

Media Release

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Children's rights and wellbeing in danger of slipping down national agenda, seminar hears

As public bodies make tough choices, assumptions about what a child's best interests are – and how to balance conflicting interests – could lead to the rights of some groups of children being upheld at the expense of other sections of the child population, a major national seminar will hear this week.

In the best interests of the child? in Glasgow on Wednesday 9 February brings together key figures across the Scottish children's sector to discuss how government aspirations to keep children's best interests to the fore – a core principle of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child – can remain strong in practice for *all* children.

Former Commissioner for Children and Young People Kathleen Marshall and Professor Malcolm Hill of the University of Strathclyde will lead the debate, which is chaired by Scotland's current Commissioner for Children and Young People Tam Baillie. Questions raised will include:

- Who decides what the best interests of a child are?
- What criteria should be used?
- Are short term best interests the same as long term best interests?
- How do you balance considerations that are in the best interests of one child, but not of another?

Kathleen Marshall said: "The child's best interests might seem to be a concept rooted in common sense, but it can be difficult to come to a 'common' agreement in today's society. Who decides? We need to be sure people who make decisions based on children's best interests are trained to reflect on and acknowledge their own beliefs and prejudices and how they relate to the beliefs of others, and the standards set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child."

Malcolm Hill said: "At times of financial stringency there are greater dangers than usual that the needs and interests of one group of children will be protected at the expense of another: for example children's centres, libraries and schools may be closed or amalgamated in ways that leave some children without a service. Cuts in funding to charitable bodies are likely to affect the most vulnerable children. Preventive services that could achieve long term benefits and savings may be sacrificed to safeguard facilities that respond to immediate or crisis challenges."

The seminar is organised by Children in Scotland with Save the Children and the Centre for Research on Families and Relationships.

Notes to Editors

1. *In the best interests of the child?* takes place on Wednesday 9 February at the Hospitality Suite at Glasgow Caledonian University, Cowcaddens Road, Glasgow, organised by Children in Scotland with Save the Children and the Centre for Research on Families and Relationships.
2. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child was ratified by Great Britain and Northern Ireland in December 1991. Article 3 of the Convention states: “in all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.”
3. The December issue of *Children in Scotland* magazine carried an article by Douglas Hamilton, head of Save the Children Scotland, picking up on key discussion points to be raised by Kathleen Marshall and Malcolm Hill in the seminar. If you would be interested in viewing or reproducing this article please contact Tracey Francis at 0131 222 2419.
4. **Children in Scotland** is the longstanding national agency for the whole of the children’s sector, reaching over 250,000 individuals through our extensive membership of more than 450 statutory agencies, voluntary sector organisations, professional associations and community groups. For further information visit www.childreninscotland.org.uk.

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