

Minutes of the meeting of the Cross Party Group on Dyslexia held via Zoom on Wednesday 7th October 2020.

1. Present:

Margaret Mitchell MSP, Elaine Smith MSP, Maurice Corry MSP, Stuart McMillan MSP

Invitees:

The meeting was held via Zoom and a sederunt was not taken.

Those invited included:

Julia Trotter, Joe Moran, David Jones, Dr Margaret Crombie; Ross Duncan, Michael Sinclair, Martin Davies Jay Kirkland; Margaret Crankshaw, Dr. Julie Ross, Mary Evan, Owen Ferry, Susan Agnew, Dean Smith, Emma Malins, Patricia Hewitt; Dr Jennie Guise, Aillen Orr, Gillian Evans, Helen Fleming, Cathy Magee, Louise Elder

A sederunt will be taken at future meetings.

2. Minutes of last meeting:

The minutes were approved.

3. Business arising from last meeting

Minutes were amended in relation to the attendance of Margaret Crombie. She had not been in attendance as noted in the minute.

4. Presentation: Cathy Mcgee, Chief Executive, Dyslexia Scotland

Cathy provided an analysis of what Dyslexia Scotland had been doing to meet the challenges of Covid 19 and gave examples of some of the key lessons learned.

These included:

Key Actions

- Staff had all been working from home and services had been adapted to online;
- The Helpline had continued throughout the pandemic;
- The Education Conference had been held online in October 2020 with 200 delegates attending;
- There had been a significant increase in the number of teachers accessing to the Assessing Dyslexia Toolkit; Views had increased from 182,105 in September 2019 to 392,904 in October 2020. A significant increase was in April/ May 2020;
- A significant increase in the completion of the Dyslexia and inclusive practices online modules by teachers;
- Establishing a 'At Home with Dyslexia Scotland' TV Channel and delivering several podcasts which proved very popular and included resources for parents, children and young people;
- Established a small bursary fund to support parents struggling with finance for tutors for their children and young people. This fund was quickly exhausted and steps were taken to try and attract and secure additional funding through fundraising during Dyslexia Awareness week.
- The Adult network had continued online with more people taking part than prior to the pandemic.

Lessons learned

- Many young people were experiencing difficulties with homework without the support of their teachers while others found it easier to learn in a less structured or pressurised environment;
- Some parents had realised the true extent of their children's dyslexia on their learning as they were witnessing it full time without support;
- The financial impact of Covid 19 on the ability of parents to continue accessing tutors requires further resourcing;

- The use of online meeting for the Adult Network leading to increased participants was noted;
- A survey of the Adult Network identified increased mental health issues and difficulties in working from home without the normal reasonable adjustments being in place.
- The negative impact of the pandemic on the ability to undertake face to face assessments and the need for further guidance from the Scottish Government.

5. Open Discussion

A number of issues were raised during the open discussion with members expressing concerns about the negative impact for parents, children and young people with dyslexia. These were in addition to existing concerns regarding the inconsistencies in the identification of dyslexia across local authorities and how the pandemic will only create more disadvantages in the future. Concerns were expressed about how local authorities were ensuring these issues were being addressed.

It was agreed that a representative from the Association of Directors of Education Scotland (ADES) should be invited to the next meeting to provide a perspective on these key concerns.

A member of the group provided information regarding a legal challenge currently being taken against a local authority in relation to dyslexic support.

6. Date of next meeting: Wednesday 3rd February via Zoom (subject to Covid 19 restrictions)