The NWG is a Charitable organisation formed as a UK network of over 1600 practitioners working to tackle the issue of child sexual exploitation (CSE) and trafficking within the UK. Our Network covers voluntary and statutory services. We offer support, advice and raise the profile, provide updates share national developments, influence the development of national and local policy informed by practice.

Our team is made up of specialists with a range of skills who can offer support and expertise to the network. We will proactively engage with Local Safeguarding Children’s Boards and their partner agencies, researchers and policy writers on the issue of CSE. Our aim is to promote effective training, prevention, disruption, prosecution and therapeutic care for victims and survivors; developing according to need, and actively working with our international partners, tackling CSE and trafficking. Our principal objective is to offer support and advice to those working with children and young people under 18 years who are affected by CSE.

The NWG is the only child sexual exploitation network working across voluntary/statutory agencies tackling CSE, with links across Europe, South East Asia, Africa and USA exchanging knowledge, understanding and dedicated to seeking ways to find alternative solutions.

In October 2013, The NWG Network Specialist team spent 4 days in Scotland, strengthening links with those who were already members of the network, whilst also developing new partnerships. We visited a number of frontline specialist projects, as well as meeting with key stakeholders and government officials working in the field of tackling Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE).

We were encouraged by the openness of those we met with to share the work that was going well, whilst also discussing the challenges to effective CSE practice in Scotland. I will take the opportunity in this report to give an overview of the effective practice we heard about and will then go on to outline the challenges that were presented by practitioners. We would also like to take the opportunity to explore some re-occurring themes that were presented during our visit.

While in Scotland we visited 5 specialist CSE projects, providing a range of services ranging from preventative education in schools, outreach/detached work with young people, 1:1 intervention work with young people at risk or being sexually exploited, training with professionals in local communities. As well as meeting with specialist projects, we also held a range of meetings
with a variety of practitioners working in the field. Our time with projects and professionals was very limited, however during the short time we had, heard of CSE manifesting in the following ways (this will not be exhaustive of the ways young people are/have been exploited, this is simply what we were told);

- Peer on Peer Sexual Exploitation
- ‘Boyfriend’ / ‘Girlfriend’ grooming & Sexual Exploitation
- Online grooming & Sexual Exploitation
- Gang/Organised Sexual Exploitation
- Young people trafficked internationally by organised crime groups for purposes of Sexual Exploitation
- Young people trafficked internally
- Boys and young men who have been sexually exploited
- Young women in unemployment are known to be displaying concerning behaviour in relationships - Glasgow

As our visit was on an informal basis, we would be unable to comment on the numbers of young people at risk of / being sexually exploited, what we could say is that according to the numbers we were given unofficially during our visit the number of young people accessing services could be anywhere between 64 – 300 young people annually.

We were told of both looked after young people and young people living at home being exploited, although it is worth noting there appeared to have been a focus on looked after young people. It was hard to get an overview of the total number of young people who were deemed at risk of / being Sexually Exploited. In some areas the numbers of young people accessing specialist services was very small, despite concerns that the reported numbers of young people being exploited or at risk of exploitation being significantly higher. This could be due to lack of appropriate services providing appropriate specialist CSE intervention or a lack of understanding around CSE, resulting in under reporting and poor recognition of the issue.

We were told of higher numbers of girls accessing services compared to boys, which would compare with the picture across the UK. There was a small acknowledgement that the number of young men accessing CSE services was not reflective of the number of young men affected by Sexual Exploitation, however in some areas there appeared to be less acknowledgement of boys as victims, and this again is likely to be down to lack of recognition and awareness and underreporting of the issue by victims, families and practitioners themselves.

Similar to challenges across the UK, there would appear to be challenges engaging young people affected by Sexually Exploitation in both the BME and Migrant communities. Young people in these groups would appear to be hidden from view possibly due to the cultural sensitivities attached to CSE, lack of recognition and underreporting by both victims and their families due to issues regarding honour and shame, and may also be down to services inability to respond to such complex issues.
Many of the CSE services were very engaged in preventative education within secondary schools within their areas, as well as providing specific CSE training for professionals in those areas. However, again this seemed to be sporadic dependent on area.

Youth participation seemed to be positive on the whole, e.g. lots of resources developed to raise awareness with young people, in consultation with young people.

The connection between young people missing from home/care and CSE was highlighted on several occasions. However, there appeared to be a greater focus on the risks of CSE when looked after young people were missing as opposed to young people missing from home. Two projects reported they carried out return interviews for young people missing from care, however there seemed less consistency with return interviews for young people missing from home.

Across the services we visited there was very little work happening with parents, except in one project who ran group work with parents & carer’s.

The increase of online sexual exploitation and how it is combatted was a recurring theme when talking with professionals.

Across the services there appeared to be a lack of therapeutic intervention for young people affected by Sexual Exploitation, except for one project who had a specialist CSE counseling service, which young people could opt into. This service appeared to have good numbers of young people utilising the service.

There was acknowledgment that there was a lack of understanding about the scale/scope of CSE in the rural areas and much more was known about the major cities in Scotland than in the country side. A scoping exercise extending across Scotland to gain a more comprehensive understanding and picture of the nature and scale of CSE would be very helpful to understand the true scale of CSE in Scotland.

Across our visits to both statutory and non statutory agencies, there did not appear to be coherent joined up thinking taking place in relation to strategic planning and response to CSE. This may be linked to different understandings across agencies about what CSE is and where it should sit strategically in organisations. There appeared to be a lack of information sharing between Statutory and Third sector agencies, which would contribute to ineffective multi agency working. In addition to this in discussion with practitioners it was noted that there was a feeling that the definition of CSE in Scotland was not always clear and perhaps this had a direct impact on multi agency working, as their was not always a shared understanding of CSE. This been said there are pockets of effective practice happening in small chunks within Scotland but without a national action plan that brings a framework nationally, efforts will continue to be inconsistent.