

Minutes of the Cross Party Group (CPG) on Dyslexia held via Microsoft teams on Thursday 18th November 2021 at 1pm

1. Present:

MSP Members: Stuart McMillan MSP, Pam Gosal MSP,

Rachael Hamilton MSP, Paul O’Kane MSP

Non-MSP Members: Mary Evans, Dean Smith

Cathy Mcgee (Dyslexia Scotland), Margaret Crombie, Julie Ross, Jennie Guise, Gillian Evans, Grace Mair, Fran Foreman (Education Scotland), David Jones

2. Apologies:

Oliver Mundell MSP

Laura Gemmill, Susan Agnew, Owen Ferry, Paul Nisbet

3. Welcome and Introductions

Oliver Mundell MSP, Convener was unable to attend the meeting due to illness therefore Stuart McMillan MSP, Vice Convener took the chair.

He welcomed both new MSP members and non- MSP members to the first constituted meeting of the new Cross Party Group on Dyslexia.

The minute of the initial meeting with MSPs held on Tuesday 28th September 2021 to formally complete and submit the registration documentation to the Scottish Parliament was noted and approved.

4. Key themes and areas of interest

The Vice Convener invited the Secretary to restate the purpose of the CPG and the general areas of interest These included:

The impact of dyslexia on individuals, families and communities with regard to:

- Education and learning;
- Health, particularly mental health:
- Behaviours;
- Employment, training and adult dyslexia

Specific legacy issues from the previous CPG included:

- The implementation of the Morgan Review on Additional Support for Learning;
- Adult assessments and affordability

- The impact of the Covid 19 pandemic and recovery plans

MSP members had expressed specific interest in exploring issues relating to:

- Neurodiversity/ Neurodivergence including the current work being undertaken by the Scottish Government;
- The impact of dyslexia on black and minority ethnic individuals, families and communities in Scotland

The Vice Convener suggested that given the breadth and scope of interest and the time available at meetings it would be important, in the first instance, to focus on a few over the next scheduled meetings.

5. The Implementation of the Morgan Review on Additional Support for Learning

The CPG noted that in October 2020, the Scottish Government and CoSLA had published an action plan after accepting the recommendations of an independent review of additional support for learning in Scotland chaired by Angela Morgan.

The review highlighted a number of issues which were of interest to the CPG.

Recommendation 5: Teacher Training

The CPG had previously expressed concerns about teacher training including differences in approaches, accreditation and qualifications between England and Scotland. The CPG discussed a range of concerns around teacher training with non MSP members having strong and varying views on the current approaches to addressing dyslexia and teacher training in Scotland.

There was also concerns raised about the increasing role of classroom teachers in the identification of dyslexia in schools, without, what many believe, the appropriate training.

Recommendation 9.1: Quality Assurance.

A number of issues were raised about quality assurance processes in relation to teachers undertaking assessments in the process of the identification of dyslexia and the apparent failure of any quality monitoring of the teachers undertaking these assessments.

Members also raised the issue of the statistics provided by primary and secondary schools regarding the identification of dyslexia and the significant inconsistencies in levels of identification across Scottish local authorities. The view was expressed that there appeared a failure by past HM inspectorates and the Scottish Qualifications Authority to address these year-on-year inconsistencies which could have significant implications for the support provided for pupils.

Prior to the end of the previous Parliament, Oliver Mundell had raised issues with the, then Cabinet Secretary for Education regarding these significant inconsistencies across Scottish local authorities in terms of both teacher training and in collecting and accuracy of data relating to the identification of dyslexia at primary and secondary schools.

The Cabinet Secretary had accepted that these were legitimate concerns and gave a commitment to take address the matter with the relevant Government departments and agencies.

The Vice Convener suggested that this should now be followed up with a letter from the CPG to the new Cabinet Secretary requesting an update on the Government's discussions.

6. The National Consultation on Education Reform

The members were encouraged to respond to the consultation.

The closing date of 26th November 2021 was noted

7. Any other business

The CPG noted that National Dyslexia Awareness Week 2021 had taken place in early November and had been very successful across Scotland with many innovative projects taking place at local levels particularly within schools.

Date and theme of the next meeting

The CPG agreed that the focus for the next meeting would be on 'Adult assessments and affordability'. The Vice Convener invited all members to contact the secretary with any particular contributions, information and experiences which could inform the session.

The next meeting would be held in February 2022, the date to be confirmed.