



**Education reform consultation on behalf of Professor Ken Muir,
University of the West of Scotland and Independent Advisor to the
Scottish Government**

Response from Barnardo's Scotland – November 2021

About your organisation

Barnardo's is the UK's largest national children's charity operating in Scotland since 1892. Barnardo's Scotland works with thousands of children, young people and their families in our specialised community-based services across Scotland. We believe in children and we believe every child and young person has a right to thrive. Our work includes family support, supporting children, young people and families through fostering and adoption services, child sexual abuse and exploitation services, support for young carers, supporting young people entering employment, education and training, and families living in poverty. We use information and experience from our services across Scotland, and from the children and young people we work with, to seek positive change in policy and practice based on what matters to the people who use our services and what we see working in communities. We work collaboratively across all sectors and political parties to achieve the best outcomes for children and young people.

As an introduction to the questions which follow in this consultation, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

1.1 The vision for Curriculum for Excellence reflects what matters for the education of children and young people in Scotland.

Strongly Agree

Agree

Neither Agree/Disagree X

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

1.2 What do you think should be retained and/or changed?

Barnardo's Scotland has a long history of working in partnership with families, schools and communities, however, the introduction of the Scottish Attainment Challenge in 2015 to tackle the poverty related attainment gap, has enabled us to extend our work to reach over 400 schools, which is 16% of the Scottish education estate.

In any reform of Scotland's curriculum, we believe a stronger focus on health and wellbeing is needed in discussions around the attainment agenda, and in particular the impact of trauma and adversity on a child's ability to learn.

It's also important that schools adopt a family learning approach which draws parents and other agencies to the school. We recognise that there are a number of complex issues which can affect children and young people's educational outcomes, however, those living in poverty often face the greatest challenge reaching their full potential. Living on a low income is not just about the struggle to pay bills. Families in poverty can find it difficult to be fully emotionally available to their children when their resources are absorbed by the stress of not being able to afford necessities like housing, food and fuel.

Children living in poverty are more likely to be delayed in terms of language acquisition, and have a higher incidence of behavioural problems than their more affluent peers. We also now understand more fully the impact that the stress caused by Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and early trauma can have on a child's development, their ability to learn and their mental health and wellbeing.

Schools are increasingly on the frontline of responding to children and young people who come through their gates with a range of unmet material and emotional needs. Closing the attainment gap then goes beyond the school gates, and we therefore believe that the relational approach must remain central to Scotland's curriculum. Recognising the need for children and young people to know themselves as individuals and to develop healthy relationships with their families and communities is crucial.

Relationships are key to creating safe, nurturing environments which help support children and young people's mental health and wellbeing. In 2019, Barnardo's Scotland worked with Public Health Scotland to develop a film which highlights practical examples and tips that education staff can build into their everyday practice to support positive relationships with young people. The film was launched virtually in April 2020 – and although it was developed before the Covid-19 pandemic, we believe its principles are more relevant than ever.

The impact of the pandemic and the isolation of successive lockdowns on the health and wellbeing of children and young people and their social development has been significant, which is why we believe that reinforcing the need to put relationships at the heart of children's experiences is more vital than ever. The film is available to view online on Barnardo's YouTube channel and at www.healthscotland.scot/nurturingrelationships

In conclusion, Barnardo's Scotland work within schools is focused on building healthy relationships and supporting families to ensure that children and young people are getting what they need to be healthy, happy and successful in the school environment. Whilst we do not have detailed comments on the form and content of assessments, we believe that the foundation and vision of Scotland's curriculum must be based on wellbeing and healthy relationships – without relentless focus on this, achieving successful learning and closing the poverty-related attainment gap cannot be reached.