

# **Cross Party Group on Dyslexia**

Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> March 2023 at 1pm

(via Microsoft Teams)

Minute

Present

MSPs

Oliver Mundell MSP, Rachael Hamilton MSP, Stuart McMillan MSP

Non-MSP Group Members

David Jones, Gillian Evans, Dean Smith, Ross Duncan, Frances Foreman, Jennie Guise, Sharon Mayhall, Maureen Brown, Liz Roger, Michele Luciano, Joanna Karkanevatou, Patricia Hewitt, Julie Ross

In attendance: Sue Bowen, Dyslexia Scotland

Apologies

Pam Gosel MSP, Cathy McGee, Paul McNeil, Margaret Crombie, Jean Tennent

## **1. Introduction**

Oliver Mundell MSP, Chair welcomed members to the online meeting. He reminded the group that David Jones had previously indicated that he would be standing down and that this would be his last meeting. The Chair thanked David for his service both as a long standing member but also as secretary for the past eleven years.

## **2. Minutes of the previous meeting**

The minutes were approved by Jennie Guise and seconded by Julie Ross

## **3. Business arising from the minute**

The Cross- Party Group had agreed that the Chair write to the then Minister for Further Education, Higher Education, Youth Employment and Training expressing concerns regarding issues relating to the availability and costs of adult assessments.

Following the last meeting, discussions in drafting of the letter had concluded that, to date, one of the key challenges in addressing the issue, had been the absence of a policy lead within the Scottish Government. Despite a previous commitment by the Scottish Government and subsequent meetings between the Minister, civil servants and Dyslexia Scotland no progress has been made.

It was agreed that, due to the cross departmental nature of the issue and collective responsibility, the letter should be sent to the First Minister.

Due to the process and election of the new First Minister, the letter was held back but will now be sent as previously agreed

## 4. Neurodiversity – An Umbrella Term

Presentation by Fran Foreman, Senior Education Officer – Inclusion, Wellbeing and Equality, Education Scotland

The subject of Neurodiversity and Dyslexia had been identified by MSP members as an area of specific interest. Fran Foreman gave an excellent and informed presentation regarding current developments highlighting that neurodiversity is not a diagnosis but the name given to a political movement. The term has been embraced and used as a means of empowerment to promote the positive aspects and strengths of the 15% of the UK population who have differences such as dyslexia or autism. The focus is on what people can do rather than where they struggle and the rejection of a culturally entrenched negativity which typically surrounded those who are deemed as different by the majority.

She explained that there is no accepted definition of neurodiversity in Scotland but the term usually refers to a range specific learning differences including:

- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
- Autism Spectrum
- Developmental Co-ordination Disorder (DCD) also referred to as Dyspraxia
- Developmental Language Disorder
- Epilepsy
- Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder
- Intellectual Disability
- Tourettes and Tic Disorders
- Specific Learning Disorder/ Differences e.g. Dyslexia, Dyscalculia

It was noted that research in 2020, concluded that 40% of children with dyslexia have another neurodevelopmental difference e.g. difficulties with maths, ADHD, motor performance or emotional difficulties.

In response to the presentation, CPG members raised concerns that there was a potential risk of the term was being adopted and used/ misused as a ‘buzz’ word with organisations rushing to be seen to be doing something to address ‘neurodiversity’ without any real understanding or long term commitment.

It was also highlighted that there is a danger that the response to neurodiversity is biased towards the better known conditions such as autism and ADHD leading to the potential disproportionate allocation of resources and resulting in conditions such as dyslexia not being given appropriate attention or support.

## 5. Dyslexia 'Changemaker' Initiative

Presentation by Sue Bowen, Volunteer Development Manager, Dyslexia Scotland

Sue provided an enthusiastic insight into a new initiative being developed by Dyslexia Scotland. The Changemaker Campaign focuses on creating a platform for the recognition of the challenges and strengths of dyslexia, encouragement to speak out and be 'champions' for dyslexia and to be part of building a collective effort to support and drive change.

The aim is to build a team of changemakers who will:

- Do something that makes positive differences for people with dyslexia in Scotland;
- Tell Dyslexia Scotland what they are doing by contributing to the Dyslexia Scotland changemaker community update channel;
- Share their positive action through social media and local news outlets;
- Display their official Changemaker status to encourage and inspire others.

A number of examples of changemaker contributions to date have included;

- Organisations making their documents dyslexia friendly;
- Directing people to Dyslexia Scotland's website and local branch network;
- Organising awareness training for their employers/ classmates;
- Fundraising for national and local dyslexia initiatives

Although the initiative had only recently been established, the response had been very positive with the potential to significantly increase volunteering opportunities at both national and local levels.

## 6. Any other business

It was noted that Paul McNeill had been invited, and accepted to take over the role of Secretary of the Group with effect from the next meeting.

## 6. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting would take place in June 2023. Date to be confirmed.