**Report from the Chair to**

**Upstart Scotland AGM, 7th October 2023**

This is my final report as Chair of Upstart Scotland. Owing to health issues which have restricted my activities throughout the year, I’m resigning from the post at this year’s AGM with enormous thanks to everyone who’s helped Upstart in changing Scotland’s educational culture over the last eight years. Especial thanks to Kate Johnston for her constant support for the campaign and, during my illness, keeping it going (including the organisation of this AGM).

It’s wonderful to be meeting in ‘real life’ again, especially since so much has happened in Scottish politics since the last AGM. Not only do we have a new First Minister and Scottish Government but, on 8th October 2022 at the SNP annual conference, the **SNP membership voted overwhelmingly to make the introduction of a kindergarten stage part of the party’s official policy** (see below). A week later, the Scottish Greens passed a similar resolution.

Sadly, the Education Secretary at the time was less than enthusiastic, stating that future educational policy would depend on the findings of the National Discussion on Education (this arose from the Muir Report mentioned at the last AGM and closed in December 2022). Many thanks to all Upstart supporters who made the case for a kindergarten stage in response to the National Discussion. At time of writing, however, there have been no further statements on the subject.

The really good news is that, in January 2023, Upstart made contact with Kaukab Stewart MSP, who has offered to work at Parliamentary Level to bring the SNP Conference resolution into effect. This means a considerable change of emphasis in Upstart’s activities, our first priority now being to support Kaukab in every way possible to achieve this aim.

**SNP National Conference 2022**

Upstart is enormously indebted to Toni Guigliano, SNP Policy Convener, who facilitated Resolution 24 at the SNP Conference 2022, and other speakers who ensured the Resolution was passed overwhelmingly. The event generated a great deal of media coverage which also helped get our campaign message across to the general public.

Many thanks also to everyone involved in taking Upstart’s case to the conference, especially the anonymous donor who paid for a stall at the venue; Kate, Dawn, Elizabeth, Ali, Fiona and Liz, who manned the stall, and Cosy Fund who provided leaflets. Details of the event are covered in the Sept/Oct newsletters on [www.upstart.scot](http://www.upstart.scot).

**Upstart Events, 2022-23**

Since the last AGM we have hosted (on Zoom) two final *Play Is The Way* Book Groups, a very well-received training course by Julie Fisher and three ‘Tea and Blether’ sessions, for all of which more thanks go to Kate for all the ideas and organisation. Her latest training event is a nine-session course on Child Development and Play Pedagogy led by Kym Scott, to be delivered via Zoom. It began on 18th September and has attracted over 500 regular subscribers. Thanks also to Carol Craig, who ran an Away Day for the Board of Trustees to consider the future direction of Upstart

**Meetings and official consultations 2022-23**

As in previous years, Kate and I have provided talks for schools and colleges and I’ve met with representatives of various early years, education and children’s sector organisations to put the Upstart case.

I also responded on Upstart’s behalf to two major consultations during the year:

* a summary of major areas of concern about children’s rights by Together, making the case for a kindergarten stage in terms of Article 3,6,24,27, 28 and 31
* the government’s National Discussion on education, referencing the ‘poverty-related **developmental** gap’ at age five and why pedagogy and assessment at this age must relate to children’s holistic development, as opposed to specific cognitive skills.

**Moving forward**

Since making the connection with Kaukab Stewart, we’ve been busy during 2023 arranging briefing meetings between her and Upstart supporters with expertise in children’s rights, health and early years education. Since this is likely to be the main thrust of Upstart’s work for the foreseeable future, my resignation as Chair is very timely: the work of the Board of Trustees will henceforth require managerial and political skills in which I’m sadly lacking.

I’m therefore delighted that, at the request of the Trustees, Willie French has agreed to take on the role of Chair and Dawn Ewan as Vice-Chair. I hope the AGM will heartily endorse their election. I hope to continue as newsletter editor and @UpstartScot on Twitter and to work with Kate on developing more Upstart training courses.

These are very exciting times and it’s impossible to thank everyone (Trustees, members, supporters) enough for your support for the campaign over the last eight years. We’ve made huge progress in changing attitudes to early years care and education, and there are high hopes that we’ll eventually achieve a statutory kindergarten stage … so it’s with deep gratitude and endless best wishes for Upstart’s future that I sign off (for the last time) as,

***Sue Palmer, Chair of Upstart Scotland, 20-9-23***