

Reaching young people

a response from Children in Scotland
and Save the Children to the
National Debate on Education



July 2002

Reaching young people

Children in Scotland is Scotland's national umbrella agency for organisations and professionals working with and for children and their families. It exists to identify and promote the interests of children and their families and to ensure that relevant policies, 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 over 300 members, including all the major voluntary, statutory and private children's agencies, professional associations and local authorities as well as many smaller community groups and children's services. Children in Scotland facilitates the National Early Years Forum, the Scottish Parenting Forum, the Special Needs Advisory Group, Enquire, the national advice service for special educational needs in Scotland and the National Steering Group on Children infected/affected by HIV/AIDS. It works in partnership with the National Children's Bureau and Children in Wales, and is a member of the European Forum for Children's Welfare (EFCW).

Save the Children is an international children's rights organisation working in Scotland, the UK and over 70 countries to achieve a better world for children. Here in Scotland we have over 20 years experience in working with and supporting children, young people and their families disadvantaged by a range of circumstances. All our work is underpinned by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child to which the UK government is a signatory. Save the Children believes that the well-being of all children could be ensured through the full implementation of the articles of the UNCRC.

Save the Children seeks to highlight the importance of children and young people's participation in decisions that affect their lives. We work to ensure greater protection, improved support and social inclusion of marginalised children and young people, through highlighting the denials of rights in key sectors and working to develop new collaborative approaches.

Children in Scotland and Save the Children would like to thank the young people, schools/groups and all those that participated in this consultation, for all their time and participation. Clearly, without their contribution, the consultation would not have been possible.

The views contained in this report are not necessarily the views of Children in Scotland nor Save the Children. The views expressed are those of the children and young people that were consulted.

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Reaching young people: Summary

The Scottish Executive provided funding for Children in Scotland and Save the Children to involve young people who otherwise might not be heard from in 'mainstream' responses to the National Debate on Education. A three stage project was undertaken:

Stage 1:

Engaging the Children in Scotland's Participation Network. The 258 members of the network, from a broad range of agencies, were sent the National Debate on Education's briefing pack and an activities sheet.

Stage 2:

Working with seven 'expert groups' of young people with different perspectives on education. The emphasis was on in-depth discussion, leading up to Stage 3. Each group developed key messages for a poster and a CD.

Stage 3:

Holding an 'Expert Debate' (called *School Daze*) to bring the young people from the expert groups together to discuss and debate their views. This included drama, a 'question time' with key decision-makers, and artwork.

49 young people participated in Stages 2 and 3. All participating young people will receive feedback on the report's findings.

Key messages from the young people

- ◆ **Children and young people support the idea of having a central place to socialise, learn and gain qualifications.**
- ◆ **Schools should do more to promote understanding, respect and appreciation of different cultures and social circumstances.** Children and young people should not be judged or labelled at school and schools should be more flexible to the diverse needs of young people.
- ◆ **Good relationships with teachers are paramount.** Teachers should be in a position to relate to young people with patience, humour and understanding. Teachers should have the time to listen and respect the views of young people.
- ◆ **Class sizes are presently too big at 30.** Classes should be 15-20 pupils maximum, should have more than one teacher, (a ratio of 8 pupils: 1 adult) and when appropriate, should be grouped to reflect how different people learn.
- ◆ **Young people need to learn more than academic subjects at school.** Schools should: (1) Teach 'skills for life', how to live independently and skills for their future jobs; (2) Provide a wider range of subject choice and a broader range of activities; and (3) Build pupils' self-esteem.

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- ◆ **Learning should be fun and flexible to the needs of the learner.** More balance in the curriculum, smaller classes and better relationships with teachers would help facilitate this.
- ◆ **Young people should not have to spend so much time at their desks** but should have a more balanced day including more sporting and cultural activities and more leisure time.
- ◆ **Reward systems for good behaviour, smaller classes and teachers with strong interpersonal skills** will do more to improve pupils' behaviour than punishments that are seen as unfair, futile or disproportionate.
- ◆ **The participation of young people needs to be improved** both in individual decisions about their education and in 'policy' decisions about their school and education generally.
- ◆ **The school environment should be safe, in good repair and with enough space for everyone.**
- ◆ **School should also be a place to socialise, where young people can spend autonomous time with peers.** Young people should have access to common rooms to relax or leisure facilities to unwind with friends.

It's like everybody has got to be the same at school. I've always been brought up to believe that when you are at school you are developing into the kind of person you are going to be and you can't make everybody fit into the same mould. You can't make everybody go to school and everybody get the same jobs because people aren't like that. (...) And I think that schools, teachers and social workers they shouldn't try to make everybody fit into school, or fit into the same thing or all be the same.
(Gypsy/Traveller)

CHAPTER ONE: Introduction and methodology

What is education for? How do children and young people learn best? In what spaces and at what times do they learn? Who can help them with their learning? Such fundamental questions are being asked of Scottish education, by two co-terminous consultations - the Scottish Executive's National Debate on Education and the Scottish Parliament's Inquiry into the Purposes of Scottish Education.

The Scottish Executive provided funding for Children in Scotland and Save the Children, to involve young people who otherwise might not be heard from in 'mainstream' responses. A three-stage project was undertaken:

- Stage 1:** Engaging the Children in Scotland's Participation Network
- Stage 2:** Working with seven 'expert groups' of young people with different perspectives on education
- Stage 3:** Holding an 'Expert Debate' (called *School Daze*) to bring the young people from the Expert Groups together to discuss and debate their views

Children in Scotland and Save the Children both work to codes of ethics on research and consultation with children and young people. These were followed for this project and are available on request.

Stage 1: The Participation Network

Children in Scotland facilitates the Participation Network (funded by the Carnegie UK Trust). The Network is open to all those with an interest in involving children and young people in 'public' decision-making. Membership currently stands at 258 members, from a wide range of organisations: from schools, social work departments, youth projects, other voluntary organisations, health boards, arts projects and advice centres. This broad range of groups includes those who might otherwise not be included in 'mainstream' responses to the Education Debate.

A mailing was sent to all Participation Network members with the National Education Debate briefing pack and an activities sheet (see Appendix 1). This sheet was piloted with children from Barmulloch Primary School, Glasgow before finalising for the mailing.

A sample of 50 Participation Network members were telephoned, who had not yet contacted Children in Scotland, to encourage their response.

Stage 2: Working with the Expert Groups

Seven Expert Groups were worked with (see list below), with 49 young people involved in total. The emphasis was on quality, in-depth discussion over several meetings, leading to an informed exchange between groups at the Expert Debate *School Daze*.

Reaching young people

The Scottish Executive feedback form for the National Debate in Education was used to develop a framework of questions for each group to stimulate thought and discussion and to elicit responses to some of the key questions in the debate (see Appendix 2). The young people were also encouraged to determine the direction of the discussion based on their own experiences of education and their own priorities. On one occasion activities from the Stage 1 process were used to help stimulate ideas and discussion.

Each group agreed one key message on education to communicate to the government and these messages were then developed into a poster and a CD rom by a design team.

Groups who participated:

Fairbridge

Seven young people, two women and five men, aged from 17-20 approximately, based in Edinburgh

Fairbridge is a voluntary project providing social and personal development for inner city young people aged 14 to 25. A deliberate decision was to engage 17-20 year olds, to hear young people's reflections on their past school experiences. Two groups of young people took part, each for a two-hour session. Two of the young people then attended the Expert Debate *School Daze*.

Graysmill School

Thirteen young people in total, nine young women and four young men, based in Edinburgh

Graysmill is a special school for children and young people with physical disabilities and associated learning difficulties. The school is a day school. The main group involved in the Debate were Class 11/12: seven young people aged 16-17 years. However, for one of the sessions the class the year above (five young people aged 17-18) and a pupil from Firrhill High School (a local mainstream school with a link to Graysmill) participated as well. The main group took part in three one-hour sessions. Four of the young people attended the morning of the Expert Debate *School Daze*.

Learning for the Future

Eight young people, six young women and two young men, based in South Lanarkshire

Learning for the Future is a recently formed advocacy group for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or receiving special educational support. The group is made up of young people from three different schools in South Lanarkshire. The group aims to promote a forum for young people to express their views on issues of collective concern and to provide opportunities for young people to participate in decision making processes at a local and national level. It also encourages young people to meet and socialise outwith the school setting. The group meets weekly and took part in three two-hour sessions on the National Debate on Education. Eight young people participated in the sessions and five attended the Expert Debate *School Daze*.

1: Introduction and methodology

Right Track Education Initiative

Nine men aged from 15 to 16, based Drumchapel, Glasgow

The project offers a one year course to young people who have been excluded from school or who are not being presented for exams by school. The young people are offered basic skills training and personal development, building confidence, self esteem and key skills necessary to take advantage of future opportunities in life. The young people who took part in the group had been formally excluded from school, had persistently not attended or were encouraged by their school not to return. The group took part in the consultation on two occasions, the makeup of the group altering very slightly from one session to the next. Four of the young men came to the Expert Debate *School Daze*.

Who Cares? Scotland

Two young men aged 15 and 18, from Glasgow and East Dumbartonshire

Who Cares? Scotland is a national voluntary organisation which advocates on behalf of young people looked after and accommodated by the local authority. The young people who took part are actively involved in the work of Who Cares? Scotland and formed an 'Expert Group' on one occasion. The young people attended the Expert Debate *School Daze* accompanied by a young woman (aged 19) who sits on the Who Cares? Scotland Board.

Woodfarm High School

Seven young women, aged 14 to 15, based in East Renfrewshire

Young women, who regularly attend Woodfarm High School's Resource Base, took part in the consultation. The Resource Base has been set up using New Community School funding to provide learning and behaviour support for vulnerable young people. All of the young women in the group had been offered the opportunity of additional support at school due to a variety of difficulties. Some of them were at risk of exclusion, some had been bullied and had a history of non-attendance and others were isolated at school. All were offered the opportunity to work on confidence and self esteem within the group and to access support from staff at the base when required. The young women met twice as an expert group and six attended the Expert Debate *School Daze*.

Young Gypsy/Travellers, Save the Children

Two young women, both aged 16, based in North West Scotland

The young women who took part have been working with the Save the Children Young Gypsy/Travellers' Project. Save the Children works with young Gypsy/Travellers across Scotland providing opportunities to develop new skills and experiences, to enable them to raise awareness about their culture and to challenge discrimination. Due to the geographical spread of the young Gypsy/Travellers who agreed to form an Expert Group, one long session was arranged in Oban and young people were assisted with transport. Unfortunately two young people were unable to attend the group due to unforeseen circumstances. No Gypsy/Travellers were able to attend the Expert Debate *School Daze*. Two young people were forced to withdraw from the debate at the last minute because their family was evicted from their roadside camp on that day.

Stage 3: The Expert Debate *School Daze*

Twenty-six young people, from the various experts groups worked with in Stage 2, came to the Expert Debate *School Daze*. The event was held at Dynamic Earth (Edinburgh) on Wednesday 26 June 2002.

The posters derived from the Expert Groups' initial work were displayed for the first time; the CD Rom of their views was playing throughout most of the day. All groups returned with their own group's poster and each young person received a CD.

Feedback

All young people who participated in Stages 2 and 3, and all groups who responded to Children in Scotland in Stage 1, will receive a summary of the report's findings. They will subsequently be asked if they would like to remain engaged in the education debate, which should have further consultations later in the year and into 2003.

2: The Participation Network response

CHAPTER TWO: Stage 1 – The Participation Network Response

The response to the initial mailing to the Participation Network was encouraging. In the first week, around 40 organisations contacted Children in Scotland confirming interest in the debate. Several requests were made by members for additional briefing packs, with the Church of Scotland notably requesting 70 and East Lothian Council 10 additional copies.

Responses have been sent directly from Participation Network members to the Scottish Executive. Ten responses were also sent to Children in Scotland.

Below are the common themes across these responses, in order of issues that gained most agreement:

- ◆ maintaining and improving extra-curriculum activities;
- ◆ participation of young people in the day-to-day running of schools;
- ◆ greater degree of flexibility in respect to who and when young people can approach teachers;
- ◆ smaller class sizes;
- ◆ bullying can and should be tackled;
- ◆ more emphasis on practical skills and vocational subjects;
- ◆ improved teaching of foreign languages and starting at a younger age.

COMMUNICATION ★ YOUNG PEOPLE

123
FAIRBRIDGE

FAIRBRIDGE
SCOTLAND

“Teachers need to be trained up more on working with kids on a more personal basis – getting more involved in the person’s lives. Class sizes have to be dropped. The bigger they are the more chance of disruption and the harder it is for teachers to handle that. The teachers get frustrated and then they treat them like crap and the kids start rebelling.”

FUN! ★ Encouragement

THE BEST DAYS OF YOUR LIFE?

THE DEBATE

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3: The Expert Groups responses

CHAPTER THREE: Stage 2 – The Expert Groups’ responses

The 49 young people were asked to contribute their views and ideas about education based on their expert knowledge gained from their individual experiences.

The difficulties or barriers that faced the young people did mean that many had a fairly negative view of their educational experience, particularly at school. However, a number of young people who took part in the work were positive about their experiences and, of those who were unhappy about the experiences, most were able to identify things that they had enjoyed about education and things which had worked well. It is hoped that these positives are reflected in this report.

Quotations used below are illustrative of points made. They are not typical of young people’s responses overall, which were diverse, unless noted. To protect young people’s anonymity, no names have been linked with quotations.

A. What needs to be improved about school education in Scotland?

Young people suggest a number of improvements, from a broader range of activities at school, considerably smaller class sizes, improved teacher-pupil relationships and more flexibility and support. These are discussed in more details under later questions.

Here, four issues that were strongly expressed by the young people are covered, which do not neatly fit into answers to the feedback form’s questions:

1. missing the opportunity of education;
2. the considerable and often interrelated problems of bullying and discrimination;
3. experiences of prejudice and negative labelling - and the need to celebrate diversity;
4. participation of young people in school and individual decision-making.

Unfulfilled potential

Whilst they recognised that there were other ways that people could learn and other ways to get qualifications, most young people felt that school offered the best opportunity to get the qualifications needed. Many felt that they had missed their opportunity to gain the education they needed to pursue the career or training they wanted to do and, even though still under age 20, felt that it was too late.

A number of young people from Fairbridge and from Right Track thought that they were responsible for their lack of success to a certain degree. Several young people talked about being more interested in doing other things at that time: they were more interested in having a laugh with their mates or going off and doing ‘their own thing’. At the time they did not see their education as a priority and they did not have a sense of its importance.

These young people wished they could now make up lost opportunities. Some of the young people describe their current situation:

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I wish I could start again. I would go back and do it all again pure good.

What would you do differently?

I'd behave. (Right Track)

I think I'd do a lot better now than I did back then. I've got more intelligence now to realise that I do need an education. I've got some college stuff but it's not the same as having your Standard Grades. I've got a few Highers but I've not got any Standard Grades, I would like to go back and do that sort of thing, but I'm not going to because I'm too old. I've looked for a course that will let me do my Standard Grades and I can't find one. I think I've mucked up somewhere. (Fairbridge)

Other young people who were outwith projects and schools did not know how to find out about career options and routes.

I wanted to do a college course but it was too difficult so I just had to give up on it. I actually want to be a hairdresser but I don't know where to apply to get qualifications or to start training for it. I didn't know what to do. (Gypsy/ Travellers)

Whilst the young people at Right Track were very positive about the project, some of them believed that by leaving school and joining Right Track their future prospects were immediately reduced and they were somewhat despondent about that. They were following a limited academic curriculum and would miss the chance to sit a range of Standard Grades. Clearly many gained from the personal development, the individual attention, the listening culture and varied activities offered at Right Track and they were developing important skills, which they might not have developed in a school setting. However they seemed to feel at a disadvantage specifically because the course was designed for those who had not had a successful school experience.

More positively, some young people from Right Track described good experiences of Further Education College. Some had enjoyed this very much because they have been treated like adults by the college staff, shown respect and they feel more in control of how they spend their time. However those who talked positively about their college experience still expressed regret about their failed school experience and still wished they could go back and do it again.

Bullying and discrimination

All groups except Graysmill School spoke of bullying.

The direct relationship between school performance and bullying described by one young person echoes many of the young people's comments:

If it wasn't for the bullying, school would be OK - you'd make more friends and people would get to understand you. People don't understand each other - if you could be friends with everybody then it would be much better. The bullies in the school make you dog it and so you're missing out - if they weren't there then you'd get a better education. They are not letting you get the education that they are getting. (Woodfarm High School)

Those who had been bullied often found themselves drawn into fighting in an effort to stand up for themselves, in desperation or in self-defence. For some this had developed into a behaviour record which eventually led to suspension, exclusion or non-attendance.

Some of the young people in the groups had been in trouble for bullying themselves. One defended himself by saying, **'I just knew how to look after myself'** (Anonymous). One of the young people from Who Cares? Scotland suggested that the bullies were often the ones with the greatest problems and they need help.

3: The Expert Groups responses



**WOODFARM
HIGH SCHOOL**

"I think there should be a teacher in a wee room and if there is something wrong with you, you can go and talk to her and tell her what's wrong so she can sort it out for you. A teacher who is just there to help you. Someone you can talk to about anything and they'd listen"



"I think you should choose who you want to talk to and that person should become your guidance teacher. Because you'd feel a lot better with that person..."




"It should be a male for a male and a female for a female, because sometimes they bully you about your body and a female isn't going to talk to a male teacher about her body."



**THE BEST DAYS
OF YOUR LIFE?**





YOUNG GYPSY TRAVELLERS

Experience of Education

COUNCIL'S ORDER IS 'MOVE ON'

Keep out this riff-raff

Petition against traveller sites

End the menacing trips of these lawless leeches

Go away, please!




Vision for the Future of Education

Respect for our way of life
Freedom for our education
Recognition that our way of life is an education
Understanding that people are all different and we don't all fit in the same box

"Its like everybody has got to be the same at school. You can't make everybody fit into the same mould. Sometimes you do have to do things differently to meet people's needs.
Do We have the Right to Choose?"

"I think that Travellers would like to see people respect us more for who we are, more schools to learn more about Travellers and that we don't do that to be different - that's our way of life..."

THE BEST DAYS OF YOUR LIFE?



3: The Expert Groups responses

Although some of the young people had been in trouble for truanting as a result of bullying, they did not think that staying at home or learning from home was the answer to the problem of bullying. They felt strongly that school was a better place to learn, that they had more access there to a good education, to resources and facilities and specialist teachers. They also thought school was important for young people socially and that, by being forced out of school by bullying, they were being denied the quality of education and social experience that other young people enjoyed:

I think you'd learn more at school than at home because you're going to all different classes, and you can't really bring all different teachers to your house to teach you different subjects.

You couldn't do the experiments in your house. (Woodfarm High School)

There were fairly mixed views about how to handle bullying. Whilst some felt that teachers did not do enough, many felt that involving teachers only exacerbated the problem. In some cases well-intentioned teachers and parents dealt with bullying insensitively or ineffectively and, in many cases, exposed the vulnerable young person to even more vicious attacks. Some teachers were said to not take the young people's reports of bullying seriously, as described by one young woman:

Sometimes I would fight back ... After a while you do get fed up of telling the teacher when they don't do anything ... So I started getting into a lot of fights at school and then I'd be the one that got the blame for starting the fight when there was, like, me and five other people! When I did tell the teacher it was like 'we're not interested in petty school girl squabbles'... (Gypsy/Travellers)

Young people spoke of particular places and times when bullying happened, such as outside the school gates on the way home, to breaks and lunchtime. Some spoke of being bullied because of special educational needs and two young people from different groups talked about bullying in relation to clothes and having 'the right stuff'. One young person advocated a mandatory school uniform as a solution.

Most agreed that young people needed to be listened to when the young people wanted to talk about what was happening to them. Support had to be easily accessible, with the feeling that there was an 'open door'.

Prejudice, labelling and diversity

One of the young Gypsy/Travellers had experienced bullying throughout her school career until she finally left school after S1 to be home educated. She described the bullying as racist and felt strongly that prejudice against Gypsy/Travellers has in effect excluded many from the formal education system. She did not feel that the teachers had been in any way helpful in addressing the bullying and in some instances had been as guilty of prejudice as the pupils:

A lot of Travellers get taken out of school for bullying ... Some of the teachers didn't bother a lot of the time ... actually a lot of the time I think the teachers were quite biased – y'know you were seen as wee 'tinky' kid ... They didn't really care that much about it ... (Gypsy/Travellers)

One young Gypsy/Traveller described how at one school she was able to stop bullying by educating others:

When I went to school first of all they would all go 'Gypsy! Go back to where you belong ...' Then I just told them 'You live in houses, I live in a caravan. I'm proud of what I do. It's my way of life, I can't do anything about it.' When I told them that - they never really accepted it – but they didn't call me 'Gypsy' or anything...

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I think a lot of the bullying comes from the fact that they don't understand – or sometimes they even envy you a bit because of what you do. If they knew more about it they would accept it more. Some schools they don't want to talk to you and to really know what a Gypsy is. At my school they wanted to know what it was like. And they thought I was lucky being a Traveller.

The young Gypsy/Traveller women both felt very strongly that Gypsy/Travellers are not respected as a minority group in Scotland. Whilst there is growing awareness of racism and discrimination experienced by black and Asian minority groups, they feel that awareness levels are low of the discrimination Gypsy/Travellers experience. Whilst racism towards those from black and Asian backgrounds was widely condemned in their schools, a 'blind eye' was turned on racism towards Gypsy/Travellers. This sense of injustice has contributed to their marginalisation from schools and education.

The young Gypsy/Travellers agreed that their key message for the government was that schools should do more to promote respect for, and appreciation of, different cultures and different ways of life. All children at school should be helped to develop self-esteem and an understanding of human rights.

From their different perspectives, young people from several groups spoke of the detrimental effects of being unfairly labelled or stereotyped.

For example, young people from Who Cares? Scotland were very aware of the prejudice that many young people who had different living arrangements faced at school:

I think that teachers and lecturers should be sent on awareness courses as not every pupil comes from typical stereotype of 2.4 children. You are going to have the ones that are staying with gran, staying with Nan, foster care, residential care. They have this preconception of you, mum and dad, the dog, the nice car, the fence and that and it's not that ... (Who Cares? Scotland)

Another young person spoke about pupils with special educational needs being singled out:

Teachers treat children who are special cases different. (Learning for the Future)

Young people from Fairbridge and Right Track talked about feeling judged by teachers at school. Some felt that they were labelled as coming from a certain family and expected to cause trouble as older siblings or cousins had. Others felt they were labelled as trouble-makers because of their past record. They felt that their reputation for bad behaviour constantly prejudiced their relationships with staff, leading to low expectations and hasty assumptions in turn making it difficult for them to break out of a cycle of conflict, punishment and resentment.

Participation at school

Many of the young people had not had a successful experience of school and some clearly felt marginalised and disenfranchised. Most - but not all - of the young people across the groups had little experience of active participation in their education, other than when they had actively decided to leave or not attend.

Smaller class sizes and individual support facilitated some young people's involvement but not others. One young person who had attended a residential school with small classes felt that the teachers were able to listen and to allow pupils more options because they had the time and space to do that. In contrast, young people from Graysmill School felt strongly that, in spite of the small classes and individual support, the choices about subjects and the structure of the school day were extremely limited. Whilst teachers were often keen to listen to their views and to make changes where

3: The Expert Groups responses

possible, the young people recognised that their school is constrained by a number of factors such as staff resources and transport arrangements.

At a school level, young people expressed different views on pupil participation. One young person from Fairbridge looked back on his school experience and felt he had had a lot of say. He had been fairly successful at school, had had no problems and as part of a large group of friends, felt quite powerful.

...if there was anything to be changed they would sometimes ask the pupils what they felt. Our entire school complained about the uniform when we had to wear a shirt and tie and trousers and we really were not happy. The teachers reviewed it and we all looked at it and decided to wear trousers and a school t-shirt. One of the pupils designed a badge to go on the t-shirt that we weren't too keen on but it was better than the shirt and tie. That's what happened and we were happy with it. It was excellent. They did listen to the views of pupils. (Fairbridge)

But even with a very active school council in place, young people from Woodfarm were not confident that their views would be listened to by pupil representatives.

...they might think some things are daft and they won't want to say them. You think they might reject your ideas.

So you don't think they're listening to your ideas?

Some of them do, some don't. Really just ones that they want as well, if they don't want what you suggest then they won't listen to them.

B. What should you learn?

Young people thought pupils needed to learn more than academic subjects at school. Their views can be summarised into three main points on what schools should do:

1. Teach 'skills for life', on how to live independently and skills for their future jobs;
2. Provide a wider range of subject choice and a broader range of activities; and
3. Build pupils' self-esteem.

Skills for life

Many young people thought more life skills should be taught at school. This view is succinctly expressed by two young people from Learning for the Future, who stated:

I don't think they teach you things you need for life.

You need to learn for everyday life.

Young people from Who Cares? Scotland and Learning for the Future detailed what should be provided. Both groups emphasised the need for work experience: **"You cannae get enough of it"** (Learning for the Future) and skills that would help them gain and maintain future employment. Young people from both groups recommended increased attention to practical skills, with such suggestions as cooking, learning to drive, learning how to deal with money and bills, and first aid. One young person who left care at the age of 16 said:

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Computing, maths and English I used, but not science. My time could have been better spent doing true-to-life things: home economics or even stuff about how to Hoover! I didn't know about budgets. Why do they not teach you about bills, all these different things they could teach you ... (Who Cares? Scotland)

Young people from Learning for the Future further recommended the teaching of social and interpersonal skills, such as making friends, resolving conflicts, 'how to stick up for yourself'. They should have more information on people who could help them, such as social workers. They should learn how to engage in leisure activities, with such skills as learning to play particular games and how to sing.

The two young women from Gypsy/Traveller backgrounds felt that the education gained from their lifestyle was undervalued by the present educational system.

Wider range of subject choice and a broader range of activities

Young people agreed that a wider range of subject choice should be available.

Consistent with the wish for choice, young people had diverse views on what subjects should be taught. Several young people recommended a reduction in the number of compulsory subjects (eg to English and maths).

Based on differing rationales and experiences, a strong, common message from the groups was that schools should value and support a broader range of activities than subject teaching. This included more time for the young people to relax and socialise, more opportunities for them to engage in physical activities such as sports and games, and to enjoy and experience music and drama.

Young people from Graysmill School and Learning for the Future emphasised the importance of school as a place where adults and young people can learn to get along and peer friendships can be made. Time without adult supervision was needed and they would like to have their own space where they can relax and socialise. Indeed, young people from Graysmill School were clear on the main message that they wished to give the Government:

We want more time and more space for the students to come together and just talk.

A place to chill out with each other.

Time to be with our friends.

Staff are always around. I would like an hour without staff over the top of us.

Learning for the Future were keen to spend more time at school involved in organised social activities, such as clubs and sports, allowing young people to spend more time together, but without teachers telling them what to do.

The young people from Graysmill School described their particular experiences, with a significant proportion of their breaks spent waiting for care needs to be met (queuing for the use of the hoist etc) and consequently opportunities were regularly cut short to socialise and 'chill out'. Many of the young people at their school lived far apart, transport was a big constraint and they had very few opportunities to meet up with their friends or take part in social activities when they were at home. At school they were supervised 'every minute of the day' and so they felt denied the chance to experience independence, risk taking and the kind of social interaction that most secondary aged pupils took for granted.

Young people from Right Track described how the focus on academic subjects created boredom and

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frustration - and ultimately led some of the young people to get into trouble. As one young person described, this can happen in the classroom:

There's nothing to look forward to at school ... That's what bugs you - you do the work, then you get bored with the work, and then when you get bored with the work you want to find something better to do ... So then you talk to your pals and that's when the teacher tells you to shut up and that's when you start getting annoyed with the teacher ... It's the work that bores you into doing other things ... things to amuse yourself. (Right Track)

And the young person went on to describe how Right Track Education Initiative provided a different approach, with varied activities and rewards:

Here [Right Track] if you don't do the work for two days you won't be going out, so we do the work and then we get to go out and more of the week we do good stuff than work ... We're obviously going to do our work if we know for a fact we are going to get something in return - if we are going to get to go out somewhere. You don't even have to do well, you just have to do it. Just finish what you have been told to do.

He also described the restrictions in his school environment as he experienced them:

You couldn't do anything - you can't play football because you'll break windows. Then you're playing a game and they say 'you're not allowed to gamble' ... They just wreck your life. All you're meant to do is stand about and talk. You run about and they class it as carrying on, they say 'that's dangerous - someone could fall and hurt themselves'. And if you stand about in a big crowd they come round to check - they think there's a fight going on, you end up getting accused of stuff.

The other young people from Right Track had ideas for a different approach:

I'd build a bowling centre next to the school so you have something to do at lunch times.

A grass football pitch because you can fall and hurt yourself.

There should be more things like 'youth academies' for football.

Building self-esteem

Young people gave examples across the groups of both positive and negative school experiences, which related to how they were treated by both other young people and teachers. Young people from three groups made particular comments on the need for a supportive environment, to help build self-esteem. One young person suggested that schools could learn from projects such as Fairbridge:

Treat the individuals with consideration. If they're lacking in self-esteem, help them build it up. There is plenty folk who are bubbly and seem to have an awful lot of self-confidence but they don't and people need to pick up on that and learn how to deal with it and help them. (Fairbridge)

Two young people spoke of the value of support groups at Woodfarm:

...you learn a lot from these sort of groups and if you are shy then you can talk in the small groups. Classes are far too big ... If you are in small groups and you like who's in your group then you'll get a better education because you all like each other and they don't make fun of what you're saying and bring you down.

The group is very important. It helps ... build confidence. Schools should have groups like this for when things go wrong and you need to talk to someone ...

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C. How should you learn?

Learning should be fun

Many of the groups discussed the need for learning to be fun.

Young people who had had problems with behaviour or attendance and those who had been excluded clearly expressed the view that school had simply not really engaged them. They had felt bored and fed up in the classroom. Various reasons were given: teaching techniques or styles that failed to excite them, subjects that they found difficult to remain interested in for a whole lesson, the lack of variety in the lesson or in the school day as a whole. One group made a comparison:

School should be more fun - because it is boring at the moment. Just sitting in the class listening to the teachers going on and on - sometimes you can spend a whole hour and just listen to the teachers talking.

What's a good lesson?

- A mixture of getting told what to do but having fun at the same time, not just sitting down and writing with someone yapping on in your ear.
- When a teacher explains and that and gives you the information and they let you find the answer for yourselves. (Woodfarm High School)

Many comments also related to young people being treated with respect by teachers, which are discussed on page 22, **The pivotal role of teachers.**

Flexibility

Certain young people felt strongly that the education system was insufficiently flexible. This young woman eloquently described the criticism expressed by other young people:

It's like everybody has got to be the same at school. I've always been brought up to believe that when you are at school you are developing into the kind of person you are going to be and you can't make everybody fit into the same mould. You can't make everybody go to school and everybody get the same jobs because people aren't like that. Traveller people have always wanted to travel, even if they want jobs they still want to travel because that is the way they have been brought up and that is part of their life, and sometimes you do have to do things differently to meet people's needs. And I think that schools, teachers and social workers they shouldn't try to make everybody fit into school, or fit into the same thing or all be the same. (Gypsy/Traveller)

Young people from a number of groups expressed a need for a particular form of flexibility: for learning to proceed at 'your own pace'. For example:

- ◆ One young person who talked about learning difficulties found it hard to fit his work into the uniform time period and recommended: **"I think instead of having to do so much in a day. You should get to stay on longer. You should have to do less in a period and stay on longer."** (Right Track)
- ◆ A young person from Woodfarm thought exams should be taken when the individual felt ready.
- ◆ A young person from Who Cares? Scotland suggested that schools should allow pupils to pursue

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a variety of courses in fifth and sixth year, giving them more time at school and more time to prepare.

These suggestions demonstrate links between inflexibility and the failure to gain necessary qualifications at school.

Class management and behaviour policies

For some of the young people, their behaviour had been a significant factor in the failure of their school experience.

Some of the young people took responsibility for their behaviour, saying they had often caused problems for themselves and for teachers. At the same time, young people also thought that some teachers could have handled behaviour issues more effectively but instead often exacerbated the situation. Many of the young people described minor incidents escalating into explosive situations where the young person, without the personal skills or the power to handle the situation, ultimately came off worse.

Young people described how some teachers were able to handle them better and avoid explosive situations. Examples of such teachers were given by three young people:

A good teacher is just someone who knows how to calm you down if you get angry. (Right Track)

When I was at [school] I had a history teacher who was fun, he was brilliant, had a sense of humour, but when people were carrying on he was firm as a rock. He never took any nonsense from anyone. He did have a great sense of humour but if there was people mucking about trying to cause trouble he was strict as anything. (Fairbridge)

The teachers that didn't get treated badly - how did they avoid that?

They wouldn't let a situation start up, they would nip it in the bud before it got out of hand. My maths teacher ... he was great in a sense because he would not take any nonsense from anybody. Any person who showed any sign of that got taken aside and told what was what and was sorted out. (Fairbridge)

The young people found it difficult to identify punishments that they felt were effective or fair. Punishment exercises were generally regarded as 'a waste of everybody's time' unless pupils were given constructive work to do. One young person commented on the irony of temporary exclusions being used as a punishment, when young people themselves did not want to be in school. Punishments were frequently described as impossible to fulfil, unjust, or out of proportion, as exemplified by these quotations:

I was getting sent down to the discipline room and was getting punishment exercises and I already had homework. I was saying if I've got homework, I can't do punishment exercises and they said don't come back and suspended us, suspended us for 24 days and then told us to come back for a meeting and expelled us. (Who Cares? Scotland)

Why did you threaten the teacher?

They wouldn't let me do what I wanted to. I was trying to work but she kept saying 'No that's wrong'. Everything I did was wrong. I felt angry because I was wasting a period, I sat and did what she told me but then she told me it was wrong. (Anonymous)

I think in certain circumstances, being expelled or suspended is a good thing. As long as they are getting work sent to them. Only in extreme circumstances, like drugs, or being involved in a seriously violent attack on someone. But not for the silly things that folk are getting chucked out for now. Folk are just being a pain in the arse in the class and they are getting suspended right, left and centre. (Fairbridge)

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The punishments are too big in school. If you're having a wee stupid push in the playground you get suspended for a week plus you get your lines ... It's just a stupid big punishment for a stupid wee thing that could have been sorted out if you just took the two of them out of the room and made them shake hands. (Right Track)

The young people's sum of experiences suggests that combining a reward system for good behaviour, smaller classes and a teacher with strong interpersonal skills are effective in preventing behaviour difficulties. One young person describes the good discipline system he experienced:

Everyone started on an even keel. You could go up the ladder as well as down. You had a verbal warning, two written warnings, referral, punishment exercise then you get a second referral, and a detention. On the other side you got praise slips, merit awards, you know. It encouraged people more as at the end of the day everything you do is for your CV. It encouraged people more to try and keep themselves right and go for the merit awards as it's extra certificates as well as your grades. (Who Cares? Scotland)

D. Who can help you learn?

The pivotal role of teachers

Young people from all the groups were very clear about how influential, helpful and supportive the good teachers in their lives had been. They were very appreciative of the supportive relationships they had with the workers or teachers involved with their groups or projects. At the same time, many young people were very negative and bitter about their experience of other teachers. They felt that too many teachers had not really been interested in them as individuals or been able to give them the support they needed to succeed at school. This was particularly pertinent for those who had had behaviour issues at school, those who had been excluded and those who had suffered persistent bullying. Many of the comments about good teachers are captured in these quotes:

There was only one teacher who was good ... He didn't talk to you like a daftie and you got a carry on with him and all ... He cared about you ... (Right Track)

... he had ultimate respect for everyone... he always had time for you. Because you could get a laugh with him ... If you had a problem he would stay with you after school ... His door was always open at lunchtime, you could go into his room and just sit and have a laugh and have your lunch with him ... (Who Cares? Scotland)

[A good teacher is] one that you can talk to and will listen, instead of saying 'Go away, I'm busy just now' ... They should be able to give you their attention when you want it or when you need it. (Woodfarm)

Some of the young people who had had a poor behaviour record at school described their sense of injustice and their confusion about the way they had been treated or the way that they had seen teachers behave.

Teachers should behave the way that they want the children to behave.

I hate when teachers shout at you and when you shout back they say 'don't shout at me'. That annoys me. (Right Track)

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If they are allowed to handle us then we should be allowed to handle them... Y'see these clipboards. She [teacher] had one of them and she was like 'take your work' and I was like 'no, I'm doing work' and she was like 'fine' and slammed it on my fingers ... (Right Track)

The importance of support and guidance

The young women from Gypsy/Traveller backgrounds spoke of the advantage of on-site provision and the disparate levels of support they had received over time and place. One of the young women remembered when a teacher had been provided at one of the sites she had stayed at. She felt that it was very helpful for children who had just got back from travelling. Unfortunately this provision had been discontinued. They could also remember a school bus with teachers going around the sites but local authorities have withdrawn this service across Scotland. They felt that this kind of support was very useful both in supporting the children and in supporting parents who wish to home educate.

Both young women had lived and attended school in different local authorities around Scotland and they agreed that there is wide disparity in the attitude towards Gypsy/Travellers. Some local authorities had been supportive and helpful and others they felt had created obstacles persistently, making education very difficult to access whilst maintaining their way of life.

Certain young people described good relationships with individual teachers to whom they would turn if they had difficulties. However, there were very few examples given of good relationships with allocated guidance teachers. Some felt that guidance teachers were just not accessible enough. One description was given by a young woman from Woodfarm High School:

He listens to you sometimes but then he's like 'I've got a class to teach'. We went up to him and he was like 'No, I've not got time. Come back when you think I've got time.' He turns away when it's really important and you feel like you've got no one to talk to.

Others felt that the guidance teacher they had been allocated was not someone they necessarily wanted to talk to or confide in. This might be because of a personality clash or because they quite simply did not know the person well and therefore felt uncomfortable about talking about personal issues with them. Sometimes they would find other staff members who they felt fulfilled this role better - or they would find no one.

While not all young people agreed, a solution offered was to stop the separate guidance system, as explained by a young man from Fairbridge:

I think the whole guidance teacher thing shouldn't be in place, I feel the teachers that do your subjects should deal with the one-to-one things. It comes back again to classes being smaller so that they can spot the individual problems ... so they can realise more of a problem within the work. The teachers see it first hand, the guidance teachers are just asking how you are. A lot of people don't feel like talking about their problems.

The group of young women from Woodfarm were split in their views about their guidance teachers. All those with a male guidance teacher found the relationship unhelpful, whilst those with a female found the relationship relatively good though not accessible enough. One young woman expressed her concerns:

I think it should be a male for a male and a female for a female, because sometimes they bully you about your body and a female isn't going to talk to a male teacher about her body ... if a girl has personal things or things that happen at home then they can ask them to listen because they are women and they have the same stuff as you have.

The consensus was that all young people should have a choice as to the sex of their guidance teacher.

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Parents' involvement

Little was said about parental involvement even when asked directly. Whilst many said that they learned things at home, they still saw school and education as being something quite separate from their family.

The group from Woodfarm High School spoke about parent involvement briefly. They thought that parents presently did not know what was going on for their child at school. A school homework diary was insufficient, as one young person explained:

The school (homework) diary is supposed to have a relationship with your parents so that they can see what homework you've got to do! You've to let them sign it to see how much homework you've got. What's the use of that – it can't talk! ... but how can that be a relationship if my parents don't look at it? You'll get very little parents that do look at it.

Some of the group thought that guidance teachers could ring up home from time to time, giving the parents an opportunity to get to know the guidance teacher and to discuss or pass on any concerns. This is supported by the criticism one young person about the lack of school-parent contact:

I was off for a year and nobody told my mum. When I was not going to school I was off for four months solid. After about three months, someone got in contact with my dad. They should be in contact within a few days, a week. (Fairbridge)

E. When should you learn?

The groups did not extensively discuss the timing of education but particular groups did comment on certain aspects.

School leaving age

Although most of the young people at Right Track had been excluded from school and some had had very negative experiences, the group as a whole felt very strongly that young people should not be allowed to leave school at 15 or 16. Rather than taking people out of school who failed to benefit from the experience, they thought that schools should adapt or change the experience so that the young people did benefit (for example through extended work experience schemes).

School holidays

No group raised this as a concern without being directly asked. Views were mixed on the length of the summer holiday. Some felt the long break was invaluable and should be even longer to let them forget about school altogether. Others did feel that it was a long stretch to fill and that they might enjoy having shorter holidays more often.

A few people commented on the point made in the National Debate video about holidays not reflecting religious diversity. They thought this should be changed.

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"I would go to school if there were more activities during your breaks. At breaks we should get to go and have a game of pool or something."

"Teachers should behave the way that they want the children to behave. I hate when teachers shout at you and when you shout back they say 'don't shout at me'. That annoys me."

RIGHT TRACK EDUCATION INITIATIVE

"Teachers should listen to pupils' opinion. Like when they say someone has done something wrong and the person's not done it. Listen to what they have to say - hear them out instead of saying 'you done it - get out of the class'."

**THE BEST DAYS
OF YOUR LIFE?**

66
DEBATE

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Reaching young people

School days

The young people from Right Track thought that school started and finished too early. They suggested that they would have been much happier coming in later and spending longer at school. One young person explained why: "Some of us don't go to school because we're too tired to get up. If I could go in at one I'd stay until about 6."

Young people from Graysmill School, Right Track and Woodfarm were all concerned that school breaks were too short and classes frequently too long. Young people from Graysmill School thought double lessons were typically too long except when they were discussion-based. Young people from Right Track recommended that classes be only 30 minutes. The need for longer breaks to combine health and care needs with social opportunities has been described above on page 16. Young people from Woodfarm found themselves locked out after break time, as two pupils described:

I would make the break longer - by the time you go to the toilet, the bell goes, and you have to rush so you're not late for your class.

I think the pupils should be given a card to get through the security doors, we only have three or four minutes to get through, if a teacher keeps you back you can't get through. You have to stand and bang on the door until a teacher comes. Then you get in trouble for being late to your class.

F. Where should you learn?

Class sizes

Groups used to larger class sizes strongly agreed that class sizes were generally far too big and contributed significantly to poor relationships with teachers, poor classroom management and the lack of support that they felt they received at school. This view is exemplified by the comments below:

I left school about six months ago. I think it was 'cos of the classes 'cos if there are big classes and you're trying to get help with your work the teacher can't get round everybody. There's hundreds of workers [at Right Track] - well, a good few anyway. About three in the room when you're doing work.

...everyone shouting and you're sitting waiting to be helped and by the time you get helped that's the class finished. (Who Cares? Scotland)

In contrast, a young person spoke of the benefits of smaller classes at his residential school:

At my boarding school, the classes were smaller and the teachers were more involved in things. You had the occasional twat in your class and the teacher would deal with it. That person was usually removed from the class, spoken to and brought in. The staff dealt with situations well and there was very rarely any disruption. (Fairbridge)

Young people whose class sizes were smaller (typically seven to nine young people, with low teacher to pupil ratios) generally seemed more satisfied. However, some young people did feel that it would be nice to have a bigger class so that they could get to know and spend time with different people. One solution was to increase the size of the class to around 10-14 pupils but to double the number of teaching staff (ie maintain the same teacher to pupil ratios).

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School settings: special, 'mainstream', residential and home education

Taken as a complete group, young people had experience of numerous school-learning settings and many groups had strong and differing views on their desirability.

On one hand, young people commented on the advantages of special and/or residential schools. These schools could often provide the necessary support or assistance that the young people needed, in contrast to mainstream schools. As one young person from Graysmill School described:

That's why this school is better because all the staff you need are in the building and they're all used to our needs.

One young person spoke positively of his experience at residential school, with smaller class sizes and good relationships between pupils and teachers, concluding:

I was there Monday – Friday and got home at the weekends. At times it was annoying because it restricted your social life but it was worth it ... I think I benefited a lot from that experience ... fair enough, I wasn't too keen on the idea of going to boarding school, but at the end of the day I look back and I think I benefited a lot. I got a lot out of school. (Fairbridge)

Mainstream schools had not served some young people well. Five of the young people from Fairbridge had special educational needs and felt that mainstream schools dealt with their needs very poorly. Resources and materials needed for those learning with a hearing or visual impairment were not provided by the school. More significantly they felt that teachers kept forgetting and disregarding their special needs and the young people received no extra help. One young person described his experience:

Although I had explained to the teachers - 'I'm deaf, I can't hear what you're saying' - half the time they kept forgetting. If I'm sitting in the middle of the classroom and the teacher is at the other end with their back to me, I'm like 'eh?'. [The history teacher] was very good at turning his back on folk – I used to have to say do you mind facing me when you are talking to me. It's embarrassing. (Fairbridge)

Some of the young people were bullied because of their impairment.

On the other hand, young people at both special and residential schools spoke of the disadvantages of restricted educational opportunities. One young person was frustrated by the unchallenging education at a residential school and commented on the prejudice faced as a result of going to the school:

I wanted to be a mechanic. I went to college, but because I have been to a residential school the person in charge ... said 'where did you get your qualifications?' It was at xxx Residential, and he said, 'I don't know if I can take you here if you have been to a residential school'. Knocking me back from college because I had been in a residential school, saying he didn't know if he could trust me in case I bring any disturbance to his college. He sent us a letter saying sorry I can't be accepted ... (Who Cares? Scotland)

Restricted educational opportunities much concerned the young people from Graysmill School. Due to the small size of the school, they had had no choice in the subjects they did until some older pupils complained and they were given a limited choice. When asked how this lack of choice made them feel, they said they were angry, they thought it was unfair and agreed that not having a choice made them feel excluded. One of the young people was having difficulty doing a Higher grade she wanted to do because there were not enough people in the class to make it viable. The school were looking into accessing the course through another school. An argument made for mainstream schools was the potential for increased educational opportunities in a large school.

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One young person commented on the importance of having a school nearby, which might be special or mainstream:

Whatever school you choose it shouldn't matter where it is as long as it provides your needs but it is better if it is near. (Learning for the Future)

This view was reflected by other young people from Graysmill and Learning for the Future. If young people travelled significant distances to get to school they rarely had opportunities to meet school friends outwith school and their chances to develop a more local circle of friends were limited. Being reliant on local authority transport also curtailed opportunities for extra-curricular activities and participation in special one-off events.

Two groups discussed their experiences of home education: those from Gypsy/Traveller backgrounds and those from Woodfarm. For these young people, home education seemed to have been a 'negative' choice: that is, because schools were not meeting their needs.

Parents could not necessarily provide the support needed. For example, one young woman from a Gypsy/Traveller background described how her parents were unfamiliar with exam courses. Her parents were unable to access support or guidance from education authorities. The authorities assumed that parents were not equipped to help their own children, just because the parents themselves had not been through the exam system. This was unhelpful and alienating for Gypsy/Traveller families. The young people again thought this demonstrated little acknowledgement of the learning that can be gained from different and diverse backgrounds and experiences.

When learning at home, the young women from Gypsy/Traveller backgrounds struggled from lack of access to books, materials and technology. They suggested that educational resources could be more widely accessible within communities either through schools or community centres. They also suggested that greater access to computers and the internet would be very helpful particularly whilst travelling, either at sites or within communities.

Young people from Woodfarm High School, who had suffered persistent bullying and who had ended up missing a lot of school, thought that more materials for home learning, using IT or TV, would be useful. They, however, implied that they had got into patterns of non-attendance and falling behind with work. They then found it very difficult to settle back into school. Above all, they felt they needed to be in touch with a teacher who could ensure they were keeping up and to whom they could go if they had any problems with work. They only saw this as a short term solution and felt strongly that home education was not the answer. They thought school provided the best opportunities and bullies should not prevent people from attending school. This was succinctly expressed by one young person: **"They are expecting you to go to school and learn but people in school are actually bullying you and stopping you from getting an education."** (Woodfarm High School)

Key findings

- ◆ **Most young people felt that school offered the best opportunity to get the qualifications needed.** Many felt that they had missed their opportunity to gain the education they needed and, even though still under age 20, felt that it was too late. Young people outwith projects and schools did not know how to find out about career options and routes.
- ◆ **All groups except one spoke of bullying.** For those who had been or were being bullied at school, the experiences had clearly had an effect on their education performance - and in some cases on their future prospects - as well as undermining their confidence, self-esteem and mental health. Some teachers were said to not take the young people's reports of bullying seriously.
- ◆ **From their different perspectives, young people from several groups spoke of the detrimental effects of being unfairly labelled or stereotyped.** Whilst racism towards those from black and Asian backgrounds was widely condemned in their schools, a 'blind eye' was turned on racism towards Gypsy/Travellers.
- ◆ **Most - but not all - of the young people across the groups had little experience of active participation in their education,** other than when they had actively decided to leave or not attend.
- ◆ Many young people thought more **life skills** should be taught at school. Young people agreed that a **wider range of subject choice** should be available.
- ◆ **School had simply not really engaged many young people who had had problems with behaviour or attendance.** Certain young people felt strongly that the education system was insufficiently flexible.
- ◆ **For some of the young people, their behaviour had been a significant factor in the failure of their school experience.** Some teachers could have handled behaviour issues more effectively but instead made it worse. The young people found it difficult to identify punishments that they felt were effective or fair.
- ◆ **Young people described how influential, helpful and supportive the good teachers in their lives had been.** There were very few examples given of good relationships with allocated guidance teachers. The consensus was that all young people should have a choice as to the sex of their guidance teacher.
- ◆ Whilst many said that they learned things at home, **young people still saw school and education as being something quite separate from their family.**
- ◆ **Big class sizes contributed** significantly to poor relationships with teachers, poor classroom management and lack of support for young people.
- ◆ **If mainstream schooling could support their needs, a number of young people would prefer to go.**

4: The Expert Debate response

CHAPTER FOUR: Stage 3 – The Expert Debate response

The day combined drama and art as well as discussion, with the full programme included in Appendix 3. The day had three stages:

1. **Acting up** which brought together the groups' ideas, to debate and discuss similarities and differences;
2. **Question Time** with key adult decision-makers, where the young people could ask these decision-makers their views on the young people's key concerns;
3. **Picture it** which asked the young people to finalise their key messages to the Scottish Executive.

1. Acting up

Through role play and physical movement, young people first identified their stereotypes of what a classroom currently looked like and then identified their 'ideal classroom'.

What was a typical classroom currently? Three examples

○ = chair

1. ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Teacher

2. ○ ○ ○ ○
○ ○ ○ ○

This version was described by one young person as 'very high school'. In primary school, students sit around big round tables. The facilitator asked why this changed in secondary school? The young people agreed that the change was to stop young people from talking.

3. ○ ○ ○ ○
○ ○ ○ ○

○

Teacher

Reaching young people

What was the ideal classroom? Two variations

1. Teacher
- | | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

The group agreed that the set up would change depending on the subject being taught: for example, art might be taught as a single group. The facilitator asked the young people why there were two groups. The young people agreed that this was to prevent cheating, so that one young person could not see anyone else's work and that there were 'not so many distractions'. The view was voiced that two groups of four pupils would further help young people to concentrate.

2. Teacher
- | | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | X | <input type="radio"/> |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Floating teacher | <input type="radio"/> |

The group agreed that a ratio of eight pupils to one teacher was desirable. One teacher could walk about, a 'floating' or mobile teacher, who could collect work and help pupils. The other teacher would sit behind a desk, able to mark work.



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Other contents of the 'ideal classroom':

- ◆ a water cooler would be present, to help concentration;
- ◆ at every chair would be a play station/computer;
- ◆ a nice homework book for all pupils;
- ◆ pupils would be able to concentrate on a small amount of work;
- ◆ school would end at 1 pm;
- ◆ there would be more sports and activities, more breaktime;
- ◆ there would be alternative activities, such as aromatherapy, to help pupils relax;
- ◆ a good library, with magazines, snooker, story tapes;
- ◆ a common room for everyone to sit in. It would need to be the right kind of space for young people to want to use it.

The facilitator asked young people what they would prioritise, in the reality of resource limits. A list was agreed (but with no prioritisation within that list):

- ◆ **Teachers should be more friendly and patient.** They should understand people, use language everyone can understand and not brand children with labels. Such attitudes should be looked for in selecting teachers and should be part of teacher training.
- ◆ Class sizes were presently too big at 30. **Classes should be 15-20 pupils**, broken up into small groups of four-to-five pupils.
- ◆ **Classes should have more than one teacher, with one teacher** (or other adult) mobile or floating, to help pupils. (a ratio of 8 pupils: 1 adult)
- ◆ **The school environment should be improved.** Some rooms currently in use should not be, with roofs falling in. Some classrooms needed to be bigger, with some current Porte-cabins small and claustrophobic.
- ◆ **Pupils should not have to spend so much time at their desks** but should have: more games, from board games to football; more after-school opportunities; more physical education and physical movement, with more choice; more physiotherapy; more swimming.
- ◆ **A common room for pupils to relax.**
- ◆ **Classes grouped to how people learn.** When pupils are not grouped by how they learn, those that learn more quickly can be distracted. People misbehave when they are not getting attention.



panel members listen intently at the Question Time session at School Daze

2. Question Time

Each group was asked to prepare two questions or statements, which were asked by young people to the panel. Some questions or statements were grouped together.

1. What was it about your education that helped you get into your important position?
2. In our school there is not enough time for our care needs to be seen to in the breaks provided. This means that social time (like snack time or lunch time) is often used instead. We think that time to hang out with each other is really important and want to know whether you agree and, if so, what can be done to keep our break time 'safe'?
3. How can we help bullies and people who are getting bullied?
4. Why are classes so big?

It has been said through the media that class sizes are to be reduced to 20. Is this achievable and when?
5. Why are teachers unfriendly?

Teachers should behave the way they want their pupils to respond, with respect.
6. There should be free school meals for everyone in Scotland.
7. How can we get male guidance teachers for males and female guidance teachers for females?
8. Young people with special needs often feel that they don't get equal treatment, they don't get listened to. Often this means that they have to go to special schools a long way from home and lose friends or the chance to play games. What can be done to train teachers and schools to include all young people?

What progress has been made in involving young people through teacher training?

4: The Expert Debate response

The panel consisted of:

Cathy Jamieson	Minister for Education and Young People
Rosie Kane	Voluntary Worker with Young People
Pamela Munn	Professor of Curriculum Research, Faculty of Education, University of Edinburgh
Cathy Peattie	MSP, Deputy Convenor of Education, Culture and Sports Committee

The discussion following these questions is paraphrased and summarised below.

1. Question: What was it about your education that helped you get into your important position?

Panel: Two panel members answered positively, about their educational experiences, while two answered negatively. Positive comments included: 'being treated as a person even when I didn't get things right', 'school encouraged me to stick with school', doing exams but also arts and sports, learning but also voluntary work. Negative comments included: being bullied at school and not completing qualifications but building confidence away from school; not being allowed to participate in the choir because of not having a school uniform; leaving school at 15 and having the chance for education and training afterwards.

2. Question: In our school there is not enough time for our care needs to be seen to in the breaks provided. This means that social time (like snack time or lunch time) is often used instead. We think that time to hang out with each other is really important and want to know whether you agree and, if so, what can be done to keep our break time 'safe'?

Panel: The 'whole school' experience was important. Pupils needed to be participate in all of school life and not just the classroom. One panel member noted that this was also a question for staff and staff having a manageable workload. The Minister offered to go away and look into any concerns in regards to this particular school.

3. Question: How can we help bullies and people who are getting bullied?

Panel: One panel member described the need for a whole school approach, with people encouraged to speak out about bullying. There were good examples of peer supporters and buddying. Teachers needed to be educated about bullying but parents and pupils also needed to be involved.

A young person asked about schools who did not want to be public about having bullying. The panel member answered that there needed to be a clear message that school could not do this and that young people and parents would not put up with that approach.

Someone from the floor noted the stigma that bullies could feel. The panel member said that it was important 'not to bully the bullies' and to recognise that sometimes bullying was deliberate but at other times bullies could be unaware.

4. Question: Why are classes so big?

Question: It has been said through the media that class sizes are to be reduced to 20. Is this achievable and when?

Reaching young people

Panel: The panel agreed between them that different class sizes were needed for different age groups and locations. Space may not be available to split into groups. New schools being built needed to allow for more small groups of young people to work with teachers or with other people. Pre-school may need smaller groups. More than one adult could be in the classroom.

The panel were told of the previous discussion where young people has suggested a ratio of 8 pupils: 1 adult, with two adults in the classroom.

A teacher in the audience said that young people want a teacher to know them. It was difficult for teachers to know 30 people individually while it was much easier to know one-12 people in the class. She was concerned that there should be an upper ceiling on class numbers.

Comments were made from the floor of the smaller classes in residential schools (sizes of six), where young people had done well. Individual learning programmes were needed, to adapt the five-14 curriculum.

One panel member noted how children learn in different ways. Another panel member commented on the 8:1 ratio at Eton and thought that all children - and teachers - should have such a ratio.

5. **Question: Why are teachers unfriendly?**

Statement: Teachers should behave the way they want their pupils to respond, with respect.

The audience were asked to vote on whether they thought teachers were all unfriendly. The vote was split.

Panel: The importance of a friendly teacher was noted. Two panel members commented on the potential stresses on teachers and low morale. These could be caused by the demands of school, the local authority and government.

A young person stated that 'Teachers shouldn't bring their personal problem in the school. They always tell us to so why we should we have to suffer them if they had a bad time at home?'

One panel member noted that there are some brilliant teachers with a real commitment to education but there are one or two teachers who should not be in the classroom.

6. **Statement: There should be free school meals for everyone in Scotland.**

The audience was asked to vote on this statement. Almost all young people voted for the statement.

Panel: Two panel members spoke of the stigma of free school meals, from their experience. Views differed strongly on whether free school meals should be available to all. There was agreement on the need to see the broader issues of nutrition, what kind of food was available for children, and the need to de-stigmatise free school meals (eg through use of smart card by all children).

4: The Expert Debate response



7. **Question: How can we get male guidance teachers for males and female guidance teachers for females?**

Panel: One panel member said that such choice should be available. Another panel member talked about the importance of guidance staff wanting to do the job and having the time to do it. Not only teachers but other adults in the school can provide support for young people. There was consensus that young people should be involved in how guidance was taught/what staff were chosen.

An audience member noted that school councils should be able to take on such issues - but not all school councils are given that opportunity.

8. **Question: Young people with special needs often feel that they don't get equal treatment, they don't get listened to. Often this means that they have to go to special schools a long way from home and lose friends or the chance to play games. What can be done to train teachers and schools to include all young people?**

Question: What progress has been made in involving young people through teacher training?

Panel: Young people should have the chance to stay in local schools. There was no reason why young people should not contribute to teacher training. The Minister confirmed that this was being progressed. Changes needed to be made in teacher training, where teachers had to be aware of the whole range of children who needed to be taught.

An audience member commented that the curriculum needed to be widened from the core, to include arts and music.

One panel member noted that some young people could not feel part of school if the sole focus was on exams. Instead, vocational skills, culture, working with one's hands were needed for young people's confidence.

Reaching young people

To close the 'Question Time', the chair invited each panel member to comment on their priorities for education in the future. Answers were:

- ◆ To focus on citizenship, and the expectations of living within the school, community and the world. Qualifications could not be the sole focus.
- ◆ An individual, flexible curriculum. Education for citizenship.
- ◆ A national forum for parents, children and teachers, so they could come together like the event today. Young people could then be involved in shaping the curriculum, could talk about their schools, could examine where the money is going and interaction could happen between the groups.
- ◆ Every young person having the best out of their education; young people having the chance to speak out.

C. Picture it

The full mural (as seen on this report's cover) has been submitted to the Scottish Executive.



Young people work on the mural

CHAPTER FIVE: Conclusions

The young people's vision for education in Scotland

What should young people learn?

- ◆ Young people should have **lots of subjects to choose from**, with more flexibility on which subjects are compulsory and where language teaching is more interesting and starts earlier in life.
- ◆ There should be **greater emphasis on vocational subjects and practical skills** that help young people in life, to continue with education, get a job and establish a career.
- ◆ A **wide range of cultural and sporting activities** should also be on offer - some which are part of the school curriculum and some which are on offer for young people to enjoy in their own time.

How should young people learn?

- ◆ **Learning methods in classes should vary** throughout the day to give variety and to cater to individual learning styles, with young people sometimes working in small groups with others that learn in similar ways.
- ◆ Pupils should spend **less time at their desks, and their day should be broken up** with a variety of activities, with more or longer breaks, giving them time to relax and socialise with their peers, to play games, listen to music or just to chill out in their own space.
- ◆ There should be more **flexibility in how courses and qualifications are followed**, with options to take time out when necessary and to decide when young people are ready to sit exams, with every young person moving through their chosen courses at their own pace.

Who should help young people learn?

- ◆ **Teachers should be in a position to relate to young people with patience, humour and understanding.** There should be flexibility in respect to who and when young people can approach teachers for the help they need.
- ◆ There should also be **specialist support** with the resources required to meet people's different physical and learning needs.
- ◆ There should be support for those who have been bullied, who have missed lessons, or are having a hard time generally. **There should always be an open door and a listening ear.**

Where should young people learn?

- ◆ The young people generally thought that the school model is the ideal model both for learning and for socialising with other young people. It should be **local, accessible and flexible** enough to meet the needs of all children and young people in the community.

Reaching young people

- ◆ It should treat young people with **respect, listen to and respect their views**, and involve young people in decisions about their education and their learning environment.
- ◆ It should **reflect and respect the diversity of the population**. Cultural, social and racial diversity, equality and discrimination should be discussed and considered within the curriculum and respect for diversity should be promoted through the ethos of the school. No-one should feel judged or labelled.
- ◆ **Classes should be no bigger than 15 or 20**, with two teachers in every class, who have the time to teach, to listen, to give individual support and attention, but also to have a laugh and chat and to manage any disruption calmly.
- ◆ It should be a **pleasant environment** in good repair and with enough space for people to work.
- ◆ There should be flexibility, understanding and **support for young people who cannot attend full time**, with access to resources, support for home learning and links with parents.



Save the Children

Activities Sheet National Debate on Education

The Scottish Executive has announced a National Debate on Education, welcoming all people in Scotland to contribute their views to the future of education. The Debate runs from March to the end of June 2002.

The Scottish Executive has suggested questions to frame people's responses, which you can see in the briefing pack enclosed. Children in Scotland and Save the Children Fund have put some ideas together below for possible activities that your group might find fun and productive.

- We have tried out these activities with children and young people and used their suggestions in what is provided here.
- You will see some suggestions of how the activities could be adapted for different groups.
- We have linked certain activities with particular questions in the Executive's briefing pack but they can be easily adapted to address other questions.
- We have made suggestions on how you could record the activities.

Of course you and your group will have your own ideas on what you want to do!

The Executive has asked for responses by **Friday 12th July**. These can be submitted either through using their form (in the briefing pack or on line at http://www.scotland.gov.uk/education/nd_homepage.htm) or through Children in Scotland:

C/o Gillian Harrow, Children in Scotland
Princes House, 5 Shandwick Place
Edinburgh EH2 4RG
Tel: 0131.222.2404
E-mail: gharrow@childreninscotland.org.uk

Have Fun!

This is an unique opportunity for children and young people to suggest a more 'radical' approach to education and learning in Scotland.

Reaching young people

1. "Voting with your feet"

Purpose: to have some fun while beginning to focus on what participants like and don't like about education.

Particularly relevant to feedback form questions 1 and 2:

- Q. 1 Thinking about your own and others' experience of school, what are the **best** things about school education in Scotland. Why?
- Q. 2 Thinking about your own and others' experience of school, what are the main things that **need to be improved** about school education in Scotland. Why?

Resources needed:

- ✓ Post-its for each participant (a post-it per statement, per person). For those groups who would prefer to avoid lots of writing, stickers can be used rather than post-its. A sheet of stickers should be numbered (1-10, to match number of statements) and provided for each participant.
- ✓ Pens for all participants, markers to write up 'ideas'
- ✓ 3 large sheets of paper labelled with large letters 'Yes', 'No' and 'Ideas', with blue tack or tape for posting.
- ✓ A spacious room, without furniture in the middle.

Method:

Similar to 'Port and Starboard' game. The 'Yes' sheet is placed on one wall while the 'No' sheet is placed on the opposite wall. The 'Ideas' sheet is also posted so that both participants and facilitators can access it.

When facilitator calls out the statement's number and the statement itself, participants decide if they agree or disagree with the statement. Participants are asked to write down the statement's number on a post-it and any views they might have. They are then asked to place the post-it on the relevant sheet - 'Yes', 'No' or 'Ideas'. Participants using stickers would take the sticker whose number matches the statement, and place it on the appropriate sheet. The facilitator may wish to write down participants' views on the 'Ideas' sheet as the activity progresses.

Here is a list of possible statements, which you may wish to tailor to your group. You and your group of course may of course come up with your own statements!

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. "All children should go their local school" | 6. "I learn the most when I am in school" |
| 2. " I don't need to go to school" | 7. "Holidays are too long" |
| 3. "Play time is the best bit of school" | 8. "We don't need teachers if we have computers" |
| 4. "Truants should be fined" | 9. "Pupils should have enough say in the day-to-day running of schools" |
| 5. "Nothing can be done about bullying" | 10. "Class sizes are too big to learn well in." |

(Note: certain of these statements match other questions in the briefing pack.)

The use of sheets and stickers/post-its provides an easy way to record participants' views. After the activity, participants can use the results as a basis for discussing why people responded as they did - and what could be done to improve children's learning. This discussion could be recorded on the 'Ideas' sheet as well.

2. "Picture your school"

Purpose: A visual exercise, to consider where children should learn, as well as how they should learn and when.

Particularly relevant to feedback form questions 1, 2 and 13:

- Q. 1 Thinking about your own and others' experience of school, what are the **best** things about school education in Scotland. Why?
- Q. 2 Thinking about your own and others' experience of school, what are the main things that **need to be improved** about school education in Scotland. Why?
- Q. 13 If you could design a school for the 21st century, what would it look like?

Materials:

- ✓ 2 large sheets of paper
- ✓ Pencils, crayons etc. Groups may also wish to cut out pictures from old magazines etc., with glue/tape to stick such pictures on the sheets of paper.
- ✓ At least 6 post-its, in 2 different colours, for each participant.

Facilitator:

In advance, the facilitator can prepare:

- (1) the first sheet - draw a large square school shape, divided into 2 sections marked 'Good things about school' and 'Bad things about school';
- (2) the second sheet - a large oval shape marked 'In the future school will be...'

Method:

- (1) The first sheet: Each participant has 6 post-it stickers, 3 of each colour: one colour to be used to note down the 3 best things about school and the other colour to be used to note down the 3 worst things about school. Participants write down their views on the post-its and put the post-its on the appropriate section of the school drawing. For those groups who would prefer to avoid lots of writing, the facilitator could ask for each participant's views and note the views in the appropriate section.

The group can then discuss participants' views and the facilitator can mark those which are widely agreed with.

- (2) The second sheet is used to document what an ideal 'school' would look like. Participants may wish to draw this in, use pictures, or make statements. Again, participants' views can be used to prompt discussion which the facilitator can note on the paper as well.

The use of sheets and post-its provides an easy way to record participants' views.

3. "Beans means...?"

Purpose: A 'hands-on' exercise that generates ideas and shows a group's prioritisation of these ideas.

Particularly relevant to feedback form questions 2 and 3:

- Q. 2 Thinking about your own and others' experience of school, what are the main things that need to be improved about school education in Scotland. Why?
- Q. 3 What are the top 5 things that all young people should learn at school?

Materials:

- ✓ 1 large sheet of paper, posted where all participants can see it
- ✓ Sheets of paper
- ✓ A marker to write on the paper and to record views
- ✓ A minimum of 5 counters (or dried beans) for each participant. Tip: if you are counters are likely to roll, you may wish to have a container per sheet of paper, in which the counters can be placed.

Method:

Similar to a brainstorming session, the group begins with a discussion of the question - eg what are the top 5 things that all young people should learn at school? The Executive's feedback form suggests consideration of particular subjects, skills, attitudes and behaviour (see page 4 of feedback form).

Participants come up with ideas, which the facilitator records on the large sheet of paper. The facilitator seeks to establish, with the group, which are the most popular statements (about 5).

Of the most popular statements, a statement each is written on a sheet of paper. Participants then 'vote' for the statements with their counters. They could choose to put all their counters down for one statement or spread them between statements. The totals are then tallied.

Further discussion can be had with the group, on the results.

The use of counters gives a numerical answer to the question posed and a clear prioritisation by the group. The sheets can be used to record participants' views.

Certain of these ideas have been developed using the **re:action consultation toolkit**, published and available from Save the Children Scotland, tel: 0131 527 8200.

Appendix 2: Expert Group prompt questions

Expert Group – Session 1

Questions to roughly steer discussions	Prompt questions	Recording
<i>How would you describe your experience of school?</i>	<p>How did you feel...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When you got up in the morning to go to school? • When you went to classes? • During lunch time or breaks? • When it was time to go home? 	Flipcharts and/or tape recording
<p><i>What were/are the most positive things about school?</i> <i>What do you like best?</i> <i>Why?</i></p>	<p>What classes or activities did you enjoy most at school? Why - what makes a good lesson? Did you think your school was a nice place to be? If you could design an ideal place for children to learn, what would it be like? Why? What sort of facilities would it have and who would be able to use it?</p>	
<p><i>What were the toughest things about school? Why?</i> <i>What might have made that better?</i></p>	<p>Who helped you most at school? Why/how was their support helpful? If you had a difficulty or a problem at school, how were these dealt with? How might you have been helped or supported better at school? Did the structure of school day suit you? If you could choose the ideal timetable for school what would it look like?</p>	
<p><i>Why did you go to school?</i> <i>Do you think school is important? What would you hope to get out of going to school?</i></p>	<p>What do you think are the most useful things you have learnt at school? Can you think of things that you wish you had learnt at school which would be useful to you in your life?</p>	
<p><i>Where should children and young people learn? Are schools the best/only place?</i> Where else have you learnt things?</p>	<p>Are there people other than teachers who can help you learn? What do you need to help you learn? How do you feel when you're learning well? Do schools give you these things - could other places give you these things?</p>	
<p><i>Imagine schools are going to be abolished/ scrapped/ and we get to start again and you are going to design how children and young people get a good education...</i> What would be the most important thing that should be changed?</p>	<p>Explain process of group session 2 to the group. Ask them to think about the key message and how they might communicate that so that the message really gets across.</p> <p>What image? What words? What lay out or design?</p>	Develop image for CD Rom

Expert Group – Session 2

Questions to roughly steer discussions	Prompt questions	Recording
<i>What would be the most important thing that should be changed about school or education?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Recap of the purpose of the project - what we are aiming towards. ● Recap of the key issues raised by the young people and the key message agreed on at the end of the final session. 	Flipcharts
How can we communicate that message?	Advice on designing the visual for the CD Rom - 'Harry's guidelines' . <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The message ● The text ● The image ● Colour, design and layout 	Flipchart and digital camera
Putting the policy makers on the spot!	Talk through the format of the event. Work with the group to identify two-to-three questions for the afternoon session. (Ideally questions based on personal experience which the young person will be able to present as evidence and background information.)	Flipchart

SCHOOL DAZE

Wed 26th June

Venue

Dynamic Earth, Biosphere Room, Holyrood, Edinburgh

Programme

10.00am	Registration
10.30am	Introduction <i>Kay Tisdall, Director of Policy and Research, Children in Scotland</i>
10.40am	Acting Up a workshop using drama to explore the future of education with Rebecca Kilbey, Freelance Drama Worker
12.00pm	Q Cards preparing questions for Question Time
12.10pm	Lunch
12.50pm	Your say in the National Debate Kay Tisdall
1.00pm	Question Time Chair Sean McLoughlan, Scottish Youth Parliament Panel Cathy Jamieson, Minister for Education and Young People Rosie Kane, Voluntary Worker with Young People Pamela Munn, Professor of Curriculum Research, Faculty of Education, University of Edinburgh Cathy Peattie MSP, Deputy Convenor of Education, Culture and Sports Committee
2.00pm	Picture It with Joanna Boyce, Creative Artworks
3.00pm	Closing

