

Hansard Society Scotland – MSPs in Schools

The Electoral Commission established the New Initiatives Fund to promote ways of raising awareness about voting and democracy. We have awarded grants to local groups as well as national organisations working with different target audiences across the whole of the UK.

This evaluation report provides information about Hansard Society Scotland's MSPs¹ in Schools project funded by the New Initiatives Fund. In the report we highlight the aims and objectives, and achievements of the MSPs in Schools project, and lessons learnt by Hansard Society Scotland.

The grant

Hansard Society Scotland partnered with Learning and Teaching Scotland, the Scottish Parliament Outreach Services team and the Scottish Executive Education Department to deliver MSPs in Schools.

Hansard Society Scotland is the Scottish branch of The Hansard Society, an independent non-partisan educational charity, which aims to promote effective Parliamentary democracy. Learning and Teaching Scotland is a national public body that provides guidance and support for teachers, school managers, local authorities, parents and others involved in education in Scotland. The Scottish Parliament Outreach Services team is responsible for informing the public, including young people, about the work of the Scottish Parliament. The Scottish Executive Education Department is responsible for administering policy on pre-school and school education, children and young people, tourism, culture and sport.

The Electoral Commission agreed to grant a sum of £5,582 to Hansard Society Scotland for the MSPs in Schools project. An amount of **£5,582** was paid out. The primary aim of the project was to develop, in partnership with other organisations, a resource pack in English and Gaelic that supports MSP visits to schools.

The Commission's grant covered a portion of the costs to coordinate and deliver the project. The remaining funds were provided by Learning and Teaching Scotland and the Scottish Executive Education Department. The Scottish Parliament Outreach Service provided in-kind support. MSPs in Schools ran for nine months from September 2004 to May 2005.

Aims and objectives

The primary objectives of MSPs in Schools, as set out in their application, were to:

- develop a resource pack in English and Gaelic that supports the visits of MSPs to schools;

¹ Members of the Scottish Parliament

- show school students how to prepare in advance for a visit from their MSP, and take a leading role in shaping the visit;
- give MSPs information about students' level of ability and understanding in advance so they are able to discuss matters in detail rather than focusing on basic facts;
- provide a structure that makes it easy for schools to arrange visits by MSPs to support the curriculum; and
- enhance the relationship between MSPs and young people.

Target outcomes

The target outcomes of the project were to:

- run eight pilots in schools throughout Scotland with MSPs from the seven political parties represented in the Scottish Parliament, and an Independent;
- evaluate and redesign the pack based on how useful schools and MSPs found it with regard to suitability of materials, levels of discussion and debate in schools, and a greater interest and understanding of the democratic process among students; and
- launch the project on a national basis.

Evaluation

Angela Wrapson, Programme Director for Hansard Society Scotland, and Greg Sanderson, Project Coordinator, were responsible

for the evaluation of this project. The following methods were used to assess the extent to which the original objectives were met:

- end-of-project questionnaire completed by five of eight MSPs;
- end-of-project questionnaire completed by five of eight teachers;
- questionnaires completed by 121 of 200 students involved in the pre-meetings with the Scottish Executive Outreach Team; and
- questionnaires completed by 144 of 200 students who participated in the MSPs' visits.

Deliverables

Over the nine-month project MSPs in Schools delivered the following:

- a resource pack developed in English and Gaelic, including sections for students, teachers and MSPs;
- 10 pilot sessions in eight schools covering the eight electoral regions of Scotland;
- participation by eight MSPs, one from each of the seven political parties represented in the Scottish Parliament and one Independent;
- participation by 200 students: 102 from primary and 98 from secondary schools; and
- participation by one Gaelic school and a Gaelic class in Edinburgh.

Resources and project management

Greg Sanderson, Project Coordinator for Hansard Society Scotland, was responsible for coordinating and overseeing the MSPs in Schools project. Records of budgeted and actual income and expenditures were maintained and monitored by the Hansard Society's central London office.

The project delivered the activities identified above within the budget as documented below:

- salaries: **£4,224**
- production of pilot pack: **£678**
- overheads: **£680**

Total: **£5,582**

How successful was the project?

Short-term outcomes

Hansard Society Scotland achieved all of their primary objectives for the MSPs in Schools project. Positive support for the resource pack and the coordination of MSP visits was received from all involved, including students, teachers, MSPs and the Scottish Executive Education Department.

The project began with the establishment of a steering group, which met every six weeks to discuss the content and design of the resource pack. Four organisations were represented: Hansard Society

Scotland, the Scottish Parliament Outreach Service, Learning and Teaching Scotland, and The Electoral Commission.

Once the resource packs were developed and translated into Gaelic, Learning and Teaching Scotland recommended a short-list of three to four schools from each electoral region and the Scottish Parliament Outreach Service team invited one MSP in each of those eight regions to participate. All eight MSPs, representing each of the seven political parties in the Scottish Parliament and one Independent, agreed to take part and worked with the project team to choose appropriate schools from the short-list.

When the MSPs and pilot schools were matched, Hansard Society Scotland and the Scottish Parliament Outreach Service began briefing MSPs and teachers about their roles and expected contribution to the project. A section in the resource pack was devoted to both teachers and MSPs, supplemented by a briefing paper and face-to-face meeting.

MSPs were offered lunchtime sessions, and all eight were able to find one date to attend. At the session, details and timelines of the project were discussed and MSPs were given the opportunity to suggest improvements to the resource pack. The MSPs who responded to the questionnaire at the end of the project felt the resource pack was adequate and well presented.

With one exception, the face-to-face meetings with teachers took place at the schools with Hansard Society Scotland and a member of the Scottish Parliament Outreach Services team. The meeting with Plockton High School took the form of a video conference. These meetings offered an opportunity to discuss key phases and expectations, answer questions from teachers, and take suggestions about how to improve the resource pack.

Once the briefings and resource pack were complete, the Scottish Parliament Outreach Services team visited each school with the Hansard Society project coordinator and made a presentation about the Scottish Parliament, the job of MSPs, and the objectives of the project. All teachers were asked to discuss the project with their students prior to this introductory session. As a result, students were prepared and used the time to identify an issue they wanted to address with their MSP. At some primary schools the Scottish Parliament Outreach Services team helped younger students choose a topic. In a number of other schools a vote had to be taken to decide which issue to take forward.

Because of these preparatory sessions, all of the MSP visits were able to focus entirely on the issue that students had prepared. Examples of issues discussed included wind farms in the Highlands and Islands, the ban on smoking in public places and affordable housing. MSPs were informed of the

students' topic in advance, and MSP feedback shows they were very impressed with the students' preparation.

In all of the sessions, students took a lead role in shaping the visit. The classes represented a broad range of subjects, including life skills, drama, cross-cultural studies, Gaelic, English and business studies. As a result, student presentations ranged from poster collages to PowerPoint presentations and scripted role-plays. The range of classes and methods used to communicate with MSPs demonstrated the concept can be adapted for a variety of forms.

A number of classes also took the project one step further, which Hansard Society Scotland left for the school to plan. In a couple of cases this involved attending the Scottish Parliament. One school presented a petition formally to the Public Petitions Committee.

Feedback from students, teachers and MSPs shows the project was an enjoyable exercise that had meaningful outcomes for everyone who took part. Students were prepared for the MSP visits and MSPs were prepared for the issues students wanted to address. This provided a good match for discussion, and students felt their views were listened to, and stated they learned more about politics and the Scottish Parliament for taking part.

Findings from teacher feedback also shows the resource pack helped prepare for MSPs' visits, and it was useful to have

information on the Scottish Parliament all in one place. However, several teachers commented that more guidance was needed about how much preparation was required, and information for younger students needed to be simplified.

Longer-term evaluation

Since completing MSPs in Schools, Hansard Society Scotland has redesigned the resource pack. They have also secured funding to roll-out the project across the whole of Scotland, and the resource pack has already been made available on both the Hansard Society's and the Scottish Parliament's websites. Over 60 school sessions have been scheduled with the Scottish Parliament Outreach Services team for the 2005–6 academic year already.

When the MSPs in Schools project is rolled-out across Scotland it would be useful to continue monitoring teacher and MSP feedback in order to understand longer-term impacts and continue implementing improvements.

Conclusions

Hansard Society Scotland's MSPs in Schools project has been successful at developing a resource pack in English and Gaelic to support MSP visits to schools.

The guidance and briefing provided to teachers and MSPs ensured students were well prepared, and feedback received suggests it was a valuable experience. Recommendations for improvement were collected, and these have now been incorporated into the final resource pack in readiness for the project to be rolled-out nationally.

Through the evaluation of this project it has been possible to identify a number of elements of good practice and lessons learnt that could be of interest to other organisations or bodies considering replicating this concept.

Good practice

- Establishing the steering group to develop the resource pack worked well as it was able to incorporate a variety of perspectives and anticipate needs of MSPs and teachers.
- Partnering with Learning and Teaching Scotland and the Scottish Parliament Outreach Services team to deliver the project provided necessary support to choose appropriate pilot schools and MSPs who were balanced across regions, genders and political parties.
- Defining tangible and realistic outcomes from the outset helped ensure the project was a success.

Lessons learnt

Projects of a similar nature can learn from the following lessons:

- Offer MSPs a number of face-to-face briefing sessions to ensure they all attend one session.
- Incorporate more time for discussion and interaction during the MSP visit. During the project some classes had done so much preparation they did not have enough time to interact with their MSP.
- Provide teachers with more detailed guidance about how much preparation is expected for the MSP visit. Some teachers felt the pilot resource pack was too vague and should have provided more direction.

New Initiatives Fund

For further information about this project please contact Hansard Society Scotland at: Hansard.Scotland@hansard.lse.ac.uk or visit their website at: www.hansardsociety.org.uk/programmes/hansard_society_scotland

Further information about the New Initiatives Fund and the wider work of The Electoral Commission can be found at: www.electoralcommission.org.uk

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