MAKING THE DIFFERENCE

RESEARCH ON PARENTS’ VIEWS OF SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE PROPOSALS TO IMPROVE PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND REPRESENTATION IN SCHOOLS

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Executive Summary

This research aimed to identify and explore the views of parents across Scotland in relation to the Scottish Executive proposals for parental involvement and representation in Scottish schools. The research was carried out in two phases:

1. MORI Scotland was contracted to carry out telephone interviews with a random sample of 1,000 parents of children aged 5-16, in state education, across Scotland. The parents were selected using random-digit dialing to ensure that all households, including those with ex-directory numbers, could be sampled. Results were analysed using SPSS and only statistically significant relationships have been reported.

2. Eight focus groups were carried out with a total of 39 parents to explore their views in-depth. Two groups of parents were approached to participate in the focus groups: those who could be described as experiencing disadvantage due to poverty or low levels of education (Groups 1 – 4); and those whose children attend schools where there is no School Board (Groups 5 – 8). None of the parents involved in the focus groups were members of School Boards.

Both the focus groups and the telephone interviews followed the same structure: parents were first asked about their own levels of involvement, then asked to comment on current structures for representing their views before turning to the Scottish Executive proposals.

Current levels of involvement

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Key statistics</th>
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<tr>
<td>• 69% of parents had not been involved in any kind of activity at their child’s school.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• 79% of parents felt that the balance of opportunities to be involved in the life of their child’s school is about right but 18% stated that there are currently too few opportunities to get involved.</td>
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<td>• 45% of parents reported that they would like to be more involved in the life of the school.</td>
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The telephone survey found that a large majority of parents had not been involved in school activities, and many (45%) reported that they would want to be more involved in the life of their child’s school. Reasons given for lack of involvement were a combination of lack of opportunities presented to them by the school and difficulties in finding time due to work or family commitments. This suggests that involving more parents in the life of their child’s school would depend on both actions by the school (such as more communication, being asked, and more activities) and better work-life balance to increase the amount of time available to parents to take part.
Views on Current Representative Structures

**Key statistics**

- 87% of parents responded that their child’s school has a School Board but only 2% of parents are members of the School Board.
- 87% of parents responded that they had never considered standing for election to the School Board.
- 45% of parents did not join the School Board because they did not feel that they had the time to volunteer. Only 10% of parents did not join because they did not want to, the remaining 45% gave a range of practical obstacles to their membership of the School Board, such as lack of childcare (5%) and meeting times (8%).
- While the majority of parents reported satisfaction with the way that the School Board represented their views, 14% responded that they did not know what the School Board says.
- Only 18% of parents reported contact with the School Board about their views on matters relating to the school.
- A third of parents did not know how to contact the School Board.

Few parents were members of parent bodies at their children’s schools (2% were School Board members and 8% were members of a PTA committee). Members of one parent body, for example a School Board, were also more likely to be members of a second parent body, for example a PTA.

Throughout the focus groups, parents asked the researchers questions about School Boards, expressing confusion about their role. This was often explicitly linked to a lack of information from the School Board, reinforced by the telephone survey findings that only 18% of parents had been in touch with a School Board about their views on matters relating to the school.

Focus groups reported concerns with the accessibility of both PTAs and School Boards, particularly in relation to the perceived socio-economic status of parent body members compared to ‘normal’ parents:

> *You see that with the School Board over at my daughter’s secondary school. Nearly everyone of them works in the University, to a person they are all Dr this and Mrs that…’* (Parent, Group 6: Urban primary)

In a few cases, this was also linked to the behaviour of their children, rather than just their own situation:

> *I always feel as well that people who are on these boards, their kids are like, the perfect kids. Their kids are not like my kids.* (Parent, Group 2: Semi-urban secondary)

The overall feeling within the focus groups was that School Boards are perceived to be ‘higher’ bodies, dealing with complicated matters and not accessible to ‘normal’ parents.
Scottish Executive Proposals for Parent Forums

Key findings
- 97% of parents agreed that the Parent Forum should consult other parents in the school about important issues and pass their views on to education authorities, head teachers and other relevant parties.
- 96% of parents agreed that there should be a body to represent parents’ views in their child’s school.
- 84% of parents felt that community groups should be involved in the Parent Forum, if invited to attend by the parents.
- 83% agreed that parents should be allowed to decide how the Parent Forum in their school is organised.
- 81% of parents felt that the parents who took part in the Parent Forum should be elected.
- 79% agreed that parents should decide what should be discussed at Parent Forum meetings.
- 63% of parents felt that they would be more likely to get involved in a Parent Forum if there were more parents involved than is currently the case with School Boards.
- 48% of parents felt that they would be more likely to get involved in the Parent Forum if it had a say over the school budget.

Flexibility and support
Parents who took part in the telephone survey and the focus groups approved of the Scottish Executive proposals to allow parents more flexibility to decide how to run Parent Forums within their own schools. In the focus groups, parents were clear that they felt each school was different and may require different structures:

*I think it should be different because all schools are different. Like I think it would be different from a town to a village.* (Parent, Group 7: Semi-urban primary)

During the focus group discussions parents requested guidelines or models from the Scottish Executive to facilitate the development of a forum at their school:

*Not unless the government put out a framework or guidelines on how they should do it and then leave it up to the school and parents how they are going to do it, a wee bit help from the government.* (Parent, Group 2: Semi-urban secondary)

Parents in the focus groups also requested training and childcare facilities to support them in becoming members of a Parent Forum. The idea of being able to share good practice between Parent Forums was mentioned by a number of parents in the focus groups:
I mean that’s the thing, if it falls by the wayside then you turn round and say I need some help here, this strategy is not working for us, have you got any other examples, have you got any other systems that are working better in other areas, can you help? (Parent, Group 1: Rural primary)

Composition of Parent Forums
The telephone survey suggested that parents felt that head teachers should be present at Parent Forum meetings: 50% of parents felt that the head teacher should always be in attendance and a further 48% felt that the head teacher should be in attendance when invited. During focus group discussions, parents gave a number of reasons for teacher involvement including that it would help parents understand school issues and that it would foster better communication between parents and teachers in general. However, some parents also highlighted the possibility that the head teacher could exert undue influence on the Parent Forum and would prefer them to attend only when invited:

They would only discuss the topics that they [the head teacher] really wanted to talk about. (Parent, Group 3: Urban primary)

Previous functions of School Boards
During the focus groups, parents were asked about their opinions on the School Board functions that are not currently contained within the draft Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Bill. In relation to powers over occasional holidays and school spending on books and materials, few parents expressed an interest in having control over this issue. However, they did express a desire to be consulted by the head teacher:

It would be good to be kept informed of what they are doing, what they are buying and what not. I think the head teacher should get the last say but I think the parents should be involved with talking about it as well. We just want involved! (Parent, Group 3: Urban primary)

Raising awareness
During the focus group discussions, parents suggested that the Scottish Executive take a proactive approach to raising awareness of Parent Forums:

We should be doing things on television….the people don’t read newspapers, they don’t read the letters cause they can’t read, having it visually like adverts, this is what parents are watching and it’s explaining their rights and really, really user friendly. (Parent, Group 6: Urban primary)

They felt that if informed of the changes, parents would be likely to get involved in their school’s Parent Forum.
1. INTRODUCTION

The Scottish Consumer Council welcomed the recent consultation on parental involvement carried out by the Scottish Executive and shares the aim of ensuring that the views of a range of parents are involved in the development of the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Bill.

This research aimed to explore parents’ views on their current level of involvement with their child’s school; the current representative structures; and the Scottish Executive proposals for parental involvement and representation.

The research was carried out in two stages:

- MORI Scotland was contracted to carry out telephone interviews with a random sample of 1,000 parents of children aged 5-16, in state education, across Scotland. The parents were selected using random-digit dialing to ensure that all households, including those with ex-directory numbers, could be sampled. Results were analysed using SPSS and only statistically significant relationships have been reported.

- Eight focus groups were carried out with parents to explore their views in-depth. Two groups of parents were approached to participate in the focus groups: those who could be described as experiencing disadvantage due to poverty or low levels of education (Groups 1 – 4); and those whose children attend schools where there is no School Board (Groups 5 – 8). None of the parents involved in the focus groups were members of School Boards.

The Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Bill proposes the following key changes to the structure of parental representation in schools:

- Schools Boards will be replaced with new Parent Forums, designed to be more flexible and inclusive.
- Parents in each school will be allowed to decide themselves on the arrangements they want for Parent Forums.
- Parents at each school would decide how to appoint the members, there would be no statutory requirement for elections to be held.
- Parent Forums will be placed under a duty to consult with other parents in the school and report back to them.
- Education Authorities will be under a duty to support the development of Parent Forums.

This report is structured thematically with quantitative and qualitative findings presented alongside each other. First, parents’ views on their own current levels of involvement are discussed (Section 2), then their views on current representative structures are explored (Section 3) before turning to the main body of the research which focuses on parents’ views of the Scottish Executive proposals (Section 4).
2. CURRENT LEVELS OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Parents were asked for their views on their current levels of involvement in their children’s schools. Findings are reported from both the telephone survey and the focus groups.

2.1 Findings from the telephone interviews

The parents who responded to the telephone interview were asked a range of questions about their current levels of involvement with their child’s school. Over two-thirds of parents (69%) had not been involved in any kind of activity at their child’s school, such as helping out in their child’s classroom or at events or trips (see table 1).

Table 1: Parents’ current level of involvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Has been involved in activities at child’s school</th>
<th>Primary</th>
<th>Secondary</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>255 (51%)</td>
<td>58 (12%)</td>
<td>313 (31%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has not been involved in activities at child’s school</td>
<td>245 (49%)</td>
<td>442 (88%)</td>
<td>687 (69%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Parents whose children are attending primary school are eight times more likely than those whose children attend secondary school to report that they have been involved in activities at the school (p<0.001).

Membership of parent organisations within the school impacts on parents views about their own level of involvement. Parents who are members of either a School Board or a Parent Teacher Association Committee (PTA) are more likely to report involvement in activities in their child’s school such as helping out in the classroom or at events or trips (p< 0.00). School Board members are 6.5 times more likely, and PTA Committee members are 3.6 times more likely, to report involvement in school activities than parents who are not members of these bodies.

1 Throughout the report we have used the following conventions to show the statistical significance of our results:
   - p<0.05 – means that there is less than a 5% chance that the relationship identified between two variables is random.
   - p<0.01 – means that there is less than a 1% chance that the relationship identified between two variables is random.
   - p<0.00 – means that there is almost no chance that the relationship identified between two variables is random.

2 The effect size of results was measured using odds ratio calculations. This is a simple set of equations that show how many more times likely one group of respondents is to give a specific answer compared to a different group.
Similarly the existence of a Parent Teacher Association (PTA) within the school increases levels of parental involvement. Parents whose children attend schools with Parent Teacher Associations are almost twice as likely to report being involved in activities at their child’s school than parents whose children’s school does not have a PTA (p<0.00).

**Table 2: Number of parents who would like to be more involved in their child’s school**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Primary</th>
<th>Secondary</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, I would like to be more involved</td>
<td>225 (45%)</td>
<td>223 (45%)</td>
<td>448 (45%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, I would not like to be more involved</td>
<td>274 (55%)</td>
<td>271 (54%)</td>
<td>545 (55%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Just under half (45%) of parents reported that they would like to be more involved in the life of the school (see table 2). Parents who are not members of PTA Committees are almost twice as likely to report they would like to be more involved in the life of their child’s school compared to PTA Committee members (p<0.01).

Despite many parents expressing a desire to be more involved in their child’s school, 79% of parents felt that the balance of opportunities to be involved in the life of their child’s school is about right. 18% stated that there are currently too few opportunities to get involved and 3% felt that there were too many demands placed on them (see table 3). This suggests that there are other barriers to involvement other than just the opportunities created by the school.

**Table 3: How would you describe the opportunities you have to be involved in the life of your child’s school?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Primary</th>
<th>Secondary</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Too few opportunities</td>
<td>59 (12%)</td>
<td>125 (25%)</td>
<td>184 (18%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balance is about right</td>
<td>426 (85%)</td>
<td>365 (73%)</td>
<td>791 (79%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too many demands</td>
<td>15 (3%)</td>
<td>10 (2%)</td>
<td>25 (3%)</td>
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</table>

There were marked differences between the responses from parents with children in primary school and those with children in secondary school: parents whose children are attending primary school are more likely to report that the balance of activities is about right, compared to parents whose children are in secondary school who are more likely to feel that there are too few opportunities for involvement (p<0.00).

Parents who are members of PTA Committees are more likely to report that the balance of opportunities to be involved in their child’s school is about right (p<0.00). Similarly, parents who are members of a Parents Association are more likely to report that they feel involved enough in the life of their child’s school (p<0.05).
Parents were asked an open question about what would help them to get more involved in the life of their child’s school. The most common responses were:

- more communication from the school (15%);
- being approached by the school and asked to be involved (13%); and
- more school activities (7%).

Many parents responded to this open question by citing the barriers that they currently experience:

- restrictions placed on parents by other commitments such as work (14%); and
- lack of time (13%).

Men are almost twice as likely as women to say that more activities would help them to get involved in the life of their child’s school (p<0.05).

Again, the existence of a school based parents body impacts on the responses. Parents whose children attend schools without Parent Teacher Associations are 2.5 times more likely to feel that they would like more communication with the school (p<0.00). Parents whose children attend schools without a School Board are twice as likely to feel that more information or communication would help them to get involved in the life of their child’s school than parents whose children attend schools with School Boards (p<0.01). They are also 3.4 times more likely to feel that more activities at the school would help them to get involved in the life of their child’s school (p<0.01). This effect may be caused by the existence of the parents bodies themselves or it may be an outcome of a strong parental involvement ethos in the school.

In relation to membership of school-based parents’ bodies, parents who are not members of PTA Committees are twice as likely to report lack of time as a barrier to involvement in their child’s school (p<0.05) and twice as likely to report a need for more communication with their child’s school (p<0.05). Conversely, parents who report being members of the School Board are actually four times more likely to report that having more activities at their child’s school would help them to get more involved (p<0.05).

Stage of school also impacts on what parents feel would help develop their involvement in the life of the school. Parents whose children are attending primary school are more likely than parents who have children in secondary school to report that their involvement in the school is restricted by work or other commitments (p<0.05). Parents whose children are in secondary school are:

- 1.6 times more likely than parents of primary school children to feel that a direct approach by the school would encourage them to be more involved, (p<0.05); and
- 1.8 times more likely than parents of primary school children to feel that they would like more information and communication with the school (p<0.01).
This suggests that parents with children in primary school are more satisfied with the level of communication than those whose children are in secondary school.

These responses suggest that involving more parents in the life of their child’s school would depend on both actions by the school (such as more communication, being asked and more activities) and a better work-life balance to increase the amount of time available to parents to take part.

2.2 Findings from the Focus Groups

2.2.1 Contact with the school
Most parents in the focus groups were able to cite instances of attending events at the school, either school discos for their children or events specifically for parents, such as bingo, family nights or quiz nights. Other events included coffee mornings and fun days. Many of these events were referred to as fundraising opportunities, often organised by the PTA, though in some cases parents were not entirely clear who had set up the event.

Many of the parents described positive relationships with their children’s schools, both primary and secondary schools:

    Aye I think that it’s like that with everybody, when you feel you’ve got to come to the school you are made to feel welcome…you are made to feel that way with this school. Just come up if something is bothering you, you ken that you’ve just to come up and you would be made welcome. (Parent, Group 7: Semi-urban primary)

    It’s a very open school. If you have a problem it’s not a case of you phoning down and getting an appointment to see the head teacher in a week’s time. If you have got a problem you can walk in and [the head teacher] will find time to talk to you. (Parent, Group 6: Urban primary)

On the other hand, some parents commented that they had very little contact with their children’s school:

    I don’t have any contact really. They never phone me to inform me of anything. (Parent, Group 2: Semi-urban secondary)

Often for these parents, their only contact with the school was when there was a problem or difficulty with their child. In some cases this was when parents contacted the school themselves:

    It’s been once or twice that I’ve had to call the school, say something has been bothering my daughter, she can be quite sensitive. And the response I’ve had is terrific, you know, they either call me back, they take
on board…It’s only been one or two incidences that I, I get full attention for what I need at the time. (Parent, Group 1: Rural primary)

For other parents’ however, contact only appeared to happen when the school contacted parents to raise difficulties:

The only time I’ve had contact with the school is negative things and if there is something wrong they’ll get in touch, that is as far as it goes. (Parent, Group 2: Semi-urban secondary)

This was seen as a negative experience, compounded by the lack of positive comments:

But at [school] it’s negativity all the time, he’s done this and he’s done that. They never lift the phone and say he’s done really well today, we are really proud of him. (Parent, Group 2: Semi-urban secondary)

2.2.2 Volunteering to assist the school
A few of the parents whose children were in primary schools mentioned helping out in classrooms:

We get a letter, we get a newsletter asking any parents if they are interested to get back to the school. I do it quite a lot. I do the word game on a Monday, that’s for primary three/four and it started on Monday there. It’s quite a good wee bunch. (Parent, Group 7: Semi-urban primary)

I’m the only person in the school that can drive a mini-bus so anytime you want a mini-bus I’m the guy that drives a mini-bus. (Parent, Group 6: Urban primary)

Other parents of primary school children help out for school trips when extra adults are needed:

It’s mostly outings and things or the kids are going to the museum or something like that but that suits me, I’d rather do that with the children than do the thing without children. (Parent, Group 3: Urban primary)

Parents with older children in primary school felt that they had less opportunity to volunteer than they had when their children were younger:

I used to go in as a parent helper in the classroom but my children are going into upper school now and the teachers don’t tend to like parent helpers for some reason. (Parent, Group 4: Rural primary/secondary)
For those parents whose children attend secondary school, there did not seem to be the same opportunity; one parent suggested that this may be due to child protection concerns:

_ I think they find it hard in schools in Scotland now so it tends to be the teachers I think rather than trying to have people vetted. But that’s what it is now, it’s Disclosure Scotland, you can’t have them in unless they are vetted._ (Parent, Group 5: Urban secondary)

Where parents were able to volunteer in schools, they felt that it had other positive impacts on their involvement with their children’s education:

_ It’s helped me with the school because they changed the teaching methods and I spent an hour being taught how to do division the way they do it at the school because I just couldn’t understand…but because of that link with the school I could go and say ‘well show me how to do that, show me how to do it the way the children are doing it now’. (Parent, Group 4: Rural primary/secondary)_

2.2.3 Information provision

It appeared common practice across the schools, both with and without School Boards, to send out newsletters to inform parents of what is happening in the school:

_ I would say I think the school is quite good, they put out a leaflet every month and there is quite a lot of information on that about what is happening in the school._ (Parent, Group 5: Urban secondary)

Parents in one group were aware that though they valued their newsletters, they did require staff time and effort and were sympathetic to the difficulties that this might cause.

For other parents, the concern was not about general school information, but a lack of information about their own child:

_ You know you get your school report at the end of the year and you have your parents’ nights, that’s really it, unless there is a problem._ (Parent, Group 1: Rural primary)

This issue was only raised by one group but they felt strongly that they should be given more information about what is happening in their child’s class and how their child is progressing:

_ And the kids are going in and they are given the citizen of the month or they are given a maths award, they are not actually told… why they achieved that?_ (Parent, Group 1: Rural primary)
2.2.4 Differences between primary and secondary schools

The parents who had children in secondary schools were able to reflect on the differences between primary and secondary schools. In some cases, parents felt that primary schools provided more opportunities for involvement compared with secondary schools:

*When they go to primary school you are invited to their sports days, once they hit high school, it’s like there is nothing...there is such a big transformation from going to primary 7 to first year. I think it’s hard for parents and kids and I think you lose that involvement; you become distanced from them, so even something as simple as a sports day.* (Parent, Group 2: Semi-urban secondary)

For most parents, the difference appears to be the personal invitation to attend meetings or events which they had experienced with their children’s primary schools but not in the secondary schools:

*At least at primary school they got in touch with you and you were invited to go and take part as you say, secondary school is entirely different.* (Parent, Group 2: Semi-urban secondary)

In one group, the parents suggested that the reduction in contact with secondary schools was due to their children’s embarrassment, rather than the school:

*I had more contact when they were in primary school...going to various trips and things like that, I was quite involved then, bit I feel that when they go to secondary school they don't want you to be there, you know, they go 'don't come up to the school mum!'*. (Parent, Group 8: Urban secondary)

2.2.5 Relationship with teachers

In two groups, both primary and secondary school, the parents’ relationship with teachers was seen as a key problem with their contact with the school as a whole:

*We are in the school and the headmistress can be there and the teachers and there’s not one of them would say ‘what are you up to today?’... You know, to make you feel welcome.* (Parent, Group 4: Rural primary/secondary)

This seemed to be based in part on difficulties of contacting teachers to discuss a child’s situation or behaviour:

*In fact even if you are phoning and there is nobody there to talk to you but they say ‘right we will get somebody by the end of the day to call you back’... at the end of the day you get nothing and you are in the same situation....*
the next day and you are back phoning at 9.00 in the morning saying I need to speak to somebody and they are like 'well nobody's available' we will get them to call you and it's like: ‘no, you said that yesterday’. And nobody is calling me back and I get frustrated at it. (Parent, Group 2: Semi-urban secondary)

There was also a prevailing feeling in the group that as their children were labelled as difficult children, the parents were also labelled by teachers:

I think it’s the attitude that they have towards the kids is passed onto the parents, I think sometimes if the kids misbehave and they are bad, it automatically falls back on us, that’s us, we are not doing our job right. I find sometimes that their attitude is that we are not doing our job right. (Parent, Group 2: Semi-urban secondary)

Some parents noted that they would like to receive more respect from teaching staff.

2.2.6 Parents who believe that they are involved enough
As with the telephone interviews, a small number of the focus group participants felt that they were involved enough in their child’s education. This appeared to be for one of two reasons:

• Parents whose children are having difficulty appear to be heavily involved already:

  *I don’t think anyone could be more involved with my son’s education than I am just now... Majority of my time is to do with my son’s education.* (Parent, Group 2: Semi-urban secondary)

• The schools are already working hard to involve parents and make them feel welcome within the school:

  *You can be more involved but the involvement I’ve got is that I can be here any time, any day and the school would more than welcome you in, do you know what I mean?* (Parent, Group 5: Urban secondary)
2.3 Conclusions on Current Levels of Involvement

The telephone survey found that two-thirds of parents had not been involved in school activities, and many (45%) reported that they would want to be more involved in the life of their child’s school. Reasons given for lack of involvement were a combination of lack of opportunities presented to them by the school and difficulties in finding time due to work or family commitments.

The existence of school-based parents’ bodies improves the level of parental involvement in children’s education, and similarly membership of these bodies increases the level of parental involvement.

Many parents in the survey felt that more communication between parents and the school was necessary. When discussed during the focus groups, some parents referred to a desire for information about their own children rather than general information about the school.

Differences between primary and secondary schools came up in both the telephone survey and the focus groups. In general, parents whose children are in secondary school requested more direct communication with their children’s schools and direct approaches from school staff to become involved.

A small percentage of telephone survey respondents felt that they were involved enough in their child’s education. In the focus groups this appeared to be due to either a high level of contact due to a child’s additional support needs or due to satisfaction with the current level of involvement provided by the school.
3. CURRENT PARENTAL REPRESENTATION STRUCTURES

Parents were asked a range of questions about the current structures for representing their views in their child’s school.

3.1 Findings from the Telephone Interviews

Both School Boards and PTAs are covered in this section though PTAs do not have the same legal responsibility to represent parents as School Boards.

3.1.1 Existence and membership of school-based parents’ bodies

In total 87% of parents responded that their child’s school has a School Board (see table 4). As parental membership of School Boards is restricted by law, only 2% of parents responded that they were members of the School Board. 1.6% of parents responded that they had stood for election to the School Board, which means that some School Board members did not have to be elected.

Table 4: Existence and membership of parent body in school

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>School Board</th>
<th></th>
<th>Parent Teachers Association</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No. with SB</td>
<td>No. members</td>
<td>No. with PTA</td>
<td>No. members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary School</td>
<td>430 (86%)</td>
<td>11 (3%)</td>
<td>454 (91%)</td>
<td>392 (78%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary School</td>
<td>443 (89%)</td>
<td>5 (1%)</td>
<td>392 (78%)</td>
<td>22 (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>873 (87%)</td>
<td>16 (2%)</td>
<td>846 (85%)</td>
<td>64 (8%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Men are four times more likely than women to have stood for election to the School Board (p<0.00). However women are twice as likely to report the existence of a School Board at their child’s school (p<0.01), suggesting higher awareness amongst women. Parents who report being members of the School Board are also seven times more likely than non-members to describe themselves as non-white (p<0.01), though this finding should be treated with caution as only 2% of the sample reported their ethnicity as non-white.

85% of parents responded that their child’s school has a Parent Teachers Association (see table 4). 8% of parents were members of their schools PTA committee. A further 4% reported membership of a Parents Association and 1% reported membership of another body within the school.

Parents who are members of a Parents Association or a School Board (but not PTA committees) are more likely to have children under school age (p<0.05). School Board members are 2.7 times more likely to have children under school age than non-members, similarly Parent Association members are twice as likely to have children under school age than non-members.
Parents who are members of Parent Teacher Association committees are also statistically more likely to report being members of the School Board (p<0.00). PTA committee members are 17 times more likely to also be School Board members than parents who are not PTA committee members; similarly School Board members are 22.5 times more likely to also be members of the PTA committee than non-members of School Boards (see table 5). Unlike School Boards, PTA committee members are 2.8 times more likely to be female (p<0.00).

3.1.2 Reasons for not becoming members of School Boards
87% of parents responded that they had never considered standing for election to the School Board. Chart A shows the reasons parents gave for not standing for election to the School Board. Overall, 45% of parents did not join the School Board because they did not feel that they had the time to volunteer. Only 10% of parents did not join because they did not want to, the remaining 45% gave a range of practical obstacles to their membership of the School Board, such as lack of childcare (5%), meeting times (8%), lack of knowledge about the role (5%), lack of knowledge about how to join (3%) and lack of awareness that, as a parent, they are able to stand for the School Board (2%).

Chart A: Reasons for not standing for election to the School Board
Parents whose children are attending primary school are almost twice as likely to cite unsuitable meeting times as a barrier to involvement in the School Board, compared to parents whose children are in secondary school (p<0.01). They are also twice as likely to cite the lack of childcare as an obstacle to involvement in a School Board, compared to parents whose children are in secondary school (p<0.05).

Parents whose children attend schools without a Parent Teacher Association are five times more likely to report that they were not sure how to join a School Board (p<0.01) and also 7.5 times more likely to report that they did not know they could become a School Board member (p<0.05).

Women are six times more likely than men to cite the lack of childcare as a barrier to involvement in the School Board (p<0.05) while men are ten times more likely than women to report working away from home as a reason for not joining a School Board (p<0.01).

Parents who live in households where either one or two of the adults are working are almost 3 times more likely to cite lack of time as an obstacle to becoming involved with a School Board than parents who live in households where no one works.

### 3.1.3 Information from School Boards

Parents were asked about their satisfaction with the way that their opinions are being represented by the School Board (see table 6).

**Table 6: Satisfaction with how parents’ opinions are represented by the School Board**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Primary</th>
<th>Secondary</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very satisfied</td>
<td>120 (29%)</td>
<td>111 (25%)</td>
<td>231 (27%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly satisfied</td>
<td>183 (44%)</td>
<td>188 (43%)</td>
<td>371 (43%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied</td>
<td>41 (10%)</td>
<td>50 (11%)</td>
<td>91 (11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly dissatisfied</td>
<td>12 (3%)</td>
<td>12 (3%)</td>
<td>24 (3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very dissatisfied</td>
<td>12 (3%)</td>
<td>6 (1%)</td>
<td>18 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know what the School Board says</td>
<td>50 (12%)</td>
<td>69 (16%)</td>
<td>119 (14%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>419</td>
<td>438</td>
<td>857</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While the majority of parents reported satisfaction with the way that the School Board represented their views, 14% responded that they did not know what the School Board says.

Parents whose children attend schools with Parent Teacher Associations are 2.6 times more likely to report that they are either very satisfied or fairly satisfied with how the School Board represents their views (p<0.00).
3.1.4 Communication with School Boards

Parents were asked if they had been in contact with the School Board about their views on matters relating to the school. This question was phrased to suggest individual contact rather than general communications such as newsletters (see table 7).

**Table 7: Proactive communication with School Boards**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Had contacted School Board themselves</th>
<th>Primary</th>
<th>Secondary</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Had contacted by School Board</td>
<td>53 (13%)</td>
<td>44 (10%)</td>
<td>97 (11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had not been in contact with School Board</td>
<td>333 (79%)</td>
<td>367 (84%)</td>
<td>700 (82%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>419 (100%)</td>
<td>437 (100%)</td>
<td>856 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

18% of parents reported proactive contact with the School Board about their views on matters relating to the school: 97 (11%) of parents had contacted the School Board themselves while 59 (7%) were contacted by the School Board.

Of the 7% of parents who reported that the School Board contacted them for their views, most often they were sent a letter (83%).

The 11% of parents who had contacted the School Board themselves to raise an issue reported a range of methods, the most popular being:
- contacting a School Board member for information (37%);
- speaking to a friend or neighbour who is a member (34%); or
- attending a School Board meeting themselves (20%).

Of those parents who were in contact with the School Board about their views, 15% stated that they would have liked more information from the School Board about the issue.

Women are 4.4 times more likely than men to have been in touch with a School Board by speaking to a friend or neighbour who is a member (p<0.01).

Parents who are members of PTA Committees are 25 times more likely to report informal contact with a School Board, for example by chatting at the school gates (p<0.01) and seven times more likely to report knowing a friend or neighbour who is a member of the School Board (p<0.05) than non-members of the PTA Committee.

In total, 33% of parents reported that they did not know how to contact the School Board. Parents whose children attend schools with Parent Teacher Associations are more likely to report that they knew how to contact the School Board (p<0.05). Parents who are members of PTA Committee are also five
times more likely to report knowing how to contact the School Board (p<0.01). On the other hand, parents who live in households with no one working are 50% less likely than one or two earner households to know how to contact the School Board.

3.1.5 Who would parents approach if they had concerns or ideas?
When asked whom they would approach if they had a concern or idea about how things could be done better at school, parents most commonly identified the head teacher (75%) or their child’s class teacher (45%). Under a fifth of respondents (18%) felt that they might approach the School Board, while slightly more (22%) indicated that they would consider approaching the PTA (see table 8).

Table 8: Who would parents approach if they had concerns or ideas?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Head teacher</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>491</td>
<td>666</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class teacher</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>312</td>
<td>402</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PTA</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Board</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other parents</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guidance teacher</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Men are more likely than women to approach a head teacher if they had concerns about the school (p<0.05). Single parents are less likely than other parents to say that they would contact either the School Board or the PTA if they had a concern or idea about the school (p<0.05).

There are a number of significant differences between primary schools and secondary schools in relation to who parents would contact if they had a concern or idea. Parents whose children are in secondary school are twice as likely as parents whose children are in primary school to say that they would contact the School Board if they had a concern or idea about how things could be done better at the school (p<0.00).

Compared with parents of children in secondary school, parents whose children are attending primary school are:
- 1.6 times more likely to say that they would contact other parents if they had a concern or idea about how things could be done better at the school, (p<0.01); and
- 1.6 times more likely to say that they would contact the head teacher if they had a concern or idea about how things could be done better at the school, (p<0.01); and
- Twice as likely to say that they would contact the class teacher if they had a concern or idea about how things could be done better at the school (p<0.00).
3.2 Findings from the Focus Groups

In order to better understand parents’ views about the Scottish Executive proposals, they were asked a range of questions about their current experience of parents’ bodies within their child’s school.

3.2.1 Schools without School Boards

Four of the focus groups were held in schools that did not have School Boards and parents in these groups were asked explicitly about the structures in place and the reasons why there was no School Board.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Group 5</th>
<th>Group 6</th>
<th>Group 7</th>
<th>Group 8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary/Secondary</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Representation Structure</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Parent Management Group</td>
<td>Active PTA</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Group 7’s primary school, the parents described an active PTA which carried out both the fundraising role of the PTA and a representation role by presenting parents’ views to the head teacher:

*Well for example there’s the book cases that were bought by the PTA for the school. She asked me to go to Ikea with her to pick them. We bought cups and saucers for the coffee morning, you know, I went with her to pick them so she does allow the parents to have opinions as well.* (Parent, Group 7: Semi-urban primary)

When asked about the reason for no School Board, the parents in the group suggested that it could be difficult to get parents to commit to being part of a parents’ body, a situation experienced by the current PTA. As a small school, they felt that there are not a large number of parents willing to give their time to the school.

The situation in Group 5, a large, urban secondary school, was similar:

*I think they did try to get it off the ground, if I remember right we got letters sent through a couple of years back and we tried to get it off the ground. At that point I couldn’t get involved anyway … A lot of the people just not taking an interest in it. Or no time for it really.* (Parent, Group 5: Urban secondary)

In this case however, the lack of interest in setting up a School Board was linked to lack of time due to work commitments.

Group 8, a large secondary school in an urban area, the experience was almost identical. Parents were aware that there had been a School Board once and that
nominations had been sought again about two years ago however they thought that there were not enough parents interested to enable a School Board to be set up. There appeared to be no PTA or other parents' body within the school.

In Group 6, the parents were involved in a Management Committee for the home-school link project. Though not formally a School Board, the parents felt that they carried out a similar role:

   We are required because we are a registered charity, we are required to have a management committee for that…primarily but it’s also taken on a role of a School Board because the head teacher is a director of the management committee and she feeds into it, she gives out a full school report at the committee. So it’s kind of one of those ones that are stuck in the middle. (Parent, Group 6: Urban primary)

There are currently ten members on this Management Committee, bringing together parents, school staff and project staff.

3.2.2 Parents' Views of PTAs
Parents in the focus groups often offered their views on PTAs, these ranged from parents who had no knowledge of the existence of a PTA to those who were members. In a few cases, parents were unsure of the difference between PTAs and School Boards.

In one primary school, the parents felt that the PTA itself was a clique that would be difficult to get involved with. One parent experienced trying to volunteer for the PTA but not being made to feel welcome:

   The PTA raised so much [money] afterwards that maybe they felt that they don't want outsiders just coming and helping out… I wouldn't do it again. (Parent, Group 1: Rural primary)

This was countered by the experience of PTA members in a different group, who felt that it was difficult to get other parents to volunteer:

   Just trying to get the parents to actually turn up. A lot of them say they will turn up and help but at the end of the day you are left stuck because nobody turns up. I had to run a disco one day myself on a Friday afternoon because nobody turned up to help… they just don't want to turn up, they can't be bothered. (Parent, Group 3: Urban primary)

3.2.3 Parents' Views of School Boards
A common view in all the groups was that School Boards are for professionals rather than for 'normal' parents:
There are, there is a formality but the way they encourage by sending out letters, to encourage people to go on them well join them, it’s also a bit more exclusive, it’s like only certain people get asked or prompted.
(Parent, Group 3: Urban primary)

Some parents mentioned the formality of School Boards as off-putting:

I think somebody who maybe enjoys a wee bit more, what’s the word I’m looking for, it’s more official, it is more serious… someone who would feel at ease with that kind of situation and most people haven’t got experience of that. A lot of them are full time mums so again that might make them feel a bit: ‘I wonder what this is going to be like?’ And I’m sure, I mean these places do make you feel welcome but it’s just that unknown.
(Parent, Group 3: Urban primary)

Throughout the focus groups, parents asked the researchers questions about School Boards, expressing confusion about their role. In one group this was explicitly linked to a lack of information from the School Board:

Parent 1: That makes it more mysterious because you don’t know what’s going on and you are thinking oh well I don't know so if it was a bit more regular about what is going on with it, it might be more useful.
Parent 2: Mind you in saying that if they gave you three pages worth on what they had done you would probably wouldn’t sit and read it anyway would you?
Parent 1: Somewhere between six lines and three pages would be good.
(Parents, Group 3: Urban primary)

Similarly, parents in another group stated that they would like to receive the minutes of the School Board meetings to give them a better idea of what is discussed as they did not receive much information:

You never get a report from the School Board. (Parent, Group 4: Rural primary/secondary)

Parents were asked to describe why they had not become members of their School Board. The most common reason for not joining the School Board was that the parents themselves felt they were not the right type of people, this was either because of their children:

I always feel as well that people who are on those boards, their kids are like, the perfect kids. Their kids are not like my kids, and that is my opinion that’s how I feel. (Parent, Group 2: Semi-urban secondary)

Or because of their perception of the socio-economic status of School Board members:
I think if you did a survey on people who were on like board meetings, if you did a survey on them like you did, did they own their own house, were they in full time employment, I think it would be tick, tick, tick, do they have a partner and all the rest of it, you know, definitely. (Parent, Group 2: Semi-urban secondary)

You see that with the School Board over at my daughter’s secondary school. Nearly every one of them works in the University, to a person they are all Dr this and Mrs that and you’ve got a list like that of near enough ‘Glasgow University, Strathclyde University…’ (Parent, Group 6: Urban primary)

It’s very official, it’s not for ordinary people like we are. (Parent, Group 4: Rural primary/secondary)

Some parents also mentioned that they felt that elections were off-putting:

I didn’t fancy the election bit either… I didn’t fancy putting myself up on a ledge. (Parent, Group 4: Rural primary/secondary)

I found this going and getting nominations and getting your self elected – that put me right off…he (the head teacher) sent me a letter out but as soon as I saw that I had to go and get two nominations I thought right, where do I get these nominations, do you know what I mean. It was just too much hassle at the time. (Parent, Group 8: Urban secondary)

Other common reasons for not taking part in a School Board are work or family commitments, which was a particular difficulty for the single parents in the groups, and the times of meetings. Those parents who were aware of the meeting times felt that as the School Board meetings were held in the evening they would not be able to leave their children.

3.3 Conclusions on Current Representative Structures

Few parents were members of parent bodies at their children’s schools. Members of one parent body, for example a School Board, were also more likely to be members of a second parent body, for example a PTA Committee. PTA Committee members are also more likely to be aware of structures and how to engage with School Boards.

While there was satisfaction with how School Boards represented parents’ views in focus groups there was a lot of confusion about the role of School Boards and a lack of information about what they do. This is reinforced by the survey findings that only 18% of parents had been in touch with a School Board about their views.
Focus groups reported concerns with the accessibility of both PTAs and School Boards, particularly in relation to the socio-economic status of parent body members compared to 'normal' parents.
4. SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE PROPOSALS

The majority of questions in the telephone survey and focus groups centred on the Scottish Executive proposals for improving parental involvement and representation.

4.1 Findings from the Telephone Interviews

The proposals in the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Bill, include fundamental changes to how school-level parents’ bodies will operate, replacing the School Boards system with Parent Forums.

4.1.1 Parents’ views on key changes

The parents who responded to the survey were presented with a range of statements about the Scottish Executive proposals and asked to rank how strongly they agreed or disagreed with the proposals. Table 9 (page 28) outlines these responses in full. In summary:

- 97% of parents agreed that the Parent Forum should consult other parents in the school about important issues and pass their views on to education authorities, head teachers and other relevant parties.
- 96% of parents agreed that there should be a body to represent parents’ views in their child’s school.
- 84% of parents felt that community groups should be involved in the Parent Forum, if invited to attend by the parents.
- 83% agreed that parents should be allowed to decide how the Parent Forum in their school is organised.
- 81% of parents felt that the parents who took part in the Parent Forum should be elected.
- 79% agreed that parents should decide what should be discussed at Parent Forum meetings.
- 63% of parents felt that they would be more likely to get involved in a Parent Forum if there were more parents involved than is currently the case with School Boards.
- 48% of parents felt that they would be more likely to get involved in the Parent Forum if it had a say over the school budget.

Again there are differences in how parents who are members of parents’ bodies responded to these statements. Parents who report being members of the School Board are more likely than non-members to strongly agree that there should be a body to represent parents’ views in their child’s school (p<0.05). Members of both School Boards and Parent Teacher Associations are more likely to agree with the statement that parents should be allowed to decide how the Parent Forum is run (p<0.05).

Parents whose children attend schools with a School Board are slightly more likely to strongly agree with the statement that there should be a body to
represent parents at their child’s school (p<0.01). They are also over twice as likely to strongly agree with the statement 'I would be more likely to get involved with a Parent Forum if more parents were involved' (p<0.05).

Men are more polarised in their views over whether or not they would be more inclined to get involved in a Parent Forum if they had a say over the school budget, with men both more likely to strongly agree and strongly disagree with the statement than women (p<0.01). Women are almost twice as likely as men to feel that they would get involved in a Parent Forum if more parents were involved (p<0.01). Women are also:

- twice as likely than men to feel that community groups should be involved in the Parent Forum (p<0.01) and;
- twice as likely to agree that the Parent Forum should consult other parents in the school about important issues and pass their views onto the education authorities, head teachers or other relevant parties (p<0.05).

Parents whose children are attending primary school are less likely to agree that the parents on the Parent Forum should be elected, compared to parents whose children are in secondary school who are more likely to state that members should be elected (p<0.05).

Single parents are slightly more likely than other parents to strongly agree that parents should decide what is discussed at Parent Forum meetings (p<0.05). They are also twice as likely than other parents to both strongly agree and tend to agree that the Parent Forum should involve community groups (p<0.05).
Table 9: Parents’ views on key components of Parent Forums

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Tend to agree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Tend to disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There should be a body to represent parents’ views in your child’s school.</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents should be allowed to decide how the Parent Forum in their school is organised.</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The parents who take part in the Forum should be elected.</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents should decide what should be discussed at Parent Forum meetings.</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would be more likely to get involved with a Parent Forum if more parents were involved.</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would be more likely to get involved if the Forum had a say over the school budget.</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community groups should be involved in the Parent Forum if they are invited.</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Parent Forum should consult other parents about important issues and pass their views to education authorities/head teachers/other relevant parties.</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: due to rounding not all rows add up to 100.
Parents were also asked an open question about what else could be done to encourage them to participate in a Parent Forum. The most common responses were:

- more communication (12%);
- meetings being held at a more convenient time (7%);
- if there was an issue I felt strongly about (4%); and
- if it was informal/open/welcoming (4%).

Some parents responded that they were likely to be restricted by other factors such as lack of time/too busy (8%) or being restricted by other/work commitments (6%).

As with the question asked earlier about barriers to involvement, parents gave a mix of responses. Some such as communication and meeting times which can be tackled by schools and Parent Forums. Others, however, are about work-life balance and go beyond the scope of the current legislative proposals.

4.1.2 Communicating with the Parent Forum

Parents were also asked about how likely they would be to respond to a range of communication methods open to Parent Forums (Chart B).

### Chart B: Likelihood of responding to Parent Forum requests for opinions

![Chart B](chart.png)

Chart B shows that for all but one method of eliciting parents’ opinions, over 60% of parents said that they were either quite likely or very likely to respond. The exception to this was asking for opinions at the school gate, presumably as the parents responding did not accompany the child to school. Parents whose children are attending primary school are over twice as likely to state that they are very likely or quite likely to respond if a Parent Forum member asked their opinion on a matter at the school gate, compared to parents of children in secondary school who are less likely to respond to this method (p<0.00).
Parents whose children attend schools without a School Board are 2.4 times more likely to report that they would be very likely or quite likely to attend a Parent Forum meeting than parents whose children attend schools with a School Board (p<0.05). This suggests that parents whose children attend schools without School Boards are more likely to want to engage with a parent body, perhaps due to a current lack of opportunities.

Men are less likely to report that they would attend a social event run by the Parent Forum (p<0.05) and less likely to report that they would respond to a request for opinions in writing from the Parent Forum (p<0.01).

Married or co-habiting parents are almost twice as likely as single parents to say that they would attend a Parent Forum meeting if invited (p<0.01) and also 1.6 times more likely than single parents to say that they would respond to an e-mail request from the Parent Forum (p<0.01).

### 4.1.3 Composition of Parent Forums

Parents were asked their views on the composition of the proposed Parent Forums. 76% of parents felt that parent members should always be in the majority (see table 10).

**Table 10: Should parents always be in the majority at Parent Forum meetings?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>178 (73%)</td>
<td>581 (77%)</td>
<td>759 (76%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>55 (23%)</td>
<td>151 (20%)</td>
<td>206 (21%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>11 (5%)</td>
<td>24 (3%)</td>
<td>35 (4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>756</td>
<td>1000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There was a split between whether or not the head teacher should be present at Parent Forum meetings (see table 11), with half of parents feeling that the head teacher should always be present and only slightly less stating that they should be present when invited. Only 1% of parents felt that the head teacher should never be present at Parent Forum meetings.

**Table 11: Should the head teacher be present at Parent Forum meetings?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Primary</th>
<th>Secondary</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Always</td>
<td>256 (51%)</td>
<td>247 (49%)</td>
<td>503 (50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When invited</td>
<td>238 (48%)</td>
<td>244 (49%)</td>
<td>482 (48%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>3 (1%)</td>
<td>6 (1%)</td>
<td>9 (1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>3 (1%)</td>
<td>3 (1%)</td>
<td>6 (1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>1000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Parents who are members of a Parents Association or are members of a Parent Teacher Association Committee are more likely than non-member parents to say...
that the head teacher should always be present at Parent Forum meetings (p<0.05 and p<0.00 respectively).

4.2 Findings from the Focus Groups

The majority of the focus group discussion centred on the Scottish Executive proposals for Parent Forums. The proposals were explained to the focus group participants during the group and information sheets were circulated to ensure that the parents felt informed before they responded.

4.2.1 Desirability of a parents’ body

The first question asked was whether or not the participants felt that there should be a body to represent their views within the school. Every parent who responded to this question agreed that there should be a parents’ body within the school:

*The Parent Forum, it gives parents a voice as well, that’s the only thing I think, you know, I think parents should have a voice.* (Parent, Group 5: Urban secondary)

Some parents argued that a parents’ body would help them to take on the school, where as individuals they did not feel that they had much power:

*As an individual, you could go and you would get fobbed off but surely if there was a group of people saying, as a voice, that this is unacceptable… you would maybe get more clout if the forum was there.* (Parent, Group 8: Urban secondary)

For a small number of other parents, the reason for a parents' body was not to represent their views but to help take the pressure off teaching staff:

*Yes I do because the teachers have enough to deal with, if that’s the case of helping the teachers.* (Parent, Group 1: Rural primary)

4.2.2 School level flexibility

The proposals for Parent Forums have been designed to allow for flexibility, with parents in each school agreeing on the format for their Forum, rather than a centrally designed structure.

In general, parents agreed that there would be a need for each school to decide how its Parent Forum should be constituted:

*I think it should be different because all schools are different. Like I think it would be different from a town to a village.* (Parent, Group 7: Semi-urban primary)
This support for flexibility was countered by a desire for clear guidelines from the Scottish Executive on how Parent Forums could be run:

The government [should] put out a framework or guidelines on how they should do it and then leave it up to the school and parents how they are going to do it, a wee bit help from the government. (Parent, Group 2: Semi-urban secondary)

Would there be guidelines sent from the government as well as to give examples and to give what’s maybe working in different areas? You might not think of something that is working in Perth but to say well here is an example, this is working, what do you think? (Parent, Group 1: Rural primary)

4.2.3 Parent membership of Parent Forums
As a key part of the proposals the elections, which are mandatory for School Board members, would be removed (though each school would be able to hold elections if parents expressed a desire for this).

Most parents felt that elections would put parents off:

You might get a better turn out with an open forum rather than people feeling they are being put pressure on to go and do something and they are maybe not 100% behind it but they have got the choice to go if they want to go. (Parent, Group 5: Urban secondary)

An open forum was preferred by most parents:

I think all parents of children in the school should be able to have a voice, they should be able to go along and say what they’ve got to say instead of it being behind closed doors. (Parent, Group 4: Rural primary/secondary)

I would think that you would have everybody available to come up but possibly only a certain number that are active...like a small committee type of thing but the meetings would be open to all. You would end up with a hardcore of people who were interested and everybody else...they would then have the freedom to come to any meeting and put forth their ten pence worth. (Parent, Group 8: Urban secondary)

A small number of parents felt that elections showed commitment:

You have a lot of people who volunteer for things that don’t follow through. How do you know you’ve got the commitment? (Parent, Group 1: Rural primary)
This was countered by one parent’s suggestion that elections did not mean much when the people voting knew little about who they were voting for.

One parent, who felt that membership should be open to any parent, pointed out that open membership itself could cause difficulties:

> And what would your amount of folk be? How would you cut it off? You know you could have 400 parents. (Parent, Group 1: Rural primary)

A further problem would be the continuity of parent members in an open forum, as not every parent who wanted to be active would feel that they had to attend every meeting:

> I don’t know, I don’t know if that would be a good idea or not, would you get mix and match, you know some coming sometime and some not… And then not knowing what’s gone on in the last meeting but getting involved in the next meeting. (Parent, Group 7: Semi-urban primary)

There is therefore a tension between wanting Parent Forums to be open and accessible and finding some way to ensure continuity and commitment. When this was discussed in two of the groups, parents pointed out that in reality even without elections there is likely to be a core group of parents who volunteer to be active members of the Parent Forum and therefore consistency (and numbers) may not be a problem in practice:

> You’re never going to get everyone. You’re going to get half the school there, it’s only going to be the same people really when you think about it. (Parent, Group 4: Rural primary/secondary)

### 4.2.4 Teacher participation in Parent Forums

Generally, parents wanted teachers to be present at Parent Forum meetings. They provided a range of reasons for this view. Many parents wanted the expertise of teachers when discussing educational issues:

> I think it should be a mixture, not all parents because at the end of the day the teachers are the ones that are in [the school] 24/7 and know what is going on and if they are in at the meetings then they are letting the parents know exactly what is going on. (Parent, Group 7: Semi-urban primary)

> You would need a teacher or some sort of assistance … because parents could go in and end up way off track about certain things, do you know what I mean. You need some sort of guidance to pull you back online: ‘you are way out of reach here, there is no way on this earth that this is going to happen’ instead of sitting talking about this for the next three months. (Parent, Group 5: Urban secondary)
Others thought that involving teachers would help the communication between parents and teachers in general:

*I think the school will get on a lot better rather than it all just being parents because then they are communicating together better... I think if teachers came to these kind of things too the parents would feel more approachable to them.* (Parent, Group 7: Semi-urban primary)

Only one group felt that teachers should not be involved in the Parent Forum at all:

*I don’t think any teachers should be involved in it, no, if it’s a parent thing then I think it should just stick to that.* (Parent, Group 8: Urban secondary)

For this group, the issue appeared to be a desire to talk confidentially about their experiences with the school without fear of repercussion for their children.

A less common view was that the head teacher could be invited when parents wanted them to attend rather than attending as a full member:

*No I certainly wouldn’t [want the head teacher to be present] no. I wouldn’t like them to be insulted, I would invite them to attend when we wanted them there.* (Parent, Group 2: Semi-urban secondary)

This appeared to be due to a concern that if the head teacher was a full member, they would exert undue influence on the Parent Forum:

*They would only discuss the topics that they [the head teacher] really wanted to talk about.* (Parent, Group 3: Urban primary)

Other parents were concerned that parents would not be able to talk freely with the head teacher present:

*I think parents will speak more openly if the head master’s not there, you can always report back to him you know, obviously tell him what’s happened at the meeting.* (Parent, Group 4: Rural primary/secondary)

There was also sympathy for teachers who may not want to attend:

*You can understand, going back to school after being there all day, they must get scunnered looking at kids all day and they are having to go back at night to do something else cannot be much fun either.* (Parent, Group 2: Semi-urban secondary)
The involvement of community groups was only mentioned in two groups, and in both cases the parents felt that they should be invited along when parents felt it would be beneficial, rather than being full members:

The thing is too if you did have the [Parent Forum] and it was like the parents and the teacher together, whatever the topic was you could always like invite a policeman for that meeting or you know, if it was to do with the priest, invite him, you could invite more or less anybody to come along if there was something you wanted to discuss or get their opinion.

(Parent, Group 7: Semi-urban primary)

4.2.5 Remit of the Parent Forum
When asked what they would like to be able to discuss at Parent Forum meetings, the most common response was that parents wanted to be able to discuss anything that appeared to them to be relevant:

You should be able to talk about anything as long as it’s to do with the school I suppose. (Parent, Group 3: Urban primary)

As long as it is to do with the school. Nothing should be held back, it should be open at these kind of meetings and discussed freely. (Parent, Group 7: Semi-urban primary)

However, along with the desire for a wide remit, parents also stressed that it was important that their views were listened to:

As long as you can go and put your point of view and know that you are being listened to would make a lot of difference. (Parent, Group 2: Semi-urban secondary)

The issue of the specific remit to consult with other parents who are not active members of the Parent Forum was discussed. Generally, parents viewed this as a positive role for the Parent Forums:

Well that’s the whole point, that is exactly what this Parent Forum as it’s been put today is about… getting the word out to every individual parent. (Parent, Group 1: Rural primary)

Few parents were concerned about taking on the task of collating other parents views:

You could send letters in to get votes in and see how the votes go, tally them up on certain subjects. It wouldn’t take that long would it really? (Parent, Group 3: Urban primary)
The issue of data protection was raised by one group in relation to members of the Parent Forum contacting other parents:

They (the school) have got the database, they are not going to give me names and addresses of all the parents. And they are not going to give my name and address to anybody else either, you know. So it would need to be the school really. (Parent, Group 5: Urban secondary)

Concerns over taking on the role of consulting with other parents were only raised in one of the groups who felt that this would involve a considerable amount of work, arguing instead that if other parents do not attend meetings they should not get a say in the issues:

Fair enough the ones that can’t you know put it in writing but to actually say there is 10 of us go every time and they are to take it on board to contact over 1000 parents, no. I wouldn't, it’s not my responsibility so if I want a say in my daughter’s schooling, I’ll go and I’ll attend and I’ll have a say, you know if one is being set up and if they don’t want to go and attend and have a say they will go with the majority. (Parent, Group 5: Urban secondary)

The parents involved in the school Management Committee in Group 6 reported that they already carried out surveys of parents:

Well we put out the questionnaires twice a year to parents … to find out their views on things, plus we talk to them, we come in here [the school’s parent room] and we sit and we talk. (Parent, Group 6: Urban primary)

Connected to the issue of consultation was a desire from one group of parents to have regular reports circulated to parents:

It would nice to get a bit of feedback once they’ve done that, get a response. So we can say that to them that if they can make sure that they get back to the parents and say what they’ve decided to do, say if you raise an issue, come back to you and say what they’ve decided to do and say why. (Parent, Group 2: Semi-urban secondary)

4.2.6 Removal of some functions of School Boards
Parents were asked specifically about three functions of School Boards which have not been included in the proposals for Parent Forums: setting occasional holidays, being able to veto spending on books and materials and control over the school building out of hours.

In relation to setting occasional holidays, few parents expressed any interest in carrying out this role, with most commenting that it should be done by the head teacher or education authority:
I think it should just go back to either the education board, the individual school or the teacher. (Parent, Group 1: Rural primary)

Involvement on decisions relating to spending on books and materials was slightly more contentious. In relation to the educational value of books and materials, the most common view expressed was that teachers were best placed to make the decision:

I think that should be left to the school again, why should, I mean we wouldn’t have a clue what books to get and what books not to get and you know that is really down to the education side of it I think. (Parent, Group 5: Urban secondary)

I certainly don’t feel that they [the parents] should have the right to tell a teacher that we think you should buy this, this and that and not this, this and this. I don’t feel they have the right. (Parent, Group 6: Urban primary)

However, while most parents felt teachers should make the final decision, parents in most of the groups noted that they would like to be consulted:

It would be good to be kept informed of what they are doing, what they are buying and what not. I think the head teacher should get the last say but I think the parents should be involved with talking about it as well. We just want involved! (Parent, Group 3: Urban primary)

I think we should have a say...But then the final decision will be the head teacher’s anyway no matter what your views were. (Parent, Group 2: Semi-urban secondary)

I still think that the parents should, what harm is it going to do for us to know what the materials, how much they are and what they are buying and then if there is anything that you do oppose then you’ve got the opportunity. (Parent, Group 7: Semi-urban primary)

If it came to the school budget say ‘well why is it you are spending x amount on doing this when something else could be done?’ And then you’d get an explanation as to why they think ...you know what I mean? That would be a good idea, you would maybe have an input without actually doing too much. (Parent, Group 8: Urban secondary)

In three of the groups the issue of decisions about money raised by a Parent Forum was brought up:

Parents should be consulted in what is going to happen with the money that was raised by them. (Parent, Group 6: Urban primary)
When the question of who should control the use of the school building out of school hours was discussed parents saw a much clearer role for the Parent Forum. One parent felt that the parents should control this because she thought that the Head Teacher was unlikely to want to be involved:

*I think that should be a parent thing because she [the head teacher] is just going to do her job and go home afterwards anyway ... if it’s nothing to do with the school she is not really going to want to get involved with it anyway is she?* (Parent, Group 7: Semi-urban primary)

However, in two schools, the parents queried whether they would have much control in reality due to the need for school staff to be present when others use the school building:

*A lot does happen in here but a lot of time that is down to the janitor. It’s down to the janitor, they were going to football ... but they couldn’t get into the school on a Saturday to get the bus so they had to make other arrangements for private transport because the janitors are only paid a certain length of time.* (Parent, Group 5: Urban secondary)

The second group that raised this felt that the local authority would have rules and regulations which would mean that in practice the parents’ body would have little control:

*I think there are a lot of rules from the Council on what they can do and what they can’t do as well... you know, what you can use and what you can’t use and what time you can have it from and to and all the rest of it, so you know I think there are a lot of rules and regulations on that anyway.* (Parent, Group 8: Urban secondary)

4.2.7 Support for parents who join Parent Forums

Parents were asked what type of support they would require if they were to become members of the proposed Parent Forums. The responses across focus groups were similar.

The most common request was for training for parents, in most cases training for carrying out consultations was referred to:

*Thing is if you are going out and asking people about their opinion. You want to know what you are talking about, if they ask you a question, you know, they are not going to have much confidence if you say well I don’t really know... And then you will have to collate all that information and make it into a report...*(Parent, Group 1: Rural primary)
Other parents asked for training on setting up Parent Forums and on holding meetings.

The second most common request for support was a mechanism to share practice with other Parent Forums across Scotland:

*Maybe advice from other forums that have already been set up. Like community councils take advice from other community councils when they are doing something when they’ve done it before.* (Parent, Group 2: Semi-urban secondary)

*I mean that’s the thing, if it falls by the wayside then you turn round and say I need some help here, this strategy is not working for us, have you got any other examples, have you got any other systems that are working better in other areas, can you help?* (Parent, Group 1: Rural primary)

Parents in two groups also discussed the need for financial support to establish and maintain the Parent Forums. One group felt strongly that the Scottish Executive would have to fund Parent Forums if they are to improve parental involvement:

*If you have got support and commitment from the top down then it’s going to make every difference to every individual school.* (Parent, Group 1: Rural primary)

A different group felt that it would be helpful to have a facilitator while the Parent Forum was being set up:

*I think in the beginning you would maybe need a facilitator person. Somebody who would actually say ‘right, this is the options and this is how to do it’ and to gather people together.* (Parent, Group 8: Urban secondary)

4.2.8 Independent involvement in support

Some parents mentioned the need for support to be provided by an organisation outwith the school or local authority. One group of parents were concerned about the impact on Council Tax if funds for supporting the Parent Forums was to come directly out of local authority budgets. Another group were concerned that without independent support, the head teacher would be able to mould the Forum to her needs, rather than the needs of parents:

*I think so because [the head teacher] can be very persuasive and when you are a parent you sometimes feel that she knows better than you, even though she doesn’t, because she is running the school you tend to back down.* (Parent, Group 7: Semi-urban primary)
One parent explicitly mentioned a desire for an independent body to provide guidelines and support:

I’d love someone like a second party involved in it, to be more able to discuss and stuff like that. (Parent, Group 3: Urban primary)

4.2.9 Increasing parental involvement through Parent Forums

Parents were asked about what else could be done to increase the likelihood of them taking part in a Parent Forum.

Parents with children in primary school mentioned the need for childcare facilities:

Yes, a crèche for anything… Crèche will always make all the difference, you are going to get four times the amount of parents through that door with a crèche. (Parent, Group 1: Rural primary)

Yes for single parents and that, rather than taking the weans along and trying to listen to what is being said. (Parent, Group 3: Urban primary)

Childcare was not mentioned by any of the parents in secondary schools, presumably as their children were old enough to be left at home without the parent for a short time.

A few parents were also concerned that in the transition from School Boards to Parent Forums, the same people would take the lead and therefore the Forums would not become more accessible:

If you have a clique on the PTA, what stops that wee clique of PTA becoming the Parent Forum? (Parent, Group 1: Rural primary)

Another concern was that the Parent Forum would ‘clash’ with the PTA or the School Board members, creating tension. As a solution to these implementation problems, one group suggested that the Scottish Executive begin informing parents of the changes now:

Start maybe talking about it now, send a few wee fliers out to folk saying this is going to be happening… I think it would be good if they had some mock meetings just now just to show how relaxed it was instead of just throwing them all in at the deep end. (Parent, Group 3: Urban primary)

One group suggested that information on Parent Forums is sent directly to parents:
As long as information was sent out, you know, I think you would actually have to send out every parent a letter asking if they would be interested. (Parent, Group 8: Urban secondary)

Another suggestion that came up in two of the groups was to use advertising to raise parents' awareness of the changes:

They would have to I suppose advertise it, make it sound appealing to parents that wouldn't usually get involved with them ... sell it to people and once you've got more people involved, maybe they'll find that they enjoy it and they are getting some good out of it. (Parent, Group 2: Semi-urban secondary)

We should be doing things on television ...the people don't read newspapers, they don't read the letters cause they can't read, having it visually like adverts this is what parents are watching and it's explaining their right and really, really in user friendly ways. (Parent, Group 6: Urban primary)

However, some parents still felt that they would not be able to take part in the Parent Forum:

Too much commitment, what you are talking about is a lot of commitment, you are saying you want this one to help out and that one and you want the commitment and you don't want somebody who is going to come in for one term and then leave so you are committing yourself to years of it. (Parent, Group 1: Rural primary)

Other parents were concerned that parents who could not be involved would be criticised:

For various reasons, they might work full time or they may have other commitments but just because they can't or don't come along to meetings doesn't mean that they aren't interested. The fact that they get their children up every day and send them to school shows they've got a commitment to their education. (Parent, Group 6: Urban primary)

There was also a suspicion amongst some parents, who themselves indicated interest in the Parent Forum, that other parents would not be willing to take part:

I dinnae ken, there is parents that want to get involved with this and that and then there are parents who just don't bother. (Parent, Group 3: Urban primary)

I really don't think there is anymore that the school can do, it's down to parents. It's parents that have got to come to things like this, it really is,
and it’s down to the parents at the end of the day. Parents have got to get involved. (Parent, Group 5: Urban secondary)

However, this view was qualified by a parent who pointed out:

Still nice to have the offer though if you wanted it, you would be able to change your mind. But as it stands now nobody is getting a choice. (Parent, Group 3: Urban primary)

4.3 Conclusions on Scottish Executive Proposals

Parents who participated in both the telephone survey and the focus groups responded positively to the Scottish Executive proposals for Parent Forums.

Parent responding to both the telephone survey and participating in the focus groups approved of the Scottish Executive proposals to allow parents more flexibility to decide how to run Parent Forums within their own schools. During the focus group discussions parents requested guidelines or Parent Forum models from the Scottish Executive to facilitate this.

There was some disagreement over the desirability of elections, with primary school parents viewing them less favourably than secondary school parents. In focus groups parents thought that open forums might increase the number of parents who were willing to get involved as elections were seen as off-putting.

The telephone survey and focus groups suggested that parents felt that teachers and head teachers should be present at Parent Forum meetings. Reasons given for teacher involvement included that it would help parents understand school issues and that it would foster better communication between parents and teachers in general.

Parents also responded positively to the consultation role of Parent Forums, with 79% of parents reporting that they felt that the Parent Forum should consult with other parents. During focus groups this view was reiterated and parents did not seem overly concerned with taking on this role themselves. Parents in the focus groups also commented that it would be important for head teachers to listen to their views and for the Parent Forum to report on findings and outcomes to other parents.

During the focus groups, parents were asked about their opinions on the School Board functions that are not currently contained within the draft Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Bill. In relation to powers over occasional holidays and school spending on books and materials, few parents expressed an interest in having control over this issue. However, in relation to spending on books and materials, they did express a desire to be consulted by the head teacher.
There was more debate during the focus groups over the role of the Parent Forum in relation to the use of the school building out of school hours. Most parents felt that it would be appropriate for parents to have control over the use of the building out of school hours, as the group most likely to use it, and as members of the local community.

Parents in the focus groups also requested the following types of support for Parent Forums:
- training (particularly in carrying out consultation exercises);
- childcare facilities to allow them to participate; and
- a mechanism to share good practice between Parent Forums.
APPENDIX 1: RESEARCH METHODS

This research aimed to identify and explore the views of parents across Scotland in relation to the Scottish Executive proposals for parental involvement and representation in Scottish schools. The research design brings together both quantitative and qualitative methods, outlined in this section.

1. Objectives and methods for telephone survey
The telephone interviews, conducted by MORI Scotland, aimed to gather the views of a representative sample of 1,000 parents of children aged 5-16 (inclusive) in state school education.

1.1 Sampling
All fieldwork was conducted by telephone using Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) between 4th and 25th July 2005 at MORI Telephone Surveys Scotland (MTS Scotland), which is based in Leith, Edinburgh.

The sample was derived using random-digit dialling to ensure that all households, including those with ex-directory numbers, could be sampled for the survey. The sampling method was as follows:
- postcode sectors were sampled from all postcode sectors with probability proportionate to household size;
- sampled postcode sectors were matched to telephone exchanges providing the root numbers (the 0131 550 segment) for generating numbers; and
- the remaining four digits of the numbers were generated randomly to provide a sample of telephone numbers.

The generated numbers were tested to screen out non-working numbers and matched against directories to remove known businesses. The remaining numbers were loaded into MORI’s sample management system which handles the dialling of numbers and the allocation of calls to interviewers.

To ensure that the achieved sample was representative of the population, quotas were set on type of school (primary/secondary) and tenure (owner occupier and renting). These quotas were based on analysis of the characteristics of households with school-age children using data from the Scottish Household Survey.

1.2 The survey questions
Each telephone interview lasted approximately 15 minutes, with both open and closed questions. The questions were developed by SCC in collaboration with MORI Scotland and with the involvement and approval of Scottish Executive Education Department. The interview script can be found in Appendix 2.
1.3 Analysis
The survey results were analysed using SPSS which allows for analysis to look for relationships between variables as well as providing basic frequencies. All the relationships described in this report are statistically significant (see box 1).

The effect size of results was measured using odds ratio calculations. This is a simple set of equations that show how many more times likely one group of respondents is to give a specific answer compared to a different group. For example:

*Parents whose children attend schools without a School Board are twice as likely to feel that they are more involved in the life of their child’s school than parents whose children attend schools with School Boards (p<0.01).*

### Box 1: Statistical Significance

Throughout the report we have used the following conventions to show the statistical significance of our results:
- p<0.05 – means that there is less than a 5% chance that the relationship identified between two variables is random.
- p<0.01 – means that there is less than a 1% chance that the relationship identified between two variables is random.
- p<0.00 – means that there is almost no chance that the relationship identified between two variables is random.

The parents who agreed to be interviewed via telephone answered a range of questions about their own families and their socio-economic situation. These questions were included to allow for statistical analysis to explore any variation in responses. They also provide the context for the responses.

A quota was set to ensure 50% of parents had children in primary school and 50% in secondary school. Parents whose children attended different schools were asked to provide information on one, randomly selected, school.

#### 2.1 Number of children aged under 16 in the household
The majority of parents who responded to the telephone interview had either one or two children under 16 (42% and 40% respectively). A further 14% had three children under 16, with 3% having four children and only 1% responding that they had five children under 16.

Most of the children were over school age (approximately five years old), 16% of parents had one child under school age while 2% had two children under school age.
The parents were selected to ensure an equal number responded to questions from their experience of either primary school or secondary school. However, they were also asked about the number of children in each stage (see table 12).

**Table 12: Number of children in each stage of schooling**

<table>
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<th>One</th>
<th>Two</th>
<th>Three</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary school</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary school</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Though parents were asked to respond only in relation to primary or secondary school, the table shows a more complicated picture. 68% of parents only had children in secondary school while 54% of parents only had children in primary school. This suggests that there are some parents who have experienced both primary and secondary school situations.

2.3 *Housing tenure*

The telephone interview also selected parents on the basis of whether their home was owned or rented to ensure that the sample matched the Scottish population. In this sample 67% of the parents were living in owner-occupied housing while the remaining 33% were renting.

2.4 *Ethnicity*

Respondents were asked to self-classify their ethnicity. In line with the Scottish population, of which 2% is non-white according to the last census in 2001, 98% of the parents who responded classified themselves as white. The remaining 2% was broken down into 1% Asian and 1% mixed background. This means that only 17 responses were received from non-white parents and due to the low numbers, caution should be taken when interpreting any statistical differences between white and non-white participants.

2.5 *Household composition*

25% of the parents were the only adult in the household. 57% reported that there were two people over the age of 16 living in the household, 14% had three people over the age of 16 living in the household and a further 4% had over four adults living in the household.

Where other adults were present in the household, 89% were husband/wife/partners and 33% were sons or daughters over the age of 16. Further analysis revealed that some parents who had responded that there was another adult in the household were referring to a son or daughter rather than a partner. Therefore the number of single parents in the sample is slightly higher than the 25% parents who were the sole adult, at 33%. It should be noted that this is higher than the true figure of single parent households in Scotland.
2.6 Working status
A slight majority of the parents who responded to the survey described themselves as working full-time (52%), with a further 28% working part-time which was defined at 9–29 hours per week. The remaining 20% who did not work were split as follows:
- 11% not working as looking after home/family
- 5% unemployed
- 2% not working due to disability
- 1% student
- 1% retired.

Participants were also asked about the working status of their husband, wife or partner. A slightly larger majority stated that their partner was working full-time (74%) and a slightly smaller percentage were working part-time (12%). The remaining 14% was made up of:
- 6% not working as looking after home/family
- 4% unemployed
- 1% retired
- 1% disabled
- 1% student.

In total, 13% of the parents surveyed lived in households with no earner, 37% lived in single-earner households, with 50% living in two-earner households.

2.7 Educational qualifications
Respondents were asked to indicate what their highest educational qualification is (see chart C).
From the chart we can see that 13% of parents who responded had no formal qualifications at all while 30% of parents had Standard Grade level qualifications. A further 20% had Further Education qualifications, either NVQ 1 or 2 (7%) or an HNC or HND (13%). 14% had a Bachelor degree or equivalent and 5% had a post-graduate degree.

2.8 Gender
24% of the participants were male and 76% were female.

3. Objectives and methods for focus groups

Following the telephone poll, we carried out eight focus groups with parents across Scotland to explore their views in more detail. To meet the stated objectives two groups of parents were approached to participate in focus groups:

1. Hard to reach parents (4 focus groups).
2. Parents whose children attend schools that currently have no formal School Board (4 focus groups).

3.1 Hard to reach parents
The Scottish Executive specified that it would be interested in hearing the views of ‘hard-to-reach’ parents. We suggested that this research focused specifically on parents who experience disadvantage due to poverty or who themselves have low levels of formal education. Our 2002 focus group research with parents³ highlighted the difficulty that low-income parents have overcoming barriers to involvement in their child’s school; in particular their own negative experiences of

³ SCC, 2002, Parents Views of and Experiences with Scottish Education Providers
schooling often appeared to impact on their relationship with their children’s school.

In relation to selecting the parents themselves, we specifically asked for parents who:

- have not been involved in the School Board; and
- have low levels of formal education; and/or
- experience disadvantage due to poverty.

The focus groups were established using the local networks of the Scottish Network for Parental Involvement in Children’s Learning. The Network brings together a range of professionals who work with parents and was able to facilitate setting up focus groups with parents who experience disadvantage due to poverty or who themselves have low levels of formal education.

3.2 Parents whose children attend schools that currently have no formal School Board

The second group of parents involved in the focus group research are parents whose children attend schools that currently have no formal School Board. Approximately 11% of schools do not have School Boards and the views of parents who take a different approach to parental involvement and representation are to be specifically targeted by this research.

Table 13: Key characteristics of focus groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>School Board in place</th>
<th>Number of parents</th>
<th>Primary/ Secondary</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group 1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Rural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 2</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>Semi-urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 3</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 4</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Primary/ Secondary</td>
<td>Rural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 5</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>Urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 6</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 7</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Semi-urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 8</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>Urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4 with School Boards/ 4 without</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>3 Secondary/ 4 Primary/ 1 mixed</td>
<td>2 rural, 2 semi-urban, 4 urban</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.3 Expenses and incentives
A small payment of £10 was made to individual participants to cover their expenses. Childcare facilities were also provided where required to enable parents to participate.

3.4 Analysis
The focus groups were transcribed and qualitative analysis carried out to draw out the key messages from the focus groups. The transcriptions were coded according to the emerging themes, and themes validated by their repeated appearance. Throughout the report we use quotes to exemplify these themes; in the majority of cases these quotes have been selected as typical responses. In a small number of cases one parent brought up an issue that, although not mentioned by others, gives an insight into their experiences; in these cases we have clearly stated that these are not typical views or experiences.

As the focus groups require qualitative analysis we have not attached percentages or numbers as, unlike the telephone poll, we are not able to generalise from these findings to the population of Scottish parents. However, to give an indication of frequency we have used terms such as ‘many participants’ or ‘a common view’ to suggest that these were issues that were raised repeatedly across the groups. Where parents indicated that they felt strongly about an issue this has been noted in the text.
APPENDIX 2: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR TELEPHONE POLL

Introduction

Good morning/afternoon/evening my name is ……. and I am calling from MORI Scotland, the independent research organisation. We are carrying out a survey for the Scottish Consumer Council about children’s education. All the information we collect will be kept in confidence, and used for research purposes only. It will not be possible to identify any individuals in the results. The interview will just take 15 minutes.

SECTION 1 – Age and school of child

1. How many children under the age of 16 living in your household?

2. How many of the children are …
   a. Too young to go to school
   b. In primary school
   c. In secondary school
   d. Out of school

   If NO children in primary or secondary, thank and close.

If more than one child in primary school

3. Do both / all of your children go to the same primary school? If no, how many different schools do they attend?

If more than one child in secondary school

4. Do both / all of your children go to the same secondary school? If no, how many different schools do they attend?

If more than one primary school OR more than one secondary school OR children at both primary and secondary school

5. Just to help me focus the questions on one school, could you tell me the names of the schools your child/ren go to, starting with the youngest child and ending with the oldest?

If more than one school listed at Q5, CATI randomly select one. If no name given, text sub ‘your {youngest, second youngest, oldest etc depending on selection} child’s school’ where questions contain School.

SECTION 2 – PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

6. Have you ever been involved in activities at School, for example by helping out in your child’s classroom or helping out at events or trips?
7. How would you describe the opportunities you have to be involved in the life of School? Do you think there are too few opportunities to get involved, too many demands made on parents or do you think the balance is about right?

- Too few opportunities
- Too many demands
- Balance is about right

8. Would you personally like to be more involved in the life of School?

- Yes
- No
- Don't Know
- Refused

9. What, if anything, would help you to be more involved in the life of your child’s school?

**SECTION 3 – PARENTAL REPRESENTATION**

10. Does School have a School Board?

- Yes
- No
- Don't Know
- Refused

11. Does School have a Parent Teacher Association?

- Yes
- No
- Don't Know
- Refused

12. Are you a member of any of the following bodies at your child’s school?

- A. {if coded Yes at Q10} The School Board
- B. {if coded Yes at Q11} The Parent Teachers Association
- C. A Parents’ Association
- D. Any other organisation at the school
Response options for each: Yes, No, Don’t know, Refused

If Q12A = 1 go to Q23
If Q10 = 2, 3 or 4 go to Q21
If Q12A = 3 or 4 go to Q16
If Q12A = 2 go to Q13

13. Have you ever stood for election to the School Board?

Yes – go to Q16
No - go to Q14
Refused - go to Q14

14. Have you ever considered standing for election to your School Board?

Yes
No
Refused - go to Q16

15. Why have you not {if Q14 = Yes} stood for election {if Q14 = No} considered becoming a member?

Meeting times not suitable
No childcare available
Was not sure how to join
Don’t know enough about what they do
Did not know I could become a member

Do not have the time to volunteer
Do not want to be a member

Don’t know
Other

16. How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way your opinions are represented by the School Board?

Very satisfied
Fairly satisfied
Dissatisfied
Very dissatisfied
Don’t know what the School Board says
Refused
17. Have you ever been in contact with the School Board about your views on matters relating to the school? If yes, did you contact them or did they contact you?

A. Yes, I contacted the School Board (go to Q20)
B. Yes, School Board contacted me (go to Q18)
C. No, neither (go to Q21)
D. Don’t know (go to Q21)
E. Refused (go to Q21)

If Yes at Q17B
18. How did they contact you? Were you… read out

Approached by a friend / neighbour who is a School Board member
Approached informally e.g. At the school gates
Contacted by e-mail
Sent a letter
Telephoned
Invited to a meeting to discuss
Other

19. How do you feel about the level of information you receive about the work of the School Board? Do you … read out …

Receive too much information
Receive just the right amount of information
Receive some information but would like more
Do not receive any information

20. If yes at Q17A, in what ways have you been in touch with the School Board?

Attended a School Board meeting
Attended an event run by the School Board
Spoke to a friend/neighbour who is a member
Contacted to raise a concern about the school
Contacted them for information
Contacted them for advice
Other
None
Refused

All answering Q20 go to Q22

21. If you had a concern or idea about how things could be done better at School which if any of the following people might you approach?
If no at Q17C
22. If you wanted to, would you know how to contact the School Board?

Yes
No
Refused

SECTION 4: PARENT FORUMS

The Scottish Executive has been consulting on proposals for a new system to represent parents in schools, to be called ‘Parent Forums’. They would like Parent Forums to:
• represent the views and concerns of all parents whose children attend the school;
• consult with parents of children who attend the school; and
• promote contact between the school, parents and the local community.
We would like to know what you think about the new proposals.

23. One aspect of the proposals is to remove some requirements about how parents are represented in schools. I’m going to read out a number of statements and I’d like you to tell me how much you agree or disagree with each.

a. There should be a body to represent parents’ views in your child’s school
b. Parents should be allowed to decide how the Parent Forum in their school is organised
c. The parents who take part in the Forum should be elected
d. Parents should decide what should be discussed at Parent Forum meetings
e. I would be more likely to get involved with a Parent Forum if more parents were involved
f. I would be more likely to get involved if the Forum had a say over the school budget
g. Community groups should be involved in the Parent Forum if they are invited
h. The Parent Forum should consult other parents in the school about important issues and pass their views onto education authorities, head teachers or other relevant parties
24. Apart from anything I’ve already mentioned, what could be done to encourage you to get involved in a Parent Forum?

25. If a member of the Parent Forum contacted you to ask your opinion on an issue of interest to parents in the school, how likely would you be to respond if they?

Invited you to attend a meeting
Invited you to attend a social event
Asking for your views in a questionnaire
Asking for your views by email
Asking for your views in writing
Telephoned you
Approached you at the school gate

Scale – very likely, quite likely, not very likely, not at all likely

26. If other people were allowed to attend a Parents Forum, should parents always be in the majority?

Yes
No
Don't Know
Refused

27. Should the head teacher be present at Parent Forum meeting…always, only when invited or never?

Always
When invited
Never
Don't Know
Refused

Section 7 - Household Classification

28. How many people aged over 16 years live in your household?

29. If only 1 adult at Q28, skip to Q30. Others ask, Which of the following best describes your current living arrangements:

How is/are the other adult(s) in the household related to you?
Husband / wife / partner
Son / daughter
Parent
Other (write in)
30. How would you describe your working status:
   Working
   - Full-time (30+ hrs)
   - Part-time (9-29 hrs)
   Unemployed
   Not working
   - retired
   - looking after home or family
   - disabled
   Student
   Other

**IF HUSBAND/WIFE/PARTNER coded at Q29**
31. How would you describe the working status of your husband/wife/partner:
   Working
   - Full-time (30+ hrs)
   - Part-time (9-29 hrs)
   Unemployed
   Not working - retired
   - looking after home or family
   - invalid/disabled
   Student
   Other

32. Thinking about yourself only now, what is your highest educational qualification?
   O-Grade, O-Level, Standard grade or equivalent
   A-Level, Highers or equivalent
   Vocational qualifications (=NVQ1+2)
   HND/HNC
   Bachelor degree or equivalent (=NVQ4)
   Post-graduate degree/Masters/PhD or equivalent
   Still in formal education
   Other
   No formal qualifications
   Don’t know

33. Could you tell me to which one of the following ethnic groups you consider yourself to belong to?
   White
   Asian
   Black
   Any mixed background
   Don’t know
   Refused
APPENDIX 3: TOPIC GUIDE FOR FOCUS GROUPS WITH SCHOOL BOARDS

Focus group topic guide – schools that have School Boards

The Scottish Executive has been consulting on proposals for a new system to represent parents in schools, to be called ‘Parent Forums’ (see information sheet). They have asked the Scottish Consumer Council (an independent body that represents all consumers in Scotland) to meet with parents and find out what you think about the new proposals. We are looking to find out your views and experiences, and there are no right or wrong answers to what we will be asking you. Everything you say will be kept confidential, your names and the name of the parents group you are part of will not be mentioned in any reports.

Arrangements in your school at the moment

Q1. Can you describe to me how involved you would say you are in your child’s school?

Q2. What opportunities are there currently for you as parents to be involved in the school?

Q3. Many parents say that they would like to be more involved in their child’s school – do you agree?
   - What is preventing you from becoming more involved?
   - What could be done differently to get you more involved?

Q4. We know that your school has a School Board, are any of you members (should be no members)? Can you tell us why that is?

Q5. Can you describe to me what the School Board does?
   - How effective do you think it is in representing parents’ views?
   - Have you experienced any barriers or difficulties when trying to communicate with the School Board? How do you think these could be overcome?

What the Scottish Executive is thinking about doing
The Scottish Executive is concerned that the current system of representing parents through School Boards is too formal and puts a lot of parents off. They are suggesting some changes to the system in the hope that this will get more parents involved in the life of the school. We would like to ask your views on these proposals.

Q6. Do you think that there should be a body to represent parents’ views in your child’s school?

Q7. What do you think that body should look like?
   - Who should be on it?
- Should all parents be members or just a few?
- Should the structure be decided by the government or should it be up to each school to decide?

Q8. If it was to be up to the parents to decide how they wanted to be represented, what would help you to do this? Prompt: would you want help from the local council, the school, or somebody else to arrange for a parents’ body?

Q9. Who do you think should be on the Parent Forum? Just parents, or also people like the head teacher and community groups? Prompt: should it be able to meet without the head teacher or not?

Q10. At the moment, by law the parents on School Boards have to be elected – do you think that this should continue or should parents be allowed to volunteer without needing to go through elections?

Q11. At the moment, there are limits on the number of people who can sit on School Boards, do you think that these limits should be removed?
  - Do you think that this would encourage more people to get involved?
  - Would you be more likely to get involved with a Parent Forum if more parents were involved?

Q12. The Scottish Executive is proposing that Parent Forums should be allowed to discuss a wide variety of topics, including anything that the parents themselves think is relevant. What do you think of this? Should there be limits on what the Parent Forum can discuss?

Q13. There are some things that School Boards currently do that the Scottish Executive proposes removing from the remit of Parent Forums; we would like to know your views on each of these:
  - The power to fix occasional holidays
  - The power to veto proposals for spending money on books and teaching materials
  - The power to control the use of school premises after hours.
  - Do you think that these are important things for a parents’ body? If not, what do you think that a parents’ body should be able to do?

Q14. The Parent Forum would have to consult with the other parents in the school when deciding about important issues and pass on parents’ views to the head teacher or the council.
  - Do you think that the Parent Forum should have to consult with other parents and ask their opinions?
  - How do you think they should do this?
  - Do you think that you would respond if they asked you your opinion?
Q15. Overall, looking at the list of functions for Parent Forums, do you think that the proposals are a good idea?

Q16. Overall, do you think that the proposals will help to increase the level of parental involvement in schools?

Q.17 Apart from anything I've already mentioned, what else could be done to help you to get involved in a Parent Forum?
APPENDIX 4: TOPIC GUIDE FOR FOCUS GROUPS WITHOUT SCHOOL BOARDS

The Scottish Executive has been consulting on proposals for a new system to represent parents in schools, to be called ‘Parent Forums’ (see information sheet). They have asked the Scottish Consumer Council (an independent body that represents all consumers in Scotland) to meet with parents and find out what you think about the new proposals. We are looking to find your views and experiences, and there are no right or wrong answers to what we will be asking. Everything you say will be kept confidential, your names and the name of the parents’ group you are part of will not be mentioned in any reports.

Arrangements in your school at the moment

Q1. Can you describe to me how involved you would say you are in your child’s school? (give prompts: helping out at events/trips; contacting school, other parents etc with issues of concern/suggestions for improvements etc).

Q2. What opportunities are there currently for you as parents to be involved in the school?

Q3. Many parents say that they would like to be more involved in their child’s school – do you agree?
   - What is preventing you from becoming more involved?
   - What could be done differently to get you more involved?

Q4. We know that your school does not have a School Board, why do you think that this is the case?

Q5. What arrangements are there currently to represent parents’ views to the head teacher and local authority?
   - If none, do you think there should be and why do you think this isn’t one?
   - If yes, can you describe to me what it does?
   - If yes, are you involved in it?
   - How effective do you think it is in representing parents’ views?
   - Have you experienced any barriers or difficulties when trying to communicate with the parents’ group?

What the Scottish Executive is thinking about doing

The Scottish Executive is concerned that the current system of representing parents through School Boards is too formal and puts a lot of parents off. They are suggesting some changes to the system in the hope that this will get more parents involved in the life of the school. We would like to ask your views on these proposals.
Q6. Do you think that there should be a body to represent parents’ views in your child’s school?

Q7. What do you think that body should look like?
- Who should be on it?
- Should all parents be members or just a few?
- Should the structure be decided by the government or should it be up to each school to decide?

Q8. If it was to be up to the parents to decide how they wanted to be represented, what would help you to do this? Prompt: would you want help from the local council, the school, or somebody else to arrange for a parents’ body?

Q9. Who do you think should be on the Parent Forum? Just parents, or also people like the head teacher and community groups? Prompt: should it be able to meet without the head teacher or not?

Q10. At the moment, by law the parents on School Boards have to be elected – do you think that this should continue or should parents be allowed to volunteer without needing to go through elections?

Q11. At the moment, there are limits on the number of people who can sit on School Boards, do you think that these limits should be removed?
- Do you think that this would encourage more people to get involved?
- Would you be more likely to get involved with a Parent Forum if more parents were involved?

Q12. The Scottish Executive is proposing that Parent Forums should be allowed to discuss a wide variety of topics, including anything that the parents themselves think is relevant. What do you think of this? Should there be limits on what the Parent Forum can discuss?

Q13. There are some things that School Boards currently do that the Scottish Executive proposes removing from the remit of Parent Forums, we would like to know your views on each of these:
- The power to fix occasional holidays
- The power to veto proposals for spending money on books and teaching materials
- The power to control the use of school premises after hours.
Do you think that these are important things for a parents’ body? If not, what do you think that a parents’ body should be able to do?

Q14. The Parent Forum would have to consult with the other parents in the school when deciding about important issues and pass on parents’ views to the head teacher or the council.
- Do you think that the Parent Forum should have to consult with other parents and ask their opinions?
- How do you think they should do this?
- Do you think that you would respond if they asked you your opinion?

Q15. Overall, looking at the list of functions for Parent Forums, do you think that the proposals are a good idea?

Q16. Given that your school doesn’t have a School Board, do you think that these proposals would help you and the other parents set up a parents’ body or do you think that there would still be difficulties? Is there anything else that you could suggest that would help to get a parents’ body up and running in your school?

Q17. Overall, do you think that the proposals will help to increase the level of parental involvement in schools?

Q.18 Apart from anything I’ve already mentioned, what else could be done to help you to get involved in a Parent Forum?