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## Press Release

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**For more information about the Society of Shoe Fitters go to their website: [www.shoefitters-uk.org](http://www.shoefitters-uk.org).**

The Society of Shoe Fitters had a truly successful event 'Politically Correct Footwear' in Westminster on October 28<sup>th</sup>.

Hosted by the Minister for Life Sciences George Freeman, MP for Mid-Norfolk, the event was a mix of shoe trade professionals and health professionals from Universities, Podiatry Associations, the Healthy Footwear Guide, NHS England.

Headed by Prof. Wesley Vernon O.B.E. the primary aim of the Society of Shoe Fitters is to ask for government support in educating parents about the dangers to their children's development if shoes are not professionally fitted in their formative years – a fact backed up by eminent podiatrists and confirmed by the NHS. The SSF would also like to see the government banning the use of carpeting in schools, insisting on pupils changing into plimsolls and slippers – something that an assistant to Alex Salmond completely agreed with as he has suffered greatly because of it and happy to be quoted.

A raft of problems stem from the lack of knowledge when fitting children's feet and the cheap availability of badly constructed footwear. There is a general ignorance about footwear but the effects are vast, people are in pain, there is a massive cost implication to the NHS, it is detrimental to retail which affects the supply chain and landfill is struggling to cope. It is not just about children; those with a mature foot requiring considerable fitting expertise are being forced to seek medical intervention and costly footwear through the NHS. It has become obvious to the government that the NHS should work together with the SSF as the rewards for all concerned are evident.

Minister George Freeman spoke eloquently and had a good grasp of the situation. He has promised his assistance going forward, has invited the SSF back to the Commons to talk further and many other politicians from all over the country also pledged their support, as well as representatives from NHS England.

Footwear has been treated as merely an accessory but it is the only item of clothing we wear that can seriously damage our health. There are now more than 135 foot amputations weekly as well as numerous operations for hips, knees, backs, necks etc. that might have been prevented if children had worn the right shoes, properly fitted in childhood. "Children's footwear should carry a Government Health Warning to educate parents. Anyone can measure, but very few know how to actually fit," said Secretary Laura West. "A gauge is merely a guide and should not be sold to the public. Our members are Qualified Shoe Fitters and deserve greater recognition for their dedication to learning and service". SSF members are taught about common foot conditions, what to look out for and what advice to give their customers through their well respected Footwear & Fitting Course. Primarily it is the independent that has given this extra service as staff turnover and shoe quality in many shoe stores simply does not measure up. Independents are finding it hard to compete with cheap fashion, online sales, even their own suppliers – a fact that interested every MP in attendance. The concern was that professional shoe fitting could disappear, but judging by the networking and conversations taking place at Westminster, the future for shoe fitting is looking healthier already.