaired the Conference. He welcomed the parent attendees and various other participants from the Highland Council (HC) (Officers and Councillors), RespectMe, National Parent Forum for Scotland (NPFS), High Life Highland (HLH) and Developing the Young Workforce (DYW). The Secretary provided a summary of the key HPCP activities in 2018, noting participation in the HC Steering Group for the programme on Sustainable Education in Highland Communities (SEiHC), continued successful engagement with HC as part of the Care, Learning and Housing Committee through Sam Blyth, and the detailed submission to the Scottish Government consultation on the (now shelved) Education Bill. Support and advice had also been given to many Parent Councils in Highland, helping to make life a bit easier for those parents wanting to work with their schools to improve education. The young Highland Author Kelsey McRae was then given a special welcome as the opening speaker.
- 3. Wellbeing: Kelsey McRae (Author) and Lisa Armstrong (RespectMe).** Kelsey gave a powerful presentation on the recent reality of being on the receiving end of bullying in a Highland school, and the absolute need to robustly confront and stop bullying behaviour. Lisa Armstrong provided some additional information in preparation for the afternoon workshop on Wellbeing.
- 4. Sustainable Education in Highland Schools.**
 - 4.1.** Sandra Campbell, HC Interim Director of Care and Learning set the context, and Barry Northedge (the SEiHC Programme Manager for HC) then gave a detailed overview of the SEiHC Programme so far. The Farr ASG “North Coast Campus” project was used as an example of what had happened under the old Management of Schools (MoS) approach, and how the lessons from that were being applied to SEiHC. It was clear that many mistakes had been made in the MoS approach, with preconceived ideas, communication breakdowns, and confusion as to what consulting parents actually meant, not least as the wishes of parents were sometimes diametrically opposed to the HC intent. SEiHC was therefore going forward with staff recruited to handle communication and community engagement, and five clear workstreams (WS) to cover Achieving High Quality Educational Outcomes (WS1), Communications (WS2), Management Structures and School Groupings (WS3), Support for Schools (ie, school offices etc, WS4), and Workforce Planning and Development (staff careers, WS5).
 - 4.2.** There were many challenges to creating a truly sustainable model of education in the Highlands, for example how to assure good quality education in all localities and all subjects, and how to provide an attractive career choice for teachers in all grades. The need to harness ICT for virtual learning was understood, with some basic connectivity issues still needing to be overcome, but it had been decided that it was better to develop capabilities, like the Chromebook rollout, as quickly as possible even if sometime the networks struggled to cope. Affordability was an important point of a sustainable approach, with the focus on ensuring best use of scarce resources, and it was right that parents wanted to know how money was being spent, and what changes were needed to manage budgets. Questions and comments from the floor made it clear that parents remained very concerned about how MoS had been run, and how SEiHC is now being managed, and the results of the SEiHC Programme Review, to be presented in January 2019, would be closely watched by the HPCP and parents.

4.3. Sarah Chapman, the SEiHC Comms Officer, gave a brief overview of how SEiHC communications with schools and parents would work, and advised that in 2019 a dedicated webpage on SEiHC would be launched to make it easier to find all the information parents will need. Councillor Baxter, Chair of the HC Care, Learning and Housing Cttee, also offered points on SEiHC matters.

5. National Parent Forum for Scotland. NPFS Chair, Joanna Murphy, gave a brief overview of what the NPFS does ahead of more detailed discussions in the afternoon workshop. She commented on how important it was for PCs and groups like the HPCP to contribute to consultations like the one on the proposed Education (Scotland) Bill. The Scottish Government had been taken aback by the strength and depth of comments from Parents, not least from Highland PCs and the HPCP which encompassed over 10% of the total organisation-based responses. In short, the voice of Highland parents had been loud, well-informed and influential.

6. Chief Executive Officer, Highland Council. Mrs Donna Manson, the new HC CEO, gave her views on how education in Highland should evolve, and what the key issues and priorities were. Councillor McKinnon (HC Budget Leader) supported her in this presentation with some details on the budget issues. Reducing bureaucracy so that teachers and schools concentrated on the essential, and did not over-plan or over-report, were key concerns. Effective action was needed in a range of areas to make Highland the choice for public sector employment, and this would need positive messages to stand alongside concrete improvements. The pupil-produced video about Highland was a good example of positive marketing of the region and the quality of life it offered, including to teachers. Immediate in-year budgetary challenges had needed urgent action, hence the decision to limit 'discretionary' spending until greater clarity was available on exactly what was and was not discretionary, and the temporary freeze on recruitment to ensure that best value for money was in fact being achieved. The SEiHC Programme was an important piece of work and, not least as an educator, Mrs Manson was determined that HC would do the work to get that right. Mrs Manson, Cllr McKinnon and Cllr Baxter continued discussions over lunch with various delegates.

7. Annual General Meeting. After lunch a brief HPCP AGM was held; separate minutes have been issued for that and are available on the HPCP Website.

8. Afternoon Workshops. Four workshops were held in the afternoon, covering Wellbeing (facilitated by Lisa Armstrong of RespectMe), the NPFS (NPFS Chair Joanna Murphy), Skills and Comms for Parent Councils (Mark Richardson and Mike Jones of High Life Highland Adult and Community Learning), and ICT in Learning (Chromebooks) (Andy McCallum, HC ICT Development). Andy Maxtone of Developing the Young Workforce provided advice during the lunch break.

9. Date of Next Conference. The next HPCP Annual Conference was provisionally scheduled for Saturday 16 November 2019.

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Mark Gunn,
HPCP Secretary.