

Cross Party Group on Dyslexia

Minutes of the meeting of the Cross Party Group on Dyslexia held in the Scottish Parliament on Wednesday 2nd October 2013.

1. Welcome and Introductions

Margaret Mitchell MSP welcomed members to the meeting.

Attendees

Margaret Mitchell MSP, Claudia Beamish MSP, David Jones, Rosemary Bowe, Yowann Byghan, Samantha Gray, Margaret Crombie, Dianne Smith, Julie Ross, Margaret Crankshaw, Lynn Dobbie, Stuart Lucas, Hamish Hunter, Joe Moran, Elspeth Dow, Anne Davidson, Cathy Magee

2. Apologies

Stuart McMillan MSP, Elaine Smith, Jenni Guise, Mairi McIntosh, Mary Evans, Jane Kirk, Kathleen Clark, Monica Gribbon

3. Minutes of previous meeting held on Wednesday 5th June 2013

The minutes were approved. Proposed by Cathy Magee and seconded by David Jones

4. Business arising from previous minute

Members commented on the positive input from Ken McAra from Education Scotland regarding the parameters of the review on dyslexia.

Margaret Crombie gave an update on her work for the Open University regarding specific qualifications.

5. Presentation

Cathy Mcgee, Chief Executive, Dyslexia Scotland gave a presentation about the current work priorities and developments within Dyslexia Scotland.

She outlined the structure of the organisation and it was noted there had been an increase in the number of local branches across Scotland.

She explained that Dyslexia Scotland aims to encourage and enable dyslexic people, regardless of age and abilities, to reach their potential in education, employment and life.

Cathy outlined its Strategic Aims for 2012-2015 as follows:

1. To provide and promote high quality services
2. To influence and achieve positive change at a national and local level
3. To give people with dyslexia a strong individual and collective voice
4. To develop and maintain a sustainable and coherent structure within Dyslexia Scotland

Examples were provided under each aim illustrating the positive outcomes that were being achieved. She explained the work of the Helpline, the range of publications available including the magazine and information leaflets, tutor service, the recently developed careers service, and work with trade unions, employers, the Scottish Prison Service and local authorities.

She highlighted how the organisation was influencing policy makers through meetings with the First Minister and Cabinet Secretaries and civil servants and through campaigns such as the Ellie Blue Ribbon Campaign.

Cathy highlighted some of the challenges facing the organisation such as the adoption of the definition and the use of the toolkit but she was positive about developments in the future.

As with many voluntary organisations, Cathy explained the capacity issues of meeting increasing demand for information and support given the small number of staff but she emphasised that without the army of volunteers who work in branches and others the organisation would not be able to offer the support it does.

Margaret Mitchell MSP thanked Cathy for a comprehensive outline of the work and priorities of Dyslexia Scotland and invited members of the Cross Party Group to make comment or ask specific questions.

A number of the members expressed their surprise at the wide range of work being undertaken by Dyslexia Scotland given the size of the organisation.

6. General Discussion

There followed a general discussion and comments and questions were raised around the following issues:

- It was suggested that the Cross Party Group should appoint a press officer to help promote its work.
- To compliment the concept of Dyslexia Friendly Schools, it was suggested that a similar approach to Dyslexia Friendly Employers could be explored.
- Members again raised the issue as to why some local authorities had not adopted the working definition or were actively promoting the toolkit.
- The issue of mis-assessment of dyslexia and a dyslexia specific professional teaching qualification was raised
- Claudia Beamish MSP made the offer to arrange for a speaker to talk about his own experience and achievements within the design industry. It was noted that the speaker would be willing to travel from London. It was agreed that the Secretary would look into the costs as the only finance available was from the membership fees and these covered the refreshments at meetings. The Convener offered to have further discussions about the logistics.
- It was suggested that the next meeting should be an open discussion meeting rather than having a speaker.
- It was noted that there had been significant developments around the use of new technologies and that CALL Scotland might be invited to a future meeting.
- The issue of Disabled Students Allowance and the appropriateness of current procedures were raised.

It was suggested that Members of the Scottish Parliament on the Cross Party Group to write to local authorities seeking information on how they support

dyslexic pupils. A further suggestion was made that a representative from the Association of Directors of Education ADES be invited to a future meeting to hear the concerns of members. It was agreed that we should wait until after the publication of the Education Scotland Review when we would have a clearer picture of the situation across Scotland.

Date of Next Meeting: January/ February 2014 date to be confirmed.