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The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP



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Dear Margaret

Inquiry into Fathers and Parenting

I would like to thank you and all members of the Committee for your extensive Inquiry and for your on-going consideration of the distinct social and practical challenges faced by fathers today.

As you will be aware, the Scottish Government wants to make Scotland the best place in the world for children and young people to grow up. We know that parents are the strongest influence on a child's life and by helping parents, carers, families and communities build better lives for themselves and for their children, we can help to ensure that every child in Scotland has the best start in life.

We want to support parents and carers to be able to form and develop healthy, positive attachments with their children, who can then go on to develop healthy, positive relationships with their peers and other adults as they go to nursery, start school and transition into young adulthood.

The National Parenting Strategy, launched in October 2012, is key towards driving forward this ambition and includes over 80 commitments covering a wide range of agendas. These commitments are at varying stages of development. Some have been delivered whilst others involve on-going discussion and development over time. Our commitment within the Strategy to encourage and support fathers to play an active role in their children's upbringing is key if we are to improve the health, wellbeing and life chances of Scotland's Children and young people. Making our policies and services more 'dad friendly' as well as addressing the issues raised by the Committee is a Scottish Government priority.

As such, the National Fathers Advisory Board (NFAB) was set up to act in an advice-giving capacity on national policy and how it impacts on fathers. For example, NFAB works to ensure that the interests of fathers are properly included in the implementation of the National Parenting Strategy. We are also working closely with organisations like DadsRock and Fathers Network Scotland to support our current work programme to promote a Family Friendly Scotland in the field of employment.

I am pleased to attach our response to the Inquiry Report demonstrating where the Scottish Government has and is taking a leadership role by setting a clear policy direction on supporting fathers.

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AILEEN CAMPBELL

PART 1: STEREOTYPES AND SOCIAL ATTITUDES

Paragraph 32. We are pleased to see that the Scottish Government has already taken steps to address fathers in its literature and guidance, but we feel that more can be done to support the idea of fathers being involved in childrearing as being the norm.

As set out in the National Parenting Strategy, NHS Health Scotland have been working with a group of dads to 'father-proof' a range of resources and to inform the development of new content to be made available on the *'Ready Steady Baby'* website. The overhaul will include a father's section, usability testing with dads-to-be and the development of a communication strategy for the launch.

The Scottish Government has also supported the idea of fathers being involved in raising their child as being the norm through the *PlayTalkRead* campaign development. The National Father's Advisory Board (NFAB) was part of the working group that reviewed the content, look and feel, of the campaign's website. The expertise of the NFAB proved particularly helpful in understanding the fine line of ensuring that fathers felt supported whilst at the same time being inclusive. For example, although there is a specific 'dads' section on the campaign's website, the imagery and content is relevant across the site.

Paragraph 33. We ask that the Scottish Government and all organisations and companies working with parents and children continue to ensure work is aimed at both parents, and in recognition of the fact that 'parent' is often taken to mean mother, actively work to include fathers specifically.

The Scottish Government recognises the importance of fathers and wants to encourage and support fathers, grandfathers and other male carers to play a more active role in their children's upbringing. The National Parenting Strategy has delivered several commitments to promote the active involvement of fathers in their children's lives and to make our policies and services more 'dad-friendly'. These include:

- taking steps to encourage more men to become involved in the children's workforce;
- setting up a National Fathers Advisory Board to advise on how national policy and practice impacts on fathers and ensuring that the interests of fathers are properly included in the on-going development and delivery of the National Parenting Strategy; and
- NHS Health Scotland establishing a Father's Forum to share practical knowledge and experience of working with dads to help ensure NHS policies and services are more 'dad-friendly'.

Part 2 - ANTE-NATAL AND POST-NATAL SUPPORT

Paragraph 57. We ask that the Scottish Government look to improving the support and guidance it can offer for new fathers, for instance by issuing good-practice guidance on including new fathers in written publications and policies.

As a commitment in the National Parenting Strategy, NHS Health Scotland have set up a Fathers' Forum to share practical knowledge and experience of working with dads to help ensure NHS policies and services are more 'dad-friendly'.

The Fathers' Forum have been 'father-proofing' a range of NHS Health Scotland resources for parents and informed and shaped the development of new content to be made available

on the 'Ready Steady Baby' website, specifically focused at expectant and new fathers which will be launched later this year.

Paragraph 58. We were encouraged to hear how local authorities are using GIRFEC as a model for improving engagement with fathers, and ask that that Scottish Government examine how such good practice can be shared as part of on-going work in establishing the GIRFEC approach.

The Scottish Government's National GIRFEC Implementation Group is currently examining ways to share best practice with as wide a range of professionals and parents as possible, chiefly via Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs).

We issue regular e-newsletters and an occasional printed publication called 'Wellbeing Magazine' which offer further opportunities to promote key messages about the role of fathers. Our information leaflet, 'Getting it right for Children & Families' contains many positive images of fathers – from new dads to grandfathers. Also, fathers' groups such as Fathers Network Scotland and DadsRock have been involved in initial discussions about how best to communicate the GIRFEC message to parents.

We are also currently developing the statutory guidance that will accompany the Children & Young People (Scotland) Act and we will seek opportunities to include case studies that demonstrate the key role fathers have to play in the lives of their children. The guidance will refer to parents, indicating that both mother and father are included in any provisions or plans.

Last year we carried out a self-assessment exercise with CPPs, asking them to provide us with an update on progress with GIRFEC implementation. One of the questions asked was about the extent to which children and families were engaged in understanding and implementation of the GIRFEC approach and how far children and families were involved in the planning of services to support them individually. Key points were as follows:

- The majority of CPPs reported to have actively engaged with parents and families in their areas. There was an overall acknowledgement of the importance of engaging with and involving children and families in processes to take forward GIRFEC development plans.
- Evidence of the use of a wide range of platforms to engage with children and families and to involve them in the development of GIRFEC policies, but also as part of some CPPs' overall improvement of services.
- Recognition from some areas of the need for further work to provide a more coherent and relevant service to children and families.

Part 3 - FIRST YEARS, INCLUDING CHILDCARE AND EMPLOYMENT

Paragraph 97. The Scottish Government has shown a drive towards improving the situation, and, as in our *Women and Work* inquiry we commend the Scottish Government on its approach and ask that such issues remain a priority in implementing the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 and the National Parenting Strategy. In responding, we ask that the Minister include an update on progress made against the recommendations made in our *Women and Work* inquiry report.

Flexible and Family Friendly Working

The Scottish Government acknowledges the important role flexible and family-friendly working plays in helping parents and carers manage the twin responsibilities of work and caring. We are committed to working with employers and their representative bodies, to explore ways of promoting and supporting flexible working.

In close partnership with Fathers Network Scotland, Parenting Across Scotland and Working Families, we are currently exploring what family-friendly working looks like for Scottish employers.

This means that we are:

- providing practical information on the implementation of policies which aim to include and engage with fathers in the workplace;
- gaining insight from Scottish employers of their current policies, activities and ambitions to engage with fathers at work; and
- creating the opportunities to share and debate these findings with Scottish employers and stakeholders.

We have recently awarded funding to 'Working Families' to support and co-ordinate activity that will allow the partnership to:

- carry out some specific work targeted at dads in the workplace to ensure they are better supported to manage their dual responsibilities of work and family;
- trial and promote a flexible working strapline across a range of employment sectors;
- to run a range of stakeholder events to promote family friendly working;
- develop a network of employer 'Champions' and carry out a "state of the nation" piece of benchmarking/research for publication;
- publish a 'Time, Health and the Family Scotland' report looking at what is needed from a working parent's point of view; and to
- develop sensible policy proposals for parental (maternal and paternal) leave and for flexible working for Scotland.

Childcare

The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act, which was passed on 19 February 2014, setting out change already reported to the Committee, is a significant step to improve levels of early learning and childcare and support for parents and families across the country.

The Act has expanded funded provision for 3 and 4 year olds from 475 hours to a minimum of 600 hours, which will benefit around 121,000 3 and 4 year olds in academic year 2014-15. In addition, the Act places flexibility on a statutory footing by introducing a requirement on local authorities to consult every 2 years with groups of parents on patterns of provision which would meet their needs; and will extend the entitlement to around 8000 vulnerable or disadvantaged 2 years old: 15% this year rising to 27% from August 2015.

We fund a wide range of third sector organisations which share our aims to increase the range and quality of provision, from very young children to school age provision and support organisations to deliver this. We have also contributed £4.5m to the £6m Big Lottery Communities and Families Fund to support community based solutions to childcare and family support. In addition, I have asked the Early Years Task Force to look at the kind of out of school care which could be provided in future.

Paragraph 99. Once again, we have heard concerns that the Modern Apprenticeships Scheme should do more to tackle inequalities and stereotypes. As stated in previous reports, we feel it is crucial that the Scottish Government launch an awareness campaign promoting inclusion throughout the scheme

The Scottish Government, through Skills Development Scotland, ensures that there is fair and open access to all our national training programmes, including Modern Apprenticeships. Training interventions are designed to help us address skills gaps across the economy in response to employer demand and learner preferences.

As our national skills body, it is part of Skills Development Scotland's role to promote apprenticeships and to encourage applications from as wide a pool as possible.

In line with the Equal Opportunities Committee's recommendations, raising awareness of MAs in underrepresented group was a focus of Scottish Apprenticeship Week in May 2014, which included a number of events designed to contribute to better inclusion of under-represented groups in our MA programme.

My colleagues and I are strongly encouraging employers to consider all people regardless of disability, ethnicity, gender, or other factors, when recruiting and offering Modern Apprenticeships and we are reinforcing this message through our 'Make Young People Your Business' campaign.

Part 4 - SUPPORT GROUPS FOR FATHERS

Paragraph 116. We ask that the Scottish Government consider how, in the context of the National Parenting Strategy, it can support the set-up of new groups and help existing groups to grow and help hard-to-reach fathers such as single dads and fathers in rural areas.

The Scottish Government has recently awarded funding to DadsRock to carry out:

- the continuation of existing work, i.e. weekend playgroups (with expected weekly total attendance of 40 families), along with existing development work and proposed meetings/collaborations and events;
- delivery of a weekly meet up with local dads in Edinburgh; and
- the development and delivery of two weekday playgroups in north and south Edinburgh (expected weekly total attendance of 10 families).

We will also work in partnership with members of the National Fathers Advisory Board to carry out an audit of what groups are available for fathers across Scotland. This should help us to identify gap, areas of need and priorities for future action.

Part 5 - SCHOOLS AND EDUCATION

Paragraph 133. We ask that the Scottish Government, through the curriculum for excellence and the support it gives to local authorities, continues to present men as a crucial part of the family and support the extension of successful initiatives such as the approach taken by South Lanarkshire Council.

Curriculum for Excellence recognises the important role that parents and carers have in developing the whole child and we will continue to work in partnership with local authorities, the National Parent Forum of Scotland and other groups to represent fathers as crucial to their child's education.

The Scottish Government recently developed a web resource for practitioners, based on an evidence review of parental engagement, which includes a section on engaging with fathers and non-resident parents. We will work with local authorities and others around communication to support schools and their parent forums.

Paragraph 134. Again, we emphasise the importance of literature and imagery, and ask that the Scottish Government consider how a national awareness-raising campaign may help to raise the profile of men in childcare and teaching.

The Scottish Government funds the Men in Childcare project to encourage more men into childcare. Working with our partners, we are acting to redress the gender imbalance and raise awareness of the need for more men working across our early years sector. Men in Childcare have been awarded £135,000 from the Scottish Government to continue projects over the period 2012-15.

Employment of teachers is a matter for local authorities and we would expect them to employ the best teachers, irrespective of their gender. The Scottish Government has no plans to mount a national awareness-raising campaign with a view to raising the profile of men in teaching.

We commissioned research (Riddell et al, 2005) which explored the underlying reasons for the gender imbalance for teaching in Scotland. This can be accessed at (<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2005/11/1493519/35199>, <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2005/11/11135710/57107>). Consistent with other reports, it considered that the main concern should be to ensure that the best-qualified and motivated people entered the profession, regardless of their gender.

The Committee may be interested to note, however, that the number of male primary teachers in Scotland's local authority schools has increased by almost 30% since 1999. We will continue to monitor the situation with interest.

Part 6 - FATHERS WITH SOLE OR SHARED RESIDENCY

Paragraph 165. We ask the Scottish Government to set out how the measures it has put in place to partially mitigate welfare reform are benefitting fathers, and to what extent it can further support fathers with shared custody who are facing financial hardship.

We are working closely with a range of organisations, including the Child Poverty Action Group and One Parent Families Scotland, to understand the impact that the UK Government's welfare reforms will have on people in Scotland. We have introduced a number of measures to help those affected and this includes funding for organisations in Scotland who provide advice and support services to help people, including single fathers, cope with the changes. This includes the 'Making Advice Work' grant funding programme which is administered through the Scottish Legal Aid Board and is focused on improving access to advice for those affected by welfare reform.

More broadly, we are funding other initiatives which contribute to mitigating the impacts of welfare reforms such as the new 'Tackling Money Worries' programme which is intended to support the Scottish Government's revised Child Poverty Strategy. This programme is also administered by the Scottish Legal Aid Board and aims to improve outcomes for low-income families with children facing a change in their circumstances which places them at higher risk of debt and money problems.

We are continuing to develop our analysis of the welfare reforms and will consider what additional measures we can take to mitigate the impacts where we are able to do so. These will be set out in future plans and we will also continue to report on the impacts within our Annual Report to the Scottish Parliament. Meanwhile, under the current constitutional settlement, we continue to challenge the UK Government for fairer reform and press them to ensure that safeguards are in place for those who need them most.

Paragraph 166. The lack of data on shared parenting arrangements is concerning, and, we feel, contributes to the perceived invisibility of lone fathers. We urge the Scottish Government to explore how it can better capture data on shared residence agreements, and in particular how this might be included in the 2021 census.

The Scottish Government's National Parenting Strategy made the following commitment:

- In 2014, we will update the Parenting Agreement for Scotland – a pack with a parenting agreement for separating parents, a Charter for Grandchildren and material on where further information can be obtained – and we will work with others to find better ways to publicise this information.
- A short-life working group to provide a broad perspective and expert knowledge of families and relationship break-down has been convened in order to meet this commitment. The first meeting of this group will take place in Edinburgh on Tuesday, 30 September 2014.

We recognise the shared residence agreements being an issue to capture in national data and we will explore the feasibility of deriving such data from the census as part of the work to develop the questions for the 2021 Census.

Paragraph 168. We were impressed to hear of the successful application of the GIRFEC approach and the use of dedicated support groups for single fathers and fathers in prison. We ask the Scottish Government to continue to support and promote the good-practice approaches we heard of, such as those run by One Parent Families Scotland and Families Outside.

The Scottish Government is continuing to provide funding to One Parent Families Scotland for core policy work and for their '*Supporting Scotland's Children and Fathers*' project. This project seeks to continue the work that the organisation carries out with fathers on confidence building, financial matters, health issues, parenting skills and advocacy.

We recognise that particular attention needs to be paid to protecting and promoting the rights of those children who are affected by imprisonment. This is a right reflected in the UNCRC. The National Parenting Strategy acknowledges the difficulties parenting from prison can raise. The Scottish Government is working in partnership with the Scottish Prison Service to consider ways of supporting families affected by imprisonment in order to:

- encourage involvement between parents in custody and their children; and
- to provide targeted support for parents in prison to aid their reintegration and help them to deter their own children from offending behaviour.

Families Outside were successful in their application to the Scottish Government £20 Million new Third Sector Early Intervention Fund.

This funding will support their core function. Funding has also been given to specifically fund their work in Addiewell Prison Visitors Centre. This project seeks to support children and their families on visiting a family member at Addiewell prison. Located within the Prison Visitors Centre visiting children and their families can access a range of information and support to their visit. They will also be supported to access other resources to alleviate difficult situations as a result of a family member being in prison and may include referrals to specialist agencies.

The National Prison Visitors' Centre Steering Group has established a Public Social Partnership which has received an award from the Scottish Government's Early Years Change Fund of £250,000 over an 18-month period for the development, operation, and evaluation of a Family 'Help Hub' at HMYOI Polmont. The purpose of the pilot project is to create a service for families of young people in custody at HMYOI Polmont. Whilst the pilot recognises necessary differences in models of service depending on local need and prison population, it will explore and create models of best practice to determine how such a model can be rolled out for wider support to families across the prison estate in future.