

# Cross-Party Group on Families Supporting Children's Learning

Tue 1 Oct 2024, 6pm to 7.30pm

Minute

Present

MSPs

Oliver Mundell MSP (Co-convener) (Chair)  
Fulton MacGregor MSP (Co-convener)  
Pam Duncan-Glancy MSP

Invited Guests

Willie French (Upstart Scotland)

Non-MSP Group Members

Cathy Sexton (Fathers Network Scotland)  
Kathryn Farrow (SPION)  
Magaidh Wentworth (Comann nam Parant)  
Gavin Yates (Connect)  
Sara McFarlane (Connect)  
Denny Henderson (Connect)  
Ciaran McDonald (Scottish Government)  
Beverly Ferguson (Education Scotland)  
Sarah Walker (NASUWT)  
Vicki Lavelle  
Kathleen McTaggart

Apologies

Stephen Kerr MSP  
Greg Dempster (AHDS)  
Annie Watson (Enquire)  
Arran Goodfellow (Parenting Across Scotland)  
John Forsyth (Shared Parenting Scotland)

## Welcome and Minutes of Previous Meeting

Oliver Mundell MPS opened the meeting as chair. The minutes of the previous meeting of 20 March 2024 were approved.

## Annual General Meeting

Gavin Yates took the chair for the AGM portion of the meeting. Oliver Mundell MSP and Fulton MacGregor MSP were re-appointed as co-convenors and Connect re-appointed as secretariat.

## Presentation by Upstart Scotland

Willie French, chair of Upstart Scotland gave a presentation to the group on the case for a kindergarten stage for young children in Scotland.

### **The case for raising the school starting age and providing what the under-sevens really need**

*In recent years, there has been a drive to 'schoolify' in the early and pre-school years. This model of schoolifying has presented damage to children, but furthermore, to society in a wider context. Those employed in education are unsure how the human mind develops and why early years aged children learn differently from older children. Modern life can damage healthy development and a play-based kindergarten could avoid and address these issues. Recent high value aspirations have been to raise attainment and narrow the gap. Formal schooling widens the gap between rich, poor and genders. A kindergarten approach could reduce all kinds of inequality. Constituent parts of our ongoing campaign would campaign for dropping SNSA assessment of P.1 children and every setting planning and implementing 'Realising the Ambition' publication.*

Following the presentation, the group discussed experiences of play based learning and the benefits it has to children. It also discussed challenges such as an education culture still focusing on putting children in an education environment much earlier than most other countries, the current postcode lottery of provision of play based learning, the need for buy in from parents and educators, lack of suitable accommodation, and possible impact on teachers and initial teacher education.

CPG members were encouraged to email Willie at [williefrench3@gmail.com](mailto:williefrench3@gmail.com) to ask any further questions, or to request the papers Upstart has published.

Parents wishing to support Upstart's campaign can become free members which will sign them up to the campaign's e newsletter, as well as follow on social media and visit its website <https://upstart.scot/>

## Scottish Assembly of Parents and Carers

Gavin Yates of Connect gave a short introduction on the Scottish Assembly of Parents and Carers, which has recently opened to applications. The Assembly is a lived experience panel for parents and carers of school aged children to share their views and experiences to influence education policy, and the Scottish Government has pledged to respond to the Assembly's views. The Assembly currently has over 250

applicants, and while the initial cohort will be 100 it is looking to increase in Years 2 and 3. Recruitment will be on a rolling basis as it is expected members will drop off once they have had the opportunity to have their say.

<https://parentcarerassembly.scot/>

## **Future Work and Any Other Business**

The chair invited members to get in touch to suggest areas for the CPG to explore. Fathers Network Scotland has recently conducted its Dads Survey and offered to present on its findings at a future meeting.

The meeting closed 7.30pm.