**Committee on the Rights of the Child**

**Concept Note for a General Comment on**

**children’s rights in relation to the digital environment**

**Children in Scotland**

Giving all children in Scotland an equal chance to flourish is at the heart of everything we do.

By bringing together a network of people working with and for children, alongside children and young people themselves, we offer a broad, balanced and independent voice. We create solutions, provide support and develop positive change across all areas affecting children in Scotland.

We do this by listening, gathering evidence, and applying and sharing our learning, while always working to uphold children’s rights. Our range of knowledge and expertise means we can provide trusted support on issues as diverse as the people we work with and the varied lives of children and families in Scotland.

Children in Scotland is pleased to report to the consultation on the concept note for children’s rights in the digital world. We are an advocate for children’s rights and our work is underpinned by the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)](https://www.unicef.org.uk/what-we-do/un-convention-child-rights/).

Ultimately, we believe that children and young people must be supported to access the digital realm in a safe and secure manner. Duty bearers have a responsibility to support them to do this.

We carry out a range of work to promote children’s rights in the digital world specifically. We support the [Young Media Voices](https://youngmediavoices.scot/) project to make sure that children and young people’s views, experiences and stories are heard in the media. As part of the project we have developed a platform for their content to be shared. Our recent [25 Calls](https://childreninscotland.org.uk/main-25-calls/) project has also highlighted a number of calls to support children, young people and families to access the digital world in a safe secure manner. Our work also includes services that provide advice on additional support for learning including a young people’s website called [Reach](https://reach.scot/) and [My Rights, My Say](https://enquire.org.uk/myrightsmysay/) service.

Children in Scotland has not had time to do a full response but wanted to submit these examples of good practice and some key points from our experience.

**How can children’s views and experiences be expressed and taken into account when formulating policies and practices which affect their access to, and use of, digital technologies?**

Article 12 of the UNCRC articulates that children and young people have the right to have their voices heard and for adults to take what they say seriously. Children in Scotland are firmly committed to ensuring that this right is upheld, and that children and young people have a meaningful impact in developing policy that affects them. Involving children and young people in decision making processes is key to making policy that reflects their needs and empowers them to hold decision makers to account.

UNICEF describes the importance of media in supporting children’s rights: “Television and radio play a vital role in raising awareness of global issues. TV and radio also play a tremendous and very critical role in shaping children's lives. UNICEF urges broadcasters to advance overall child development in their countries ...TV and radio can become meaningful, positive media experiences for children and young people.”

Children in Scotland have worked on a range of projects that provide examples of how children and people's views and experiences can be expressed and taken into account when formulating policies and practices which affect their access to and use of digital technologies.

**[Young Media Voices](https://youngmediavoices.scot/)**

Young Media Voices is a national project which supports children and young people across Scotland to learn new skills, create multi-media content, work with media partners and share the stories that matter most to them and their communities. The project is currently made up of a core group of 18 Young Creators aged 8-17, living in Scotland. Since 2018, the Young Creators have developed their knowledge and skills in producing media content and have created a new exciting online platform where theirs and other children and young people’s stories can be shared.

Young Media Voices is youth-led and works with children and young people to change how their stories are shared. Children and young people are one of a number of groups who are under-represented in the Scottish media. There is a lack of media organisations set up to support them and their stories and experiences are often missed. The Young Media Voices Project aims to challenge this and create a platform for children and young people across the country to share their views and experiences.

Children in Scotland believe that digital media plays a significant role in how young people learn about themselves and the rest of the world. Children and young people’s methods of consuming media and broadcasting are changing; they spend an increasing amount of time online and accessing social media at the expense of traditional broadcasting.

Digital media has the capacity to power to shape public opinion and influence the products children, young people and families purchase. We know from project and policy work we carry out in relation to food that marketing of unhealthy food products to families has a large impact on their food purchasing habits.

However, young people rarely see or hear themselves represented on radio or screen and programming is often based on what adults think young people want. They also have little opportunity to articulate whether the content they have access to and is … to them is supporting them at critical points in their development.

Young Media Voices addresses the gap between public broadcasting offered and children and young people, by working with the UK’s national broadcaster and other partners to harness the power of the media to support children and young people and to give them a voice, with their ideas reflected in the media around them.

BBC Scotland have recognized their need to do more to engage with their younger demographic and extend their offer and their reach to those aged 17 and under and is committed to giving young people a voice. Children in Scotland’s inclusive approach will create new approaches to working with young people who are not core BBC Radio Scotland or BBC listeners or viewers. Voices from across Scotland will be heard. Content will be produced “on location” by the young people, giving a strong sense of place and ownership, with many voices and accents from across the whole of Scotland. The BBC commitment to diversity and inclusion is a shared value that will be the cornerstone of the project.

Media channels, including social media, can provides a platform for many to share their voices, but they are not accessible to younger children, and come with a range of risks and benefits that all children and young people need to be supported to navigate.

There is a need therefore to provide opportunities to support children and young people to gain the knowledge, confidence and skills in how to develop and share their views, stories and opinions in ways that are accessible and safe.

[**Children and Young People’s Panel on Europe**](https://childreninscotland.org.uk/children-and-young-peoples-brexit-panel-june-2018-december-2018/) **-****[Report](https://childreninscotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Brexit_FINAL_nobleed.pdf)**

Children and young people’s voices have not been included in the Brexit debate, much of which has taken place in digital spaces. Children and young people have a right to be heard in the discussions about Brexit. Participation projects have already been established in [Wales](http://www.childreninwales.org.uk/news/news-archive/young-wales-consult-children-young-people-brexit-300418-w/) and [Northern Ireland](https://www.niccy.org/about-us/our-current-work/brexit/) to ensure that children can have their say. To ensure that this happens in Scotland, Children in Scotland worked in partnership with Together, the Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights to set up a panel of children and young people to provide advice to the Scottish Government.

The Panel brought together a group of children and young people with a range of views to talk about the main issues for children and young people in relation to leaving the European Union.

As children and young people were not allowed to vote in the referendum, it is even more important that politicians speak to children and young people about their views and take them into account in the decisions that they make. In Scotland, there is a law (Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014) which says that politicians should consider the views of children and young people in every decision that they make. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has written a ‘General Comment’ which explains how children and young people’s Article 12 rights should be taken forward. This includes making sure that processes that help children and young people to have their voice heard are informative, voluntary, respectful, relevant, child-friendly, inclusive, supported by training, safe, sensitive to risk and accountable. These principles have been taken into account throughout the recruitment and the activities of the Panel to ensure its work is strongly based in children and young people’s rights.

**[5Rights Youth Commission](https://young.scot/5rights/)**

It is also important to recognise the important work of the 5 Rights Youth Commission. This commission was conducted by our colleagues at Young Scot and “promotes a positive and holistic rights-based approach that looks not only at internet safety, but literacy and empowerment for children and young people under a single framework”

**How can discrimination (originating offline or online) be effectively addressed, to ensure all children have their rights realised in a digital world?**

The boundaries between online and offline are now so fluid that it’s not possible to make a meaningful distinction between the two. Children in Scotland advocates for the realisation of children’s rights in all areas of their lives which includes digital spaces. By taking a children’s rights approach online and offline discrimination will be effectively addressed.

With this in mind it’s important to acknowledge that there is still disparity in children’s ability to access online spaces, this can be as a result of poverty meaning that you don’t have access to technology or rural isolation meaning that you don’t have access to high-speed, reliable, internet access.

**How should the General Comment treat the role of parents and other caregivers?**

Parents and carers should be empowered to support their children in understanding and accessing rights. They also have a key role in safeguarding and navigating digital spaces. Parents need to be acknowledged as partners in access to digital rights for children.