

The Convener of the School Closure Review Panels



School Closure
Review Panels

Annual Report 2023



The School Closure Review Panels and the Convener of the School Closure Review Panels are independent statutory bodies which have been created to enhance and strengthen the process of local authority school closures in Scotland.



School Closure
Review Panels

Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills
St. Andrew's House
Regent Road
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

Dear Ms Gilruth

I have pleasure in submitting this, the ninth Annual Report of the School Closure Review Panels, to the Scottish Ministers.

Dr Colin Morrison
Convener

School Closure Review Panels

tel 0131 210 0446 email admin@scrp.scot web www.scrp.scot

The office of the Convener of the School Closure Review Panels and the School Closure Review Panels were established by virtue of section 17A of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010.

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Foreword

by the Convener of the School Closure Review Panels

Welcome to the annual report describing the purpose and work of the School Closure Review Panels. My role as Convener began midway through the reporting year and so my first task must be to thank my predecessor Iain Nisbet for his work in this role from the establishment of the SCRP to mid-2023. Iain's ambition had been to establish the School Closure Review Panels as a trusted and effective part of the schools and education framework, and this has been achieved.

My thanks also to Panel members and Scottish Government colleagues for my welcome, and to the team at the Scottish Arbitration Centre for their work providing administration services.

While there were no school closure decisions called in by Scottish Ministers for review in 2023, it remains necessary for me to retain the capacity to convene a panel at short notice in the event that this is required. I am confident that we have a highly skilled team in place to meet the task of review should that arise in the coming year.

Dr Colin Morrison

Convener
January 2024

ABOUT THE CONVENER AND THE PANELS

The School Closure Review Panels and the Convener of the School Closure Review Panels are independent statutory bodies which have been created to enhance and strengthen the process of local authority school closures in Scotland.

Scottish local authorities proposing to close a school within their area must do so in line with the requirements of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 (“the 2010 Act”) and it is for the Scottish Ministers to decide whether the authority has met these statutory requirements. The 2010 Act contains the power for Ministers to “call in” a local authority school closure decision, if there is evidence that the requirements may not have been met. When the Scottish Ministers decide to call in a decision, they refer the decision to the Convener, who appoints a Panel of three to review the closure decision.

In making decisions on appointments of Panels, the Convener is independent of the Scottish Government and any other body or individual. The Convener is also independent of the Panels and has no input on review decisions made by a Panel. The Convener is responsible for providing the Panels with necessary staff and services for the delivery of their functions as well as making appropriate arrangements for training the persons eligible to be selected to serve as a Panel Member. The Convener is appointed for a period of up to five years and is eligible for reappointment thereafter. The current holder of the Office of the Convener, Colin Morrison, was appointed as Convener on 13 July 2023 and his appointment will last for five years until 12 July 2028.

The main statutory function of a Panel is to review a called in closure decision of an education authority. Each Panel is independent of other Panels, the Convener, the Scottish Government and any other bodies or individuals. School Closure Review Panels cannot become involved in any school closure unless the decision is called in by Scottish Ministers. The Convener appoints persons eligible to serve as a Panel Member for a period of up to five years and each individual is eligible for reappointment thereafter. Currently there are eight persons eligible to serve as a Panel Member.



Dr Colin Morrison
Convener

Further details on the Convener and Panels can be found at www.scrp.scot.

PERSONS ELIGIBLE TO SERVE AS A PANEL MEMBER

Administrative Support Services

The Scottish Arbitration Centre (“the Centre”) provides administrative support to the Convener and the Panels, including the coordination of training for persons eligible to serve as Panel Members. The Centre is a not-for-profit company providing an administrative service to the Convener and Panels and is not involved with the decision making of the Convener nor the Panels. In 2021 the Centre successfully bid and won a competitive tender exercise to continue to provide administrative support to the Convener and the Panels for a further three to five years.



Beverley Atkinson



Dr. Charles S. Bestwick



Roddy Macleod



Helen McGhee



Catriona Waddington



Sally Wainwright



Justin Willey



Nairn Young

**For more about the
staffing structure of
the Centre, see**

<https://scottisharbitrationcentre.org/about-us/our-people/>

THE YEAR 2023

There were no new call-ins of school closure decisions in 2023.

The Convener

The Convener has exercised his statutory functions during the year. These functions include appointment of persons eligible to be selected as a Panel Member and making arrangements for the training of these persons.

Training

One of the statutory responsibilities of the Convener is to make appropriate arrangements for the training of the persons eligible to be selected as a member of a Panel.

In January 2023 an afternoon of in person training was arranged to bring the pool of persons eligible to serve as a Panel Member together. The training session provided an opportunity for those who had previously worked on the panels to reflect and share their experiences. There was also presentations and discussion on current issues of importance for rural schools and on incorporation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child into Scots law.

Recruitment

In October 2022 the Scottish Government commenced a recruitment process for the appointment of a new Convener. On 13 July 2023 Dr Colin Morrison was appointed as Convener of the School Closure Review Panels.

FINANCE

Background

The Scottish Arbitration Centre provides administrative services to the Convener and Panels and has done since the establishment of these statutory bodies.

Expenditure 20223

Payment for service and other expenses by Scottish Government.

The actual expenditure for the period from 1 January 2023 to 31 December 2023 was £78,936.05. This is an increase of £2,058.22 on the expenditure for 2022.

Expenditure breakdown 2023

Administrative, IT, financial and payroll services, including staff costs and office overheads	£74,046.06
Training and accommodation hire	£1,749.17
Fees for Convener	£1,543.06
Fees for Panel Members	£1,021.14
Expenses for Convener and Panel Members	£576.62
Legal Advice	£0
Total	£78,936.05

THE CALL – INS

THIS YEAR SAW ZERO CALL-INS BY THE SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT.



CONCLUSION

While there were no school closure decisions called in by Scottish Ministers for review in 2023, to maintain that state of readiness, much work has continued behind the scenes, including ongoing training for persons eligible to be School Closure Review Panel members. As a result of this activity, the Convener and persons eligible to be Panel Members are well prepared to deal with any call-ins which may arise in 2024 or beyond.



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tel	0131 210 0446
email	admin@scrp.scot
web	www.scrp.scot