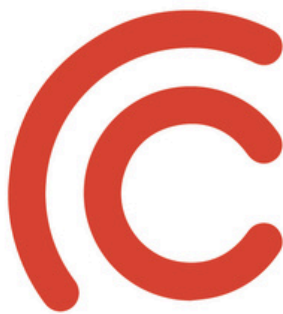




Children's Rights
Alliance for England
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PLANT YNG NGHYMRU
CHILDREN IN WALES



Wales UNCRC Monitoring Group



Grŵp Monitro CCUHP Cymru



Rights of the Child UK

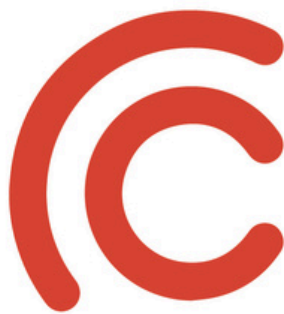
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Rights of the Child UK (ROCK) Annual Conference 2024 Post-Conference Report

**17th September 2024, City Art Centre,
Edinburgh**

Kindly sponsored by:

ELEVATE GREAT



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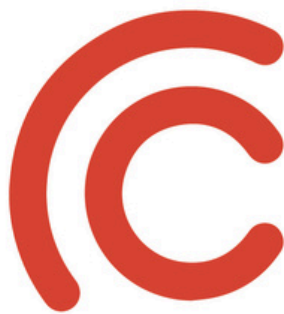
1. Foreword

*"I am delighted to introduce the **Rights of the Child (ROCK) Conference 2024 Report**, which captures the energy, insights and shared commitment of everyone who took part in this significant event.*

Held in Edinburgh on 17th September 2024, the conference brought together over 90 delegates and speakers from Scotland, England, Wales, Northern Ireland, Jersey and Iceland, all working to advance the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in law, policy and practice.

The conference had four key goals:

- To highlight the importance of strengthening children's human rights protections in domestic legislation, at both devolved and UK-wide levels.*
- To provide updates on developments across the UK and internationally, allowing for shared learning between jurisdictions.*
- To re-engage supporters in efforts to strengthen domestic legal frameworks to protect and progress UNCRC implementation.*
- To build networks and partnerships between ROCK members to support proactive advocacy for children's human rights.*

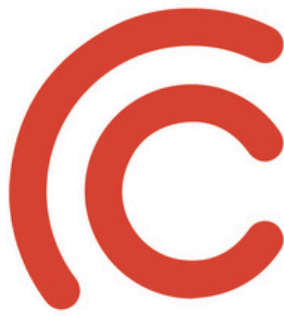


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Hosted by Together (Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights) in partnership with the ROCK Steering Group, and with generous sponsorship from Elevate Great (formerly known as Cattnach), the event was a vital opportunity for children's rights advocates, decision makers and academics to exchange knowledge, highlight progress and explore ways to overcome the challenges that remain. We are particularly grateful for the contributions from children and young people, who although unable to attend this year's event, submitted questions in advance for our speakers. Their insights reminded us that their views and lived experiences must guide our efforts every step of the way.

The conference showcased inspiring examples of progress and innovation from across the UK and beyond. Special thanks go to Hanna Borg Jónsdóttir from UNICEF Iceland, for her insightful keynote on Iceland's experiences of UNCRC incorporation, and the important 'lessons learned' that will help to inspire progress at devolved and UK level.



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The conference also created space for updates from Children's Commissioners' offices, government officials, and lively discussions between delegates on how we can collectively strengthen children's rights in the context of the [2023 UN Concluding Observations](#). A key theme that emerged was the importance of partnership working and accountability in driving forward change and ensuring that children's rights are fully embedded at all levels: UK, devolved and local.

On behalf of the ROCK Steering Group, I would like to extend our sincere thanks to all speakers, contributors and delegates who made the event such a success. Special thanks go to Elevate Great for their generous sponsorship, and to the Together team whose dedication and hard work ensured that the conference ran smoothly.

This report – and the next steps it identifies – serve as an important reminder that real progress happens when we work together. By continuing to harness the collective expertise, passion and determination of the ROCK coalition and its partners, we can ensure that children's rights are not just words on paper – but lived, breathed and experienced by every baby, child and young person, every day.”

Juliet Harris
Director, Together (Scottish Alliance for
Children's Rights)
Chair, ROCK Steering Group



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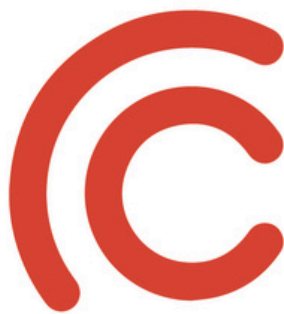
2. About ROCK

'Rights of the Child UK' (ROCK) is a coalition of voluntary organisations and individuals working together to embed children's human rights into law, policy and practice.

Successive governments at a UK and devolved level have asserted their desire to become the best place in the world for children to grow up. The ROCK coalition believes this can only be achieved by bringing the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into law across all jurisdictions of the UK, bringing the rights it enshrines within the reach of all babies, children and young people, regardless of their background or circumstances.

Our aims are to:

- Achieve the active recognition and realisation of children's rights in the UK jurisdictions and Jersey through the incorporation of the UNCRC into law at UK-wide and devolved levels.
- Identify and act upon opportunities for the incorporation of the UNCRC into law.
- Work together to maximise the opportunities to strengthen children's rights that are presented by proposals from the UK and devolved governments.



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About the ROCK Steering Group:

ROCK's work is guided by its Steering Group, which comprises representatives from leading child rights alliances across the UK, including:

- [Together \(Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights\)](#): An alliance of over 600 members working to realise the vision that Scotland becomes a place where every baby, child and young person grows up in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding.
- [Children's Rights Alliance for England \(CRAE\)](#): Part of Just for Kids Law, works with its members to promote children's rights and monitor UK Government implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and other human rights treaties in England.
- [Children in Wales](#): The national umbrella organisation for organisations and individuals who work with babies, children, young people and their families in Wales.

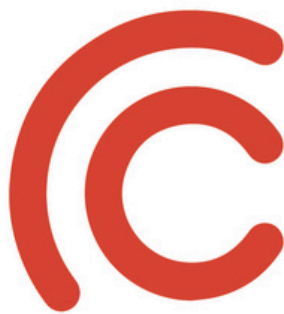


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- Wales UNCRC Monitoring Group: Chaired by Children in Wales, this national alliance monitors the UNCRC's implementation in Wales.
- Children's Law Centre: The Children's Law Centre was founded upon the principles laid down in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and works to protect the rights of all children and young people living in Northern Ireland.
- UNICEF UK: One of 32 UNICEF national committees that work locally to promote and protect the rights of children as set out in the UNCRC by advocating for lasting change for children in the UK and worldwide, and raising funds for UNICEF's emergency and development work around the world.

Wales UNCRC Monitoring Group



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3. About our Sponsor

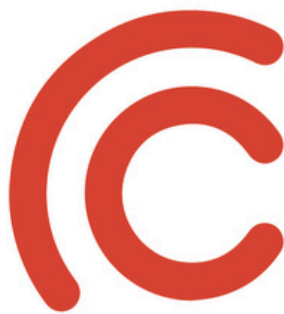
We would like to thank Elevate Great (formerly known as Cattanach) for their generous funding which made this conference possible.

Experiences during very early childhood have a critical impact on health and wellbeing across the lifespan. Strong and nurturing relationships in the early years matter and parents and carers need good social and emotional support as well as secure finances to enable these relationships to flourish. Cattanach aimed to use their endowment to make the case for greater investment and better systems to support families in the early years, with the views and rights of young children and their carers at the heart of their work.

In early 2025, Cattanach became Elevate Great. As an Equity Catalyst, Elevate Great strives for a society where everyone can flourish by making evidence-based investments in the early years.

Website: www.elevategreat.co.uk

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4. Key messages from the conference

Incorporation

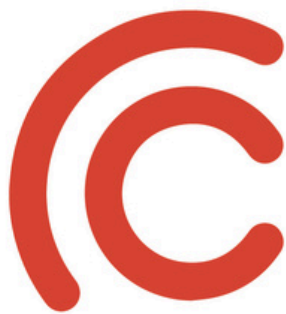
Full and direct incorporation of the UNCRC is needed at both UK and devolved level. While progress is being made in Scotland and Wales, incorporation at UK-level will help to address gaps in legal protection for babies, children and young people across all UK jurisdictions.

Monitoring implementation

National and local monitoring is essential to track progress, identify challenges and address gaps in implementing the UNCRC. Speakers and delegates emphasised the importance of using international recommendations, such as the [2023 Concluding Observations](#) from the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, to hold governments to account and drive progress.

Partnership approaches

Progressing children's rights requires a coordinated, collaborative approach, with strong connections forged across jurisdictions by civil society, Children's Commissioners, governments and civil servants. The conference underscored the importance of working together to identify and share best practice, overcome challenges, and importantly as a source of support, to build confidence and sustain energy. The ROCK coalition was recognised as a vital platform to foster this collaborative spirit and share learning across jurisdictions.



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Participation of babies, children and young people

There is a need for comprehensive, strategic and systematic approaches to participation at both national and local level, which are inclusive and fully resourced. Even the very youngest children are capable of expressing their needs and preferences, yet these signals are often overlooked. Governments should demonstrate how participation has influenced their decision making and actively take steps to build knowledge and understanding of the UNCRC amongst all children, young people, and the adults around them.





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5. Summary of presentations

Morning keynote

Hanna Borg Jónsdóttir, Programme Director, Child-Friendly Cities Initiative, UNICEF Iceland

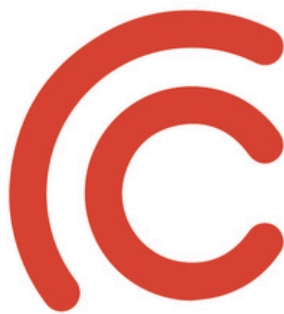
Hanna Borg Jónsdóttir delivered an insightful keynote on Iceland's journey towards incorporating the UNCRC into domestic law. She reflected on the challenges and successes, and shared valuable lessons to guide progress in the UK.

The path to incorporation

Iceland ratified the UNCRC in 1992, which prompted several legal changes, including amendments to the Children's Act and a new constitutional provision guaranteeing children's protection and care. Yet gaps remained in practice. In 2011, a review by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child urged Iceland to take concrete steps to ensure children's rights were not merely theoretical, but actively upheld:

"This was a wake-up call for our government, prompting the incorporation of the UNCRC directly into domestic law, which ultimately laid the groundwork for meaningful change."

Iceland directly incorporated the UNCRC into its domestic law in 2013.



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Impact of incorporation

Incorporation has had a transformative impact, influencing policies and legal frameworks. Ms Borg Jónsdóttir highlighted positive impacts including:

- **The Prosperity Law:** which encourages collaboration between institutions to align services with children's best interests.
- **Child-Friendly Cities and Rights Respecting Schools:** development of UNICEF-supported programmes have further embedded children's rights into municipal and educational settings.

Challenges and lessons learned

Despite progress, Ms Borg Jónsdóttir acknowledged ongoing challenges, including the need for comprehensive child rights education for professionals and addressing inequalities such as access to mental health services and online safety:





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“Direct incorporation into Icelandic law was no magic solution. It doesn't happen like that. The provisions of the UNCRC still needed to be implemented purposefully into the work and practices of authorities, municipalities, educational institutions, child protection, health services and parents also needed to be more aware of their duties and child rights.”

She stressed the importance of preparing for incorporation by laying a strong foundation through education, action plans, and raising public awareness.

Key lessons learned included:

- **Child participation:** Iceland has prioritised children's meaningful involvement through youth councils and the National Child Parliament.
- **Holistic policy development:** The introduction of the “Child-Friendly Iceland” policy and action plan in 2021 marked a significant step forward, focusing on participation, public awareness, and monitoring UNCRC implementation.
- **Partnership approaches:** Partnerships between government, NGOs, and municipalities have proven crucial for creating systems that respect and fulfil children's rights.
- **Data and monitoring:** The recent launch of a government ‘Dashboard for Children's Prosperity’ has been a “game-changer” for providing data, helping identify issues and craft targeted interventions.



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Inspiring progress

Ms Borg Jónsdóttir concluded with a call for collective effort, urging governments, NGOs, and communities to educate, empower, and engage children and families. By sharing Iceland's journey, she encouraged delegates to work towards a society where children's rights are respected, protected, and fulfilled in practice.

Questions from children and young people

In the lead up to the conference, Together invited children and young people to send us their questions for speakers. These were asked throughout the day.

Q. When you were a child what right did you find it hardest to access? Do you think that that is still a problem today? If not, what is? (from Oscar, Rights Detective)

A. Ms Borg Jónsdóttir shared that when she was a child, she felt like she was heard at school, but that this wasn't the case for all children. She discussed the right of all children to be heard in all decisions that affect them, the importance of giving children opportunities to speak through councils and consultations, and how all children should be given equal and fair access to this right.



Watch the full presentation here: [Youtube video clip](#).



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Children's Commissioners updates

The Children's Commissioners offices provided valuable insights into progress and challenges in implementing the UNCRC across the UK jurisdictions and Jersey.

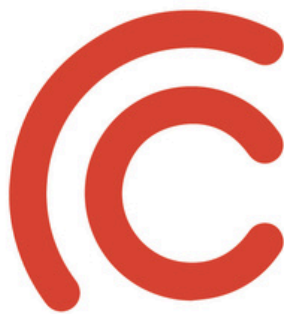
Watch the videos here: [Youtube video clip](#)

England

Beatrice Longmore, Head of Advocacy, Children's Commissioner for England

Ms Longmore highlighted the work of Commissioner Rachel de Souza, who has focused on amplifying the voices of children and young people whose rights are most at risk, including children in care or custody. The office has used its powers to:

- **Conduct visits:** meeting children and young people in the places where they live or are cared for, such as immigration detention centres and young offender institutions.
- **Request and gather data:** such as data on strip-searching from police authorities, and carry out major surveys, to inform reports based on issues raised in the UN's 2023 Concluding Observations.
- **Represent and provide advice:** supporting children and young people through its [Help at Hand service](#).
- **Empower participation:** working with a team of child ambassadors to meet with Ministers and contribute to discussions on specific topics like social care.



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Ms Longmore emphasised that listening to children is central to the Commissioner's work, exemplified by [The Big Ambition survey](#) - one of the largest surveys of children in the world - which has informed policy recommendations on issues such as child poverty, social care, and youth justice.

Northern Ireland

Alex Tennant, Head of Policy and Participation, Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY)

Ms Tennant shared how Commissioner Chris Quinn's office had welcomed the 2023 Concluding Observations as they reflected many of the critical issues that NICCY had previously reported on, while acknowledging progress has since been made in some areas, such as:

- The Department of Health and Department of Justice are exploring the development of a [Barnahus model](#).
- Moves within the Assembly to increase the minimum age of criminal responsibility.
- Work to end the defence of reasonable chastisement when a child is assaulted by their parent/carer.

Challenges remain, including political instability, budget constraints, and regression in decision-makers' prioritisation of children's rights. Ms Tennant expressed concern about potential threats to NICCY's independent status but reiterated the Office's commitment to promoting a child rights culture and pushing for full incorporation of the UNCRC in Northern Ireland:



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“The challenge really is in the next phase, in terms of bringing the recommendations home, looking to our respective governments to implement the recommendations and, as we will hear, this is the time when optimism and positivity is most needed.”

Questions from children and young people

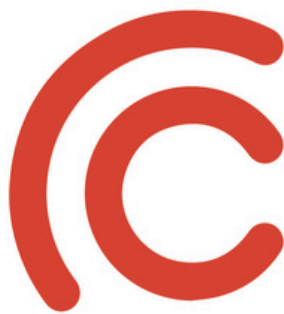
Q. One of the calls from the Children's Parliament in Scotland is around improving government communication on climate change to children.

Do you have any ideas on how to improve this that you can share?

(Members of Children's Parliament)

A. Ms Tennant said it was important that children and young people have access to spaces to engage with government – such as through workshops. She said that youth forums can be a powerful mechanism to hold governments to account. Ms Tennant said there were opportunities for partnership working across the UK – particularly partnerships between Northern Ireland and Scotland around climate change, with the proposed Human Rights Bill set to incorporate the right to a health environment.





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Scotland

Nicola Killean, Children's and Young People's Commissioner Scotland (CYPCS)

Commissioner Nicola Killean celebrated the landmark commencement of the [UNCRC \(Incorporation\) \(Scotland\) Act](#) ('2024 Act') in July 2024, making Scotland the first UK jurisdiction to directly incorporate the UNCRC.

Key features of the Act include:

- A duty on public authorities to act compatibly with the UNCRC.
- A requirement for Child Rights and Well-being Impact Assessments (CRWIA) for new legislation and strategic decisions.
- New powers for the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland and Scottish Human Rights Commission to take legal action to uphold children's rights.

The Commissioner noted her office had started to use its new legal powers for the first time. She also updated on wider developments such as the Children's Care and Justice Act 2024, which saw children finally removed from prisons.

Ms Killean stressed the need for sustained momentum to ensure the 2023 Concluding Observations are acted upon. She urged stakeholders to work together to monitor progress and push for gaps to be addressed:



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“This is a time for building communications, trust and support even further so that we can track together progress or flag early signs of regression. As we move into the first full year following the commencement of the UNCRC Incorporation Act in Scotland, we collectively need to monitor how children are experiencing their rights, how progress or regression is reported and acted upon and help to address the implementation gaps we all know exist.”

Questions from children and young people

The following question was asked on behalf of babies and infants who took part in story-gathering sessions for Together's State of Children's Rights Report 2024.



Q. How would you envision expanding access to sensory play and exploration for babies, particularly in disadvantaged communities where access might be limited?

A. Ms Killean spoke about the importance of upholding babies' right to play. This included the need to support parents, carers and families by ensuring the necessary infrastructure is in place to give access to play spaces and opportunities for every child. She highlighted the important work of Starcatchers and initiatives like the Play Café, and how babies and families would benefit if these initiatives were implemented and accessible consistently across Scotland.



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Wales

Rachel Thomas, Head of Policy and Public Affairs, Children's Commissioner for Wales

Ms Thomas reflected on Wales' pioneering role as the first UK jurisdiction to partially incorporate the UNCRC into domestic law in 2011. Ms Thomas acknowledged limitations with the "due regard" model set out in the [Welsh Measure](#), such as inconsistent application of Child Rights Impact Assessments (CRIA), gaps in universal service provision, and lack of application of UNCRC at local authority level.

Despite these challenges, progress has been driven by:

- Welsh Government's recognition of the UN Concluding Observations, with annual ministerial statements on progress, and a [recent detailed report in response](#) to the UN's 2023 recommendations that was accompanied by a child-friendly version.
- Monthly meetings between a Child Rights Advisory Group and Welsh Government to discuss new policies and legislation:
"it's 90 minutes in the diary on a monthly basis for a specific purpose to bring people together on a range of issues and focusing in on those children's rights considerations. I think it's hugely beneficial and I certainly suggest that it's something to be recommended for consideration elsewhere."
- Development of a communications campaign to raise awareness of children's rights, with input from Welsh Government and the Commissioner's Office.



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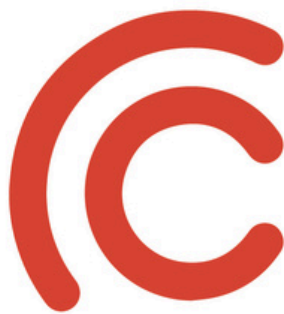
While welcoming this progress, Ms Thomas reaffirmed the Commissioner's call for full and direct incorporation of the UNCRC in Wales to ensure a comprehensive and child-focused approach.

Questions from children and young people

Q. Do schools listen to how children feel about artificial intelligence (AI), and how can they make it better and safer for everyone? (Members of Children's Parliament)



A. Ms Thomas said the Children's Commissioner for Wales had consulted with children and young people about AI. Children felt that schools didn't teach them how to navigate AI properly and that this was a major concern. Ms Thomas said that AI and misinformation can create risks for children and young people, and that education is needed to minimise these so that digital spaces are safe for everyone.



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Jersey

Sheree Maher, Participation and Engagement Lead, Children's Commissioner for Jersey

Ms Maher reflected on the role of Commissioner Dr Carmel Corrigan and her wider team in promoting awareness of the Concluding Observations, following the Office's first engagement with the UN reporting cycle in 2023.

Engagement with local media on the Concluding Observations had helped to significantly increase public awareness of the steps the Government of Jersey's needs to take to progress children's rights. However, the Government of Jersey had not issued a formal response to the Concluding Observations. Ms Maher reflected there was little pressure on government from civil society, as most organisations are focused on service delivery rather than children's rights advocacy.

Despite these challenges, the Office continues to make progress on the implementation of the [Children \(Convention Rights\) \(Jersey\) Law 2022](#), using the Concluding Observations to prioritise work as well as other UN Treaty Body recommendations to push the Government of Jersey into action.



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Questions from children and young people

Q. How can you make schools a better place for children, where their rights are always respected? (Members of Children's Parliament)



A. Ms Maher highlighted that Jersey has had 100% uptake from schools for the UNICEF Rights Respecting Schools Award Programme. This has helped to ensure more equal access to children's rights education and has started to develop a universal language for children's rights that is helping to foster activism. She said there was an opportunity for Jersey to learn from Iceland about rights respecting kindergartens and early years rights-based practice.





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Government updates

United Kingdom

Janet Daby MP, Minister for Children and Families, UK

Government

The Minister provided a pre-recorded update. She reaffirmed the UK Government's commitment to the UNCRC, outlining key actions such as:

- **Social care reform:** Developing a Children's Wellbeing Bill to focus on early interventions and address systemic challenges, particularly for disadvantaged children.
- **Mental health support:** plans to expand services and support for looked-after children.
- **Upholding Article 20:** Ensuring alternative care meets children's cultural, linguistic, and religious needs.

The Minister emphasised the importance of partnership working, with an acknowledgment that upcoming budget discussions would provide greater clarity on new investments.

Watch the video here: [Youtube video clip](#)



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Wales

Dawn Bowden MS, Minister for Children and Social Care, Welsh Government

The Minister provided a pre-recorded update on progress in implementing children's rights, highlighting key achievements and commitments, such as:

- **Children's rights in law:** requiring consideration of children's rights through the [Welsh Measure 2011](#); banning physical punishment of children (2020, commenced 2022); and extending voting rights to 16- and 17-year-olds (2021).
- **Children's rights in education:** introducing a new curriculum which mandates schools to adopt a human-rights based approach , alongside modules to support staff.
- **Responding to UN Concluding Observations:** [Welsh Government's response](#) followed consultation with children, young people and other stakeholders.

The Minister reaffirmed Welsh Government's ongoing commitment to advancing children's rights and implementing the UNCRC.

Watch the video here: [Youtube video clip](#)



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Scotland

Natalie Don-Innes MSP, Minister for Children, Young People and The Promise, Scottish Government

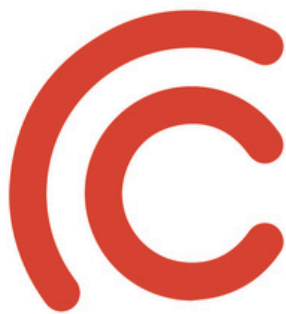
The Minister celebrated commencement of the [UNCRC \(Incorporation\) \(Scotland\) Act 2024](#). Scotland is now the first UK jurisdiction where public authorities must act compatibly with UNCRC requirements. Despite limitations imposed by [the Supreme Court judgment](#), the Act requires:

- Ministerial reporting on measures taken and planned to uphold children's rights.
- Child Rights and Well-being Impact Assessment (CRWIA) for all new legislation and some strategic decisions.
- Public reporting on child rights implementation by listed authorities.

The Minister highlighted Scottish Government's commitment to tackling child poverty through measures like the Scottish Child Payment and expanding free school meal eligibility. She also noted efforts to improve mental health services, promote children's participation through initiatives like Cabinet takeovers, and engage schools in UNICEF's Rights Respecting Schools programme.

The Minister emphasised the importance of partnership working and learning from experiences in other jurisdictions, particularly progress in Wales.

Watch the video here: [Youtube video clip](#)



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Questions from children and young people

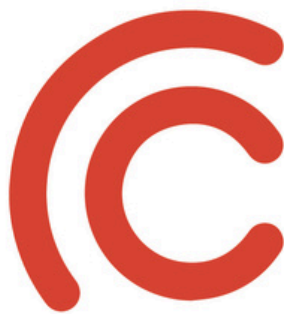
The Minister took part in an extended Q&A, with questions submitted in advance by children and young people.



Q. When you were a child what right did you find it hardest to access? Do you think that that is still a problem today? If not, what is? (Oscar, Rights Detective)

A. The Minister spoke about her childhood, growing up in difficult circumstances, and her experiences with different services and the frustration she felt when the adults didn't ask her what she wanted. The Minister spoke about the importance of engaging children and young people at all levels of decision making, and that the Scottish Government aims to do this.





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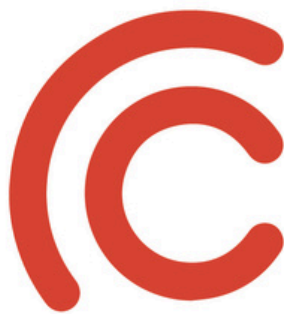
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Questions from children and young people

Q. Parents often have to manage their babies' needs with limited resources both physical and financial. What mental health and social support services are being provided to ensure the well-being of caregivers particularly new mothers who face these challenges? (asked on behalf of babies and infants involved in Together's State of Children's Rights Report 2024)

A. The Minister answered this question drawing on her experiences as a new mother who had a baby during the pandemic and experienced isolation. She said the Scottish Government had invested money into health boards that provide maternity and neonatal mental health support services, and highlighted the important work of organisations that help new mothers to develop connections and build supportive networks.





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Questions from children and young people

Q. What can be done about the cost of food for families struggling to afford it? As Children's Human Rights Defenders, we are currently involved in cabinet and Executive Takeover meetings throughout the year. How do you plan on involving more children in decision making processes? (Members of Children's Parliament)

A. The Minister spoke about Scottish Government's commitment to extend free school meal provision beyond primary school and the importance of universality for lifting families out of poverty.

A. On decision-making, she spoke about the importance of the UNCRC Incorporation Act, child rights impact assessments and children's advisory groups in helping children's views and experiences to be taken into consideration in any decisions that affect them.

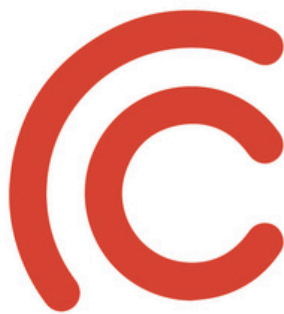


Questions from children and young people

Q. One of your calls to action this year was to reduce children's access to vapes. Do you plan a generational ban on vapes like the last UK Government thought about doing with smoking? (Members of Children's Parliament)

A. The Minister spoke about the Scottish Government's awareness campaign aimed to educate people about the dangers of vaping, she said that the introduction of limitations and restrictions to the sale of vapes is an ongoing discussion within Scottish Government and something they are considering.





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Northern Ireland

No speaker from Northern Ireland Executive.

Jersey

Michelle Clark, Senior Policy Officer, Government of Jersey

Ms Clark shared Jersey's journey towards the incorporation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Jersey became a State Party to the UNCRC in 2014. In 2017, the Independent Jersey Care Inquiry highlighted the need for reform in child welfare, leading to the establishment of the Children's Commissioner and Minister for Children in 2019. Notable achievements have since included:

- **[The Children \(Convention Rights\) \(Jersey\) Law 2022](#)**: an indirect incorporation model, requiring duty bearers to consider children's rights when making decisions.
- **Children's Rights Impact Assessments (CRIA)**: duty bearers must complete CRIAs when relevant, helping to ensure that children's rights are considered. Since January 2024, 74 CRIAs have been published, with a positive impact on children's rights, focusing on best interests, health, family environment, and alternative care.

Challenges have included resistance to CRIA adoption and resource limitations. Yet efforts are being made to address these, including ministerial guidance, templates and training, and a resource bank to support decision makers.

Ms Clark emphasised that the Government of Jersey aims for full incorporation of the UNCRC in future, with continuous monitoring and support for duty bearers.





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Civil society updates

Scotland

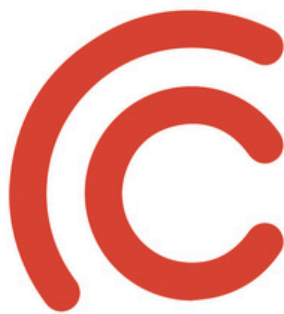
Juliet Harris, Director, Together (Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights)

Juliet provided an update on the progress and challenges of incorporating the UNCRC into Scots law. The commencement of the [UNCRC \(Incorporation\) \(Scotland\) Act 2024](#) marked a significant milestone, but she was clear that this was the first step on a much longer journey.

Juliet highlighted challenges posed by the [Supreme Court challenge](#). This had delayed the Act's commencement and resulted in the scope of the Act being narrowed. This means that the Act only applies to laws passed by the Scottish Parliament and not Acts of the UK Parliament – even if these relate to devolved areas like education or health. Juliet outlined the need for Scottish Government to take an ongoing approach to ensure the Act has maximum possible impact, including legislative amendments and an audit of devolved legislation. She concluded by emphasising the need for a constructive dialogue between the Scottish and UK Governments and continued collaboration to realise the Act's transformative potential for children's lives.

Watch the videos here: [Youtube video clip](#)





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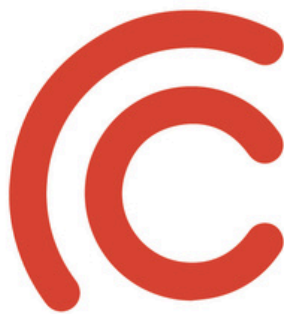
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England

Louise King, Co-Lead Just for Kids Law and Director, Children's Rights Alliance for England (CRAE)

Louise reflected that, despite some progress, there is still a long way to go before children in England have all their rights respected. She highlighted challenges including rising levels of child poverty, worsening child mental health, severe regression in the rights of asylum-seeking children, and persistent structural racism and inequality. These challenges were all emphasised by the UN Committee in its 2023 Concluding Observations.

Louise highlighted some progress made by UK Government around the UNCRC 'General Measures of Implementation', including the UNCRC Action Group, co-chaired by CRAE and the Department for Education; the development of a civil servant e-learning tool on children's rights; a template for conducting child rights impact assessments; and positive civil society and cross-government engagement in the run up to and following the 2023 examination by the UN Committee. She noted progress in England had been slow due a range of factors, including no children's rights strategy since 2010, a relatively junior ministerial lead on children's rights, the absence of statutory CRIAs, and no government appetite for UNCRC incorporation in recent years.



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She expressed concern over threats to existing rights protections, such as the former government's plans to repeal the Human Rights Act, and disappointment that there had been no UK Government response to the 2023 Concluding Observations, in contrast to the Welsh and Scottish Governments.

More positively, Louise pointed to opportunities following the change of UK Government in the summer. This included the new Prime Minister emphasising his "profound respect for international law" in one of his first speeches; a new Attorney General, Richard Hermer KC, who was a human rights expert and had taken important cases in relation to the rights of children in prison; and a new Children's Minister sympathetic to children's rights with expertise gained from her background in social work. Louise welcomed Labour's manifesto commitment to enact the socio-economic duty in the Equality Act 2010, and noted improved engagement with Government at the recent UNCRC Action Group meeting.

Louise emphasised that Scotland's incorporation of the UNCRC provides valuable evidence for the UK Government on its potential impact. She also highlighted the opportunity presented by the Covid Inquiry's module on children and young people, and how CRAE, as a core participant in the module, would be pushing alongside other organisations for the Inquiry to make a recommendation to incorporate the UNCRC into law at UK-level.



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Northern Ireland

Paddy Kelly, Centre Director, Children's Law Centre

Paddy presented an update on Northern Ireland's challenges in implementing the UNCRC. Despite the restoration of the Northern Ireland Executive, she said the Programme for Government lacked a focus on children and child poverty, with 24% of children living in poverty across Northern Ireland.

Key concerns she raised included:

- Budgetary pressures impacting services for babies, children, and young people.
- Increased use of measures like spit hoods and stop-and-search on children.
- Barriers to cross-border healthcare for children exacerbated by Brexit.

Paddy emphasised the importance of delivering full incorporation of the UNCRC through the outstanding commitment of a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland. She called on the Scottish Government to share lessons from their incorporation journey to support Northern Ireland's advocacy efforts.



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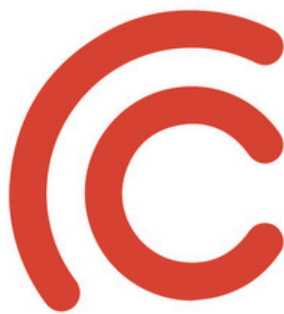
Wales

Sean O'Neill, Policy Director, Children in Wales & Co-ordinator of the Wales UNCRC Monitoring Group

Sean outlined the work of the Wales UNCRC Monitoring Group, established in 2002 to coordinate civil society reports to the UN Committee, as well as monitoring implementation and promoting the UN Committee's recommendations in Wales.

He noted significant progress had been made since the indirect incorporation of the UNCRC into Welsh law through the Welsh Measure in 2011. Key developments included the creation of a Children's Rights Expert Group by Welsh Government to advise on draft Child Rights Impact Assessments (CRIA); a manual to guide officials in drafting CRIs, and a [detailed response to the UN's 2023 Concluding Observations](#). Another welcome development was the appointment of a named Minister for Children with responsibility for children's rights in September 2024.

The [State of Children's Rights in Wales report](#) provides 134 recommendations across 38 policy areas, highlighting the need for full incorporation of the UNCRC into Welsh and UK law, eradicating child poverty, safeguarding all babies, children and young people, and supporting their mental health. Despite some good progress, challenges remain in ensuring that all children have their rights respected, protected and fulfilled.



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Looking ahead, the Wales UNCRC Monitoring Group will push Welsh Government to deliver on the actions in their response to the UN Committee and work more collaboratively with officials and ministers in the new UK Government. The 2026 Senedd elections provide another opportunity to advocate for full incorporation of the UNCRC, statutory CRIAs, and statutory guidance with monitoring and accountability mechanisms for all Welsh public bodies.

Finally, Sean emphasised the urgent need for sustainable funding for third sector services and delivery partners to support early intervention, prevention and crisis support. He stressed that it is essential that the UN recommendations lead to tangible and lasting changes in children's lives.



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6. Discussion Groups

The discussion groups provided delegates with an opportunity to reflect on progress, identify challenges, and collaborate on strategies to advance children's rights across the UK and Jersey.

Below is a summary of key themes and insights from these sessions:

Progress on the UNCRC 'To-Do List'

Delegates highlighted several areas of progress, including:

Across all jurisdictions:

- Increased access to rights education, with the UNICEF Rights Respecting Schools Award programme mentioned frequently.
- Emerging innovative participation practices.
- Growing successes in amplifying the role of Child Human Rights Defenders.

Scotland:

- Implementation of the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024.
- Removal of children from prisons through the Children's Care and Justice Bill.
- Growing child participation structures.

Wales:

- Universal free school meals for primary school children.
- Introduction of legislation to prevent violence against children.

International:

- Iceland's investment in childcare and paternity leave
- Cross-sector collaboration models
- Rights-based practice with early years.



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Cross-jurisdiction learning

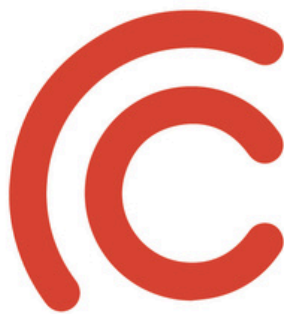
Participants expressed a desire to learn from successes in other jurisdictions to inform policy and practice in their own jurisdiction, including:

- Establishing cross-departmental children's rights action plans.
- Developing universal free childcare models and inter-agency initiatives for well-being.
- Strengthening the alignment of child rights policies with the UN Concluding Observations.
- Modelling initiatives such as free bus travel for children and young people in Scotland.
- Developing workforce education plans on children's rights.
- Developing a child-friendly complaints system model.
- Sharing the use of CRIAs.

Collaborative advocacy on reserved issues

Discussions explored how collective efforts could influence UK Government actions on reserved matters:

- Advocating for UNCRC incorporation across the UK.
- Promoting child-friendly policies in areas like immigration, education funding, and mental health services.
- Encouraging collaborative lobbying frameworks and children's participation in direct engagement with MPs to ensure children's voices are represented.
- Encouraging cross-departmental and cross-jurisdiction collaboration and networking.



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Key actions needed

To address gaps in children's rights implementation, delegates identified priorities such as:

- Raising the age of criminal responsibility across the UK.
- Embedding child rights impact assessments (CRIA) in law and practice.
- Increasing training for professionals on UNCRC implementation and raising public awareness of children's rights.
- Strengthening mental health services to reduce waiting lists and meet growing demand.
- Develop mechanisms to track and report child rights progress at a national level.
- Involve children and young people in the creation of resources and tools for their rights.

Commitment to partnership approaches

Attendees emphasised the importance of ongoing partnership work for the better implementation of children's rights across the UK:

- Establish regular forums to share updates, resources, and strategies with clear benchmarks and targets.
- Establish accountability mechanism for UK and devolved governments with child-focused reviews.
- Strengthen partnerships between child rights organisations, local authorities, and policymakers across the UK.
- Form coalitions to promote joint advocacy efforts to create a unified voice for children's rights across jurisdictions.
- Joint advocacy efforts should focus on UK-wide incorporation of UNCRC into law.
- Organise campaigns targeting UK Government decision-making on children's rights.



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These discussions reaffirmed the importance of unity and partnership working in tackling both jurisdictional and UK-wide challenges to better protect the rights of all babies, children and young people.

7. Next Steps

Recommendations for ROCK

1. Develop a UK-wide strategy for UNCRC incorporation

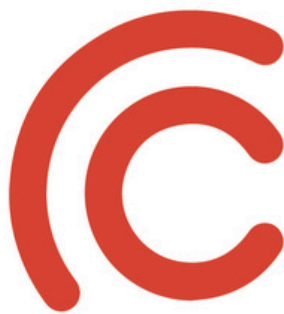
Establish a coordinated approach across all UK jurisdictions, with a clear roadmap that includes tangible outcomes, timelines, and measurable benchmarks. This strategy should clarify what incorporation looks like in practice, when it should be achieved, and how it will be implemented across different legal and policy contexts.

2. Strengthen monitoring of implementation

Create a shared monitoring framework with regular updates from each UK jurisdiction. This should include a publicly accessible evidence bank showcasing how children's rights are being realised in practice, with replicable examples, tools, and learning to support implementation across sectors.

3. Enhance cross-sector collaboration

Build and strengthen UK-wide alliances across the third sector to share best practice and coordinate advocacy. This could include regular online forums, in-person convenings, and dedicated spaces for inter-jurisdictional learning and collaboration.



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4. Broaden stakeholder engagement

Actively engage a wide range of stakeholders — including babies, children and young people, child practitioners, schools, local authorities, and service providers — to ensure that efforts to implement children's rights are inclusive, informed by lived experience, and grounded in practice.

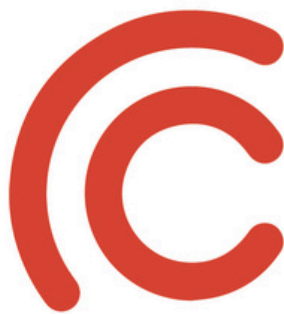
Recommendations for UK and devolved governments

1. Incorporate the UNCRC into law

- Fully incorporate the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child into UK-wide and devolved legislation, ensuring children's rights are directly enforceable in practice.

2. Plan and coordinate implementation

- Develop cross-government children's rights action plans in each jurisdiction, with named ministerial leads, timelines, and measurable outcomes.
- Establish permanent participation structures to ensure babies, children and young people influence decisions that affect them, including advisory councils and engagement with Ministers and officials.



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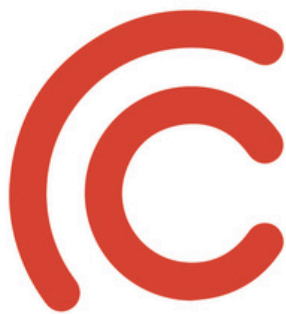
Recommendations for UK and devolved governments

3. Monitor progress and strengthen accountability

- Introduce statutory Children's Rights Impact Assessments (CRIAs) across all policy areas affecting children, supported by guidance, templates and training.
- Establish robust monitoring and reporting frameworks across all UK jurisdictions, supported by an independent accountability mechanism.
- Create a UK-wide evidence bank to capture and share good practice in implementing children's rights.

4. Deliver on the 2023 UN Concluding Observations

- Take coordinated action to implement the 2023 Concluding Observations, with public progress reporting.
- Conduct a systematic review of all legislation for UNCRC compliance and amend laws where necessary. For example, raise the age of criminal responsibility to align with international standards.
- Tackle key areas identified by the UN Committee, including:
 - Tackling child poverty, food insecurity and homelessness through policies with measurable goals and monitoring mechanisms. Specific priority measures include abolishing the two-child limit on Universal Credit and the Benefit Cap, and expanding access to suitable housing.
 - Improving access to timely and rights-based mental health and social care services.
 - Ensuring rights-based support for children in care, care leavers and asylum-seeking children.
 - Reforming justice systems to ensure child-centred approaches and alternatives to detention.



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8. Appendix

Please refer to the [Delegate Pack](#) for details of:

- Full agenda.
- Speaker biographies.
- Details of breakout group questions and themes.

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