

# Backchat



SPTC Newsletter

**Scottish Parent Teacher Council**, the independent voice for parents, is a national organisation. It has been serving parents' groups in schools for 60 years.

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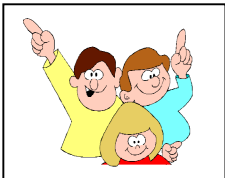
§ParentLine

## It's your SPTC!

It came as a shock recently when someone said that they thought SPTC was an official body, part of the Scottish Government. No way - and it is clearly time to set the record straight!

SPTC is a totally independent, membership body, owned and fully funded by its members - and that means you. It was set up by a group of enthusiastic parents in 1947 and we are about to celebrate our 60<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference at a big event in the Scottish Parliament (see the back page).

Whilst day-to-day matters are carried out by an office staff of three, SPTC's policy is determined by a Board of Directors, all of whom are either parents of children currently at school or teachers. They are drawn from member PTAs or Parent Councils throughout Scotland and appointed at the AGM in November for a three-year term of office - and you can get involved!



This is the time of year when we seek nominations for directors to be appointed at the AGM (November 8<sup>th</sup> this year). With this *Backchat* we attach a leaflet which explains the role of a SPTC director as well as a nomination form.

The rules simply state that there can be a maximum of one parent and one teacher nominated by each **member** organisation, with a total of 20 directors in all. If that sounds pretty random, it has always served SPTC well. Our current directors come from all over the country - from Moray in the North East down to Dumfries in the South West - and from different types of school - rural & urban, primary & secondary, small & large. We also have a number of directors with particular experience of additional support needs.

So that's who we are; in terms of what we do, we support our members, contribute to Government policy committees, give evidence to the Scottish Parliament and speak to the Press. We are a National Body for Parents and you are already part of it. We are here for you. SPTC is yours!

## Consultation on new exams

The consultation on changes to SQA exams has now been launched and **responses** have to be in **by 31<sup>st</sup> October**. The Government is preparing an information leaflet and DVD for distribution to all Parent Councils. The full consultation is available online at [www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/06/09084232/0](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/06/09084232/0)

## Features of the new curriculum

The main features of the new proposals are:

**S1-S3** will be a general course for all pupils. It will feature cross-curricular teaching, and teaching through "experiences". It will be possible for youngsters to begin Skills for Work courses but not other exam courses.

**S4 – S6** will be the time when youngsters will study for qualifications. The current proposals mean that there will be time in the school year for youngsters to study a total of five exam courses in S4, but these five courses can be either five whole courses or some whole courses plus a number of half courses which together add up to a total of five courses. (We assume this means that youngsters will make subject choices at the end of S3). Youngsters will still continue to study non-exam areas like personal and social education, RE and PE as well.

### The new exam structure

- The new exam structure will start with **Access** at the lowest level, move on through a new **General** qualification (replacing both Standard Grade General and Intermediate 1) and **Advanced General** (replacing SG Credit and Int 2) to **Higher** and **Advanced Higher**.
- All qualifications will be available in a range of subjects, as at present.
- The courses will consist of units with youngsters having to pass the units as well as a course exam at the end of the year in order to get the qualification.
- The Government is consulting on whether the unit passes should be graded e.g. A, B, C, etc and whether the graded results should contribute to the final grade. (At present grades for the Intermediate and Higher courses are based solely on the final course exam.)
- The Government is consulting on whether there should be a second exam diet, in the winter.
- The Government is keen that the most able youngsters bypass the General qualifications and move to straight to Highers after S3. They are therefore keen that youngsters should have recognition for what they have achieved and are consulting on whether courses should be graded down to “E” or whether there should be a fall-back award.

### Literacy and Numeracy

The Government also proposes that all youngsters should take compulsory literacy and numeracy exams, possibly at the end of S3 or maybe in S4. There will be no separate literacy and numeracy courses; instead teaching for these qualifications will be done by all subject teachers as part of their normal teaching programmes. These qualifications will be available at Access, General and Advanced General level.

- Numeracy will cover basic number, time, money as well as statistics and probability.
- Literacy will cover communication, analysis as well as use of language.

SPTC are in the process of constructing a response and we will make it available online by the beginning of October. Meanwhile, please get involved and if you have any queries, please get in touch.

### Safeguarding rural schools

Another important consultation, this time on safeguarding rural schools and strengthening the consultation process for all school closures is also available on Parentzone (click Rural Schools on the front page) [www.ltscotland.org.uk/parentzone](http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/parentzone) Responses have to be in by **19<sup>th</sup> September**.

There are two parts.

**Part 1 applies only to rural schools.** This proposes that Local Authorities should have a presumption against closing rural schools and should give very high consideration to the needs of the local community. In our view, the proposals give community needs priority over the needs of the children for a good education; we feel that this balance is wrong. We think that, as with all school closures, the main consideration should be whether it will result in children receiving a better education.



**Part 2** of the consultation **applies to all schools** that are faced with closure and it lays out a more stringent and meaningful consultation process amongst other things, it requires the local authorities to:-

- publish a statement setting out the educational benefit of closure
- issue a consultation paper
- run the consultation for at least six weeks of term time
- provide a way for inaccuracies in the consultation proposal to be corrected
- extend the list of consultees
- hold a public meeting
- issue a report on consultation responses

In general we support these proposals as it is important for everyone to understand exactly what is involved in a consultation, what the process will be and then be satisfied that it has been carried out fairly.

Our draft response is currently available on our website [www.sptc.info](http://www.sptc.info) If you have any comments please email us giving your name and school.

## Child Protection

The story so far - those of you who have been around for a few years will know that we have gone through several stages with the child protection legislation.

Initially, when the Protection of Children (Scotland) Act was introduced, we worked with officials in the Scottish Government and from the Central Registered Body in Scotland (CRBS) to establish exactly what it would mean for PTAs and similar parents groups (this pre-dates Parent Councils). With the officials' approval, we produced a straight forward leaflet explaining when people needed a disclosure check and when they did not. In general, people needed a disclosure check if they were in a pre-planned, childcare position, but people who simply found themselves in charge of children on an *ad hoc* basis or who were in school and not in charge of children did not.

However, towards the end of 2007, there was a new interpretation of the legislation and this identified that anyone who did anything on a regular basis in a school, regardless of whether children were present or not, was in a child care position and needed a disclosure check simply by being in a school. This included Parent Council members who were attending regular committee meetings in school, but not those attending regular committee meetings in the local pub or someone's house.

This requirement went well beyond what legislators had ever intended, so the Government set about introducing an amendment, which would bring the actual legal position back into line with what everyone believed it to be, i.e. only those in actual and pre-planned childcare positions should be checked. This change has now been approved by Parliament and we are now pleased to re-issue our explanatory leaflet which we had to pull in December when the new interpretation was first identified. The leaflet has been revised and checked by officials.

However, along the way a number of other issues have been identified.

### 1) Disclosure checks can be used for more than one post

We initially understood – and so advised – that disclosures were specific to a particular post and that a disclosure obtained for one post/position could not be used for a different one. We now know that where both parties agree (i.e. the person who holds the disclosure certificate and the body making the appointment), an existing disclosure certificate can be used (assuming it was issued reasonably recently, say within the last two years). If you are setting up a club and a teacher is to run that club, then you can accept his/her disclosure certificate as long as you both agree to this.

### 2) Meaning of “Normal”

The legislation is quite specific: it is those whose **normal** duties include childcare who should get disclosure, but “normal” is not defined. In England, where there is similar legislation, the concept is defined by frequency i.e. more than twice a month. Scottish legislators have resisted giving “normal” a frequency definition, preferring to leave the concept slightly vague and open to interpretation. However, it is helpful to bear the English definition in mind, so one disco a term would not place anyone in a situation of having *normal* duties that included childcare.

### 3) Registering with CRBS

Volunteers who need a disclosure check can have these done free of charge through CRBS. However, this requires the appointing group (PTA or Parent Council) to register with CRBS and, initially, this process was extremely complex, designed with large organisations in mind. CRBS recognised the problem and has worked hard to make the procedure as simple and straightforward as possible. Over the summer, we have been working with them to produce a short leaflet that explains this new, streamlined procedure and we're pleased to attach it with this *Backchat*. Further copies are available by post from the office as well as on our website [www.sptc.info](http://www.sptc.info)

# SPTC's 60th Birthday



The plans for SPTC's 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Conference are now in place.

The Date is **Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> November 2008**

The Venue is **The Scottish Parliament**

We are totally delighted that Aileen Campbell, MSP has agreed to sponsor our event so that we are able to hold it in the Scottish Parliament. It will be in Committee Room 1 with the normal Committee table and swivel chairs still in situ and available for us to use. We plan to run a free draw to allocate these seats to delegates.

The General Theme will be **The Past, the Present and the Future**

- **The Past:** the Conference will start at 10.30 am (registration from 10.00 am onwards) with a brief history of SPTC. This will be accompanied by a visual display of material drawn from our archive. Throughout the day, in a separate committee room, there will be an exhibition of pictures and documents reflecting SPTC's history.
- **The Present:** **Adam Ingram, MSP** Minister for Children and Young People will speak on education and parents in the present.
- **The Future:** **Walter Humes** of the University of the West of Scotland will speak on education and parents in the future.

## Lunch

We will then have an extended celebratory lunch when we will be joined by invited guests and delegates will have the opportunity to join a short tour of the Parliament building.

## AGM

The final part of the day will be the AGM.

The good news is the event is entirely FREE; the bad news is that places are strictly limited with only TWO allowed per member school. Security arrangements mean that we will have to close registration early and no-one who is not registered will be let in. Similarly, delegates have to pre-register for the tours, which are also free.

Registration forms will be coming out the week beginning 8<sup>th</sup> September with registration closing on 13<sup>th</sup> October.

## Mobile Adventure Course

A good way for PTAs and Parent Councils to spend their funds is by bringing the Mobile Adventure Centre (M.A.C.) into school. It is a twelve-obstacle assault course designed to help children exercise and have fun at the same time. It is suitable for children from P1 onwards and can be adjusted in height to suit all. A full safety talk and demonstration is given to all participants beforehand and the assault course is fully manned at all times. M.A.C. has £2,000,000 of Public Liability Insurance.

The assault course can just be used as a fun activity/treat for the children or it can be used as a fundraiser, with pupils being sponsored for each obstacle. For more information:

**Tel:** Lee Denholm on **01555 759291** or **email: MOBILEADVENTURE@aol.com**

## Help for Parents

Parents can often feel very isolated when faced with a difficult situation and it always appears that everyone else is coping brilliantly. Children 1<sup>st</sup> run the confidential helpline ParentLine for just such occasions. The number is 0808 800 2222. The advisers are used to hearing about and helping with all sorts of problems but the most common ones are challenging and demanding behaviour, bullying, family relationships and problems relating to separation.