



Working Together, Achieving More

A joint commitment to take action in response to the UN
Committee on the Rights of the Child's Concluding Observations



department for
children, schools and families

DCSF leads the implementation of the UNCRC in England
and coordinates UK-wide reports on the Convention



One of our most important goals is to make England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland the best place for all children and young people to live. As part of this, we are committed to working progressively towards implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. This document tells you more about how we plan to do that.



Foreword

Twenty years ago, the member states of the United Nations signed one of its most important documents: the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Over the last two decades, the UK has put in place far-reaching policies to improve the lives of children and young people and has made huge progress to ensure the UNCRC is a reality in every area.

Since devolution in 1999, responsibility for implementing the UNCRC has been shared between each of the

four administrations: England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Each has adopted different approaches, through a combination of laws and policy.

We all have ambitious programmes to improve outcomes for every child and young person and to provide a happy, healthy and safe environment for children and young people to grow up and live in so that they can fulfil their potential.

We now have dedicated departments for children and young people and ministers with special responsibilities for policies affecting children and young people. All four administrations also now have their own Children's Commissioner, who acts as a champion for children and young people, especially those who are disadvantaged and vulnerable.


“ All four administrations recognise the challenge ahead of us, which is why we welcome the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's Concluding Observations ”

This year, the UK has withdrawn its remaining two reservations against the UNCRC. This means that refugee children and young people now enjoy the same status as other children and young people (article 22) and that children and young people in custody will no longer be detained with adults under any circumstances (article 37c). We have also signed up to the Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography. Together, these are further proof that we are using the UNCRC to help us deliver on our mission to improve the lives of all children and young people, particularly those who are most vulnerable.

But we are not complacent; we know there is more to be done, and we are steadfast in our determination to make the UK the best place for children and young people to live.

All four administrations recognise the challenge ahead of us, which is why we welcome the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's Concluding Observations – a report published in 2008 which offered recommendations on how we should take forward the implementation of the UNCRC. The UN Committee welcomed our progress so far and our ambitions to improve the lives of all children and young people. But the UN Committee highlighted a number of areas where they felt that we could do more to implement the UNCRC.

As set out in our individual action plans, the four administrations continue to take forward their own policies to meet local needs. However, we recognise that, to achieve our goals, we must work collaboratively. In particular, we have set clear and joint targets to tackle child poverty, agreed a shared approach for tackling negative portrayal of children and young people in the media, and taken forward plans to collaborate to enable children and young people to participate in decision-making on issues that affect their lives. We also intend to do more, together, to raise awareness of the UNCRC.



Our success continues to depend on the quality of our partnership with our stakeholders including non-governmental organisations, the four Children's Commissioners and children and young people themselves so that we can benefit from a range of views, insight and support in developing and implementing our individual jurisdiction's plans.

We are delighted to produce this joint commitment in response to the UN Committee's Concluding Observations.

Working Together, Achieving More is an expression of our continued commitment to make the UNCRC a reality for all our children and young people.



We are delighted to produce this joint commitment in response to the UN Committee as an expression of our continued commitment to make the UNCRC a reality.



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The context: the UNCRC and our policy

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is an international human rights treaty that grants all children and young people (aged 18 and under) a comprehensive set of rights. These include the right to:

- special protection measures and assistance;
- access to services such as education and healthcare;
- develop their personalities, abilities and talents to the fullest potential;
- live in an environment of happiness, love and understanding; and

- learn about their rights in an accessible and active manner.

The UK government signed the UNCRC in 1991 and it came into force in 1992.

Protecting children and young people's rights

One of our most important goals is to make England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland the best place for all children and young people to live. As part of this, we are committed to working progressively towards implementing the UNCRC.

Children and young people here already enjoy many of the rights set out in the UNCRC, and policy programmes such as Every Child Matters in England and the 10 year Children and Young People's Strategy in Northern Ireland help build on this.

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All four administrations are responsible for protecting children and young people's rights and are proud of what has been achieved.

”

Recently, the UK withdrew its reservations to two articles of the UNCRC:

- article 22 (refugee children); and
- article 37c (children in custody with adults).

In March 2009, it also ratified the Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography.

All four administrations are responsible for protecting children and young people's rights and are proud of what has been achieved. We recognise that there is more to be done.



Reporting and responding

Reporting to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child

Like all State parties¹ that have signed the UNCRC, we must provide the UN with regular reports on how it is being implemented. The last report was completed in 2008. It included:

- a State party report to the UN in July 2007;
- evidence from the four Children's Commissioners, a consortium of NGOs and children and young people in June 2008;
- the UK State party's response to the United Nations' list of issues in September 2008; and
- an oral hearing, where we gave evidence to the UN Committee on the progress made in implementing the UNCRC.

This was the first time that the UK State party had taken a 'four administrations'² approach to its collaborative reporting to the UN Committee. The report highlighted the changes that had taken place since the last report in 1999 and the major contributions to the realisation of children and young people's rights in the respective jurisdictions.



What the UN Committee said

After the Oral Hearing in September 2008, the UN Committee published its Concluding Observations. The Committee welcomed our progress in implementing the UNCRC and recognised our ambition to improve the lives of all children and young people and to make the UNCRC a reality.

However, it also made several recommendations for the State party to take implementation of the UNCRC forward, through the four administrations.

You can read the Concluding Observations onlineⁱ.



ⁱ A State party is the generic term for a national administration that signs up to the UNCRC. It essentially means the UK government.

² This means that England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland worked together to produce a coherent report on the state of children and young people's rights across the UK.

Taking forward the Concluding Observations

The four administrations welcome the UN Committee's 2008 Concluding Observations, which provide a helpful framework for further action, building on measures already in place to make children and young people's rights under the UNCRC a reality. Each administration will address the UN Committee's recommendations as appropriate to their own circumstances and has consulted with a number of its stakeholders through meetings, events and conferences in order to develop a set of local priorities. For example:

“ ... each administration will address the UN Committee's recommendations as appropriate to their own circumstances ”

- In October 2008, England published an update to the *Children's Plan* which sets out priorities for taking forward the UN Committee's recommendations. The English plan, *UNCRC: Priorities for action* is published alongside this document.
- At the same time as this UK-wide commitment is published, the Welsh Assembly Government is publishing *Getting it Right*, a 5-year rolling action plan to further implement the UNCRC in Wales.
- In September 2009, Scotland launched *Do the Right Thing*, the Scottish Government's response to the Concluding Observations, setting out 21 priority areas of action.
- Northern Ireland is developing additional actions for inclusion in its existing children and young people's strategy action plan.



However, as well as the actions of the individual administrations, the joint approach taken throughout the reporting process has been further developed and regular meetings are now held between officials from all administrations to discuss progress and to share effective practice.

Ministers representing the four administrations met at the National Assembly for Wales in June 2009 to discuss how to work together to take forward

the UNCRC. They agreed several ministerial level commitments:

- to hold ministerial meetings annually to discuss progress and share good practice;
- to raise awareness of the UNCRC within their jurisdictions, using opportunities such as the 20th anniversary of it being signed; and
- to develop a joint commitment that sets out how they are responding to the UN Committee's Concluding Observations.

In taking forward the UN Committee's Concluding Observations we continue to build on our links and working partnerships with non-governmental-organisations (NGOs), the Children's Commissioners and children and young people.

Addressing common issues

Each administration is taking forward the UN Committee's recommendations in a way that reflects its particular requirements. However, the four administrations all agreed that in some areas, we should work together to achieve progress. We highlight four below:

- tackling child poverty;
- addressing the negative portrayal of children and young people in the media;
- supporting children and young people to participate in decision-making on issues that affect their lives; and
- raising awareness of the UNCRC.

“ The four administrations all agreed that in some areas, we should work together to achieve progress. ”

Continuing to tackle child poverty

The UN Committee recommended that the State party should now:

- adopt and adequately implement the legislation aimed at achieving the target of ending child poverty by 2020, including by establishing measurable indicators for its achievement;
- give priority in this legislation and in the follow-up actions to those children and their families in most need of support;
- when necessary, besides giving full support to parents or others responsible for the child, intensify its efforts to provide material assistance and support programmes for children, particularly with regard to nutrition, clothing and housing.



We are taking forward these recommendations with the Child Poverty Bill. This will bring a new impetus to eradicating child poverty by 2020, ensuring Government and its partners are held to account on progress towards this goal.

The Bill sets a UK-wide framework for tackling child poverty and reporting on progress, and is supported by each of the devolved administrations. However, we are clear that a UK-wide approach to child poverty should not stop the individual administrations from tackling child poverty in their jurisdictions in line with their particular priorities – which they are best equipped to do.

We have set ambitious targets which will make a substantial impact on children and young people's outcomes, as well as family income. Achieving the target of between 5-10% for relative low income would put our position on child poverty firmly among Europe's best.

Addressing the negative portrayal of young people in the media

The UN Committee recommended that the State party should take:

“urgent measures to address the intolerance and inappropriate characterisation of children, especially adolescents, within the society, including the media.”





The vast majority of children and young people are doing well, achieving more at school and are more involved in volunteering than any other age group. It is critical that we continue to help all children and young people get on the right track and target support to those who face the greatest disadvantage. To do this, we will:

- continue to work with key stakeholders such as the four Children's Commissioners, NGOs and children and young people to identify how best to address negative portrayal of children and young people by the media;



... it is critical that we continue to help all children and young people get on the right track and target support to those with the greatest disadvantage



- launch a pro-active, targeted communications strategy across all four administrations that aims to rebalance the public narrative about children and young people by actively promoting good news stories on a local and national level, challenging myths and presenting the real facts about our children and young people.

These activities will complement initiatives such as 'Young Scot Active', 'Aiming High for Young People' and 'Takeover day', which all aim to counteract negative perceptions by celebrating the achievements of the majority of children and young people.

Enabling children and young people to participate in decision-making on issues that affect their lives

The UN Committee recommended that the State party should continue to:

- support forums for children and young people's participation, such as Funky Dragon in Wales and the Scottish Youth Parliament; and
- collaborate with civil society organizations to increase opportunities for children's meaningful participation, including in the media.

We will continue to support the participation of children and young people in each administration, and also will:

- consider how to increase opportunities for participation, both in schools and colleges and in community settings; and

- explore how to give children and young people in the four administrations a voice on non-devolved, European and international issues.

Raising awareness of the UNCRC and of children and young people's rights

The UN Committee recommended that the State party should:

"further strengthen its efforts, to ensure that all of the provisions of the Convention are widely known and understood by adults and children alike, by including the Convention in statutory national curriculum and ensuring that its principles and values are integrated into the structures and practice of all schools."

It also recommended ensuring there is systematic training about the UNCRC for all professional groups that work for and with children and young people.



... we are building on these activities to share good practice and to develop strategies for making the UNCRC widely known



We recognise that more needs to be done to raise awareness of the UNCRC, and we have been discussing with our partners how best to address the UN Committee's recommendation. In each administration we have carried out a number of activities and initiatives since the publication of the Concluding Observations such as:

- producing children and young people's versions of the Concluding Observations and held events for children and young people to highlight the UNCRC and what the UN Committee said. These events have also sought views from children and young people on our priorities; and
- there have been several initiatives specifically aimed at raising awareness of the UNCRC. These include the UNICEF "Rights Respecting Schools Initiative",

which helps children and young people understand the personal meaning of their rights, and those of others, by relating the principles of the UNCRC to everyday behaviour in the classroom and school. In England we have also funded the development of a curriculum resource for teachers on the UNCRC to be used with Key Stage 3 pupils; and

- training and awareness-raising related to human rights and the UNCRC, which is now available or is being developed for a wide range of professionals working with children and young people across the administrations.

We are now building on these activities to share good practice and to develop strategies for making the UNCRC widely known across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.







Each administration's detailed plans

To find out more about what we propose to do in each administration to implement the UNCRC, read our action plan.

- England – *Priority for action*
www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/uncrccommit2009
- Wales – *Getting it right*
<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/childrenyoungpeople/uncrc>
- Scotland – *Do the right thing*
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2009/08/27111754/0>
Version for under 18s
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2009/08/27133115/0>
- Northern Ireland – *Priorities and Plan*
<http://www.allchildrenni.gov.uk/index/uncrc/uncrc-working-together.htm>

ⁱ See www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/strategy/strategyandgovernance/uncrc/unitednationsconventionontherightsofthechild/





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