

Education and Children’s Services Group of Prospect

Biennial General Meeting

5 November 2021

Leeds Marriot Hotel
and via ZOOM

**Education and Children’s Services Group of Prospect**

**Biennial General Meeting**

**Leeds Marriott Hotel, Friday 5 November 2019**

**AGENDA**

11:00 Welcome from the ECSG President 2019-2021 and apologies for absence

11:15 ECSG Biennial report,
update from Steve Thomas, National Secretary and Mark Patton, President

12 00 Lunch break

**Guest Speakers**13:00 Ben Bryant, ISOS partnership will present on the ISOS/Local Government Association report, ‘Better Connected: How Local Education and Children’s Services in England have responded to the Coronavirus pandemic’.

14:00 Mike Clancy, Prospect General Secretary will speak on the challenges faced by Prospect and our members and how the union is responding to them.

**Formal business meeting**

1. Minutes of Previous Meeting

2. Matters arising from the Minutes

3. Motions from the Group Executive Council

4. Declaration of the election of GEC Officers and Council members

14:45 Closing remarks from the ECSG President 2021-2023

15:00 Close

**Education and Children’s Services Group of Prospect**

**Biennial Report 2021**

This is a report which covers the main developments within the Education and Children’s Services Group (ECSG) of Prospect since November 2019.

Through that period the ECSG has remained as a Group within Prospect, having a distinctive Group Executive Council (GEC), its own branding, designated officers’, and staff in addition to wider support within the union.

In this sense the ECSG continues to operate somewhere between a Branch and a Sector in the union.

The last GEC term has been extremely challenging, and great credit should be given to GEC members, officers and staff for their hard work, persistence, and support for each other.

I want to give particular thanks to the ECS Presidential Team – President Mark Patton and Vice Presidents Diana Robinson and Paul Watson for their amazing contribution, wise judgement, and professionalism over the last two years.

**Industrial Relations, Collective Bargaining and Consultations**

Together with colleagues in the NEU and AEP we negotiated a one-year pay settlement for members covered by the Soulbury Agreement for 2020. These negotiations continue to be with the Local Government Association (LGA).

The agreement was for a 2.75% increase on all pay points on each scale from 1 September 2020, an improvement on the previous 2%.

We are in pay negotiations for 2021 and anticipating a final offer to me made shortly that will be shared with the GEC along with recommendations for next steps, including engaging with members.

The public sector pay landscape has retreated to the pay freeze policy imposed during ‘austerity’ years and although the local authorities have made it clear that they have autonomy to set pay policy, funding challenges and this environment are making progress to an acceptable offer extremely difficult.

Prospect and colleagues continue to make strong arguments about aligning pay to those of senior leaders in education and comparable professional sectors and sought to make other minor structural changes to Soulbury scales, including removal of the lowest spine points.

We have been able to fend off attempts to remove Soulbury from local authorities, and successfully challenge the incorrect interpretation of the agreement on issues like SPA points.

Full Time Officers regularly engage in consultation with employers where the union has either recognition or a route to do so. Given the challenges of being a small union in employers with large numbers of employees we prioritise consultations that affect our members and the roles that they undertake, this is often reorganisations and reductions of Schools Improvement/Advisory posts. Doing so with very few local reps, full time officers communicate directly with members in those employers to seek their views and preferences to seek to improve outcomes.

The link between Prospect and the local workplace is still in need of improvement. It has been some time since we had a rep covered by Soulbury on the Soulbury Committee. We have tried various devices to achieve this or mitigate this, however it is vital that we develop a lay rep base to support negotiations and will be looking at this again with support from the incoming GEC.

Our ECS Group is part of a wider Public Sector membership in Prospect where issues such as pension reform are addressed. This enables us to have support and access to specialists dealing with, for example exit payment caps that would have affected our members early retirement under the Local Government Pension Scheme as well as capping redundancy payments.

**Communications with members**

Prospect has continued to publish *Education Eye* on a quarterly basis. We regularly review feedback on articles and stories, including by assessing analytics that be retrieved from data. The ‘opening/click’ rate of the publication remains high in comparison to similar formats and groups newsletters.

Editorially we continue to strive to provide a publication where members can see something of themselves, so as well as updates on industrial issues and policy work, commissioned work from Warwick Mansell and opinion we have sourced headline interviews with education professionals. These are regularly the most popular articles.

Given the dispersed nature of our membership face to face union meetings and events have been rare and poorly attended for several years. The Covid pandemic has therefore not has big an impact on our communications with members then other parts of the union. We have however, taken the opportunity to increase the opportunities for members to engage remotely with the union through video conferences and online surveys – including Thought Exchange.

Supplementing the Prospect Live events for the whole union, we have held two members’ webinars in 2021 with promising attendance.

In addition, we make some use of social media to get a sense of news affecting our members. The immediacy of Twitter is a valuable resource in finding stories that affect our members.

**Protecting the Individual**

Our ECS Full Time Officers continue to be heavily involved in personal cases, and have provided independent, professional, and personalised advice up to employment tribunals for individual members when they most need it at work.

Given the roles that Prospect members undertake, including at senior levels, cases can become complex and highly sensitive.

Prospect continues to support regular training and peer reviews for our officers keep them up to date with changes in employment law so can be on hand to ensure that employers are acting in line with this and ACAS codes of practice on grievance and disciplinary procedures, for example. We have established checks on cases where we have not heard back from members, so they are not ‘lost’ in the system.

**Growing engagement with self-employed members**

A growing number of Prospect members are working as consultants on a self-employed basis. In the past this has largely been through leaving long-standing employment, however, there is an expansion of consultancy in the sector that we need to consider.

Since the last BGM we have undertaken a digital marketing campaign on social media to publicise an improved and sharper self-employed offering for ECS members, supported by an updated self-employed section of the ECS website.

Adding to the ‘Beyond Redundancy’ training we have advertised a small number of skills-based online ‘bitesize’ training modules working with the Prospect education team. We are assessing what future needs of self-employed members are in terms of training that Prospect can provide to develop a programme.

**Membership Organisation**

Recruiting and retaining members in ECS remains extremely challenging, particularly given the continued squeeze in local government and the changing nature of employment in education.

While the needs to support schools during the pandemic (including the temporary ring-fencing of the Monitoring and Brokering Grant) may have helped maintain the role of Soulbury officers there continues to be decline in maintained schools, funding challenges and ageing membership. Although we forecast to increase the numbers recruited and decrease the numbers lapsing membership from recent years, membership remains extremely challenging and ECS membership continues to decline.

This will need to be a priority for the GEC.

Internal specialist organising resource has been secured for ECS to undertake specific project work and a focus is being applied to ‘mapping’ workplaces with existing membership to assess what opportunities exist and to develop a strategy to increase union density.

**Campaigning**

The GEC has identified priority areas for campaigning as part of its 2-Year Plan and engagement and formal consultation has responded to that.

Each policy area has been well supported by a team of GEC members working with the Group Secretary where appropriate to update a Work Plan.

Prospect has responded to requests for consultation including Department for Education Consultations on: Home Education, Early Years Foundation Stage Reforms, Inquiry into Impact of Covid on Services, High Needs and general National Funding Formula, Behaviour Management Strategies In-House units and Managed Moves, Attaching Conditions to SI Brokering and Monitoring Grant.

We also share our views on a range of other items through informal channels re-instigated with the DfE.

We also continue to attend regular Covid Stakeholder Groups with the DfE including the Schools Minister that developed from campaigning through with other education unions and the TUC around schools opening that included a meeting with Secretary of State, Gavin Williamson MP.

Members of the GEC also attend SEC and SEND groups on behalf of ECS.

**Group Resources**

National Secretary Steve Thomas acts at the Group Secretary for the ECSG with admin support from Team Leader Jayne Clark. Senior Executive Assistant Rebecca Roberts has also provided much support during the last term.

Claire Dent and Stuart Anderson act as Full Time Officers for the Group amongst their other duties in Prospect with a geographic split South/North.

With regional responsibilities and links Angela Moffat (Northern Ireland) and Daniel Maney (Wales) lead in those devolved matters working with GEC members based there and local reps.

Jayne Clark acts as the lead for developing and supporting self-employed membership.

The Group Council (GEC) continues to meet 4 times a year to manage the affairs of the Group. The intention is to go back to the split of 2 face to face and 2 online meetings for the next term.

The composition of the GEC has changed remarkably in the last two terms and we now have a largely working membership which, while difficult in terms of time supports our ability to deal with contemporary issues. This will undoubtedly be a source of strength in dealing with significant challenges in the next two-year period.

Steve Thomas

Group Secretary

23 October 2021

**Education and Children’s Services Group of Prospect**

**BIENNIAL GENERAL MEETING**

Minutes of the 4th Biennial General Meeting of the Education and Children’s Services Group of Prospect held at the Newcastle Marriott Hotel on Friday 22nd November 2019.

**1. Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence had been received Nikki Elliott.

**2. Minutes of Previous Meeting**

The Minutes 3rd Biennial General Meeting of the Aspect Group of Prospect at the Birmingham Marriott Hotel, on Friday 8th November 2017, which had been previously circulated, were approved as a true and correct record.

**3. Matters arising from the Minutes**

There were no matters arising from these Minutes.

**4. Declaration of the election of GEC Officers and Council members**

 It was formally announced that the Council for 2019/21 was constituted as follows:

President Mark Patton

Vice-President Diana Robinson

Vice-President Paul Watson

Council member for N Ireland – Glenn Walsh

Council member for Scotland – Tommy Doherty

Council member for Wales – Betsan O’Connor

Council member – Karan Flanaghan

Council member – Sara Griffiths

Council member – Vinod Hallan

Council member – Gill Hedworth

Council member – Maria Marsh

Council member – Chris Roberts

The Group Secretary extended thanks to the previous GEC for its work over the past term of office and welcomed new members to the council.

**5.Biennial Report of the Council**

The Group Secretary reported that the national-level Soulbury Committee Officers' Side had maintained effective negotiating and consultative structures for members working in Local Government and had negotiated a 2% increase on all pay points on each scale from 1 September 2018 and 1 September 2019, a modest increase from previous pay negotiations of 1% in 2016 and 2017. The Officer’s Side had also been able to agree the insertion of a clause in the Soulbury report that recommended using the scales to non-Soulbury professionals undertaking Soulbury type work

The group’s member communications had been updated in line with Prospect’s overall communication’s strategy, most significantly seeing Education Eye develop into an electronic newsletter format. The group’s digital communications had also been extended including the use of social media and blogs to provide more timely information of developments within education and children's services sector.

The Group Secretary reported on the work undertaken by the ECS Full Time Officers highlighting their heavy involvement with casework support for members. He advised that officers undertook regular professional training to ensure they were up to date with changes in employment law.

Membership of the group had fallen over the period noting however that the number new recruits joining the group had increased in recent months. New recruitment leaflets aimed at reflecting the changing nature of the workforce had been produced and recruitment in new areas was being considered.

The Group Secretary expressed his thanks to the Group Executive Council, including the new members taking up seats for the forthcoming term, as well as the full-time officers and staff, for their work support members of the group.

The report was duly accepted by the meeting.

**6.** **Motions from the Group Executive Council**

The group secretary provided an overview of recent GEC discussions around the composition of the Group Executive Council and following discussion the Biennial General Meeting unanimously agreed a constitutional amendment to remove reserved seats for Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. The Group Rules to be amended at 2(iv) as follows:

*The Group Executive Council (hereinafter in these Group Rules called “the Council”) shall consist of a President and two Vice-Presidents (all of whom shall, for the purposes of these rules, be described as the “Officers of the Group”), and 9 other members.*

**7. Any other business**

The President expressed thanks to GEC members for their contributions to the work of the Group, including attendance at meetings, development of consultation responses and policy statements whilst managing busy day jobs. The President expressed thanks to the group’s Vice Presidents and other elected officers, full-time officers, local representatives and office administrative staff for their hard-work during the period to ensure membership services were maintained whilst responding to challenges to secure the future of the group’s membership.

The meeting concluded.