SCOTTISH CONSUMER COUNCIL

Management Training for the headteachers: module on "The School in its Community"

Role of the Scottish Consumer Council

The SCC is funded by the Department of Trade and Industry to represent and promote the interests of consumers of goods and services in Scotland, having regard to consumers least able to help themselves. The SCC does this through its own research, publications, seminars, lobbying and other activities, with a view to influencing the policies and practices of central and local government and other agencies in areas such as education, health, housing, legal services, and transport.

In education, the SCC takes as its starting point the role of parents as their child's educators in "partnership" with educational staff. This is given added force by the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, under which responsibility for the education of school age children rests primarily with the parents. Parents also have a stake in children's education as voters in educational policy making matters and as payers of community charges and taxes to fund educational services.
The SCC's long-term aim has been to promote good communication between home and school with a view to parents and school staff giving children the best possible support with their education. Whilst recognising that the views of parents and staff need not coincide, the SCC nonetheless believes that both educational "partners" owe it to children, the "consumers" of education, to understand each others' point of view and work together constructively, on an equal footing, to resolve any difficulties. The publications listed below were produced with this long-term aim in mind.

The SCC, at the same time, recognises that children's education is not only shaped by factors originating from the home or the school but is also influenced, to a large degrees, by policy-related considerations at a national or regional level. The SCC therefore frequently comments on legislative and other proposals which have implications for education from a parent's point of view. For example, the SCC took a special interest in the "parents charter", legislation of 1981 dealing with choice of school, school closures and information for parents.

Similarly, it has played an active role in connection with the government's introduction of school boards and their proposals concerning self-governing schools.
Although the SCC does not take up complaints from individual members of the general public, the SCC regularly monitors parental concerns through its wide network of contacts and conferences it organises from time to time. It maintains a good working relationship with local authorities, and education authorities have co-operated with the SCC on a number of projects. The SCC has worked with individual teachers and other education staff in preparing a biography and curriculum guidelines on consumer education in school. It assisted Dumfries and Galloway region with the induction day it ran for members of the "pilot" school boards set up in the region in 1988-89. Some years ago, the SCC ran a competition for schools to see which ones published the best handbooks for parents.

**How schools can assist the SCC**

The SCC welcomes approaches from school and other education staff about any of their activities which have a bearing on the SCC's interests or concerns. The SCC particularly welcomes communications from schools relating to:

* statements of school policy or practice on home-school liaison
* details of any home visiting or other special schemes facilitating contact between parents and staff

* copies of school handbooks or other written information for parents

* school board annual reports

* details of any parent participation schemes run by the school (eg in connection with curricular activities)

**Key questions of interest to the SCC.**

1. **Partnership with parents.** How can schools make parents more aware of the importance of their "partnership" role with staff in educational processes, having regard to parents of children at an educational disadvantage.

2. **Liaison with parents.** What policy-making, policy influencing or policy implementing roles should be played by school boards and school staff in the development of school policies and practices on home-school liaison?
3. **Written information for parents.** How should written information about the school and its achievements be conveyed to parents, having regard to differences in parents' perceptions of the educational system?

4. **Contacting parents.** How can schools facilitate contact with parents who either have practical difficulties visiting school or who are reluctant to approach staff, having regard to such factors as the timing, location and format of meetings?

5. **Reporting to parents.** How should schools report to parents individually on the progress of their child and related matters, having regard to frequency, content, and presentation of written reports and arrangements for parents to discuss progress reports with staff?

6. **Meeting groups of parents.** What arrangements should be made by the school for groups of parents to discuss their children's schooling at a classroom or year-group level, for example, through "mini-PTA's" based on the classroom unit?
7. **Consulting parents.** On what matters of educational policy or practical concern should parents be consulted by the school, whether as individuals or as a group? (eg consultations about curricular choices and changes, policies on discipline and homework, playground safety and supervision, etc.)

8. **Representing parents.** How should the views of parents on various issues or concerns (eg provision of books and materials) be represented through the school and school board in dealings with the education authority, central government, and individuals or other bodies with an interest in the school?

9. **Rendering accounts to parents.** How should schools render accounts of their performance to parents. (eg in school board annual reports) in terms of their educational activities and achievements, staffing, running costs, and so on?

10. **Handling complaints or grievances from parents.** What remedies should be available and what procedures should be followed at school level for dealing with complaints or grievances from individuals parents and groups of parents?
SCC Publications

The Book of the School (1982). A handbook of guidance for school staff and parents about the content and presentation of school handbooks (out of print, but photocopies can be made available on special request, price £3).

Consumer Education Bibliography (1984). Annotated list of books and other printed materials of use to teachers and pupils doing work in consumer education. The bibliography is divided into thematic sections, such as money management, buying goods and services, running a home, energy, consumer protection and information, and government and public services. Copies obtainable from Scottish Curriculum Development Service, Glasgow Centre, Lymehurst House, 74 Southbrae Drive, Glasgow G13 1SU, price £1.10.

Making the Case for Rural Schools (1986). A guide for parents, prepared for Rural Forum Scotland, presenting the arguments for keeping rural schools open and practical advice on how to put these arrangements to good use. Obtainable from Scottish Consumer Council, 314 St Vincent Street, Glasgow G3 8XW, price £1.00.
The Law of the School: a parent’s guide to education law in Scotland (1987). A comprehensive guide to education law in Scotland, covering, in alphabetical order, some 56 educational topics, including choice of school, discipline, examinations and assessment, homework, pre-school education, school rules, and so on. Obtainable through HMSO and other bookshops, 259pp., price £5.95.


In Special Need: a handbook for parents of children and young people in Scotland with special educational needs. (1989). A five-part handbook explaining to parents the assessment and recording of special educational needs, the types of support children with various difficulties may require, some of the broader issues arising out of provision for special needs, and sources of further advice and information. Obtainable from HMSO and other bookshops, 207pp, price £7.50.

SCC Annual Report. Provides up to date information about the SCC's current and recent work in education, housing, health, legal services and other matters. Obtainable from Scottish Consumer Council, 314 St Vincent Street, Glasgow G3 8XW, price £2.00.

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