

More news, views, resources.....

Summer, here we come!

Welcome to the June issue of Backchat. After a slow start, summer seems to be here – hope you're enjoying it!

In this issue you're sure to find something of interest: we report on our ICT survey and give you the latest of government thinking about ICT in the classroom.

Our member survey results have now been published too: your comments have given us lots of food for thought.

We're very excited about our 2012 conference - and we hope you will be too. This year you'll hear from parents all around the country about the work they're doing – working with the parent forum, schools, local authorities, communities and others.

By the time this issue of Backchat reaches you, the results of **Education Scotland's deep audit** of the secondary sector's readiness to deliver the new qualifications will have been published. You'll be able to find the report on their website and we're likely to publish a response on ours. We don't know what's in it but no doubt there is a lot of interest among parents.

There's been a flurry of activity around CfE and qualifications over the last few months – we try to bring you the main points of interest in this newsletter. You can read our recent press release on the issue on our website www.sptc.info We highlight the feedback we've had from a majority of parents, who are growing impatient with the delay and uncertainty surrounding CfE and qualifications.

Universities Scotland has just published a report on how the sector is going to respond to CfE. Many parents have been anxious about how the new qualifications will be treated by the universities – in our view the report is good news. Read more in Backchat.

PTA members: if your PTA hasn't renewed, remember your membership-linked insurance has now expired along with your SPTC membership, so if you are organising any events you don't have public liability insurance. It's easy and quick to get your membership in place – just contact the office.

Parent Councils who pay for their own membership will soon receive renewal documents: it expires at the end of July, so act quickly to make sure your membership-linked insurance is maintained.

Growing Up in Scotland is a long-term research project tracking children to identify what difference government policy is making to their lives. Reports are published each year – this year's focuses on parental involvement. More elsewhere in Backchat.

Our big project this year is a new website. Work will start in June and hopefully the new site will be up and running in the autumn: it's a massive job but we hope you'll begin to benefit from an easier, more straightforward site very soon.

Lastly, we know many parent groups are very busy between now and the end of term. Remember we are here to help if you need advice – hope your events go well and have a great summer when it comes.

In this issue...

- **Broad General Education**
- **Qualifications**
- **Parent to Parent**
- **Conference**
- **University Admissions**
- **School toilets**
- **Reading research and events**
- **Place2Be**
- **Member Survey**

Keep in Touch

Website: www.sptc.info

Email: sptc@sptc.info

Twitter: [@parents_sptc](https://twitter.com/parents_sptc)

Sign up to SPTC e-updates on the website

SQA – Qualifications Update

SQA has published the final documents for the 197 new National Qualifications at Nationals 2, 3, 4, 5 and Higher levels on its website – you can find the material at www.sqa.org.uk/curriculumforexcellence. That means the information on the qualifications, with guidance and advice for teachers, is all online a year ahead of the start of the senior phase for the current S2 cohort.

SQA says the new qualifications are more skills-based, less prescriptive, and more user-friendly. These Units require knowledge and understanding as well as skills. Their specifications are more flexible and open. They have fewer, broader outcomes that encourage more wide-ranging assessment, and rely on assessors to exercise professional judgment instead of having to satisfy long lists of criteria.

Parents are generally telling us that while they have concerns, they want schools to stick to the timetable for introduction of the new qualifications in 2014: while most probably will, it's unclear what the picture will be across the country.

Growing up in Scotland – tracking lives

How do you tell if government policy is making the difference it's designed to? When it comes to children's policy, the answer is **Growing up in Scotland (GUS)** – a long term research project that's tracking children as they grow up, looking at their family lives, health and wellbeing, educational outcomes and more.

There are now three groups of children who are part of the study, which provides a huge amount of data for use by government but also academics, the voluntary sector and others. Each year, reports are published highlighting particular areas of the study's findings: this year these focused on the involvement of grandparents in children's lives; overweight, obesity and activity; early experiences of primary school (transition to school) and also parent/carer involvement in school activities.

The study measured things like levels of parental attendance at school events, the factors that limit parental involvement and involvement with homework (our current Parents Voice topic!).

As you would expect, the children whose parents or carers are involved in school generally do better. You can read all about GUS and the findings of the study at www.growingupinScotland.org.uk

CfE – latest on Broad General Education

Education Scotland has just published a briefing for teachers on the principles for the Broad General Education (BGE) entitlement for children in S1-3 in Scottish schools. It's the first of a number of briefing documents to be published for teachers, on topics including learner progress, inspection and assessment.

There is also a version of the BGE briefing planned for parents and we'll let you know when that is published. The briefing covers areas parents often ask about: what does BGE mean in practical terms; how choosing subjects fits with S1 – S3 BGE; where the Experiences and Outcomes (Es and Os) fit in. The briefing is not particularly parent friendly, but we think the main points are:

- Young people should not see their options being closed off by subject selection during BGE
- Selection should only be made after young people have achieved the third curriculum level (see <http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/parentzone/cfe/>)

You can find the briefing paper here:

http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/Images/CfEBriefing180412_tcm4-715587.pdf

ICT in Education – what you said

We have just published the results of our small survey on ICT in education. 85 parents from 21 local authority areas responded to the survey and the key results were:

- All of those surveyed have a computer at home and most are comfortable using the Internet
- Some children owned Smartphones but did not use them at school for learning
- The majority of parents would be happy for their child to use a tablet at school but only 13% of children actually do so
- 77% of parents had heard of Glow but only 9% use Glow to support their child's learning at home

The full report can be found in the Info Shop section on our website: www.sptc.info

The Scottish Government has just announced that Education Scotland has been asked for recommendations on how schools can realise the benefits of new technologies and whether national guidance is necessary.

Minister Mike Russell says that schools must embrace the use of mobile devices and tablet computers in order to modernise teaching and learning.

Universities Scotland - Commitment to 'Fair and Equal Treatment'

Universities Scotland has just published a report looking at how universities should respond to the new qualifications being introduced in 2013-14.

SPTC had a sneak preview of the report and we feel most parents will take comfort from indications that the admissions system will adapt to the CfE approach, and not penalise young people for its flexibility.

You can read the report here:

<http://www.universities-scotland.ac.uk/uploads/latest/USBeyondtheseniorphaseCfEMay2012.pdf>

WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION - REPORT ON IMPROVING GIRLS' FITNESS

A recent report from the World Health Organisation (WHO) recommends that governments and schools should be looking for ways to make sports and other physical activities more attractive for girls.

Although girls do enjoy engaging in physical activities, many are put off taking part in sports at school for a variety of reasons. WHO recommends one way to increase participation would be to include women in key roles, such as coaching, and role models from within local and wider communities as well as looking outside mainstream sports, for example dance, mixed ability, non-competitive and co-operative activities.

To read more, go to: www.icsspe.org/documente/Girls.pdf

Are your School Toilets Bog Standard?

You may remember we asked members of Parents Voice to take part in a survey on school toilet provision. We received some real horror stories, for example, children not using the school toilets as they were so dirty and smelly, youngsters only allowed to use the toilets at break times and children suffering medical problems as a result of this.

Some Parent Councils were prompted to take action and campaign for changes, either by lobbying their council or offering to pay for deep cleaning and re-decoration.

Despite the horrors, many primary and secondary schools have good toilets and this should be celebrated.

The Bog Standard Campaign is encouraging schools to apply for a School Toilet Award, online or by post. There is no cost to schools as entry and support materials are free. All applications for the Award will be entered into a prize draw to win various prizes including a storyteller visit and signed books. For more information go to: www.bog-standard.org

If you would like to join Parents Voice, drop us an email at sptc@sptc.info

Reading – Making a difference

More evidence of how parental involvement is strongly related to a child's achievement comes from the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). Their report *Let's Read Them a Story! The Parent Factor in Education* examines how different types of parental involvement are related to a child's proficiency in and enjoyment of reading.

This involvement does not necessarily require lots of time or specialised knowledge, only genuine interest and active engagement. Most importantly, the report shows parents that it's never too early – or too late – to get involved in their child's education. Read the report here:

<http://www.oecd.org/pisa/letsread>

Interestingly, Education Scotland has announced its latest conference for parents will be on the subject of *Reading – what's my role?* The event will take place at the Hilton Hotel, William Street, Glasgow on Saturday 16 June and is free of charge.

If you would like to register, phone 0141 282 5064 or email margaret.mcguinness@educationscotland.gov.uk

Travelling Green

Travelling Green is a six-week walking project from sustainable transport charity Sustrans. It aims to encourage P5 children to walk more.

It is an interdisciplinary project in which children learn about walking time and distance and chart their progress; why walking is good for them and how to stay safe on the walk to school.

The Travelling Green resource includes a teacher pack, pupil packs and a leaflet for parents which can be delivered to your school.

Contact Cecilia Oram for more information:

Cecilia.oram@sustrans.org.uk or telephone 0131 346 9777

The Great Outdoors!

If your Parent Council/PTA is looking at ways to improve your school's grounds, then don't forget to check out the Grounds for Learning website.

They've got lots of examples from across Scotland of how school grounds are used in all sorts of creative ways for outdoor learning, play and sport. GfL can also arrange for someone to visit your school and provide advice on how to develop and make your site more inspirational and child-friendly.

For more information go to: www.tl.org.uk/scotland

Have you signed up for SPTC e-updates?

If you'd like to receive periodic e-updates, just go to www.sptc.info and subscribe on the home page.

Check out the archive too!

A Place2Be – tackling mental health in schools

Place2Be is an award winning charity committed to supporting troubled and unhappy children in schools; providing a dedicated service that helps children to understand and cope with their emotional reactions to difficulties and challenging circumstances, whatever they may be – trouble at home, bullying, bereavement, parents separating...

One of the keys to their success is that the service happens inside the school, meaning the children can access it easily, quickly and without stigma.

Place2Be works within over 170 schools throughout the UK. In Scotland they provide support to more than 5000 children in Edinburgh, East Lothian and Glasgow. Each of these schools has a dedicated and safe Place2Be room, a fully qualified School Project Manager and a team of trained counsellors.

The specialist teams are based on site 2 1/2 days a week and provide a range of support including:

- one-to-one emotional therapeutic support;
- The Place2Talk - a self-referral, lunchtime drop-in service;
- group work on issues such as bullying, friendship or peer relationships etc;
- one to one support for parents and carers, enabling them to explore any issues that impact on their parenting without being judged.

What do children think who use The Place2Be service?

- "It's the best place to be."
- "You can let out all your feelings and talk to someone who understands."
- "You feel safe and cared about."

Funding for Place2Be comes from local authorities, schools, parents and the organisation's own supporters.

To find out more about Place2Be visit: www.theplace2be.org.uk or email Scotland@theplace2be.org.uk

Member Survey – What you told us

Over the last two years SPTC has made lots of changes to how we work. We want to reach more parents, give them the support and advice they want to help them get involved more with their child's school and education.

The survey was designed to find out:

- What we're doing that you like
- What you want us to do more
- What you want us to stop
- What you want us to start doing

More than 200 members (PCs and PTAs) responded to the survey, from 27 local authority areas and from a mix of primary/secondary/all-through and special schools.

They told us they appreciate our website and also Backchat but that they want more contact in their local area.

We were surprised awareness of our telephone and email helplines is not higher, and we need to work on that. The membership-linked insurance is highly regarded, and we'll continue to make sure that meets your needs.

Communication with members is the big issue that came out of the survey and we are looking hard at ways to ensure more parents are able to access the support and information we provide. Our information sessions – this last academic year we held more than 60 for parents all over the country – are a major part of how we plan to do that!

A big thank-you to everyone who took part – the full report on the survey is on our website and we'll keep you up-to-date about changes we make as a result of your feedback.

Bullying – a growing issue?

We are concerned that the number of calls we receive from parents concerned about bullying is on the increase – and parents have no-where to go to get specialist advice.

SPTC board members and staff are looking at what help is currently available and whether other organisations are experiencing the same thing – watch this space!

Parent to Parent – our 2012 Conference

Parents we work with tell us all the time they want to hear from other parents about what they're doing, what works and what doesn't. If that's you, our 2012 conference is just what you want!

We'll be in Glasgow on 10 November with a day jam-packed with parents talking about what they're doing, working with their parent forum, school, local authority, communities – all for the benefit of our children. We'll also have two speakers to talk about the important role of parents – both in and out of school.

It's going to be a fantastic opportunity to share experiences and learn from each other – don't miss it! The cost of parent places is kept as low as possible to make it affordable for the maximum number of parents to attend.

You can pre-book your place by contacting us one email (sptc@sptc.info) or by calling 0131 474 6199.

More details in the next issue of Backchat.

UCAS – Admissions Applications

You may remember we reported recently on a UCAS consultation which put forward its proposals to change the way it handled student applications for university, obliging students to wait until they had their results before they made applications.

There was a lot of concern that the proposals would have disadvantaged Scottish students, who sit their examinations at a different time to students elsewhere in the UK.

UCAS have listened to the various points put forward and indicated that they will not press ahead with their proposals though this is something which may arise again in the future. We'll let you know if we hear more.