

cross-party group on children and young people

Embargoed Thursday, 28 October

PRESS RELEASE

Members of Scotland's Children's Parliament attend first official meeting

They are just 11-years-old, but today (Thursday 28 October) Rachael Murray and Andrew Blackie will sit on a panel in the new Scottish Parliament alongside MSPs and other adults to debate the involvement of children and young people in shaping policy at local and national level.

Rachael and Andrew are the first members of Scotland's new Children's Parliament to meet officially with those who they call "the adults who matter" – any adult who has an influence on policy.

They hope that today's cross-party group meeting on children and young people will herald the beginning of a much closer relationship between children in Scotland under the age of 14 and the country's policy-makers and decision-makers.

The meeting 'Children and young people's participation – are we nearly there yet?', will be chaired by Janice Forsyth of BBC Radio Scotland. Rachael and Andrew will sit on a panel with Donald Gorrie, MSP, Liberal Democrat, Jamie McGrigor, MSP, Scottish Conservatives, Cathy McCulloch, co-director of the Children's Parliament, Tara McCarthy, of Article 12 and Susan Elsley, head of policy and research at Save the Children.

Andrew, a member of the Midlothian Children's Parliament Group, believes that before children can become truly involved in the decision-making, they have to tackle adults' attitudes towards them. He said: "On the whole children's rights are quite well enforced, but we are still ignored too often. I was ignored by a shop assistant the other day. If children are seen to be meeting with adults and helping to make important decisions, maybe that wouldn't happen so often."

Rachael added: "Children see things differently to adults so it's very important that we're given the opportunity to have our say. I think this new Parliament can make a big difference."

Scotland is the first country in the world to create a national children's parliament that recognises the importance of providing children under the age of 14 with the experience of active citizenship.

Cathy McCulloch, co-director of the Children's Parliament, said: "We hope that being part of the Children's Parliament will increase children's self-confidence and understanding of how decisions are arrived at and that adults will begin to see

children in a new light – as valuable contributors to policy development, and helpful and constructive voices in the search for solutions to community concerns.

“It is not about creating mini Margaret Thatchers or Tony Blairs, or about cultivating a group of middle class, articulate children who will debate the merits of space travel. It will not even work in ways that are easily recognised by adults – no committees, no notion that the children are representatives and no compartmentalising of the world as adults see it. It is about creating an experience for children, and about promoting opportunities for children of all abilities and backgrounds across Scotland to engage directly and meaningfully in local and national democratic processes.”

The meeting will also be attended by Paul Kane, 22, chair of the Scottish Youth Parliament who will press for increased involvement by young people in the workings of the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Executive.

He believes that young people should be allowed to sit in the parliament chamber at least once a month, and that the Scottish Youth Parliament should host issue specific debates, that can be fed into the MSP debates.

He will also suggest a “politician swap”, where members of the Scottish Youth Parliament and MSPs swap their roles to allow young people to be involved in the debates in Parliament.

Notes to editors:

- The Cross-Party Group on Children and Young People will meet in the Scottish Parliament on Thursday, 28 October between 12:30 and 1:45pm.
- 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.
- The Children’s Parliament aims to have 20 groups of 20 children up and running by the spring of 2007. Each group will be involved in a three-year programme of monthly meetings held at 20 different primary schools throughout Scotland and use music, drama, photography and other creative approaches to think more deeply about issues that are important to them. When they feel ready, the children will meet with MSPs, councillors, officials, teachers, the commissioner for children and young people, journalists and other adults chosen by them, to talk about matters that concern them. The meetings will take place without the intervention of advocates or mediators.

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