

Children in Scotland

RSSB Committee
T2.60
Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

Dear Committee members,

Children in Scotland welcomes the opportunity to present comments for your consideration. Our points are limited to your review of issues concerning Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People.

On behalf of our 450 voluntary, private and statutory sector members, we played an early and active role in encouraging the Scottish Parliament to create this office. Now, as the inaugural term of SCCYP is drawing to a close, we are surprised that its future status as an independent public body might be in doubt.

While SCCYP (like all other organisations) doubtless could be improved, we see no rational, evidence-based reason for it to be merged or terminated. Indeed, we think that the Scottish Parliament has good reason to take pride in the creation and development of SCCYP over the past five years.

Conversely, it is hard to imagine that diminishing or closing SCCYP would be received by the media and the public (let alone by child-related groups) as a positive message about the Scottish Parliament's commitment to children's rights -- or to advancing the well-being of Scotland's children and young people.

Accordingly, Children in Scotland encourages the RSSB Committee to affirm the current status of Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People and proceed timeously with securing the successor to Kathleen Marshall.

If this is not an acceptable course of action to the RSSB Committee and the Parliament, then we encourage a thorough evaluation not only of SCCYP's performance during its first term, but also a detailed analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of a merger with the Scottish Commission for Human Rights (or any other alternative future).

It would make sense to include substantive, financial, and political considerations in this analysis. We support all organisations finding and implementing operating efficiencies and cost savings during these difficult economic times. Therefore, if it is actually the case that certain 'back office' work of SCCYP could be combined with one or more of the other bodies you are reviewing, then it might be wise to proceed with these administrative changes. Of course, we trust that any analysis of the options will be a fair one involving "like for like" comparisons.

At the end of the day, what matters most about any decision regarding SCCYP's future are not minor cost savings, but rather the likely and predictable impacts upon children and young people themselves. Children in Scotland thinks that the analysis of SCCYP's future should focus first and foremost on answering the question: **what option is most likely to: a) ensure children's rights across Scotland; and, b) result in the greatest improvement to the status, well-being and life chances of all of Scotland's children and young people?**

Based upon the available evidence at this time, we know of no option more likely to achieve these goals than retaining and improving Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People as an independent office under the oversight of the Scottish Parliament.

Please don't hesitate to contact me if Children in Scotland can be of assistance in the next stages of this process of consideration.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Jonathan Sher
Director of Policy, Research and Programmes

Children in Scotland is Scotland's national agency for organisations and professionals working with and for children, young people and their families. It exists to identify and promote the interests of children and their families and to ensure that policies and services and other provisions are of the highest possible quality and are able to meet the needs of a diverse society. Children in Scotland represents more than 450 members, including 90% of Scottish Local Authorities, all major voluntary, statutory and private children's agencies, professional organisations, as well as many other smaller community groups and children's services. It is linked with similar agencies in other parts of the UK and the European Union.

The work of Children in Scotland encompasses extensive information, policy, research and practice development programmes. The agency works closely with MSPs, the Scottish Government, local authorities and practitioners. It also services groups such as the Cross Party Parliamentary Group on Children and Young People (with YouthLink Scotland) .In addition, Children in Scotland hosts Enquire - the national advice service for additional support for learning, and Resolve:ASL, Scotland's largest independent education mediation service.