

Scottish Women's Convention response to:

The Scottish Government:

**Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006 -Updated Statutory Guidance
Consultation**

June 2020

Introduction

The Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act was passed in 2006. This set out the rights of parents to be involved and engaged with their children's education. This new draft guidance explains the purpose of the legislation and the duties placed upon Education Authorities (EAs), schools and headteachers to involve and engage parents in their children's learning and the life and work of our schools. The Scottish Government (SG) invites views from parental organisations, head teachers, local authorities, third sector organisations, professional bodies, members of the public and any other organisation or individual with an interest.

The Scottish Women's Convention (SWC)

The Scottish Women's Convention (SWC) is funded to engage with women throughout Scotland in order that their views might influence public policy. The SWC uses the views of women to respond to a variety of Parliamentary, Governmental and organisational consultation papers at both a Scottish and UK level.

The Scottish Women's Convention engages with women using numerous communication channels including Roadshow events, Thematic Conferences and regional contact groups. This submission provides the views of women and reflects their opinions and experiences in a number of key areas relevant to women's equality.

Alongside the statutory guidance document, we have provided key principles which we think should underpin practice and approach. Do you agree that key principles should be provided within the final approved version of the guidance?

Yes.

We are interested in your thoughts on the Principles, please provide your comments below.

Inclusion of headline Principles is crucial to highlighting and complementing the specifics of the guidance and relevant legislation. Ensuring a clear strategic framework which seeks to underpin both practice and approach is key. In line with this, provision of in-depth and detailed guidance clearly aligned with relevant Principles that can be followed should continue to include the following:

- **Empowerment:** Ensuring parents and guardians feel they can approach schools and other stakeholders with knowledge and accessibility to relevant legislation with a remit to heighten parental involvement and engagement.
- **Partnership:** That parents are clear of the nature of their role in heightening educational development of their child. This should be laid out clearly in a sensitive manner which accounts for opportunities for those who may not have the time for involvement due to structural inequalities.
- **Openness and Accessibility:** All relevant stakeholders are aware of the transparent processes for involvement in children's education. This should include an emphasis on harder to reach families, marginalised groups and those who are at risk of socio-economic inequalities.
- **Flexibility:** EAs and Parent Councils have clear cut approaches and models of best practice to ensure these can be readily adapted to meet individual family's needs at a local level. This should also include an assurance that parents feel comfortable in coming forth to explain difficulties they may be facing and are regularly consulted.

We want the guidance to be clear – to be easy to understand and written in plain English. How clear did you find the guidance?

Somewhat clear.

We want the guidance to be comprehensive. In other words, we want it to explain all the relevant legal duties and powers and to expand on what those duties and powers should mean in practice. Did you think that the guidance covered all of the information that should be covered?

It covers most of what is needed.

An important task for the guidance is to explain what is meant by the term's parental involvement and parental engagement. Do you think that the guidance explains the terms of parental involvement and parental engagement in an accurate way?

Yes.

Do you have any comments about the way we have defined the terms parental involvement and parental engagement?

Inclusion of a “Jargon Buster” after each section within the guidance is to be commended, specifically the way in which this highlights the definitions of both parental involvement and engagement. This provides an effective foundation whereby all stakeholders can be made aware of the contextual terms in relation to educational policies and procedures.

It should be made clear at the very outset and throughout that both terms are not to be misconstrued as exclusionary by use of the word “parent”. Failure to take account of this at a practical level may result in the absence of certain carers and guardians who are in fact covered by the definitions. Given the lengthiness of the guidance, there may be further issues where stakeholders miss out on these definitions and their use in the relevant sections. To counteract negative implications, these should be clearly laid out within any additional documents as well as ensuring communication to encourage active participation with individuals that are covered underneath the terms.

We have sought to modernise and strengthen the guidance. Please provide your comments on each section of the guidance and on the guidance document as a whole.

Section A – Introduction. Please explain your view.

Women and their families are at risk of “*falling through the cracks*” where parental involvement and engagement may not always be a feasible option. This is often due to several inequality issues such as the disproportionate burden of caring responsibilities or unsociable working hours in sectors where women tend to dominate. Where this manifests itself, there may be a number of negative consequences if this is not addressed in a sensitive and high-quality manner.

Women may feel guilt, worry or anxiety where they believe that it is due to such issues that there may be damage to their own children's educational prospects and development. Given this, guidance should also outline from the outset the appropriate appointment of resources and training for parents where they are unable to actively partake. This should also include information regarding the corresponding roles played by other relevant stakeholders to maximise use of parental involvement and fill gaps where needed.

**Section B – Involving and Engaging Parents: what does it mean and why is it important?
Please explain your view.**

The importance of this legislation and what it entails for women both in their role as primary care providers and as other relevant stakeholders cannot be underestimated. This is particularly pertinent for women and their families where there is high risk of structural and income related inequalities. The emphasis must be on ensuring that these families are not forgotten. Utilising involvement and engagement of parents should include:

- The full criteria for parental involvement within different contexts of the school and home setting. This should detail the relevant legislation, duties, and guidance as well as recognition of the role that this plays in supporting children's advancement and development.
- An emphasis on the lived experiences of women and their families in a representative way with due attention where socio-economic inequalities may be a factor.
- Toolkits for best practice where women can choose from a range of localised options to engage with parental involvement initiatives that reflects theirs and their family's individual needs.
- Encouragement and resources for families to feel actively involved in their child's education with an emphasis on the importance of their own role in encouraging development in a successful way.
- Ensuring constant and continuous communication for parents with an emphasis on those who present with issues or protected characteristics to ensure they feel included. This should also make use of a variety of means such as electronic communications and other approaches in situations where parents may not be able to attend regular meetings of Parent Councils.
- That any changes to guidance or legislation is clearly communicated to all parents in a clear manner. This could also include offering opportunities for training and involvement on a regular basis in regard to this.

Section C – Guidance for Education Authorities (EAs). Please explain your view.

In depth directions and examples of best practice for EAs and their approaches to parental involvement should be clearly laid out within the guidance and other relevant materials as needed. This should include toolkits for how EAs best consult and collaborate with all relevant stakeholders and with due emphasis given to equality and diversity.

In regard to the exercising of duties under the Act, it is imperative that appropriate funding streams are made available to EAs where needed in order to provide required resources to ensure a nationalised structure. This should be done on the basis that EAs

are best situated to use their own discretion and localised knowledge to place resources where it is most needed at this level. Guidance should include:

- An emphasis on the connection of high-quality delivery of outcomes with established steps and processes for all parents including marginalised groups. This should detail best practices to identify hard to reach families and promotion of the Act and guidance to such individuals.
- Clear guidance on consulting with all parents and other relevant stakeholders that is representative of the community including individual school's needs.
- An emphasis on the differing structures of rural and urbanised EA areas and how these barriers can be overcome when communicating guidance at localised levels.
- That EAs have regard to any extra burdens that are placed on already over worked teachers and their involvement within the context of the legislation. This should include ensuring provision of adequate resources and training are allocated for such circumstances.

Section D – Guidance for Parent Councils. Please explain your view.

The need for active encouragement for the involvement and cooperation of all parents is imperative. This must fully take account of instances where some may feel disinclined or unaware of how to participate due to issues such as language barriers or where they may feel intimidated. This can often result in a Parent Council structure which may be highly unrepresentative of the wider population and the school population in general. The fundamental importance of Parent Councils and the role they play within the school and wider EA setting must remain clearly emphasised within any final draft including:

- The differing structures and procedures for Parent Councils including the importance of their role in decision making within the educational setting, at home and other settings out with the physical school.
- Clear definitions and best practice for EAs and Parent Councils to work collaboratively to ensure all parents and relevant stakeholders are notified of changes to Council structures and decisions in accessible formats.
- Clearly laying out the definitions of both Parent Councils and Parent Forums to ensure all parents understand the role of both. This should also include guidelines around participation in such structures.
- Guidance on best practice around any relevant training for Parent Councils to ensure they promote membership to under-represented groups who may face barriers. This should actively include guidance on monitoring both quantitative and qualitative data that can be regularly reviewed alongside strategies to encourage effective representation.
- Ensuring the use of flexible processes and procedures for appointments of roles to allow parents working in a range of different sectors to partake. This is particularly apt given the way in which employment is now structured out with the

9 to 5 stereotype which may see some women unable to participate due to work commitments.

The Guidance as a whole – please explain your view.

Outlining a strategic framework of a high standard that illustrates the development of children's education in reference to parental involvement is crucial. A clear and emphasised commitment to ensuring diversity, inclusion and equality are at the forefront of both guidance and best practice is to be commended within the current draft. It is laudable that this includes highlighting mandatory duties for stakeholders under the Equality Act, 2010, and other relevant legislation.

Structuring of additional policies and legislation could be further complemented by setting out examples from EAs where this has been clearly implemented and effectively monitored already. This should also include key caveats surrounding refreshed data monitoring and updated guidance being published on a regular basis to ensure outcomes are being met.

The statutory guidance document will be a lengthy document and deals with technical matters. We think it would be helpful to develop shorter summaries of key duties and powers with more practical advice. Do you think that additional summary guidance products would be helpful?

Yes, additional summary guidance products would be helpful.

Do you have any suggestions on the type of additional support materials or additional activity to accompany the new guidance?

The SG is to be commended for ensuring that the guidance is as extensive as possible as well as being laid out in an accessible and clear manner. This is of high value from a policy context in terms of the quality of detail and reference to other relevant procedures in the Scottish educational system. There may be concerns, however, that it is too lengthy in terms of explaining the particular duties and legislation as needed by the range of stakeholders the Act pertains to. This could be a significant problem for parents in terms of raising complaints where duties are not being appropriately met.

Inclusion of additional simplified guidance set out per relevant stakeholder group should be actively considered to rectify this. Clear examples of approaches where successful training and information has already been implemented per these groups should also be investigated for addition. This could include best practice of related guidance and toolkits such as the national Getting It Right For Every Child approach. Inclusion of such

documents would provide quick reference tools for parents as a key way to highlight any issues that they may have.

Conclusion

The SWC is grateful for the opportunity to respond to the statutory guidance regarding provisions as relayed within the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) (Scotland) Act. The emphasis placed on the active engagement and involvement of parents within the educational context is to be commended. To promote children's full potential, this should actively seek to take account of the Guidance in a format that promotes equality of education in order to significantly reduce the attainment gap.

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The Scottish Women's Convention engages with women using numerous communication channels including Roadshow events, Thematic Conferences and regional contact groups. This submission paper provides the views of women and reflects their opinions and experiences in a number of key areas relevant to women's equality.

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