

A CONSULTATION ON THE COMMON CORE OF SKILLS, KNOWLEDGE & UNDERSTANDING AND VALUES FOR THE CHILDREN'S WORKFORCE IN SCOTLAND

INTRODUCTION

The Scottish Government is seeking views on the common core of skills, knowledge & understanding and values for all those working with children, young people and families. Once implemented the common core will support the development of more effective and integrated services which in turn will promote more flexible development and career progression for the workforce and will make communicating across organisational boundaries and cultures easier.

A Consultation on the Common Core of Skills, Knowledge & Understanding and Values for the Children's Workforce in Scotland



RESPONDENT INFORMATION FORM

Please Note this form **must** be returned with your response to ensure that we handle your response appropriately

1. Name/Organisation

Organisation Name

Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People (SCCYP)

Title Mr Ms Mrs Miss Dr *Please tick as appropriate*

Surname

Baillie

Forename

Tam

2. Postal Address

85 Holyrood Road

Edinburgh

Postcode EH8 8AU

Phone 0131 558 3711

Email

tam.baillie@sccyp.org.uk

3. Permissions - I am responding as...

Individual

/

Group/Organisation

Please tick as appropriate

(a) Do you agree to your response being made available to the public (in Scottish Government library and/or on the Scottish Government web site)?

Please tick as appropriate Yes No

(b) Where confidentiality is not requested, we will make your responses available to the public on the following basis

Please tick ONE of the following boxes

Yes, make my response, name and address all available

or

Yes, make my response available, but not my name and address

or

Yes, make my response and name available, but not my address

(c) The name and address of your organisation **will be** made available to the public (in the Scottish Government library and/or on the Scottish Government web site).

Are you content for your **response** to be made available?

Please tick as appropriate Yes No

(d) We will share your response internally with other Scottish Government policy teams who may be addressing the issues you discuss. They may wish to contact you again in the future, but we require your permission to do so. Are you content for Scottish Government to contact you again in relation to this consultation exercise?

Please tick as appropriate

Yes

No

CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

1. **Workers need to intervene early, tackle inequalities and build the capacity of children, young people and families. To what extent do you agree that the proposed common core equips our workers to do this?**

I agree with the idea of having a set of core skills for the children's workforce and think it essential that those working in the children's sector workforce share and understand a common core of skills, knowledge and language.

The document would be considerably strengthened by a clear reference to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. This international agreement was ratified by the UK Government in 1991 and across the UK, governments have committed themselves to bringing its law, policy and practice into line with the Convention. Much of Scottish law, policy and guidance is both influenced by and rooted in this.

In their 2008 Concluding Observations¹ the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, which monitors implementation of the Convention, made the point that there had been no systematic awareness raising of the Convention across the UK since the last report and expressed concern that levels of knowledge among professionals working with children is low. Training in the UNCRC across the children's sector workforce should be an essential part of the common core skills.

I believe that there should be an explicit statement within the document which references the UNCRC and makes the point that a children's rights approach should be the foundation for practice across all sectors and services. This would help to move away from a deficit focused approach which I feel is currently reflected within the document, to one which builds on the strengths of children and young people and recognises their role as active participants in their own lives.

The use of the term 'early intervention' appears to suggest that the main role of the workforce is to respond to problems as they occur, rather than building capacity and providing support. This is important, but the tone of the document appears somewhat skewed towards child protection.

I suggest that the tone and thrust of the document should reflect the early years framework which focuses on capacity building and is very much in line with the UNCRC, in particular article 18 which recognises that parents bear the primary responsibility for the upbringing of their children and that it is the role of the state to provide support and assistance in this. Article 19 is clear about the responsibility of the state to protect children from abuse and neglect by their parents, but there is an important balance to be struck here. The document seems to be firmly positioned in the latter category.

The foreword is also laudable. However, in terms of impacting on inequalities, workers may have all the skills and knowledge detailed in the document, yet fail to impact on inequalities in any meaningful way. More emphasis should be given to the skills needed to promote positive outcomes for children along with an indication of how these will be measured.

¹ (a progress report on how the four nations are fulfilling their commitments to the UNCRC)

2. What specific comments do you have around the skills, knowledge & understanding associated with “sound observation, judgement and decision making?”

In my view, the consultation paper focuses very much on a deficit based model, rather than one that builds on children’s strengths and capacities. The areas of knowledge and understanding refer to harmful behaviours and the needs of children from both their parents and those who care for them, failing to acknowledge the role children and young people themselves play.

The document rightly notes that workers will need anything from an awareness of these areas to a deep understanding depending on their role. An understanding of child development/ developmental milestones is essential to improving outcomes for children, as is an understanding of theoretical frameworks, such as attachment theory and resilience. Such knowledge can help the worker appreciate the barriers some children and young people have faced and what has made them vulnerable, but also what can build on their strengths and act as protective factors.

Successful childhood should primarily be seen in the context of reaching potential and workers should be focused on striving towards this goal. This is particularly useful when considering children with disabilities and a rights based approach is helpful in this regard. Our values influence both the way disabled children are treated and how they value themselves. Whilst public awareness of disability and the portrayal of more positive images has undoubtedly increased in recent years, anecdotal evidence all too often points to the contrary.

My office has done a considerable amount of work over the last few years around the moving and handling of disabled children. A key tenet of the UNCRC, Article 12 assures the child capable of forming his/ her views, the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child. Asking children their preferences regarding receiving physical assistance is not just essential to ensuring good moving and handling practice, it is also a basic human right. One parent said that her daughter’s support workers did not know she could weight-bear and stand upright until she got a stand aid, yet they had worked with her for four years. There had never been time for the daughter to express her views or preferences.

A further area I would particularly wish to highlight is around developmental milestones which can be problematic for disabled children. Whilst it is essential to know what is expected at any given age if the child is to be supported appropriately, it is important to differentiate between the impact of experience and disabling barriers and the impact of the child’s impairment.

3. What specific comments do you have around the skills and knowledge associated with “appropriate and effective communication”?

I think this section covers some important areas and is helpful, but perhaps needs to go further and recognise the diverse communication skills required by the workforce and the need to use appropriate and effective systems for the relevant audience. Perhaps more should be made of the vast array of approaches that can be used to ensure effective communication as well as promoting meaningful dialogue with children and young people (i.e. moving away from talking to children and young people to actively seeking to engage and involve them) There is a reference to “promoting rights at every opportunity in this section”, which is somewhat vague. More could be made of this, including a reference to meaningful

participation which would promote real opportunities for children and young people to have their views and opinions taken into account. This is very much in line with article 12 of the UNCRC and promotes a positive and preventative approach.

I am encouraged by the response to my consultation, *a RIGHT blether*, which attracted over 74,000 responses from children and young people and has influenced my Strategic Plan. This was promoted through a large number of professionals facilitating contact between my office and children and young people – education settings were particularly responsive. In my view, it demonstrates that there is a willingness to engage with children and young people on rights based issues and we can capitalise on this, both in terms of developing a deeper understanding of UNCRC and in terms of reaching a wider audience of relevant professionals

There are a number of omissions from this section and these include:

helping to develop empathy in young people, an essential skill which can improve interaction and lead to more appropriate and effective communication;

understanding how to present choices and obtain consent, as the document misses this key component, even if it refers to the importance of openness, honesty and confidentiality;

the importance of self reflection and critical questioning as well as the ability to bring self knowledge to the process of working with children and young people;

and while the importance of confidentiality is stressed, it may be useful to have a reference to the fact that confidentiality will, at times, require to be broken in the context of child protection.

4. What specific comments do you have around the skills, knowledge & understanding associated with “effective partnership and multi-agency working?”

I understand and agree with the two aims of the common core which are essentially to remove the unhelpful barriers that exist between different organisations and to equip the workforce with the skills to build capacity within children, young people, families and communities to better help themselves. These are valid and important aims, but there a number of omissions which could help to reinforce these aims.

It is important to see the focus being on removing unhelpful barriers as all too often these professional barriers do not facilitate multi-agency working and lead to poorer outcomes for children and young people. GIRFEC should help to address this. Putting the child at the centre in partnership working in line with the GIRFEC approach will ensure that their best interests are at the forefront of any action. This needs to be based on an understanding of rights and the UNCRC should form the basis for policy and practice development.

In terms of building capacity within children, young people, families and communities to better help themselves is a worthy aim and an essential one. The areas of knowledge and understanding refer to “working with young people and families to make their own decisions and form their own solutions.” There should

also be some indication of how support can be provided to ensure that such solutions can be reached.

I am pleased to see a reference to transitions and the particular needs of young people and their families going through this process. Transition at different stages of a child or young person's life is also important and particularly when that young person moves from primary to secondary school or from children's services to adult services.

There is also no reference to working with adults with the document and this I feel is an important and major omission. There appears to be an assumption that skills can be easily transferred across, yet different knowledge and skills are also needed.

Finally, whilst I agree entirely that everyone involved in partnership working is entitled to be treated with respect and that discrimination should be addressed and challenged, the reference to equality, diversity, cultural differences and disability within this section should apply across the board and not be limited to this section.

5. What if anything is missing from the skills, knowledge & understanding or values?

I would wish to reiterate the point that the UNCRC should be highlighted as underpinning these very important GIRFEC principles. There are a few references to rights within the document: under the categories 'appropriate and effective communication' and 'sound judgement and decision making' (with regard to information sharing and confidentiality.) It would be helpful to have some clarity around 'the importance of promoting children's rights at every opportunity' actually means. (under 'appropriate and effective communication')

I believe that there needs to be a real commitment to human rights education, including children's rights. This needs to be more thorough, purposeful and committed approach which addresses rights as concepts and allows those working with children and young people to apply their learning and knowledge appropriately.

There has been much discussion around the idea of promoting a pedagogy model and the work conducted by Children in Scotland has highlighted the idea of how such a model can be used in Scotland as a professional standard for working more widely with children, families and communities. This is an area of particular interest to me, not least because such work is underpinned by children's rights and in particular article 12 which focuses around the participation and empowerment of children and young people in decisions affecting them. The holistic approach to working with children and young people and supporting their overall development is also very much in line with a UNCRC approach. I understand that a qualification in Social Pedagogy has been recognised by the SSSC as a professional qualification for working with children in residential child care services and this is encouraging.

The issue of qualifications is an important one and yet there is no reference to qualifications within this document. Introducing a common core of skills, knowledge and values across the workforce will require a more simplified and integrated qualifications framework, one which will allow workers to transfer across different

disciplines more easily. This will provide more focus and support integrated working. I would be interested in hearing more about plans around how this could be taken forward.

Implementation of the proposed Common Core

6. Describe briefly how, your organisation, or your sector might implement the common core of skills, knowledge and values?

My office does not provide direct services although I consider it to be part of the children's sector workforce. It is my belief that it is essential all of the sector workforce share the same values and common language with regard to children and young people.

Given that the key function of my office is to promote and safeguard children's rights, it is important for my staff have a good understanding and knowledge of this area. We have regular training and continued professional development in children's rights and also in child protection. Members of my team have also received training in child development.

The development by my office of a children's rights impact assessment framework ensures that representations we make in the name of the office or responses to consultations are firmly grounded in a children's rights perspective. The next stage of this process is to encourage others to take such an analysis forward.

As Commissioner, I have a duty to highlighting areas where children's rights are being violated, as well as the promotion of good practice.

Implementation of the proposed Common Core

7. What opportunities are there in your organisation or service for the proposed common core to be implemented at the following 3 levels?

- Strategic management
- Operational Management
- Day to day working with children, young people and families

I am in the process of finalising my Strategic Plan for 2011-2015 and the accompanying Annual Operational Plan for 2011-2012.

Two of my four Strategic Aims are:

Strategic Aim 1 - Increase the awareness, understanding and implementation of the UNCRC in all sectors of Scotland's society

Strategic Aim 2 - Develop sustainable, communication links between the Commissioner and children and young people to act as a catalyst for high quality participative practices in Scotland

Both of these aims are commensurate with the opportunities in developing common core skills and in particular the central consideration of UNCRC and children's rights in workforce development.

8. What opportunities do you see for working collaboratively with other organisations/sectors to implement the common core?

I am particularly keen that my office works in partnership with local and national government and with agencies working with and for children and young people and see collaborative working as essential. I will continue to promote children's rights at all these levels in line with my statutory obligations.

In my role, I must also have regard to any relevant provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and regard, and encourage others to regard, the best interests of children and young people as a primary consideration. Promoting a common core based around the principles of the UNCRC, and which recognises the value of children's participation is one I would support wholeheartedly and would encourage others to do so.

9. What challenges can you identify around implementing the common core, and how might these be overcome?

There are a number of challenges with regard to implementation, not least engaging and ensuring buy in from the professional bodies / organisations and regulators. For instance, in paragraph 32 of the document, there is a reference to and the suggestion is that such bodies 'may choose to reflect the common core in their Standards (when they are next up for review)'...and this could 'potentially lead to the creation of an integrated children's workforce.'

For a common core to be effective, it needs to have support and commitment across the board (in particular clarity around enforcement), including and especially from these bodies. As noted, the greatest impact of the proposed common core will come when different parts of the workforce choose to implement it together. I agree strongly with this.

The common core also needs to link in with the range of policy initiatives, not least GIRFEC, Curriculum for Excellence, the three 3 key policy frameworks (The Early Years Framework, Equally Well and Achieving Our Potential) and the Additional Support for Learning (Scotland) Act 2004 (and as amended in 2009).