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## THE NATIONAL SEND FORUM Minutes 31st March 2021

### Virtual Zoom Meeting

**Present:** David Bateson OBE (DB) *Chair*, Lorraine Petersen OBE (LP) *FLSE*, Rona Tutt OBE (RT) *NAHT*, Caroline Wright (CW) *RCSLT*, Carol Kelsey (CK) *NNPCF*, Chris Rollings (CR) *FLSE*, Julie Walker (JW) *sen.se*, Brendan Heneghan OBE (BH) *Engage*, Clare Dorer (CD) *NASS*, Catherine Ollington (CO) *NSN*, Kiran Hingorani (KH) *SWALSS/NASS*, Catriona Moore (CM) *IPSEA*, Kim Taylor (KT) *FLSE*, Tina Wakefield (TW) *BATOD/NATSIP*,

**Guests:** Andre Imich (AI)

**Minutes:** Andy Petersen (AP)

#### 1. Welcome and Introductions

For Action

DB welcomed and thanked everyone for joining this virtual meeting.

#### 2. Protocol for meeting

DB went through some protocols for this virtual meeting

#### 3. Apologies

Pdnet, NAHE, NSN, RB

#### 4. Minutes of last meeting and matters arising

RT highlighted that RCEs should have been “Thought Leadership Paper”

The minutes were agreed

DB queried whether the dates for next year were acceptable – there were no comments.

## **5. Covid 19: schools and services.**

**Attendance** – AI commented that DfE had been monitoring attendance closely. There had been 82% attendance in special schools and children with EHCPs had achieved 84%. DfE were hoping for improved figures after Easter.

AI commented that masks were still an issue and this would be reviewed at Easter and an announcement made in the new term.

AI informed the meeting that DHSC had made available access to a portal about PPE which enabled special schools to get free PPE. Unfortunately the take up had been low (less than 50%).

CR/JW commented that they were not aware of it. TK thought that some of her residential special schools were aware of it. LP commented that details of the offer had been included in the FLSE newsletter of 26 January 2021.

*The Department advise that if you have not received the email first ensure that you have checked your junk folder and then contact the Customer Service team at 0800 876 6802 who can help support you registering with the portal.*

CR queried whether there had been any response to the letter about vaccinations for special schools and was there a plan going forward for colleagues in those schools to be prioritised for future vaccinations. AI responded that the letter had been received and the response was being formulated. However it was up to the local areas to determine the priorities and DfE knew that across the country there was slightly different interpretations or applications of the guidelines. Thus there were quite a number of local areas where every teacher in every special school had been vaccinated but some where it is just those who are deemed to be working most closely with those pupils who need most personal care. TW Commented that 51% of her colleagues had managed to be vaccinated.

## **6. Policy and DfE update**

AI commented:

Ofsted and CQC Area Inspections: Revisits to those local areas with existing written statements of action were to start after Easter and the inspections of local areas that have not yet had an inspection start from the beginning of June in addition a new inspection framework for all is expected from April 2022.

The SEND review was continuing and publication was expected in late spring. DB queried what type of report it would be – AI responded that it would be in the form of a consultation. RT queried the timetable and whether it was to be implemented in September. AI was unable to give an answer at this point. RT also queried whether there would be changes to the SEND Code of Practice. AI felt that there probably would be some changes.

CR queried whether the language used to describe youngsters with disabilities might be reviewed and also what therapies might be funded. AI responded that at local level, there would be more opportunity for accountability and transparency and hopefully equal distribution across the country. CR asked if there would be increased clarity to help make decisions. AI responded that this was under consideration. Also there was work going on around EHCP plans particularly the issues around what is health, what is social care, and what is education provision.

DB queried about schools funding reform and that the consultation indicated some uplift in the HNF – AI responded that responses were still being analysed. DB commented that at least the review would recognise difficulties experienced by LAs.

## **7. Building Back Better – RCSLT letter and policy (CW)**

CW introduced the key findings from the report (circulated with the agenda). The day after publication a coalition of more than 80 organisations wrote a letter to the Prime Minister urging the government to implement the recommendations. CW thanked all those who had lent their support. CW considered that this was the first step of a campaign which would use the report to influence discussions in the future. The All-Party Parliamentary Group on speech and language difficulties had met and discussed the report so there may be actions at parliamentary level. It was intended to publish further breakdowns of the findings in the coming months as well as looking at the findings for different conditions.

DB thanked CW and commented that S&LT were coming more to the fore in common with other therapies and it was to be hoped that therapies would not suffer in the same way in any future emergency, and that lessons would be learnt and influence future policy. AI queried whether schools were preventing therapists from coming into their establishments. CW confirmed that this was happening.

CR commented that anecdotally in the northeast, where the speech and language therapy delivery worked differently from the delivery for physio, or nursing, S&LT had withdrawn from schools and delivered therapy remotely as a result of interpretation of directives by S&LT Services about remote working. This had caused some concern amongst school staff. CW responded that S&LT needed a clear steer of their role as health care professionals coming into schools. CR stressed that this was not a comment on S&LT colleagues. RT commented that she too had heard of similar situations about therapist coming into schools. CW commented that the lockdown had exacerbated existing situations in respect of relationships with schools.

DB commented that COVID had promoted a high degree of fear and highlighted perceptions of what people's motives were. CK commented that access to therapists was high on family's priority lists. CK also agreed with the comment that there were geographical differences across the country. CK felt that there was a mixed picture and it was sometimes not reasonable to expect young children to work

remotely for long periods. CK had reports of families wanting private therapy because access was so difficult. This was causing inequalities.

LP commented that there was going to be an on-going problem with pre-school children missing out on language development due to isolation. CW responded that RCSLT members had the same concerns and there was also a problem with language checks at 2.5 years. AI commented that another issue was the richness of the language environment that pupils experienced when they eventually attended school and that practitioners needed to “up their game” in teaching speech and language skills. There was a scheme called [NELI](#), funded by the DfE which is running in a lot of reception classes in schools. AI felt that not all children in future reception classes would need S&LT but would instead benefit by a richer language strategy. CW was in agreement with this sentiment.

DB commented that there was also an issue of oracy including speaking, listening and reading amongst the secondary school population. Also DB agreed with LP that children who were already disadvantaged would have become increasingly disadvantaged over the last year.

## **8. Update: Identification of SEND (MR) and subsequent Thought Leadership paper**

MR was continuing his work on this paper

## **9. Regional Centres of Expertise**

DB reported that he had met with AB and MR and Alex Grady (WSS) since the last meeting to explore the possibility of the reviews being of interest to WSS. Another was planned for the future.

RT commented that DB had picked up the points made in the dialogue between working group members which was helpful. The report had also been submitted to the SEND Review. The relationship with WSS was still under discussion since clarification on the contract was awaited. AB had stated that contract would run for 1 year as an interim measure.

Research had also been looked at and highlighted as a key element for establishing RCEs. RT wondered if some of Prof. Ben Lakers grant could be used to fund further research. DB commented that he had offered to “match fund” research expenditure by nasen/WSS. Another meeting was needed to “firm up” these issues. DB was keen to come up with a “pilot idea” as long as this didn’t have any negative or automatic assumptions about what a ‘pilot’ implied, as well as research. RT echoed these sentiments. JW stated that Somerset would be keen to be involved in this work.

**(DB introduced item 11 at this point)**

RT queried whether the forum wanted to make a contribution to the deliberations of the working group for the next meeting. CR volunteered his help with this support. DB suggested that the forum have a virtual meeting with the group.

CR

DB

*(CD & KT joined at this point).*

CD commented on the research vs pilot initiatives. CD was concerned about using the word “pilot” since this suggested that something had already been developed about what the model should look like which wasn’t the case at present. DB commented that his interpretation was a focus on an area to look at the principles that underline RCEs, what had already been done, and what could be enhanced or done better.

KH commented that discussions at the recent SWALLS meeting, suggested that the focus of the conversation was, well, what actually does a pilot mean? There was enthusiasm, and a great deal of interest, but also concern about what they would be expected to do. KH felt that this needed to be clarified. DB commented that the project would be more about what schools were doing now and how that could be better enabled.

DB

KB suggested that the working group plus AB, MR and AG should have a meeting to “firm up” the proposals. AI commented that these were healthy discussions.

## **11. Laurel Trust research grants <https://laureltrust.org.uk> (Item B/Fwd by Chair)**

Two years ago members of the trust had attended NSENDF to talk about Laurel Trust that had significant research monies for schools working in collaboratives. The details were on the Laurel Trust website. The projects were based on schools working collaboratively, often with a school that was outward facing. They focused not just on special schools but also involving special schools and mainstream particularly speech and language therapy and autism. DB urged the working group to look at that site for groups of schools to actually apply for grants. JW queried whether the grant round was open at present since the website suggested otherwise. DB responded that the next grant round was due to open “soon”.

## **10. Thought Leadership – next papers and update on their circulation**

DB queried whether TL papers had been posted on the nasen website – LP agreed to check and post them on the NSENDF website if possible.

LP

DB suggested that papers currently in progress be completed before undertaking new topics.

## **12. Updates from Members**

**FLSE NE** - still working remotely with our FLSE colleagues in NE region and nationally with EQUALS. the new Rebound Therapy Handbook was going live next month. An Equals meeting live in July in London was also being considered.

**RCSLT** – had written a letter to the children's minister jointly with the Royal College of Occupational Therapy, the Justice Society of Physiotherapy and the Disabled Children's Partnership, to ask for therapists to not be redeployed in the event of a second wave. A helpful and clear response was received from the board to say that, that they should not be redeployed, which RCSLT thought had some effects in reducing the level of redeployment. Following the second wave they had written again and the Children's Minister had agreed to meet to talk about the impact of the pandemic on access to therapies for children with SEND. RCSLT was also trying to set up a meeting with NAHT to discuss how head teachers and speech and language therapy services could work together to address some of those impacts of the pandemic on wider language and communication skills. The virtual RCSLT conference was planned for October. <https://www.rcslt.org/events/rcslt-conference-2021/>

**BATOD/NATSIP** – new president in post who was profoundly deaf which was the first time such an individual had been president. A virtual conference was planned which was to be broken up into 2-hour slots. Face coverings was the hot topic at the moment.

**ENGAGE** - engage and connect events had been continuing with the help of CD/NASS. The next event was planned for 27<sup>th</sup> April and featured Nick Whittaker. The National Creative Awards were continuing with a deadline of 30<sup>th</sup> April with a theme of "Journeys". The National Conference was planned for 4/5 November and the 3<sup>rd</sup> November for the National Awards. There was a lot of work going on at the moment with local authorities - ENGAGE has been approached by several local authorities around the country to provide help with mental health in mainstream schools. P2P support work was going on, concentrating on developing middle leaders. A Mental Health Wellbeing Audit had been developed which it was hoped would be rolled out in September.

**NNPCF** – had held a virtual AGM.

**NAHT** – AGM was to be held at the end of April and the Annual Conference in the Autumn. The SEND conference was to be held on 20<sup>th</sup> October. APPG had held its AGM in the previous week. A report had been produced entitled "Forgotten, Left Behind, Overlooked: the Experiences of Young People with SEND and their Educational Transitions during the COVID 19 Pandemic in 2020".

**NASS** – was coming to the end of its Incubator Programme. Nine schools were considered that had good ideas that they were making work in their own school but which NASS thought other schools could really benefit from accessing. All nine schools have something that they are able to share with other schools, A briefing had been prepared which CD would send to DB for circulation. An article was also to be published in nasen's magazine.

**SWALSS** – KH supported CDs comments and felt that the project helped people to develop themselves professionally, giving a wider view of what was going on in SEND. KH was happy to share his experience on this issue.

CD

**FLSE (E)** – KT explained that Zoom conferences had taken place to help members navigate the COVID regulations. Next term it was planned to continue the Engagement Model training. A FLSE conference focusing on Mental Health was planned for July. A refresh of the assessment and curriculum group in epilepsy was also planned. DB commented that he had noted improved contact with stakeholders.

**13. Relevant updates from other affiliations, forums, trusts, alliances and partnerships**

None

**15. NSEND Forum Operation**

**Website:** The website was at long last finished and there was now a need for resources to put onto the website so if members had anything like thought pieces or reports or videos (videos are particularly welcome because they were very good for search engine optimization.) Also a job vacancy section was now available.

DB promised to send details of a trusteeship post that he had received.

DB

NEW WEBSITE ADDRESS: <https://www.sendforum.org/>

**16. Any focus for actioned statements of agreement including future invitees**

NIL

**17. AOB**

DB explained that it was hoped that meetings in the Autumn would be physical rather than virtual and that the July one might be physical too.

**18. Remaining dates for 2020-21 **26<sup>th</sup> May, 7<sup>th</sup>July****

**Dates for 2021-22      6<sup>th</sup> October, 8<sup>th</sup> December, 2<sup>nd</sup> February, 30<sup>th</sup> March, 25<sup>th</sup> May, 6<sup>th</sup> July**

DB thanked everyone for attending. **Next Meeting to be held on 26<sup>th</sup> May**