



‘Family Law Bill insufficient to address inequalities in fatherhood’

Immediate release, Thursday, 15 September

Children in Scotland is calling on the Scottish Parliament to do more to address existing inequalities in the way that non-resident parents, usually fathers, are treated by public services.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that in some areas in Scotland, parents who do not live at the same address as their child have been denied access to information about their education by the school, despite having legal parental responsibilities and rights (PRRs).

In a briefing issued on the same day that the Scottish Parliament debate the Family Law (Scotland) Bill, Children in Scotland argues that current proposals are insufficient.

Stephen Harvey, national development officer for a three-year project in Scotland *Children, Fathers and Fatherhood*, said: “The Bill does not address the practical effects of PRRs. We are urging MSPs to amend the Bill to include a duty on public authorities, including health boards and education authorities, to recognise the PRRs of non-resident parents and the practical application of these rights.

“This is a particularly pressing issue because the forthcoming Equality Bill, currently making its way through Westminster, would place public authorities under a duty to promote gender equality. This has real implications for how public authorities address issues related to non-resident parents, who are usually fathers.”

Children in Scotland is also concerned that even with a change in the law to extend PRRs to unmarried fathers who jointly register the birth of their child, Scots Law will still be in breach of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, because it does not extend to all parents. The UNCRC gives all children the right to both parents having joint responsibility for their upbringing, as long as this is in the best interests of the child. An obvious reason for concern would be where there is a history of domestic violence.

Children in Scotland welcomes the introduction of the *Parenting Agreement for Scotland* as a useful and informative tool for encouraging parents to take a proactive approach in often difficult and sensitive situations following relationship breakdowns.

Notes for editors:

- Children in Scotland is running a three-year project, *Children, Fathers and Fatherhood (2005-2008)*, to improve services and support for fathers in Scotland. It is funded by the Scottish Executive and run in partnership with Fathers Direct and the Equal Opportunities Commission.
- Children in Scotland is the national agency for voluntary, statutory and professional organisations and individuals working with children and their families in Scotland. It exists to identify and promote the interests of children and their families and to ensure that relevant policies, services and provisions are of the best possible quality and able to meet the needs of a diverse society.