

Justice Committee

Offensive Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communications (Scotland) Bill

Written submission from Action for Children Scotland

Action for Children Scotland welcomes the opportunity to submit evidence to the Justice Committee for its Stage 1 consideration of the Offensive Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communications (Scotland) Bill.

We believe it is important that young people's voices are heard in the current debate around the Scottish Government's proposals to tackle sectarianism and attach, as part of Action for Children Scotland's evidence, a copy of the recent survey we carried out seeking young people's views on sectarianism.

A total of 114 young people accessing Action for Children Scotland's services participated in the survey. Most of the young people who responded were from the West of Scotland, where the impact of sectarianism has been particularly damaging over the years. The key findings of the survey include:

- 47% of young people believe that sectarianism leads to abuse, hatred, violence and knife crime, and a further 21% said that sectarianism can lead to bullying and insecurity, and make it more difficult for people to form relationships;
- A total of 36% of the young people confirmed that they had been treated badly or unfairly because of sectarianism or some other form of hatred, while 59% said that they knew someone else who had been treated badly or unfairly because of sectarianism or some other form of hatred;
- 47% of those who participated in the survey confirmed that sectarianism was a big problem within their community;
- A total of 65% of young people said they believe that sectarianism is increasing in Scotland;
- 47% of young people believe that tougher sentences will not bring an end to sectarianism, and to other forms of hatred in Scotland; and
- A total of 52% of the young people who participated in the survey said that other actions are necessary to stop sectarianism, including education programmes in schools about sectarianism, different kinds of punishments and the greater use of football banning order

Action for Children Scotland would be happy to arrange for a group of young people from our projects to give oral evidence to the Justice Committee, or to host a visit by a Reporting Group from the Justice Committee to one of our projects, to meet a group of young people to discuss sectarianism. This would provide the committee with an opportunity to find out more about how sectarianism impacts upon the lives of young people, and upon their

communities and to discuss ways in which sectarianism can be tackled effectively.

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Action for Children Scotland
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Young people's views on the Offensive Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communications (Scotland) Bill: A survey by Action for Children Scotland

Background

Action for Children Scotland works in partnership to run more than 60 services, which support almost 8000 of Scotland's most vulnerable children and young people to fulfill their potential, and to make the most of their lives. This includes looked after and accommodated children and young people, young carers, children affected by parental drug and alcohol misuse, young people with disabilities and young people who offend or at risk of offending.

Action for Children Scotland carried out a survey seeking the views of children and young people about the Scottish Government's proposals to tackle sectarianism through the Offensive Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communications (Scotland) Bill.

We received a total of 114 responses from 18 of our projects. We received a total of 90 responses from young people accessing our services in the West of Scotland, an area where sectarianism has historically been a significant problem. All of the responses Action for Children Scotland received were anonymous. The age range of the young people who participated in the survey was 14 – 20. All of the young people who completed surveys are actively engaged with Action for Children Scotland's services.

Many of the young people who participated in the survey have been directly affected by sectarianism either as the victim and/or perpetrator of such behaviour, or know someone who has been affected by issues around bigotry and sectarianism.

Key findings

A copy of Action for Children Scotland's survey of young people's views on the Scottish Government's proposals to tackle sectarianism, and other forms of hatred can be found below. The key findings of the survey are as follows:

- A total of 44% of the young people who participated in the survey said that they believe people hold sectarian views as a direct result of how they were brought up, while 25% attributed sectarian views to religious beliefs;
- 47% of young people believe that sectarianism leads to abuse, hatred, violence and knife crime, and a further 21% said that sectarianism can lead to bullying and insecurity, and make it more difficult for people to form relationships;
- A total of 36% of the young people who participated in the survey confirmed that they had been treated badly or unfairly because of sectarianism or some other form of hatred, while 59% said that they knew someone else who had been treated badly or unfairly because of sectarianism or some other form of hatred;
- 47% of those who participated in the survey confirmed that sectarianism was a big problem within their community;
- A total of 65% of young people said they believe that sectarianism is increasing in Scotland;
- 47% of young people believe that tougher sentences will not bring an end to sectarianism, and to other forms of hatred in Scotland;
- A total of 52% of the young people who participated in the survey said that other actions are also necessary to stop sectarianism, including education programmes in schools about sectarianism, different kinds of punishments and the greater use of football banning orders;
- 62% of young people said that primary schools and secondary schools should take a range of actions to help tackle sectarianism, including inviting experts in to promote awareness and understanding of the key issues and how sectarianism impacts on people's lives, and educating children at an earlier age about sectarianism;
- A total of 62% of the young people who participated in the survey confirmed that the problem of sectarianism was wider than just being a problem at football matches and on the Internet, and were aware of it on a regular basis; and
- The young people made a number of suggestions about how best to change the views of those convicted of sectarian offences to ensure they do not reoffend. Their suggestions included providing more education programmes focusing on the issues, introducing the offender to the victim(s) of the offence and tougher sentencing.

Range of quotes from the young people

Some of the quotes we received from the young people who participated in the survey about their experiences of sectarianism included:

Why do people hold sectarian views?

“The media have a big part to play in all of this”.

“Some people thrive on being abusive”.

How does sectarianism affect people?

“Some people are frightened to leave their home”.

”People lose confidence, and become insecure”.

Have you been affected by sectarianism?

“Why can’t you just be allowed to support your team”.

”It’s only friendly banter, don’t take it so serious”.

Do you know other people who have been affected?

“Alcohol plays a big part in sectarianism”.

“I know someone who was killed”.

Is sectarianism a big problem in your community?

“Police have cracked down in my area”.

“Only when the Old Firm are playing”.

Is sectarianism increasing or decreasing?

“It’s terrible what’s happening with Neil Lennon”.

“I don’t really think it is bad as it used to be”.

Will tougher sentences work?

“New laws might improve things for people in the public eye, but not us”.

“Need to make a larger impact”.

“Will never be eradicated”.

“May help some people”.

“Will never end”.

“Some people enjoy fighting”.

“No mixed schools”.

“May increase when they are all put in prison”.

“How are the police going to arrest 10,000 people for singing at a game”.

“It might increase when you put them together in prison”.

Is other action necessary?

“We need to work harder to break down religious barriers”.

“Generations will grow out of it”.

What action should schools take to tackle sectarianism?

“Parents need to play a more active role”.

“Zero Tolerance is the way forward”.

How wide a problem is sectarianism?

“You can see it on Facebook and other chat sites”.

“The media have a big role to play”.

How do you change people’s sectarian views?

“It’s just a game, get on with it”.

“Introduce them to other faiths and religions”.

Any other comments

“Fine them, the way they do with litter louts, and sectarianism is much more serious”.

“You need to look at the role alcohol plays, in the build up to matches”.

**Young people's views on the Offensive Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communications (Scotland) Bill:
A survey by Action for Children Scotland**

<p>1.</p>	<p>Why do you think certain people hold sectarian views?</p> <p>44% of young people felt that people held sectarian views as a direct result of how they were brought up.</p> <p>25% of young believe that sectarian views are attributed to religious beliefs.</p> <p>12% as a result of supporting a particular football team.</p> <p>7% of young people felt that some people just cannot get on.</p> <p>5% feel that peer pressure can force people to hold sectarian views.</p> <p>7% answered 'don't know', or did not answer this question.</p>
<p>2.</p>	<p>How does sectarianism affect people's lives?</p> <p>47% of young people believe that sectarianism leads to abuse, hatred, violence and knife crime.</p> <p>21% felt that it can lead to bullying and insecurity, resulting in difficulties in forming relationships.</p> <p>10% of young people felt that it makes people scared.</p> <p>5% believe that it changes people.</p> <p>10% answered 'don't know'.</p> <p>7% did not answer this question.</p>

3.	<p>Have you ever been treated badly or unfairly because of sectarianism, or some other form of hatred?</p> <p>61% of young people responded 'No' to this question.</p> <p>36% answered 'Yes'.</p> <p>3% did not answer this question.</p> <p>The majority of young people, who answered 'yes' to this question, cited football as the main contributing factor to being badly or unfairly treated. A small number of young people were treated unfairly as a result of skin color, with one young person giving the reason, as a result of disability.</p>
4.	<p>Do you know other people who have been treated badly or unfairly because of sectarianism, or some other form of hatred?</p> <p>59% of young people answered 'Yes' to this question.</p> <p>35% said 'No'.</p> <p>6% gave no answer.</p> <p>Similar to the question above, the vast majority of young people who responded 'yes', cited football as the reason why others were treated in an unfairly or bad way. A small number of young people gave skin color as the reason, with disability and attending a catholic school, as the other reasons given.</p>
5.	<p>Is sectarianism a big problem within your community?</p> <p>47% responded 'Yes'.</p>

	<p>40% responded 'No'.</p> <p>9% Said 'Don't know'.</p> <p>4% gave no answer.</p>
6.	<p>Do you think that sectarianism is increasing in Scotland, or is it decreasing?</p> <p>65% responded 'Yes'.</p> <p>15% responded 'No'.</p> <p>16% Said 'Don't know'.</p> <p>4% gave no answer.</p> <p>Young people give a number of reasons to explain why they felt sectarianism was on the increase. The recent events involving Celtic manager Neil Lennon, continued trouble in Ireland and certain marches were seen as the main causes of the increase. A number of young people commented on the role of the media, and how their portrayal of events increased tensions.</p> <p>A small number of young people who felt sectarianism was decreasing attributed this to local police being on top of things within local communities.</p>
7.	<p>Will tougher sentences help to bring an end to sectarianism, and to other forms of hatred, in Scotland?</p> <p>42% responded 'No'.</p> <p>34% responded 'Yes'.</p>

	<p>13% Said 'Don't know'.</p> <p>11% Said 'Maybe'.</p> <p>Young people made the following comments to this question:</p> <p>"New laws might improve things for people in the public eye, but not us".</p> <p>"Need to make a larger impact".</p> <p>"Will never be eradicated".</p> <p>"May help some people".</p> <p>"Will never end".</p> <p>"Some people enjoy fighting".</p> <p>"No mixed schools".</p> <p>"May increase when they are all put in prison".</p>
8.	<p>Do you think that other actions are necessary to stop sectarianism? If so, what?</p> <p>52% of young said 'Yes', confirming they do think other forms of action are necessary.</p> <p>42% said 'No'.</p> <p>6% gave no answer.</p>

	<p>More than half of the young people gave examples of a wide range of actions which they felt could help tackle the problem of sectarianism.</p> <p>15 young people indicated that school programmes would help. 10 young people felt that more punishments were necessary. 10 young people want to see bans being imposed at football grounds. 12 young people want it to stop, and feel that something serious needs to be done. 5 young people believe that catholic schools should be abolished.</p> <p>Of the remaining responses, the young people said they felt that children need to know more about the negative impact which sectarianism can have on people's lives, and that religious barriers need to be broken down, while some said that football teams should have points deducted from them if their fans behave in a sectarian manner.</p>
9.	<p>What action do you think primary schools and secondary schools should take to tackle sectarianism?</p> <p>62% of young people provided a range of actions in response to this question.</p> <p>26% gave no answer.</p> <p>12% answered 'don't know'.</p> <p>The following actions were suggested by the young people as ways in which sectarianism could be tackled within schools:</p> <p>25 young people felt that schools should invite experts in, to discuss the issue and develop a better understanding of how it impacts on people's lives.</p> <p>24 young people believe that educating children at an early age would prevent them growing up with sectarian views.</p> <p>12 young people feel that separate schools should be abolished.</p>

	<p>6 young people want football banning orders.</p> <p>6 young people felt that schools need to get tougher and exclude pupils who behave in a sectarian manner.</p>
10.	<p>Is sectarianism just a problem at football matches and on the Internet, or is it much wider? Are you aware of it on a daily basis?</p> <p>62% of young people believe that sectarianism is much wider and are aware of it on a regular basis as opposed to a daily basis.</p> <p>18% were not aware of it on a daily basis.</p> <p>8% of young people felt it only occurs at football matches.</p> <p>12% did not provide an answer.</p>
11.	<p>What action do you think would help to change the views of those convicted of sectarian offences to make sure they do not reoffend?</p> <p>40% of young people provided no response to this question.</p> <p>15% believe that educating offenders would make a difference.</p> <p>10% felt that tougher sentences would prevent them reoffending.</p> <p>13% want the offender to meet with the victim in order to understand the affects their actions has had.</p>

	<p>7% want football bans.</p> <p>4% believe heavy fines will stop reoffending rates.</p> <p>Other actions which young people believe should be considered were rehabilitation, tagging, community service and having something of great value taken away.</p>
<p>12.</p>	<p>Do you have any other comments/suggestions about how best to tackle sectarianism?</p> <p>73% of young people answered 'No' or 'Don't know' to this question.</p> <p>27% of young people provided a range of suggestions, which were the same to the answers given to question 11.</p>