

9th UNCRC Implementation Programme Update

Improving Outcomes
for Children and
Young People in Scotland



The Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

Introduction

Welcome to the ninth Children's Rights Unit update.

The [Children's Human Rights page](#) on the Scottish Government website includes links to a range of resources that will help public authorities implement a children's human rights approach. This includes the [Children's Rights Skills and Knowledge Framework](#) which has been designed to support training for individual workers who want to build or reflect on their children's rights knowledge and take a children's human rights approach to their practice.

Please email us at UNCRCIncorporation@gov.scot if you have: any questions about the newsletter content; themes you would like covered in future issues; or content you would like to contribute to highlight how your organisation has been taking a children's human rights approach.



About the Act / Updates on amendments

Update on the Children (Withdrawal from Religious Education and Amendment of UNCRC Compatibility Duty) (Scotland) Act

The Children (Withdrawal from Religious Education and Amendment of UNCRC Compatibility Duty) (Scotland) Bill was passed by the Scottish Parliament on 17 February 2026 and has now received Royal Assent.

Part 2 of the Act, once commenced, will add an exemption to the section 6 Compatibility Duty in the UNCRC Act. This exemption will make clear that a public authority will not be acting unlawfully under the UNCRC Act where it is required, under an Act of the Scottish Parliament, to act in a way that is incompatible with UNCRC requirements.

The exemption will only apply where a public authority has no discretion as to whether to act incompatibly, and the legislation cannot be read or given effect in a way that is compatible with UNCRC requirements (under section 24 of the Act). The Scottish Government has not thus far identified any existing circumstances in which the exemption would apply. However, our understanding of what is and is not compatible will evolve over time, and so it may be that the exemption will be needed while we consider addressing the legislative source of the incompatibility.



During the Bill's progress in Parliament stakeholders and MSPs called for additional safeguards about the use of the exemption. These safeguards were added to the Act and include:

- A requirement for the Lord Advocate, Children's Commissioner and the Scottish Human Rights Commission to be notified when the exemption is relied upon in legal proceedings. This notification will mainly be operated by the Courts and Tribunals Sector;
- A requirement on public authorities listed under section 19 of the UNCRC Act to notify the Scottish Government, the Children's Commissioner, and the Scottish Human Rights Commission as soon as reasonably practicable, where the listed authority is of the view - when discharging its duties under the UNCRC Act - that it cannot read and give effect to legislation in a UNCRC-compatible way, and therefore concludes that the exemption applies in connection with the exercise, or potential exercise, of a relevant function. (This duty seeks to ensure that notification follows a considered assessment about whether the relevant legislation can be read and given effect in a way which is compatible with the UNCRC requirements. It does not intend to place a proactive duty on listed authorities to identify potential incompatibilities, but instead seeks to require notification where they have already reached the view that the exemption applies); and
- A requirement on Scottish Ministers to report annually, through the Children's Rights Scheme, on notifications received relating to the use of the exemption and any actions they intend to take in response.

The Act has not yet commenced. Officials will be in touch with key stakeholders in due course to discuss plans and timelines for commencement.



Children's Rights Reporting Duty

Listed authority senior leaders received a letter from the Scottish Government's Director-General Education and Justice reminding them of their Reporting Duties under the UNCRC Act. The first reports were due as soon as practicable after 31 March 2026.

Part 3, section 18 of the UNCRC Act places a duty on public authorities [listed in section 19 of the Act](#) to publish, every three years, a children's rights report which addresses the following four areas:

1. action taken in the previous reporting period to ensure compatibility with UNCRC requirements under the Act
2. action taken to secure better or further effect of children's rights
3. actions that will be taken in the next 3-year reporting period to ensure continuing compatibility with UNCRC requirements under the Act; and
4. actions planned in that period to secure better or further effect of children's rights.

The Scottish Government has published [statutory guidance](#) intended to support public authorities in the implementation and operation of the duties under Part 3, section 18 of the UNCRC Act.

A copy of the published report must be sent to Scottish Ministers via **UNCRCIncorporation@gov.scot**. The published report must also be accompanied by a version that children can understand.



UNCRC Local Government conference

On Monday 23 February, the Improvement Service held the second UNCRC Local Government Conference which brought together local authorities and partners to share their children's rights practice. The focus was on learning from different approaches.

Key themes and discussions included turning legal duties into day-to-day practice, moving beyond compliance to culture change and making children's rights visible in frontline services.

The conference reinforced that UNCRC implementation requires whole-system change across services (not just education or children's services) and alignment with wider agendas like Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC), The Promise, and child poverty.

Participation and the voice of children and young people featured prominently throughout the conference with a strong emphasis on Article 12 (respect for the views of the child). There was recognition that participation can be inconsistent or tokenistic, and that there is a need for more meaningful approaches. Speakers noted that participation must move from engagement exercises to genuine influence on decisions. Examples presented included embedding participation in governance and co-design of services with children and young people.



Across sessions, several consistent insights emerged:

- Culture change is the hardest part – legal incorporation alone does not guarantee impact
- Leadership is critical – senior buy-in drives organisational change
- Integration beats duplication – UNCRC should be embedded into existing frameworks, not added as a separate layer

Colleagues also took time to consider their approach to developing their first UNCRC reports with the opportunity to share thoughts and questions with an experienced panel including colleagues from the Improvement Service, Scottish Government and Edinburgh University.

Presentations from the day are available on the [Children's Human Rights in Scotland Knowledge Hub Group](#).



Resource spotlight – Highland Council

Views of children should be systematically embedded in our systems to ensure their voices are listened to and heard in relation to education, schools and early learning settings. This has been a significant priority in Highland Council over recent years and has built on previous work.

Between October 2023 and April 2024, engagement in various forms took place with over 800 children and young people between the ages of 4 and 26, as the basis to the creation of the [Highland Children's Participation Strategy](#).

Highland Council has curated some resources for practitioners to support them in gathering the views of children and young people at all ages and developmental stages. [Tools for gathering the views of Children and Young People](#) provide ideas and suggestions for engaging with children of all ages and abilities.

Since creating the strategy, Highland Council has moved into an implementation phase, to ensure this work is embedded in practice, with a suite of innovative, rights-based resources designed for children, by children. These include an ethics framework, consent tools, a practitioner [participation guide](#), and the '[Library of Voices](#)', a digital platform amplifying children's views and reducing consultation fatigue. These resources are widely available on a dedicated [children's rights website](#).



Highland Council has also worked with children to create some talking points around capacity and consent in line with the UNCRC Act and to support its Child Friendly Complaints process.

The [Participation ROCCS resources](#) relate to a number of 'Myths' that adults may believe, with counter statements and scenarios written by children and young people. These myths and counter comments have been used in training to both raise awareness and dispel some of the closely held beliefs in a way that is non-threatening to practitioners.

To find out more, contact: Bernadette Cairns (Education Psychology) via email Bernadette.Cairns@highland.gov.uk



Independent Review of Scotland's Legislative Framework for Children's Care

In January 2026, the Scottish Government announced an independent review of the [Scottish legislative framework for children's care](#).

The remit and scope makes clear that the review will take full account of the requirements of the UNCRC Act and may make specific recommendations about how the existing protections for children's rights in that Act might be applied as widely as possible across the devolved legislative landscape.

This could involve making recommendations about which provisions, currently in UK enactments and that relate to the care system, would benefit from being considered for re-enactment in an Act of the Scottish Parliament, to bring them into scope of the protections for children's rights.



NHS Education for Scotland UNCRC Implementation Project

NHS Education for Scotland (NES) UNCRC Implementation Project came to an end in March 2026. The project team supported health boards across Scotland to implement the UNCRC Act and develop a children's human rights approach. The project was commissioned in December 2023 to help increase health boards' understanding of children's rights and prepare them for their legal duties under the UNCRC Act. NES delivered the project across three linked phases: awareness, embedding and reporting and sustainability. One key success was the creation of a NHS UNCRC Leads Network with representation across all health boards.

The UNCRC leads network strengthened several areas to implement the UNCRC act and create a culture of everyday responsibility for children's rights aspects in their local Health Boards including: clinical documentation to record when children's views have been considered, a revitalised youth forum, rights-based communication and a strengthened Children and Young Persons Steering group, with the Promise and UNCRC as standing agenda items. The network continues as an active forum to progress children's rights across health services



The NES project team created resources and webinars, available on the [GIRFEC \(Getting It Right for Every Child\) and Children's Rights learning site](#), which will continue to be updated with any new UNCRC resources. They developed and facilitated a number of focused learning events. Webinars included: Child friendly communications; Nurturing the Spirit, Children's Rights and Spiritual Care in Practice; Childhood Vaccination and Consent; reducing oral health inequalities; chatting together to support early language and communication; understanding your role in keeping the promise; and UNCRC and Remote/Rural Practice.

NES also hosted the National UNCRC Health Conference, on 26 November 2025, which brought together over 1,500 participants from health, social care, education, and partner organisations.



Children's Rights in Healthcare National Survey

NHS Education for Scotland (NES) conducted a survey in 2025, as part of the UNCRC Implementation Project. The survey was designed and facilitated in partnership with Young Scot.

The purpose of the survey was to find out about children and young people's awareness of their rights in healthcare and what matters most for them and their families about healthcare services. The aim is for the findings to identify areas for improvement to further champion and uphold children's rights within healthcare.

Key findings suggest that the most important aspects to children and young people are feeling heard, being taken seriously and for healthcare staff to believe them. Please see the [report](#) for more information



Annual Dads Survey 2026

There are well over 400,000 fathers with dependent children in Scotland. Fathers Network Scotland are again conducting their survey asking fathers to share their experiences. It is an annual opportunity to hear directly from fathers across Scotland and understand how modern fatherhood, work and family life, and well-being are evolving.

Each year, they aim to reach fathers from across the country and from all walks of life, building a representative picture of fathers' experiences, priorities, and challenges. The Children's Rights Unit add a question each year to ask fathers what they know about Children's Rights, which helps inform their awareness raising work.

Please could you share the survey with your networks and help ensure father's voices are heard and contribute to evidence that can shape policy, services, and support for families. Any father aged 16 or over, currently living in Scotland, who has at least one child under the age of 18 can take part. The survey is live and will close 16 August. The link to the survey is [here](#).



Support for Public Authorities

Law Centre Funding

CLAN Child Law and Just Right Scotland , who specialise in work with children and young people, have been successful in our recent competition for grant funding to support the provision of legal advice and representation for children and young people.

Clan Childlaw ensures that children and young people in Scotland can access independent, free, child-centred legal advice and representation when they need it.

Just Right Scotland (JRS) have been awarded funding to work with Roma children and young people in Glasgow, in partnership with Romano Lav (Roma Voice), a community education organisation at the forefront of advocating for Roma rights.

The project will build on the existing Community Catalysts initiative, which engages young Roma people aged 16-24 in weekly sessions focused on community leadership, human rights education, and creative skills building.



Support for Public Authorities

Children's Rights Skills and Knowledge Framework

[The Children's Rights Skills and Knowledge Framework](#) was launched in March 2025 and has recently passed first anniversary. The Framework provides access to resources and training on children's rights and taking a children's human rights approach.

The resources are reviewed and updated regularly, and the Framework now includes new resources such as the Scottish Government's [Children's Advocacy Guidance](#) and a suggested [menu of training](#). This menu will help organisations to use the Framework to support their staff, based on the time and equipment available for training e.g. there are options for a 10 minute all staff meeting or a 30 minute team session.

The [Training Plan](#) which accompanies the Framework, can also help staff responsible for developing and delivering training, to plan and deliver appropriate training on children's rights and taking a children's human rights approach.



Resources

Trusted Adult Pathways Resource

The Children's Rights Unit has developed the [Pathways -Trusted Adult Illustrated Story resource](#) with Education Scotland to help those in the trusted adult role better understand how they can support children and young people to share concerns about their rights.

This resource is now available on the [UNCRC Skills and Knowledge Framework](#) (link above, section 4).

Young Scot Truth About Youth Survey

Young Scot's national survey for young people aged 11 to 25 offered an opportunity to share what life in Scotland really looks like for them. From cyber safety and social media to body image, wellbeing and safety, they explored the realities shaping this generation of young people.

The insights will help Young Scot and partners design services that truly reflect what matters most to young people. The Young Scot survey has now closed and there were 2660 final responses from all 32 local authorities, with additional marketing in February helping to shift the male response rate up to 36%. [You can access the results via their website.](#)



Children's participation in policy – Vaping

Since 2017, the Children's Parliament and Scottish Youth Parliament have been involved in the co-design of an annual meetings between children and young people and Cabinet Ministers. Since 2020, SYP has also led a meeting between young people and the Scottish Government Executive Team (ET). Children's Parliament began engaging children in meetings with the ET in 2022. From 2024 there have been joint annual ET meetings with children and young people. At these meetings children and young people bring 'calls to actions' to raise awareness of issues that matter most to them.

Vaping was one of the 'calls to action' for the [Cabinet and ET Takeovers between 2024 and 2026](#). Members of the Children's Parliament (MCPs) led an event on vaping on 25 March in Dundee. It focused on reducing children's access to vapes and exploring the introduction of vape-free zones within the city.

MCPs gave a short presentation during which they reiterated their ask to Scottish Government to reduce access to vaping and increase children and young people's understanding of its impact. The children led on choosing the venue and space for the event, and were confident in discussing the impact of vaping on CYP in their communities. The event was captured by an article in the [Dundee Courier](#).



Write right about me

To support equality and non-discrimination, Aberdeen City Council created [Write Right About Me](#), to reflect care and love for children and embed trauma informed practice in report writing.

The multi-agency writing project developed a suite of [reflective e-learning resources](#) to ensure children and young people are not retraumatised by the way practitioners write about their needs and the support provided to them.

Putting Children's Rights at the Heart of Your Service [A new resource from the Improvement Service](#)

If your service is less familiar with children's rights, knowing where to start can feel daunting. This new resource will help you think about different ways in which you can embed children's rights in your service.

As public services are designed by adults, thinking about children and young people as active service users requires a fresh way of thinking to ensure that services meet their needs. Almost all services provided by a local authority are likely to have an impact on children and young people – even if they are not a 'children's service'.



For example;

- ground maintenance services have an important role in supporting children to play outside, in well maintained play areas;
- roads and transport services have a important role in creating safe crossing points to allow children to safely walk or scoot to school; and
- children often accompany their parents and carers when accessing services as a family, bringing children into adult-focused spaces.

Children experience their rights in a range of places, including their home, community, education and health settings. It is important that public services consider how to protect and respect the rights of children and young people in these spaces.

This new resource includes general advice and details tools and approaches that can help you to understand, demonstrate and improve the way you are taking children's rights into account in the way you design and deliver your services. The resource is free to download from [Putting children's rights at the heart of your service](#)

For more information or to discuss support for your local authority, please contact rebecca.spillane@improvementservice.org.uk



Online [Child Rights Connect](#) Webinar - How to Analyse, Track and Influence Public Budgets for Children's Rights

Public budgets play a critical role in realising children's rights. As part of their '[How to Child Rights](#)' Series, [Child Rights Connect](#) have developed a new toolkit to provide practical guidance for civil society organizations and child rights practitioners seeking to strengthen budget analysis, expenditure tracking, and advocacy efforts to advance children's rights. [Child Rights Connect](#) are hosting a webinar to launch the toolkit on Thursday, 23 July, 13:00–14:30 (UK Time).

The launch event aims to:

- Introduce the new toolkit and its practical applications.
- Strengthen awareness of the importance of child rights-responsive public budgeting.
- Share key lessons and approaches for analysing, tracking, and influencing public budgets for children.
- Promote the use of the toolkit among civil society organizations, child rights practitioners, and other stakeholders.
- Foster dialogue and exchange among actors working to advance accountability and investment in children's rights.



The event is primarily intended for: Civil society organizations, child rights practitioners, child rights coalitions and networks, national Human Rights Institutions, researchers and academics, government representatives, development partners and donors, youth-led and child-focused organizations, and other stakeholders interested in public finance and children's rights.

The webinar is free to attend and a link to register is [here](#).

