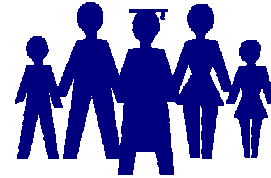


Backchat



SPTC Newsletter

Scottish Parent Teacher Council, the independent voice for parents, is the national organisation for Parents' Associations and Parent Teacher Associations. *Backchat* is sent to all members.

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Issue 97

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Countdown to Parent Councils

All the meetings and preparation are nearly over and Parent Councils are set to come into existence in August, so here's a final check list.

1. First, it is very important to know - and ensure - that what happens in your school is what the parents at your school want to happen. The constitution and membership of the Parent Council are for **all** the parents to decide. No one, not even the headteacher or local authority, can tell you what to do. The only time the local authority can veto your constitution is if it breaks the law in some way.
2. One of the decisions that parents can make is to keep the PTA quite separate and operating exactly as it is at present. This means no change for you and the Parent Council will be set up independently.
3. Alternatively, parents may decide that the functions currently carried out by the PTA should be undertaken by the new Parent Council or by a special events and fundraising subcommittee. If this is your decision, then the existing PTA has to be formally disbanded as we explained in the last *Backchat*. One member helpfully identified a wee problem and then the solution.
4. **The problem:** Their constitution requires that the PTA hands all its remaining funds to the school when it is disbanded. This means that the money could not be handed on to their new Parent Council's fundraising committee.
5. **The solution:** at the EGM (or AGM) called to disband the PTA, they first passed a resolution to change the constitution allowing any remaining funds to be handed on to a successor parents group at the school.
6. **Insurance:** the new Parent Councils will need public liability insurance as they have no cover from the school or local authority for their events.
7. If the Parent Council is to be quite separate from the PTA, then it will need to seek its own insurance. It cannot "share" the PTA cover. However, it can get insurance from SPTC.
8. If your PTA is disbanding and the Parent Council will be the only parent body at your school (subcommittees do not count as separate bodies) then you can transfer your existing insurance to the Parent Council for the rest of this calendar year. However, we need to know that you intend doing this so that we can make the formal transfer.
9. If your local authority tells you that it will provide insurance cover for the Parent Council, **check that you will still be able to do your normal range of activities** – provide home baking, run discos, have bouncy castles etc. – **without any restrictions**.

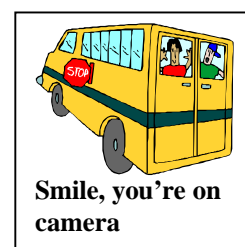
10. Finally, if your PTA is currently a charity (this only applies to a very few), you cannot pass your charitable status on to the Parent Council. If you decide to disband the PTA and set up a subcommittee, you will have to inform the Charity regulator, OSCR, of your intention to disband and get their approval.

The Cinderella Service?

One of the issues we are asked to comment on frequently is school transport. You may be aware that where a youngster lives at a distance from the school (the precise distances are detailed in legislation), school transport is provided free. However, “free” does not necessarily mean top quality. Indeed, in the words of one SPTC Director, it is often a “Cinderella” service with cost a very important factor in determining the quality of provision, as many local authorities claim they are underfunded by central government and they have to provide transport on a shoestring.

Authorities organise transport by taking out a contract with a local bus company who, in turn, have an obligation to meet the terms of that contract but do no more than that. The lack of money often means that the bus companies will provide older buses for school pupils with the newer models kept for luxury tours and the like. The needs of users, (pupils and their parents) often don't feature in these contracts and the terms rarely allow for supervision, so the bus driver is expected to keep control.

In a recent survey, bad behaviour and bullying were highlighted as problems by bus companies, local authorities, pupils and parents alike. It also suggested that CCTV on buses would improve the situation and that this was a more practical solution than adult supervision. One authority, West Lothian, does have CCTV on all its buses; not only has this resulted in improved behaviour and less bullying, it even pays for itself because it cuts vandalism.



SPTC has decided to campaign for universal CCTV on all school transport and we want to hear from you about schemes to improve school transport in your area. Contact us by email, phone or post.

The Qualifications Mystery Tour!

May/June is the exam season. Parents worry, pupils worry and teachers worry that everything will go OK. But what exactly are all the exams that pupils do these days and how do they fit together? The picture is very complicated with some youngsters doing Standard Grades, some doing “Intermediates” and some taking the new Skills for Work courses. Some youngsters start exams in S3 whilst others wait until S4. Some do everything at school, whilst others go off to the local college for part of the time. It's not only complicated, it is also hard to know how it all fits together. Fortunately help is at hand.

First, let's start with the various qualification options;

Standard Grades (SGs): these have been around for about twenty years; they come at 3 levels – Foundation, General and Credit; they are available in the traditional school subjects and are usually sat at the end of S4 although some schools now offer the exams in S3.

National Qualifications (NQs): this is the overall name for a range of courses at different levels. Starting at the lowest and going to the top, these are Access, Intermediate 1, Intermediate 2, Higher, Advanced Higher. Youngsters tend to take the Access and Intermediate Courses in S4 and then move up a level in S5 and another level in S6.

Skills for Work courses: these are new NQ courses and they are in the process of being developed at the various levels. They cover a range of more vocational subjects including Early Education and Childcare, Financial Services, and Construction. Youngsters may take the course in college or partly in college and partly in school. They differ from other NQs in that there is no final exam; instead youngsters have to pass four internal assessments.

The complicated picture continues once youngsters move beyond school. If they go to College, they may take Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) which come at five levels, Higher

National Certificates (HNCs) or Higher National Diplomas (HNDs). These courses are vocational in that they focus on the needs for employment but they lead to very well respected qualifications and cover a large range of subjects including sciences, languages and health care. To find out more go on the website of your local college. Moreover, someone with an appropriate HND can often move into year 3 of a degree at a University. Meanwhile, youngsters who go to University may do a degree course but then follow it up with a Diploma, Masters Degree or Ph.D.

If that is the range of qualifications, how do they fit together? All the qualifications have been carefully developed so that they fit into the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). This shows the level of all qualifications. It starts at level 1 for Access and goes all the way up to level 12 for a Ph.D. It is easy to see at a glance what fits where so, for example, although they are all very different qualifications, SVQ level 2, Standard Grade Credit and Intermediate 2 qualifications are all at SCQF level 5, whilst Higher is the same as SVQ 3 at SCQF level 6 (see below). For more information go to www.scqf.org.uk

Table of main qualifications			
SCQF level	SQA National Units, Courses and Group Awards	Higher Education	Scottish Vocational Qualifications
12		Doctorates	
11		Masters	SVQ 5
10		Honours Degree Graduate Diploma/Certificate*	
9		Ordinary Degree Graduate Diploma/Certificate*	
8		Higher National Diploma Diploma in Higher Education	SVQ 4
7	Advanced Higher	Higher National Certificate Certificate in Higher Education	
6	Higher		SVQ 3
5	Intermediate 2 Credit Standard Grade		SVQ 2
4	Intermediate 1 General Standard Grade		SVQ 1
3	Access 3 Foundation Standard Grade		
2	Access 2		
1	Access 1		

* These qualifications are differentiated by volume of outcomes and may be offered at either level

Your Questions Answered

Our PTA is disbanding so that we can join the Parent Council. We aren't keen to hand over all the money that we have raised this year and would prefer to spend it on improving our school playground. Do you have any ideas?

The organisation that can give you a lot of advice and support is Grounds for Learning which is the Scottish school grounds charity. Not only will they give you ideas for involving parents and the local community (for example by having a "skills audit" of parents to see if you have any budding builders or gardeners) they will also provide you with advice on organisations that can help with technical support. Have a look at their website: www.gflscotland.org.uk or telephone: 01786 445922

Many schools paint games in the play-ground, but check that youngsters both know how to play them, and actually want to! Another really good idea that we saw at a local primary school was a “graffiti board” in the playground. This is essentially a long blackboard which youngsters can write/draw on during break. Then there was the climbing wall, quiet corner and so on. For more ideas, look on the Success Stories website which can be accessed via the SPTC website, www.sptc.info

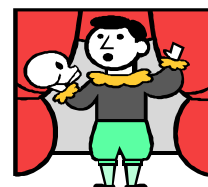


Another great idea for spending money is to organise a visit from a theatre company. Here are details about two of the favourites:

Hopscotch Theatre Company has been touring around primary schools the length and breadth of Scotland for more than 18 years. Their shows are suitable for P1 – P7 and run for approximately 55 minutes. Their current production is “Saint Andrew & the Story of Scotland’s Flag” –“battles, bones and a cross in the sky, that’s how we got the flag that we fly”. For more details: phone: 0141 440 2025; email: info@hopscotchtheatre.com Website: www.hopscotchtheatre.com

Live Wire Productions is a mobile theatre-in-education company, promoting health, citizenship and environmental issues. Their productions cover everything from nutrition to personal safety to climate change.

Contact them by tel: 01224 592777 email: info@livewireproductions.org.uk



SPTC MEETINGS

Parent Council troubleshooting meetings

In the Autumn term we plan to run a series of regional meetings to help new parent councils resolve any difficulties and swap ideas with each other on the best way forward. If you’d like to host such a meeting (i.e. just provide the venue and refreshments, we’ll do the rest) please contact the office by phone, letter or email.

Annual Conference

This is early notice that our 2007 annual conference will focus on bullying, including cyber bullying. It will be on 10th November in Moray House Campus, Edinburgh. We are hoping to secure the services of Andrew Mellor, the former Director of the Anti-Bullying Network who has vast experience and expertise in this field.

In the afternoon, there will be a Parent Council trouble-shooting session picking up on the concept of the regional meetings.

Full details and booking forms will be available in September.

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