



Together (Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights)

Strategic Plan 2019-24

Vision:

- All children and young people growing up in Scotland have their human rights respected, protected and fulfilled.

Mission:

- We work to inspire and enable everyone in Scotland to put children and young people's human rights at the heart of everything they do.

Values:

- **Courageous:** We are independent and we challenge when we need to. We always stand up for children's human rights.
- **Collaborative:** We involve, engage and consult our members, children and young people and the government. We are representative, open and transparent in all we do.
- **Constructive:** We do things in a respectful way. We support our staff, interns and children and young people to reach their potential.
- **Inclusive:** We enable everyone to participate equally, especially children and young people.

Our strategic aims:

During the next five years (2019-2024) Together will work to ensure:

1. Law in Scotland is fully compliant with the UNCRC and other international human rights standards.
2. Law and policy in Scotland is fully implemented in line with the UNCRC and other international human rights standards.
3. Children and young people's voices are listened to, respected and influence the world around them.
4. Scotland is recognised internationally as a pioneer and an innovator in taking forward children and young people's human rights.

5. Our impact and reach continues to grow, and we develop as a sustainably funded organisation.

Our strategies:

We will develop and pursue the following strategies throughout 2019-2024 to ensure we achieve our strategic aims:

1. Law in Scotland is fully compliant with the UNCRC and other international human rights standards.

- Advocate for the full incorporation of the UNCRC and other international human rights standards into Scots and UK law.
- Identify where Scots law falls short of the standards enshrined in the UNCRC and advocate for legislation that meets and exceeds international human rights standards.
- Influence and inform new legislation brought forward by the Scottish and UK Government to ensure it meets international human rights standards.

2. Law and policy in Scotland is fully implemented in line with the UNCRC and other international human rights standards.

- Work with our members to raise public and professional awareness and understanding of children and young people's human rights.
- Influence and build the capacity of our members and duty bearers to inform policy and direct practice.
- Develop and test innovative ideas to lead best practice in implementing children and young people's human rights, doing this in ways which are proactive, agile and seize new opportunities.
- Undertake robust monitoring and reporting to support UN bodies to hold the Scottish and UK Government to account in implementing international human rights obligations.

3. Children and young people's voices are listened to, respected and influence the world around them.

- Consistently explore, embed and develop opportunities to ensure that children and young people's views, experiences and concerns are listened to and acted on. Achieve this through partnerships with our members and all levels of government.

4. Scotland is recognised internationally as a pioneer and an innovator in taking forward children and young people's human rights.

- Bring learning from the international community to inform and develop work in Scotland to further children and young people's human rights.
- Promote and share good practice from Scotland with partners in the international community.
- Create and promote opportunities for our members to learn from – and bring learning to – the international human rights community.

5. Our impact and reach continues to grow, and we develop as a sustainably funded organisation.

- Ensure operational compliance and good governance in all we do.
- Develop and implement a funding strategy that promotes a diversity of income sources, including support from government, charitable trusts and membership.
- Develop our staff, volunteers, interns and trustees to ensure there is a strong foundation from which we can progress our mission.
- Assess and measure our impact to ensure we learn from successes and challenges and develop our approaches and strategies.

Background and history

Together (Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights) is an alliance of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and interested professionals that works to improve the awareness, understanding and implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and other international human rights standards across Scotland. It was established in 1996 as a small, informal network drawn from Scottish children's organisations. The impetus to create such a grouping came from the ratification of the UNCRC by the UK government in 1991. The main activity of Together was driven by the reporting process to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, and included submitting a report and presenting oral evidence to the UN Committee in 2008.

In 2009, funding from the Scottish Government enabled Together to employ a small staff team. In the subsequent 10 years, Together has established a reputation as a leading source of expertise on children and young people's human rights at a Scottish and international level. Membership has grown from 30 to over 380 organisations and individuals, ranging from small local playgroups and youthwork projects through to large international charities, academics and professionals. Together now has four members of staff: a full time Director and Legal & Policy Manager, part-time Business Support Officer and Policy and Communications Assistant and our work is supported by a number of interns. Achievements in this time have included:

- Coordinating UK reporting to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2016. This resulted in 150 recommendations to the Scottish and UK governments that were rooted in experiences of the children and young people that Together's membership work with.
- Supporting a delegation of children and young people to participate in the 2018 UN Day of Discussion on Children as Human Rights Defenders as workshop leaders, moderators and speakers. This resulted in a child from Scotland becoming the 'youngest ever moderator' at the UN, and the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child reviewing how children and young people could become more involved in its work.
- Continuously advocating for a raise in the age of criminal responsibility and for children to be given equal protection from violence. This has led to two bills being laid before the Scottish Parliament which are expected to be passed in 2019.
- Relentlessly pushing for the incorporation of the UNCRC in Scots law. This has led to a commitment in the 2018 Programme for Government and a draft Children's Rights (Scotland) Bill being presented to the Deputy First Minister to support Scottish Government to take the commitment forward.
- Leading calls in Scotland for children and young people's views to be taken into account as the UK leaves the European Union. This resulted in the creation of a Children and Young People's Panel on Europe to advise Scottish and UK Government.
- Setting up a comprehensive website, resource library, fortnightly e-newsletter and social media channels to raise awareness and understanding of children and young people's human rights. The website and resource library is used by over 700 visitors each week, there are over 1500 subscribers to the e-newsletter and our social media channels are followed by over 4000 people.

Context

Within Scotland, there is an increasing recognition of the importance of children and young people's human rights. Whilst legislative commitments have been made—such as the incorporation of the UNCRC into Scots law—there still needs to be a concerted effort to translate these into action before the next Scottish Parliament elections in 2021. The value of children and young people's participation is being increasingly recognised, with children and young people being invited to an annual Cabinet Meeting with the First Minister and full Cabinet and more Scottish Parliament Committees seeking contributions from children and young people. In 2020, public bodies will have to report on the steps they've taken to consider children and young people's human rights.

Far more needs to be done to ensure that the positive legislative and policy commitments have a real impact on children and young people's experiences of their rights. Poverty remains the most serious human rights issue. Children are disproportionately likely to be affected by poverty, with around 24% of children in Scotland living in relative poverty after housing costs (the figure is around 19% for adults). There has been no significant reduction in this figure in recent years and figures remain relatively high and stable, with one in five children living in low income households. The impact of welfare reforms and a decade of austerity has compounded existing problems, with a further 200,000 children and young people projected to be pushed into poverty across the UK by the end of 2020. There has been an increase in the number of families with children accessing food banks, with the three primary reasons that families cite being benefit delays, benefit changes, and low incomes. Children's organisations and schools share widespread concerns around children's access to food during school holiday periods, when free school meal initiatives do not run.

Whilst Scotland's health outcomes are generally improving overall, inequalities persist resulting in stark differences for various health outcomes. Poverty and deprivation remain the key determinants of health inequalities. Children and young people from lower socioeconomic groups have poorer nutrition, lower life expectancy, increased rates of smoking and substance misuse, increased risk of suicide, and worse mental health. Poverty is the leading cause of inequalities in children's early development, including in their educational attainment. Children living in poverty are more likely to start school at a disadvantage compared to children from families on higher incomes. The gap between the poorest 20% of pupils and the wealthiest 20% widened sharply during 2015 and this gap is continuing to grow.

The UK's departure from the EU also presents a series of potential challenges. Alongside the uncertainty as to when Brexit will happen and what the deal will look like, there are real concerns that it will result in a regression of children's legal rights protections through the loss of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. Further concerns from among Together's membership include the uncertain short and long-term economic impact; risks to EU funding for breakfast clubs, education, training and youth work projects; and the mental health impact on children and young people faced with prolonged uncertainty.

Key influences

Scotland

Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014: the 2014 Act embeds reporting and awareness raising duties relating to the UNCRC on Scottish Ministers. It also places reporting duties on public bodies. The 2014 Act has encouraged national use of Child Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessments (CRWIAs).

Action Plan on Children's Rights: The Action Plan was published in December 2018. It provides an overview of Scottish Government priorities for the next three years: Governance, Incorporation, Awareness, Participation and Impact Assessments.

UNCRC audit: The Programme for Government 2017-18 included a commitment to undertake an audit on the most effective way to further embed children's rights into policy and legislation, including the option of full UNCRC incorporation.

UNCRC incorporation: The Programme for Government 2018-19 includes a commitment to incorporate the principles of the UNCRC. Together and the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland established an advisory group that drafted a Children's Rights (Scotland) Bill to demonstrate what incorporation could look like in legislative terms. Scottish Government will be launching a consultation from May to July 2019. In order for a Bill to be passed within this Parliament (while there is a majority support for incorporation) a Bill would need to be introduced before the end of 2019.

Care Review: A 'root and branch' review of the care system in Scotland is being undertaken and is due to report in 2020. Together is involved in the 'rights' workgroup and is working to explore how the recommendations can be strongly grounded from a rights-based perspective. Expectations around the impact of the Care Review among children and young people and Together's membership are high.

Scotland's National Action Plan on Human Rights (SNAP): SNAP is currently being redeveloped and revised and is due to be published in early 2020. As a member of the SNAP Development Advisory Group, Together is raising questions about resourcing and how to involve children and young people throughout this process.

Potential Scottish independence referendum: The SNP has been clear in its intention to call a further Scottish independence referendum before the Scottish Parliament election in 2021.

Year of Young People 2018: Following a successful Year of Young People in 2018, young people are keen to ensure that energy is not lost. There are many conversations among Together's membership as to how a successful 'legacy' from the initiative can be secured.

Legislative developments: New legislation going through the Scottish Parliament in 2019 includes Bills for equal protection and raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility. These Bills demonstrate the impact of UNCRC Concluding Observations on the development of domestic law. Other Bills may include Neglect (Section 12) & Family Law and Female Genital Mutilation.

Other key policy issues: Headline children's rights issues continue to be educational attainment, child poverty, emphasis on ACES and mental health. 2019 marks the critical first implementation first stage of the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2018. It will also include enactment of the Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018 and Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018.

Other issues of note: The Children's Commissioner's investigatory powers are now being used and will shine light on critical issues such as the use of restraint in residential settings. There will be a review of the National Child Protection Guidance (rights and participation opportunity to be addressed) which will be published in Dec 2019. Changes in education governance are expected to bring opportunities and challenges.

UK

Brexit: the UK Government has chosen to abandon the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights when the UK leaves the EU. This means losing important protections for childrens rights, workers' rights, LGBTQI rights and human rights more broadly.

Human Rights Act: there have been campaigns to repeal the Human Rights Act and replace it will a 'Bill of Rights', offering a lower standard of protection. The UK Government's position is that there are no current plans to repeal the Act. However, the 2017 Conservative Manifesto notes that reform of the human rights framework may be considered once Brexit is complete.

Europe

Brexit: as above.

Council of Europe strategy on the rights of the child (2016-2021): the 2016-21 strategy includes priority areas such as: equal opportunities for all children, children's participation, a life free from violence for all children, child-friendly justice and children's rights in the digital environment. The resulting guidelines and recommendations are useful advocacy tools. A new strategy is to be put in place from 2021.

International

30th anniversary of the UNCRC: 20th November 2019 marks the 30th anniversary of the UNCRC being opened for signature. Activities, events and celebrations are planned all over the world.

Sustainable Development Goals: Some particularly relevant for children's rights, including 1 (poverty); 2 (hunger); 4 (education); 5 (gender equality); 10 (reduce inequalities); 16 (right to elect leaders – citizenship for children). Targets of 2030.

Optional Protocol on a Communications Procedure (OPIC): OPIC entered into force in April 2014 and currently has 42 State parties¹. The UK has yet to ratify.

UN General Comments: Several new General Comments are in development including on juvenile justice and children's rights in the digital environment. A further new General Comment on Children as human rights defenders is a possibility.

UN Days of Discussion: These events are held biennially. Scotland has played an increasingly prominent role in the last two DGDs (on the subject of the environment in 2016 and human rights defenders in 2018). The days provide an opportunity for Together to link its membership with the wider international community to support advocacy efforts and highlight promising practice.

Special Rapporteurs

Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty: Together played an active role in reporting and meeting with the Special Rapporteur and briefing and involving our membership in the discussions. His recommendations are expected to include a statement around the importance of incorporation. His report will be published in Spring 2019.

Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders: The report from the 2018 DGD is being shared with the Special Rapporteur to encourage him to place additional emphasis on children in 2019. This is likely to create more opportunities for Together's work with members to support and empower children as human rights defenders.

¹ As of 10 January 2019

Treaty body/UPR reporting

Together contributes to ensuring children's rights are raised through other treaty body reporting and the Universal Periodic Review:

- UN Convention Against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment – 2019
- Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women – 2019
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights - 2020
- International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination – 2020
- UPR – next report 2021 (mid term report 2019)
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights – 2021
- UN Convention on the Rights of the Child - 2022
- Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities - 2023

Organisational and internal governance

Governance

Together's memorandum and articles underpin our work. These are complemented by Together's policies and procedures, which are published on Together's website. The Board of Trustees has overall decision-making authority and comprises of 10 members, appointed by the Together membership at the Annual General Meeting. Trustees are elected for a three-year term, after which they may be re-elected for a further three years. Within the Board of Trustees, a Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson and Honorary Treasurer are appointed by the Together membership through a vote at the AGM. Each officeholder is elected for a three-year term and is eligible for a second term of three years. The Board of Trustees meet every six-eight weeks. The Board delegates day to day authority to the Director who is responsible for overseeing the implementation of Together's strategic plan.

Working structures

Together has the following working structures:

- **Finance subgroup:** This comprises of the Treasurer, Chair, Director and nominated Board members and meets prior to every meeting of the Board of Trustees. The role of the subgroup is to oversee and scrutinise the monthly management accounts and annual financial statements, before presenting them for approval to the Board of Trustees. The subgroup's role is also to revise and develop financial policies and procedures as appropriate.
- **Executive subgroup:** This comprises of the Chair, Vice Chair, Treasurer and Director to provide regular contact, support and advice to the Director between Board meetings. The role of the subgroup is to discuss agendas and focus of Board activities and to make proposals to the Board about its business; provide a fast and accessible response to issues raised by the Director where required; make recommendations on decisions and actions where required between Board meetings; and to represent or facilitate Board engagement to external bodies.
- **Ad-hoc subgroups:** The Board of Trustees may set up ad-hoc subgroups to work on specific issues. These are established for a definite period of time and work towards delivering clear tangible outputs. Subgroups must contain a minimum of three Trustees and may include up to two co-opted Advisors. Subgroups are chaired by a Trustee, who is responsible for reporting to Together Board meetings. The Director will also be a member of each subgroup.

Membership structure

Membership is available to organisations and individuals with an interest in promoting the full implementation of the UNCRC across Scotland. Members must:

- Be based or working in Scotland;
- Sign up and commit to Together's vision, mission and values;
- Fulfil formal application procedures and be approved as a member through the Board of Trustees;
- Base their work on the principles enshrined in the UNCRC and other international human rights conventions.

Membership types

- **Voting member** - Voting membership is open to local, national and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) with an interest in improving the awareness, understanding and implementation of the UNCRC in Scotland. Voting is limited to one vote per organisation.
- **Non-voting member** - Non-voting membership is open to public bodies (including health, education and social work), academic and research institutions and individuals, with an interest in improving the awareness, understanding and implementation of the UNCRC in Scotland.

Membership process

Applications for membership are assessed by the Director and approved by the Board of Trustees at quarterly Board meetings. All new members for the previous year are announced at the Annual General Meeting (AGM). Members can resign from Together at any time by giving written notice to the Board of Trustees. Their withdrawal is notified to other members at the Together AGM. The Board of Trustees is able to exclude members if the need arises. Reasons for exclusion can include bringing Together in disrepute or lack of commitment to Together's mission, vision and values. Members can only be excluded after being given the opportunity to put forward a case for their defence to the Board of Trustees.

Membership disclaimer

Together members commit, upon application, to Together's vision, mission and values. Together strives to ensure that its members take forward Together's values and act in accordance with national and international legal standards. However, Together cannot be held responsible for the positions or actions of any of its members (or their employees). The views and opinions expressed by individual members do not necessarily represent those of Together unless officially endorsed.

Monitoring and evaluation

As part of the monitoring and evaluation framework, Together's Director produces a quarterly report for the Board which outlines progress against each aim according to the following monitoring framework. An annual progress report is produced to inform the development and revision of the Strategic and Operational Plans.

<u>Strategic Aim</u>	<u>Monitoring Method</u>	<u>Measure</u>	<u>Timescale</u>
Law in Scotland is fully compliant with the UNCRC and other international human rights standards.			
Law and policy in Scotland is fully implemented in line with the UNCRC and other international human rights standards.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Findings of State of Children's Rights report • Advocacy matrix • Monitoring of proactive approaches for expertise • Comparison of progress made between State of Children's Rights report 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence of improved good practice • Ongoing monitoring • Number of requests for expertise and information from key decision-makers (e.g. MSPs, government, media etc.) • Evidence of improved good practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annually (Nov) • Ongoing • Annually (Nov)
Children and young people's voices are listened to, respected and influence the world around them.			
Scotland is recognised internationally as a pioneer and an innovator in taking forward children and young people's human rights.			
Our impact and reach continues to grow, and we develop as a sustainably funded organisation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual member/e-newsletter surveys • Broadening of membership/participation in events • Website analytics • Media monitoring • Approval of annual report and financial statements • Appropriate income secured • Staff and intern annual survey • Regular productive Board meetings • Compliance with Memorandum and Articles • Companies House / OSCR requirements met 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quantitative data • Membership matrix / event report • Increased number of hits/users/time spent on website • Number of requests for media comment/coverage • Accounts successfully examined and accepted by Companies House • Evidence of income secured • Evidence of staff/intern satisfaction • Evidence of actions being completed • Evidence of compliance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annually • Ad-hoc • Monthly • Ongoing • Annually (Sept) • Ongoing (Apr) • Annually • Bi-monthly • Ongoing • Annually (Oct)

Resources

Office accommodation

Together is based at Children in Scotland's premises in Haymarket, Edinburgh. There is capacity for four staff members in the office at any one time.

Staff

Annual funding from the Scottish Government Children's Rights team enables Together to employ a Director and part-time Policy and Communications Assistant (from April 2019). Funding from the Children and Young People's Early Intervention Fund allows Together to employ a Policy and Legal Manager and part-time Business Support Officer up to March 2020.

Interns

Together has made increasing use of interns who have supported the development of the State of Children's Rights report, helped to organise member seminars and advocate through the Universal Periodic Review. Together will continue its use of interns to add capacity to its staff team to fulfil the workplan. Every year, Together seeks funding from the EmployEd internship programme to employ a Policy and Research Intern over the summer to support the research and drafting of the State of Children's Rights report. Together is committed to securing dedicated income for all internships.

Volunteers

Together has recruited a qualified accountant to act as a Finance Volunteer, supporting the staff with the production of the monthly management accounts, training staff and volunteers on the use of Together's financial systems and advising the Finance subgroup as requested. Together also has a Communications Volunteer who works two days a week. Together is committed to recruiting and training volunteers as needed in line with its volunteering policy.

Board of Trustees

Together is led by a Board of Trustees who are responsible for leading the strategic direction of the charity. The Board comprises of 10 Trustees who are elected from within Together's membership. The Trustees have a range of expertise including children's policy, children's services, human rights and research. The Trustees hold regular Board meetings every quarter and monitor the strategic direction and financial situation of the charity closely. The Board of Trustees are ultimately responsible for overseeing the delivery of the Strategic Plan.