



## Manifesto for General Election 2001

The Scottish Parliament has power over many important areas that affect children such as education, health, family law and social work legislation. However, other areas have been reserved for the Westminster Parliament, which have a significant impact on children, young people and their families. These include:

- Election law
- International treaties
- Equalities legislation
- Social Security
- Taxation
- Work and Family provisions

Children and young people living in Scotland need a UK Government that fully recognises the needs and rights of children and young people and effectively supports families to care for them.

CHILDREN IN SCOTLAND ENCOURAGES ALL POLITICAL PARTIES TO:

**Promote participation and improve communication by**

- **Reducing the voting age to 16**
- **Increasing structures and process for children's and young people's participation in policy-making**
- **Reviewing what level of government should make particular decisions**

**Recognise and accept diversity; tackle poverty and inequality by**

- **Reporting annually on implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)**
- **Removing the reservation on the UNCRC for refugee children**

**Enhance the health and well-being of children, young people and their families through promoting child and family centred policies by**

- **Linking policies for taxation and social security to Scottish action to reduce child poverty**
- **Addressing the particular needs created by rurality and remoteness in fighting child poverty**
- **Combining maternity and paternity leave into a system of parental leave**

**Promote participation and improve communication**

VOTING AGE TO BE REDUCED TO 16

The voting age should be reduced to 16. Young people are a unique group in that they are more affected by government policy than most other groups but have no say in the make up of that government. When given the chance, young people have shown that they are well informed and able to make a positive contribution to political debates. Voting for Community Councils is open to anyone aged 16 or over. There is no logical reason why young people of 16 and 17 should be denied the right to vote in parliamentary elections.

*"I think children should be able to vote because it's our future as well"* 11 year old girl, Edinburgh

*"Our view is that if young people vote our decisions will be taken seriously. Older people vote but will not be around to live with their decisions in 50 or 60 years. If we vote we will be deciding our own futures."* 12 year old girls, Stranraer

(Quotes taken from Children in Scotland's art competition, "If I were First Minister")

Lowering the voting age does not mean the particular needs - and protection - of young people should not be recognised. It does mean recognising their right to have an official say in government.

**FACT:**

31% of young people under the age of 22 said that they would definitely not vote in the 1997 general election. (MORI, 1997)

#### STRUCTURES AND PROCESSES FOR PARTICIPATION

Voting is not enough. More needs to be done to ensure that children and young people can participate in decision making at a UK level – and that they have the information to do so. Opportunities are opening up for children and young people to be involved in local government (e.g. youth forums) and at a Scottish level (Scottish Youth Parliament). Scottish children and young people must not be ignored when it comes to UK decisions that affect them.

**FACT:**

Research has shown that young people are concerned about political issues but are not so interested in politics. Several reasons for the lack of interest in politics have been identified: limited opportunities to participate in the political process; politicians' failure to take account of young people's views; feelings of powerlessness and frustration. (JRF, 2000)

#### POWER TO MAKE DECISIONS AT THE APPROPRIATE LEVEL

A key principle of devolution is that issues should be dealt with by the appropriate level of government. Regular reviews need to be undertaken at all government levels – local, national and European. What powers should be further devolved? What powers are best dealt with at higher levels?

Many decisions could be made at a community level or within a school or other such institution. A continuing process of devolution could provide new ways of empowering people who are young and/ or disadvantaged. All of these are issues that need to be constantly kept under review by the Westminster government.

## **Recognise and accept diversity; tackle poverty and inequality**

### **UN CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD**

The UK government is responsible for the implementation, promotion and reporting of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Children in Scotland welcomes the development in the most recent UK report to the Committee, which for the first time has a separate chapter for Scotland. However, a large number of the issues covered in the Convention are now devolved matters, yet the Scottish Executive is not accountable to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.

Implementation of the Convention is not something that should be thought about once every five years whenever a report is due. Implementation must be monitored on a regular basis. The last report of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child highlighted a number of areas where the UK government were not meeting their obligations and these need to be addressed.

#### **FACT:**

Only 34% of participating children in the 'Our Lives' report had heard about the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child'. (SCF, 1999)

### **REMOVING THE RESERVATION ON REFUGEE CHILDREN**

The UK government has entered a reservation to the UNCRC, which states that:

"The United Kingdom reserves the right to apply such legislation, in so far as it relates to the entry into, stay in and departure from the United Kingdom of those who do not have the right under the law of the United Kingdom to enter and remain in the United Kingdom, and to the acquisition and possession of citizenship, as it may deem necessary from time to time".

Children in Scotland supports Save the Children's 'Forgotten Children' campaign. Children in Scotland believes that the reservation is discriminatory and is calling upon the UK government to withdraw it.

**FACT:**

It is estimated that about 6,000 asylum seekers each year will be housed in Scotland as part of the dispersal programme.

## **Enhance the health and well-being of children, young people and their families through promoting child and family centred policies**

### **ENDING CHILD POVERTY**

The Scottish Executive's long term targets set out in 'Social Justice ... a Scotland where everyone matters' include the defeat of child poverty in Scotland within this generation. Child poverty is affected by a wide range of factors. To meet such targets, therefore, UK action must be effectively combined with Scottish policies.

In tackling the problems of child poverty, the UK government needs to go further and look at ways that it can assist in tackling social exclusion in Scotland. UK policies such as the Working Families Tax Credit appear to have assisted in tackling some of the problems but more needs to be done to ensure that the benefits of such initiatives are more widely spread. Very often remote and rural areas of Scotland, that are not considered deprived by standard poverty indicators, are areas of social exclusion that are not benefited by current policies in Westminster. Policies for taxation and social security need to be linked to action that will be undertaken in Scotland.

A key task of the new UK government will be to make sure that it is able to take account of the particular circumstances and developments in Scotland when deciding policies that will impact on child poverty and social exclusion.

**FACT:**

30% of children in Scotland live in low income households. (Scottish Executive, 2000)

Over 200,000 Scottish children live in households without work. (Scottish Executive, 2000)

Almost three in every ten Scots live in rural settlements of less than 10,000 people. (NCH Factfile 2001)

### **AN EFFECTIVE MODEL OF PARENTAL LEAVE**

A commitment to parental leave is a commitment to child- and family-centred policies. A system of pre and post leave should meet the needs of women during pregnancy, childbirth and recovery from childbirth and enable fathers to participate in the care of children as well as mothers. By the government's own admission, the current system is not as generous as that in many other European countries.

A combined model of maternity and paternity leave is required – a system of 'parental leave'. This would involve a period of up to 18 months leave that can be split between the father and mother and can be used at various times during a child's first six years. Parental leave enables mothers and fathers to spend more time caring for children at a vital stage in their development. In order for this to be successful, both parents must have the assurance that they will not suffer adverse consequences in their employment.

Children in Scotland is calling for a radical alteration to the system of parental leave that will ensure that the welfare of children and families is a paramount consideration in all government policy.

## Questions to Political Parties

### **Promote participation and improve communication**

*Does your party think the voting age should be reduced? If so, what age do you think the voting age should be?*

*How would your party ensure that the views of children and young people from Scotland are taken into account by the UK government?*

### **Recognise and accept diversity; tackle poverty and inequality**

*In what ways will your party ensure that the UK meets its obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child?*

*Will your party remove the reservation that the UK has to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child relating to refugee children?*

*What are your party's plans for working in partnership with the Scottish Executive to tackle child poverty?*

### **Enhance the health and well-being of children, young people and their families through promoting child and family centred policies**

*How will your taxation and social security policies benefit children and young people in Scotland?*

*In what ways do your policies take into account the particular needs of families living in rural and remote areas?*

*What plans does your party have to extend the provisions for parental leave?*