

STANDARDS, PROCEDURES AND PUBLIC APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE

INQUIRY INTO LOBBYING

SUBMISSION RECEIVED FROM CHILDREN IN SCOTLAND

We welcome this opportunity to contribute to this inquiry on lobbying activity in Scotland. We previously responded to Neil Findlay MSP's consultation on his proposed member's Bill and have been following the progress of the Lobbying Bill at Westminster. Along with other NGOs and third sector organisations we have some concerns about the implications of the UK Bill. One specific concern is around how rules governing non-party campaigning and spending might affect membership organisations such as ours.

This call for evidence asks if there have been significant changes in the last decade in the way that lobbying is carried out – the most obvious being that there is far more 'virtual lobbying' with email and social media replacing face to face meetings. This is certainly beneficial in terms of increased access to elected representatives and to allow organisations to campaign and mobilise support quickly.

We conducted a survey of a sample of our membership (including responses from voluntary organisations, local authorities, statutory organisations, professional organisations, universities and individuals) which showed that most engaged in what could be described as lobbying behaviour (whether or not they define it that way themselves). The majority of respondents said that they would be happy to join a register of lobbyists although they would welcome clarification on what this would entail. Some did not feel individual staff should be identified on such a register unless they were specifically employed to undertake lobbying behaviour with one stating "*an individual approach to parliament is a democratic right, as is the right to lobby via petitions and democratic action*". Others were unsure if such a register was a good fit for their organisation.

There were mixed views on whether such a register should be voluntary or compulsory to join suggesting this is an issue which may need to be teased out in future consideration of options.

In our previous response to Neil Findlay MSP we noted that we would not be supportive of proposals that placed unnecessary and additional administrative burdens on charitable organisations. Our members were very clear that they would not be happy to pay to have to join a register of lobbyists.

In summary, we hope the Committee will take account of the potential impact on the voluntary sector, which includes organisations of all sizes, in taking action to remedy problems with lobbying in Scotland. Lobbying (also described as campaigning or influencing) is an essential function for Children in Scotland and many of our members in order to influence policy change to the benefit of the causes they represent. To quote one of our respondents:

“Significant and positive changes in social policy often emerge from the individual and collective lobbying of the third sector; both in bringing attention to the perhaps uncomfortable truths of the negative/ positive effects of government policy or proposed party political policies, and in providing the expertise and knowledge to help create useful and workable policy solutions to identified issues. Lobbying is at the core of much of that work and should not be overtly restricted through any politicians or civil service fear of being brought to account for the effects of their decisions”.

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Children in Scotland is the national umbrella agency for organisations and professionals working with and for children, young people and their families. It exists to identify and promote the interests of children and their families and to ensure that policies and services and other provisions are of the highest possible quality and are able to meet the needs of a diverse society. Children in Scotland represents more than 400 members, including most of Scottish local authorities, all major voluntary, statutory and private children’s agencies, professional organisations, as well as many other smaller community groups and children’s services. It is linked with similar agencies in other parts of the UK and Europe.

The work of Children in Scotland encompasses extensive information, policy, research and practice development programmes. The agency works closely with MSPs, the Scottish Government, local authorities and practitioners. It also services groups such as the Cross Party Parliamentary Group on Children and Young People (with YouthLink Scotland). In addition, Children in Scotland hosts Enquire - the national advice service for additional support for learning, and Resolve: ASL, Scotland’s largest independent education mediation service.