

Scottish Parliament Cross Party Group on Children and Young People
Minute of Meeting

Tuesday 7 June 2016 13.00-14.30

Committee Room 1 The Scottish Parliament

Chair: Kezia Dugdale MSP

The Impact of EU Membership on Children and Young People

Opening from chair: Kezia Dugdale MSP welcomed everyone and introduced new MSP Fulton Macgregor from the SNP.

Cross Party Group re-registration:

- Membership agreed to continue the CPG
- Membership agreed to re-elect Kezia Dugdale MSP and Alison Johnstone MSP as co-conveners.
- Membership agreed to elect Fulton Macgregor MSP and Alex Cole-Hamilton MSP co-conveners.

Kezia Dugdale MSP welcomed the fact there will be four co-conveners so a rota can be set. Notice will be sent to all co-conveners to make them aware they have been elected.

- Membership agreed to continue with the joint secretariat provided by YouthLink Scotland and Children in Scotland.

Kezia Dugdale thanked both organisations for their joint secretariat work.

Following the AGM, Kezia Dugdale MSP opened the meeting and introduced the 6 speakers:

Juliet Harris, Director of Together (the Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights), acting a neutral capacity to offer background to the issue and analysis of EU membership from a rights perspective.

John Edwards from Scotland Stronger In Europe and Vanessa Glynn, Honorary Fellow, Edinburgh University Europa Institute spoke for the remain side

The Leave was represented by Mev Brown, Chief Spokesman for Business for Britain (BfB) Scotland & Scottish Vote Leave, Dr Kate Pickering a GP and social commentator and Iain McGill, Director of the Harmony Employment Agency.

Each Speaker had three minutes to present their arguments, followed by a period of question and answers from the floor.

Juliet Harris asked for 10 min to offer a more detailed presentation, which was agreed by the membership.

Panel discussion:

Juliet Harris, Director, Together

- Together is an organisation that promotes and monitors the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) across Scotland.
- Together does not have a position on the debate but explores what the impact on Children's rights could be.
- On the 23rd of June adults will be voting to remain or leave in Europe but it will be children who will be the most affected.
- 16 & 17 years can join the army, get married, pay tax but are excluded from the vote despite the fact that they will have the longest to live with the result of the polls.
- No efforts were made from either side to get children and young people's position on the matter.
- What would be the impact on children's rights?
 - It is difficult to find a law that doesn't affect children: toy safety, online advertising, employment and working hour restrictions just to name a few.
 - EU law protects children's rights that are not included in the Human Rights Act (rights to free compulsory education, non-age discrimination etc..).
 - Directives on child abuses, pornography, human trafficking have been implemented into Scots Law.
 - There has been a wide spread consultation on the rights of the child not just in Brussels but in all European countries (child friendly justice, violence against children and young people)
 - The 2014-2020 European Structural Fund (ESF) for Scotland is £362 million funding programmes in education, mental health, custody, drugs to name a few. A further £60 million has been attributed to Scotland to boost youth employment in South West Scotland. The ESF mainly targets children & young people in vulnerable areas.

- The CE mark shows that toys have been made according to EU toy safety regulations. The last death because of a toy was recorded in 2003, in comparison with the United States of America where there is no regulation and considering they have the same number of children in USA and Europe in the same period there were 15 deaths in the USA.
- It is also important to reflect on what the UK has done unilaterally.
- What would happen to the cross border family law? If the UK votes to leave there will be a massive gap and it still remains unclear on the way it will continue if the UK stays in Europe.
- Evidence based proposals to be protected under a leave or remain vote.

John Edwards - Scotland Stronger in Europe's Senior Campaign Spokesperson

- The EU is partly a British creation it wasn't done to us. We are the 2nd largest country in the EU and if we want Europe to work with us we have to be part of it.
- It is a shame that 16 & 17 years old are not allowed to take part in the vote.
- Children will be affected one way or the other by the result.
- It is thought that because children are not a direct economic agent or actor that they are not affected, however they are.
- Free movement and free trade is really important for children's education.
- Many teachers and social care workers come from Europe.
- We also have to look outside Europe regarding helping other countries and the role for children's rights in applicant countries.

Mev Brown, Chief Spokesman for Business for Britain (BfB) Scotland & Scottish Vote Leave.

- As mainly dealing with businesses, it will be a different perspective.
- Sweden has a strong welfare state and a strong economy. They should go hand in hand.
- If you get the economy right everything should fall into place.
- If Britain goes back into recession because of Europe falling apart, business will stop recruiting, there will be no job opportunities for young people.
- What Europe does for us we can do it for ourselves:
 - We are currently giving 10 billion a year to Europe, this money will be available to us if we decide to leave and it could be redistributed into programmes such as Erasmus for Europe but also education in other non EU countries.

- 15% of the UK workforce comes from EU countries, if we can't find people with the right qualifications, yes it is fine but we have to prioritise British citizens.
- Money given to Europe for key projects could be redistributed to organisations and charities here in the UK.

Vanessa Glynn - Honorary Fellow, Edinburgh University Europa Institute

- During most of the last century Europe was at war and bereaved, the EU was designed to tackle this with economic cooperation and human rights. It helped countries get out of poverty and dictatorship and allowed countries to grow. The UK has a 2% a year growth since being in the EU.
- At the moment we have stability and a growing economy, freedom to travel, work and study, and our position will be uncertain if we leave.
- Erasmus is a great programme, which allows young people to experience different cultures, countries and the UK benefits also from young people coming here.
- 74% of young people between the age of 18 and 24 answered a poll in favour of remaining in the EU.
- They know that they live in a globalised and connected world.

Dr Kate Pickering (Clinical Lead Islay and Jura, Principal GP) and social commentator

- The right of the child is cornerstone of the UN not the EU.
- Education standard are currently dropping.
- Children shouldn't be allowed to vote at 16/17.
- If we vote to leave, we will not stop thinking for ourselves about different laws, we will continue, it is not just about the EU, it's about the world.
- We should have control over our own budget to look after our citizens.
- We are already divided in our own country (English students have to pay tuition fees in Scotland but EU members don't have to pay it).
- The NHS and schools are under pressure with immigration (there is already not enough for children in schools).

Iain McGill - Iain McGill, Director of the Harmony Employment Agency for social sector staff across Scotland.

- I have worked all over the world, in non-EU countries, I've never seen the necessity for EU, it does not prevent travel.
- When I worked in Africa I have seen how Europe imposes tariffs & subsidies to keep people in poverty. Europe is not helping them to trade out of it.
- The EU works for the haves not the haves not.

- In my job I have no problem recruiting well qualified staff from non EU countries.
- European projects have failed our country, there is 50% youth unemployment in Greece.
- Our own parliament is tied up in EU court when making decisions.

Michael Gowan from SYP:

- As part of the Lead The Way manifesto launch young people were asked their opinion regarding the EU referendum vote.
 - 66% for Stay
 - 11% for Leave
 - 23% undecided.
- We need to educate young people, if the message is taken to grassroots level, young people will take responsibility.
- The EU offers massive opportunity for young people.
- As a gay young person I can't go and work in non EU countries as there is no minimum standard over there compared to EU countries and it would be dangerous for me.
- In the US there is no guarantee for maternity leave, it depends on your employer.
- We need to think further afield for young people and where we can take it especially for children's rights.

Questions from the floor: (2 QUESTIONS THEN THE PANEL ANSWERS)

1. Lewis Ritchie, Children in Scotland:

I previously worked in multiple countries around Europe and it allowed me to learn about the world. Our responsibility as adults should be to pass on more rights and freedoms to the next generation, not fewer. .Will leaving the EU offer children and young people fewer opportunities than I had?

Iain McGill answers:

We can travel to 180 countries without a visa and if we leave Europe we will still have 150 countries to travel to. People will still have the right to move freely.

Dr Kate Pickering answers:

The problem is that poor children don't come from families that can push them on and education is failing them.

We can all travel everywhere if we want to.

If Brexit wins there is an uncertainty about the rights to work and travel in Europe but the UK parliament will be empowered.

2. Luna Nerea Carmona, Xchange:

Xchange works with young people who have a difficult background and we provide them with opportunity with the Erasmus programme.

If leaving the EU how are you going to substitute this?

Andy Murray from East Lothian Council:

I fear that the aftermath of the referendum will be worse than before the vote.

How do politicians come together after the referendum?

Mev Brown answers:

We could still take part in the Erasmus programme but it will leave the UK with more funding for other project.

Vanessa Glynn replies:

We currently receive 7 billion a year by Europe, where is the money going to come from if we leave?

Mev Brown answers:

The government doesn't create jobs or wealth. Britain is out performing the EU. The Eurozone is 2 trillion in debt, and Europe has been buying their way out by printing more notes.

The EU creates fewer jobs than the UK.

3. Mary Hamilton from Deep limited:

We are an organisation dealing with 16-25 year looked after young people. There are more and more funding cuts and young people are being excluded.

Some of those young people can't even leave their hometown never mind travelling.

We had a 45% reduction in government funding, and have to rely on grants, charity funding.

Maybe we would have a lower unemployment rate if we leave the EU.

Ruth Mendel, Scottish Education:

We have a shortage of teachers in specific subjects and geographical areas.

If we leave the EU what would happen as we already have a recruitment problem?

John Edwards answers:

Regarding poverty and austerity if we have a look at your tax return only 0.3% goes to the EU budget, before Europe was giving money to poor areas in Glasgow and other deprived areas in Scotland but now it goes to other countries as they are much poorer than us.

Being in Europe really helps us recruit teachers as we have a mutual qualification, this mutual recognition allows teachers to practice anywhere which is not the case for the USA, Australia etc...

Iain McGill answers:

We will be saving if we come out of the EU, the EU tells us how to spend it, it is making all the decisions for us.

At the moment, money is spent in the wrong way and we are losing great potential staffs because non-EU people don't meet the right criteria.

Closing arguments:

Iain McGill:

What happen will happen.

The aftermath will be a lot easier after the EU referendum than the Independence one.

I don't think that the EU will exist in 20 years' time.

John Edwards:

I don't know what will happen regarding jobs tomorrow, but it is better to face it collectively by staying in the EU.

People need to vote for what is happening now, not what could happen tomorrow.

Vanessa Glynn:

In 20 years' time the EU will still be here.

Problems are not caused by the EU but by being part of the world.

Cooperation and sharing creates a superb and vibrant economy.

We are in a position of leadership as part of the EU.

Mev Brown:

Since 2008, 4 out of 5 jobs created went to other EU nationals.

If we leave, the EU those jobs will go first to UK people.

Juliet Harris:

The debate on leaving or staying in the EU should focus on children and young people, and it is disappointing that it has not.

In Sweden they believe that if you get things right for children, then the economy and the rest will fall into place.

Action point:

Next CPG meeting date will be sent out to members.

If members would like a subject to be discussed at the CPG they can get in touch with the secretariat.