

cross-party group on children and young people

Embargoed Thursday, 21 April

PRESS RELEASE

The Cross Party Group for Children and Young People will today press the Scottish Executive to act on its commitment to carry out a national review of the inconsistencies in children's rights across Scottish legislation.

Under Scottish law an eight-year-old child can be found guilty of a criminal offence, yet young people are not considered responsible enough to vote or drink until they reach the age of 18. And the age of sexual consent for females is 16, whilst contraception can be prescribed at any age without parental consent.

Scott Barrie, MSP, convenor of the Cross Party Group for Children and Young People, said: "When it comes to what children can do or have done to them, Scots Law is a mess. Given that most aspects of children's lives are devolved to the Scottish Parliament, I believe we need an overhaul of all legislation that impacts on their lives so that we can be consistent. At the moment it sends out a very confusing message to children, young people, their families and those who work with them."

The Cross Party Group for Children and Young People will meet at the Scottish Parliament between **12:45pm and 2pm today, Thursday, April 21**, to discuss the different age thresholds at which children are given certain 'legal rights' and considered to have 'legal capacity' in Scottish legislation.

The group, which seeks to ensure that the needs and rights of children and young people are met throughout Scotland, will press the Executive to honour a commitment it made last year to review the issue after a crucial amendment to the Additional Support for Learning Bill was refused.

Whilst the Bill gave young people over the age of 16 the same rights as their parents, the same did not apply to children under the age of 16 making it inconsistent with other Scottish legislation. The Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000, for example, gives children with legal capacity the right to appeal school exclusions.

After the amendment was refused in April 2004, Euan Robson, Deputy Minister for Children and Young People, said that consultation and wider discussion of the matter was needed and that the Scottish Executive would undertake this. And in response to a Parliamentary question in December 2004, Mr Robson said "internal discussions" had

already commenced.

Shelley Gray, policy officer for Children in Scotland, which organises the Cross Party Group meetings, said: “When the deputy minister referred to the need for a review of children’s rights he warned against making piecemeal legislation. But this is precisely what will continue to happen until such a review is undertaken.

“The Scottish Executive has recently confirmed that the issue will be discussed at the Cabinet Delivery Group on Children and Young People on April 26th and we would urge the Executive to begin the review as soon as possible after these discussions.”

Notes for editors:

- The Cross-Party Group on Children and Young People aims to ensure that the most important issues affecting the lives of Scotland’s youngest citizens are recognised and discussed. Meetings are organised by Children in Scotland and Youth Link.
- Contact Nicola Pay on 0131 2222419 or 07793588672