



the National Parent Forum of Scotland

ENSURING PARENT VOICES ARE HEARD IN SCOTTISH EDUCATION

Foreword

This Group was established by the National Parent Forum of Scotland to give particular consideration to the needs and views of parents as we move forward with assessment in Curriculum for Excellence. Few would disagree that parents are crucial partners in children's learning. We also know that one of the keys to success of Curriculum for Excellence will be how we harness and maximise the true involvement of parents. But without close attention, the prize of working in true partnership with parents will not be won.

I am grateful to the members of the group who came together, all giving up valuable personal time to share their experiences and expertise. As a group, they were able to explore the difficulties and possible solutions, and come up with a set of recommendations and actions which I hope will be helpful to both parents and staff in developing stronger partnerships for the benefit of everyone, but most of all for our children.

Iain Ellis MBE

Chair of the National Parent Forum of Scotland
August 2014

About the Group

The National Parent Forum of Scotland formed this working group because they were aware of a common theme coming from parents about lack of clarity on new assessment levels and approaches. Following on from the changes introduced by Curriculum for Excellence, many parents were feeling that they did not understand the new system. The change in reporting and assessment arrangements from the old system left many parents feeling that they no longer knew where their children were in their learning.

We invited people from all our main partners to sit on this group but at all times had parents at the forefront of our discussions. We also were aware of the report and recommendations from the Curriculum for Excellence Working Group on Tackling Bureaucracy. In line with the actions and recommendations of that earlier report, the Group were committed to addressing the assessment needs of parents in a way which supported learning and teaching and did not lead to unnecessary bureaucracy and paperwork.

We have split the report into different categories that we felt would be most beneficial for parents. We also felt it was important to start with our recommendations.

We hope that Headteachers will discuss this report with their Parent Council and consider how the messages can best be shared with the Parent Forum and taken forward in their school.

Open dialogue and partnerships should play a big part in our children and young people's learning throughout their school life, and involve a range of ongoing reporting and communication with parents. Learners have different needs and so one size cannot fit all in relation to learning, teaching and assessment.



RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Schools and parents need to find ways of supporting a culture of real partnerships.
2. Education Authorities and ADES need to ensure that their policies and structures support real partnerships which allow a 3 way dialogue between learners, parents and practitioners.
3. Education Scotland should make greater use of its processes to highlight and share examples of real partnerships.
4. Education Authorities, schools and parents need to work together to develop an understanding of the purpose of assessment and what it should look like.
5. Schools should see profiling as an ongoing process for all ages, 3-18.
6. Education Authorities and Education Scotland should consider how Career Long Professional Learning for teachers can explore the culture changes needed as a result of Curriculum for Excellence in relation to parents and transition in particular.

Assessment is how learners, teachers, parents and schools know that learners are progressing and have demonstrated the required knowledge and skills. The diagram of the iceberg can be used to illustrate how assessment information is gathered. The upper section of the iceberg is what parents see or hear and perceive this to be what assessment is. However the vast majority of assessment information is gathered from day-to-day classroom activities and would lie below the waterline. The balance between on-going and formal assessment will vary from 3-18.



More formal or structured assessment may include projects, investigations, case studies, design folios and question papers/ tests and may occur at set points in the school calendar. For example after a short course, at the end of a school term or year or at points of transition.

Within the classroom and other places where learning takes place, assessment information is gathered frequently and informally. Teachers will use this information on a day to day basis to help learners plan next steps. This on-going assessment can take the form of peer and self-assessment by learners, teacher questioning and teacher observing pupils working together. This will also include teachers commenting on learners' work.

The Group identified three main priority areas which need to be addressed to ensure greater parental understanding, partnership and involvement:

- Culture change • Assessing learning • Sharing Learning



CULTURE CHANGE

Curriculum for Excellence is as much about culture change as change in practices. Teachers and parents need time and space to get used to a new style of learning, teaching and assessment, and to explore the big principles of what Curriculum for Excellence is trying to achieve and how children should benefit, as well as what types of partnership can work.

1. All with a stake in education need to consider how they can actively create an environment of real partnerships involving learners, parents and educators.
2. Developing real partnership involves sharing and communicating regularly in a spirit of mutual trust, where everyone is learning together.
3. Learners are a living report card and own and need to understand their learning and how to talk about it with their parents, teachers, and others with an interest in their learning
4. Partnerships should be based on equity and meeting and supporting the needs of all learners.

ASSESSING LEARNING

Assessment is an ongoing process to support learning; it is not just a task for reporting purposes. It is about getting the evidence to help a child improve and move on to the next steps in their learning.

1. Parents need to understand the process. A diagram can illustrate where words often become confusing and complicated. For some parents, more face-to-face approaches might be needed, but fundamentally important is that all parents can help and understand, if given the right support.
2. Children and young people need be supported to understand their learning, their strengths and what they need to do to improve. This process should enable them to talk about their learning at home and with others who want to help them improve their learning.
3. Parents need to be supported to understand that there are a range of different assessment approaches under Curriculum for Excellence and how they support learning and reporting.
4. Staff need to be supported to have conversations amongst themselves to help their understanding of standards and confirm judgments.
5. For those children and young people with additional support needs, targeted support may be required to develop the skills which support lifelong learning. When this additional support is required, this will be personalised to meet individual needs. It will be planned for, using the same processes as for skill development in all areas of the curriculum, i.e. Individualised Educational Programme/Child's Plan.

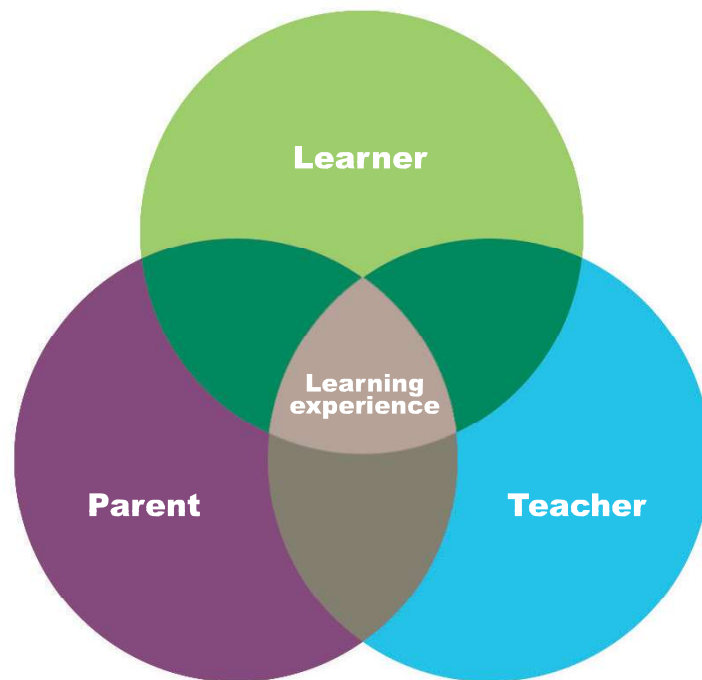
SHARING LEARNING

If parents are to support learning, they need to be seen as part of the assessment process, being supported to talk to their child about their learning and next steps. They can be an active partner in helping the teacher and their child improve.

1. Parents have a right to know how their child is being assessed and also how they are performing.
2. Schools should share any key points/times during the year where more formal assessment is planned.
3. Parents and schools need to shift the focus to discuss next steps in learning, who needs to do what and what success will look like.
4. Annual reporting should be short and include how parents can help their child's learning. It does not need to repeat information that is available elsewhere or has been shared with parents through other means.



True and effective partnership will only work when all involved take responsibility for trying to make it work. The Group identified some necessary actions for all three key players – parents, teachers and learners.



PARENTS CAN

1. Approach their school when they require more information or have concerns about their child's learning.
2. Play an active part in learning by encouraging their child.
3. Support their child by having a positive attitude towards learning and towards their child's school and teachers.
4. Expect to be involved in their child's learning.
5. Ask their Parent Council to discuss the school's approach to learning, teaching and assessment.

TEACHERS CAN

1. Expect trust in their professional judgments.
2. Have an honest and open dialogue with families.
3. Identify concerns and issues for discussion when they feel the need to engage the support of home.
4. Expect relationships with parents to be manageable and not create unnecessary bureaucracy.
5. Expect parents to support learning at home.

LEARNERS CAN

1. Be a living report card and share their learning experience with those that can help them.
2. Expect support if they need it.
3. Expect their learning achievement outside of school to be recognised and taken account of.
4. Expect to be at the centre of their learning, which means that their learning should be aimed at their own strengths, interests, needs and areas for development.
5. Expect to know where they are going on their learner journey, and what steps they need to take to get there.



NEXT STEPS

This report contains some pointers and recommendations for schools, parents, teachers and learners. But these alone will not ensure sustained and continued improvement. Further consideration should be given to the following:

1. All schools should take account of the recommendations in this report.
2. Further research should be carried out by Scottish Government into the opinions of learners in relation to assessment. Also, the practice being identified by Education Scotland should be shared and promoted with parents.
3. Education Authorities, schools and parents should work together to develop an understanding of what assessment looks like in their context.
4. NPFS should develop a Nutshell on assessment and reporting which will be made available to all parents.
5. National bodies and schools should share the Nutshell on their website and with parents.
6. Parent Councils should allocate time at meetings to consider this report and how they will use it to support future training.

EXAMPLES

Some examples of schools engaging with parents to help them understand and support their child's progress:

1. Learning Logs/Learner journeys shared regularly throughout the year between home and school.
2. Profiling for all year groups shared with parents.
3. Report card formats which are individual and personalised.
4. Format of parents' nights/meetings which support meaningful discussion between school, parent and child.
5. Timing of parents' nights so that discussion can be focussed around reporting.
6. Regular open days for parents to observe what is happening day to day in their child's learning.

MEMBERS OF THE GROUP

- National Parent Forum of Scotland • Parents • Headteachers • Teachers • Scottish Government
- Education Scotland • Association of Directors of Education in Scotland
- The Educational Institute of Scotland

For further information on the work of the Group and other useful links, please go to:

www.parentforumscotland.org/npfs-assessment-group/



the National Parent
Forum of Scotland

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