Thank you for the opportunity to submit written evidence in advance of the oral evidence session on 26th June. A core part of our role is to work with international colleagues to learn from each other and develop standards that will improve the lives of children and young people in Scotland and internationally. Given the focus of the Committee on mental health, we would like to inform you of some of the work we are doing on the issue with children and young people in Scotland, and international partners.

In particular, our submission will focus on a piece of work which we are undertaking with the European Network of Young Ambassadors (ENYA). We feel that this work clearly demonstrates the importance of listening to the views of children and young people in issues directly affecting them - in this case their views around mental health.

We are members the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children (ENOC) which comprises 42 institutions in 34 countries within the Council of Europe. Each year ENOC chooses a focus for our joint work. The Theme for 2018 is Children’s Rights to Mental Healthcare.

The ENOC Secretariat had circulated a questionnaire on mental health and wellbeing to all its members earlier this year and the feedback from this was discussed at a meeting in Dublin on 6th June. This was chaired by the ENOC Chair Elect, the French ‘Children’s Rights Defender’. Groups discussed the WHO definition of mental health and whether it adequately covered children’s rights. Other issues covered included the age of consent (or to withhold consent) to medical treatment, the importance of play, school transitions and the importance of rigorous data collection. Specific groups of children who are particularly vulnerable included children with learning disabilities, children affected by domestic abuse, gypsy traveller children, migrant children and children affected by parental imprisonment.

The feedback from the various workshops has been collected and will be shared with the European Network of Young Ambassadors (ENYA). This network allows Scottish children and young people to share their experience and develop solutions at a European level. The office has previously supported young people to work with ENYA in 2014 (the impact of austerity), 2016 (equal access to education) and 2017 (relationship and sexuality education).
This year our office is working with a group of young people to develop a set of evidence-based recommendations on this topic and we will support two of those young people to travel to Barcelona at the end of June to present their findings to the ENYA network and to representatives of ENOC. ENOC will then use those recommendations to inform a statement on children’s rights to mental healthcare which is directed to all member states in the Council of Europe. In the course of this work, two of the young people will collaborate to blog about the experience and the group will also produce a short video which will reflect their views and recommendations.

Mental health was one of the more common issues raised by children and young people during the Scotland-wide consultation the office undertook in the development of our 2018-20 Revised Strategic Plan. In particular, young people told us that they were concerned about access to mental health services.

It was also identified as a priority by respondents to the adult survey we conducted on the Commissioner’s priorities. In addition, mental health waiting times, availability of assessments and impacts on children with ASN have been raised with us via our Advice function. For this reason, we are pleased to be able to support a group of young people to contribute to this important issue at a European level and to give them the chance to bring back learning and recommendations from their peers in other countries to inform the debate here in Scotland.

We will keep the Committee updated on our progress with this work and we, along with our Young Advisers, would welcome the opportunity to present this work to the Committee in due course.

Yours sincerely

Bruce Adamson
Commissioner for Children and Young People, Scotland