

Children's rights in Scotland and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)

Seminar 3: Policy and children's rights

Four events were held in 2017 to find out more about children's rights and decide what needs to be done to make Scotland a better place for children. People coming to these events learned more about the UNCRC and how to support children's rights. People who came to these events have lots of different jobs in places like children's charities, Scottish Government, schools, universities, and councils. Some children and young people also came to the events to talk to adults – and each other – about their views and opinions.

5 important messages:

1. There is a set of rights for children and young people from all over the world which is called the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child – or '**UNCRC**' for short. It says that it is important for **children and young people's rights to always be considered when policy is being made.**
2. **Policy is a set of rules or instructions** which says how things should be done. For example, schools have policies to make sure teachers keep children safe and to make sure pupils wear their school uniform every day.
3. Each country puts children's rights in their policies in different ways. Some don't think of children's rights at all, but others **listen to the views of children and young people** every time they decide to make a policy.
4. **In Scotland, there is a child rights tool** which decision-makers such as people in Scottish Government should to decide if their policies are good for children and young people, or not – it makes them ask lots of questions about their plans and reminds them to ask children and young people too!
5. To make sure that children and young people's rights are *always* taken into account, **the government should make an action plan.** This plan would help *everyone* to know what they need to do to make sure all children and young people are enjoying their rights, all of the time!

What is the UNCRC?

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, or the UNCRC, is a list of all the rights that children and young people all over the world should have. These rights affect all areas of children's lives like health, education, family life, and protection from violence. The UNCRC also gives some groups of children particular protection, like children with disabilities or children who have had to move to another country to escape war.

About Seminar 3

At seminar 3, experts in children's rights spoke about why it is important that the rights of children and young people are always considered when policy is being made. People from the Scottish Government, the Children and Young People's Commissioner for Scotland office, and Aberdeen City Council also talked about what is happening in Scotland to make sure that children and young people's rights are always included in policy decisions.

What do we mean when we say 'policy'?

A policy is a set of rules or instructions which sets out the way different things should be done.

Policy can be made and used in a lot of different ways. For example, schools have policies to make sure teachers keep children safe and to make sure pupils wear school uniform every day.

At this seminar, we talked about policy that is made by government, both for the whole of Scotland and for different areas such as Edinburgh, Aberdeen or the Highlands. Government uses policy to make sure that local councils, schools, hospitals, and the police achieve the best results when they are doing their job.

Almost every policy that the government creates has an effect on children and young people. For example, even though a policy on transport might not seem relevant to children, it could actually have an effect on the way children get to school and travel around their home towns.

How do we make sure children's rights are included in policy?

There are five ways that governments can make sure children's rights are included in policy making:

1. By understanding that all rights included in the UNCRC are equally important when thinking about children's rights and policy.
2. By making sure government answer some questions that make them think about how a particular policy or law will affect children and young people. In Scotland, these questions are known as a Child's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment (CR(W)IA)
3. By making sure that different government departments are working together to make sure all their policies respect children's rights
4. By making sure that government departments have the money that they need to create policies that respect children and young people's rights. Children and young people should also have the chance to talk to governments about how money would be best spent.
5. By listening to children and young people and using their thoughts and views on different issues to help make policy.

How do different countries use children's rights in their policies?

Each country puts children's rights in their policies in different ways. Some countries place very little importance on children's rights when they make decisions. This might mean that children and young people aren't listened to when decisions are being made or government doesn't consider the impact the decision will have on children and young people. Other countries use other ways to make sure children's rights are always considered when decisions are being made.

For example, Ireland is the only country in the world where the government has committed to listening to the views of children and young people when making any decision. Every government department in Ireland, like transport, health and education, must listen to children and consider their views when making a new policy.

How does Scotland make sure children's rights are included in their policies?

In Scotland, there is a tool that helps people think about how a particular policy or law will affect children and young people. This is called a Child's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment (CRWIA). It helps governments to answer lots of questions about their plans so that they can make sure their policies are good for children's rights. CRWIAs are helpful in making sure children's rights are included in policy in many ways:

- They make people who work in government more aware of the importance of children's rights
- They encourage government to listen to the views of children and young people when making decisions
- They support different government departments to work together to make sure children's rights are prioritised by everyone working in government.

CRWIAs have already been used in Scotland by government departments when they were making important decisions. It has meant that more importance has been placed on children and young people's rights. For example, children and young people were asked about how they thought a new law on public spaces (like parks) could affect them and what they would like the law to achieve.

Recently, government decided that a law should be made in the Scottish Parliament to change the age which children can be arrested and charged with a crime. At the moment, it is eight years old but the new law will make it twelve. Using a CRWIA was very useful for helping the government understand why increasing the age from eight to twelve is so important for protecting the rights of children and young people, especially those that need protecting more. It also made sure that government listened to what children and young people thought of the change in the law.

What else needs to be done in Scotland?

To make sure that children's rights are always seen as really important, the government should come up with an action plan that everyone can read, including children and young people. This action plan will help everyone understand what they need to do to make sure all children living in Scotland know about their rights, and the government makes the changes that are needed to make sure that all children and young people can enjoy all of their rights, all of the time.

The events are organised by a charity, [Together \(Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights\)](#), and two universities, the [Centre for Research on Families and Relationships](#) at the University of Edinburgh, and the [Centre for Child Wellbeing and Protection](#) at the University of Stirling. Money for the events has been donated by [Scottish Universities Insight Institute](#).

Together (Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights) is a charity in Edinburgh which does lots of different things to improve children's rights in Scotland. This includes making sure more people know about children's rights and trying to make sure that politicians and the Scottish Government listens to the opinions of children and young people when making decisions about their lives. Together has nearly 350 members across Scotland. Members include other charities, as well as teachers, social workers, youth workers and nursery workers who support children's rights. Together works with the members to help them learn more about children's rights. The members help Together by giving them information about different things – like schools, hospitals and even the police - which Together uses to convince the government to improve children's rights.