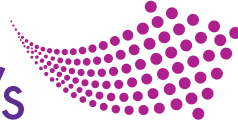




The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Scotland's  
**Futures Forum**  
Fòram Alba air Thoiseach

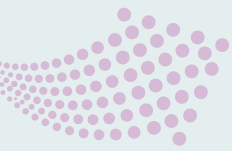


**SCOTLAND 2030 PROGRAMME**

## **Life in Future Scotland: Growing Up**

Tuesday 6 March 2018, at the Scottish Parliament





The Presiding Officer and chair of Scotland's Futures Forum board of directors, Rt Hon Ken Macintosh MSP, welcomed guests to the fourth session of the Futures Forum's Scotland 2030 Programme, an investigation into the society we want Scotland to be in 2030.

Having considered the challenges of technological developments and climate change to our economy and society, in 2018 the Futures Forum is looking at stages of life in future Scotland. This session looked at what life is like for children and young people in Scotland today, and how it could and should change by 2030. Cathy McCulloch, co-director of the Children's Parliament, Madeleine Brown, Member of the Scottish Youth Parliament, and Marc Lambert, chief executive of the Scottish Book Trust, provided their views to start the discussion.



## Cathy McCulloch, co-director of the Children's Parliament

Through 20 years of working at the Children's Parliament, Cathy McCulloch was uniquely placed to report on how children view Scotland. Generally, children feel that Scotland is doing well in how it delivers services to children, with most children reporting that they feel loved and cared for, while many are also excited by Scotland's landscape and history.

The picture is more complex for many of the children the Children's Parliament work with, 75% of whom have additional support needs, including difficulty with relationships and positive engagement in and out of school. Cathy highlighted how some of these children had met the First Minister and the Scottish Government Cabinet that morning to share their concerns. These included too much shouting at school, which makes them feel scared and unable to learn; differences in how teachers treat boys and girls; a lack of consistency in dealing with bullying; and care-experienced children feeling defined by that label.

Cathy argued that only the implementation of a children's human rights approach offered the means to make a difference to the lives of all children, particularly those who most need our support. She cautioned that a children's rights approach does not mean that children get to do whatever they want or that adults lose control; rather it offers a framework that can transform cultures and encourage the development of mutually respectful relationships between children and adults. Without such an approach, adults retain all the power and children are dependent on adults to create the culture, ethos and values of kindness, trust, empathy and human dignity.



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The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) can guide us towards adopting best practice to ensure our children grow up with respect for their own and others' human dignity. The Convention also offers a set of minimum standards against which we can measure how we are doing and below which we must not fall.

In Cathy's view, if we get this right now, we will leave a legacy, up to 2030 and beyond, of stronger, safer, more resilient and cohesive communities in which people of all ages feel valued and able to play their part in shaping Scotland's future. The evidence suggests that by implementing a children's rights framework we would also see improved emotional wellbeing and resilience, improved relationships with peers and adults, and increased commitment to school and learning.

Having adopted such an approach, Cathy hopes we will see a Scotland in 2030 where children feel able to speak up for themselves when things are going wrong for them, knowing that adults will take them seriously and involve them in making things better.

To encourage this vision, the Children's Parliament's has launched a campaign for 'Unfearties' - adults who are willing to stand up for and stand alongside children. Cathy ended her presentation by encouraging everyone to sign up to be an Unfeartie.



## Madeleine Brown, Member of the Scottish Youth Parliament

The Scottish Youth Parliament is in the process of undertaking a national consultation on growing up in Scotland, which has posed two questions:

- > What is the best thing about growing up in Scotland?
- > If you could change anything from 2030, what would it be?

Madeline was able to share the interim results of the on-line consultation which is open to all young people from across Scotland.

Common responses to the question on the best thing about growing up in Scotland included: dedicated youth work, which was seen as playing an important role in improving young people's lives; free education, especially free higher education; a strong sense of identity as a country; and access to a beautiful landscape with opportunities to be in nature.

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Education must keep pace with the changes that we are likely to see in the future.

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Youth work and education also featured prominently in the responses to the question about what young people said they would like to see changed in the future. Madeline reported that respondents had said they wanted to see the importance of youth work fully recognised and backed by an adequate budget so young people in all areas of Scotland could access it in the future.



In Education, there was a strong feeling that the current assessment methods needed to be reviewed. A move away from exams, which were viewed as stressful and not very effective, to more continuous assessment would allow greater opportunities for people to get back on track. Respondents to the consultation also said that they wanted to see education keep pace with the changes that we are likely to see in the future.

Mental health was another key issue that came out of the consultation, with a strong view that young people need to be educated about mental health issues and where to find help.

Madeline finished her presentation by highlighting that the Scottish Youth Parliament is currently running a national campaign, 'Right here, right now,' which is pushing for the UNCRC to be incorporated into Scots law.



## Marc Lambert, chief executive of the Scottish Book Trust



Marc Lambert opened his presentation with some stark facts on poverty, pointing out that 25% of Scottish children are currently living in poverty, a figure that is predicted to rise to one in three children by 2020.

Marc went on to highlight how the effects of poverty start early and have long lasting impacts. Children from the most disadvantaged backgrounds are twice as likely to experience a speech, language or communication concern at 27 to 30 months, while the vocabulary scores of children aged five are associated with their literacy as adults aged 34. Scotland's current attainment gap sees around two in every three pupils from the most deprived areas leave school without any qualifications (compared to two in every five of those from the least deprived areas) and fewer than one in 10 pupils from the most disadvantaged districts go to university.



It is impossible to deal with poverty without also dealing with literacy: language lies at the root of agency.







Although literacy cannot solve poverty, Marc proposed that it is impossible to deal with poverty without also dealing with literacy. Quoting Sir Harry Burns, the former Chief Medical Officer for Scotland, he noted that language lies at the root of agency and, 'is a prerequisite for full, informed and responsible participation in social, economic, cultural and political life'.

To tackle the attainment gap, it was suggested we need to acknowledge that the first few years of a child's life are crucial in laying the foundations for future learning. The way that a child's brain develops, including their capacity for language, is strongly influenced by the strength of attachment between parent and child. In that context, we need to challenge as a society the fact that fathers are not as engaged in their children's development as they could be, often because they are unclear about their role as an educator.

In Marc's view the attainment gap will neither be narrowed nor closed so long as policy focuses on children's educational outcomes rather than the factors that affect their outcomes such as value, respect, dignity, understanding, inclusion, appreciation, and participation within school. He also argued that we need to dismantle the barriers to high aspirations and recognise that parents living in poverty do not necessarily lack aspirations for their children but their aspirations are often a construct of what is familiar or known to them.

In thinking about the challenges children are likely to face in the future, Marc considered the impact of digital technology and how it has already facilitated a move from a world dominated by logos (the word) to one dominated by simulacra (images). However, while digital technology has changed the means by which we read, write, communicate and access information, in his view it has not removed our need to be confident, articulate and skilful with language.

Technological changes do, however, require us to redefine what we mean by 'literacy' and to acknowledge the difference between 'deep reading' and 'digital reading'. While the latter is often about information-finding, 'deep reading' involves sophisticated processes that include inferential and deductive reasoning, analogical skills, critical analysis, reflection and insight. Marc suggested that these processes are in danger of being lost in a culture that advantages speed, multitasking, and the processing of the next piece of information, a fact that needs to be considered alongside the research that shows screen time makes children less creative in problem solving, less able to persevere at tasks, and less tolerant of unstructured time.

Marc finished his presentation with the following quote from Frank Furedi, 'Literature penetrates and shapes human thought. It transforms peoples' mentality, alters the way they think, and can, in certain circumstances, shape their identity... It is the principle gateway through which questions of value are internalised, articulated, and clarified.'



**Screen time makes children less creative in problem solving, less able to persevere at tasks, and less tolerant of unstructured time.**





# Discussion

## Children's rights

The discussion opened with a series of questions about children's rights: why do we need them and how do they sit alongside the rights of parents? It was pointed out that children currently rely on adults for their rights and, for this to change, rights need be implemented at a national level rather than by being realised on an individual basis. A rights based approach means a consistent approach across all communities, all statutory bodies and all sectors so that all children have the right to be heard and to be treated with respect. It was noted that the recent string of sexual abuse scandals have illustrated the damage that can be done when children are not listened to.

It was strongly refuted that there is any clash between children's rights and the rights of parents. Under the UNCRC, parents have a right to bring up their children and it is only when something goes wrong – when parents don't exercise their duty of care – that the state is allowed to intervene. It was reiterated that adopting a children's rights approach does not equate to letting children do what they want, nor does it mean that children's rights trump anyone else's rights.

It was pointed out that the Scottish Government could choose to incorporate the UNCRC into legislation without waiting until it has competence over all areas within the convention.



**The recent string of sexual abuse scandals have illustrated the damage that can be done when children are not listened to.**



## Technological change

As the discussion moved on to the technological advances we can expect by 2030, questions were raised around how we support children to navigate the increasingly rapid pace of change we can expect in the future. It was suggested that some of these changes, like moving from pens to a tablets, will be cosmetic, and that two essential aspects of the human experience – language and our need for social interactions – will remain unchanged. As such, how children engage with knowledge will fundamentally remain the same.

It was noted that, in addition to technological change, we also need to prepare children for the advances in medicine, cybernetics and genomics which are likely to throw up new ethical challenges. In particular, these will require future generations to understand how to balance the rights of an individual against the rights of wider society. For example, should people have the right to choose to have children with blue eyes?

It was pointed out that how adults engage with technology is as important as how children interact with it, given that many children already complain about the amount of time their parents spend on their phones and other digital devices.



**Two essential aspects of the human experience – language and our need for social interactions – will remain unchanged.**





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Encourage children to read: it not only offers an exploration of our social world, but also helps to increase empathy.

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## Role of education

The role of the education system in preparing children for other aspects of the world in 2030 was the focus of further discussion. It was argued that we need an education system that is less knowledge-based and one which helps children develop qualities like resilience and agency to enable them to deal with new challenges. It was noted that this had been the original aim of a Curriculum for Excellence, but that this aim has been undermined by the emphasis placed on exams by universities and others.

In answer to a question around how we can prepare children for a world where there is greater potential for armed conflicts, it was suggested that we need to study history so that children can learn the lessons of the past and spot the tell-tale signs of any coming conflict.

There was a question around how school can engender greater emotional literacy. It was suggested that the best way to do this was to encourage children to read, which not only offers an exploration of our social world, but also helps to increase empathy.

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Literacy is key to developing a child's sense of agency and their ability to engage with the world.

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## The impact of poverty

The discussion returned to the impact of poverty in realising a child's right to an education and their ability to learn. It was argued that this is particularly the case for children with learning difficulties or a disability if their parents are not in a position to demand or afford the right support. The importance of literacy was also reiterated as key to developing a child's sense of agency, without which it is difficult to engage with a whole range of services, not least our healthcare system where agency is crucial to making the most of the choices available

# Post-event comments

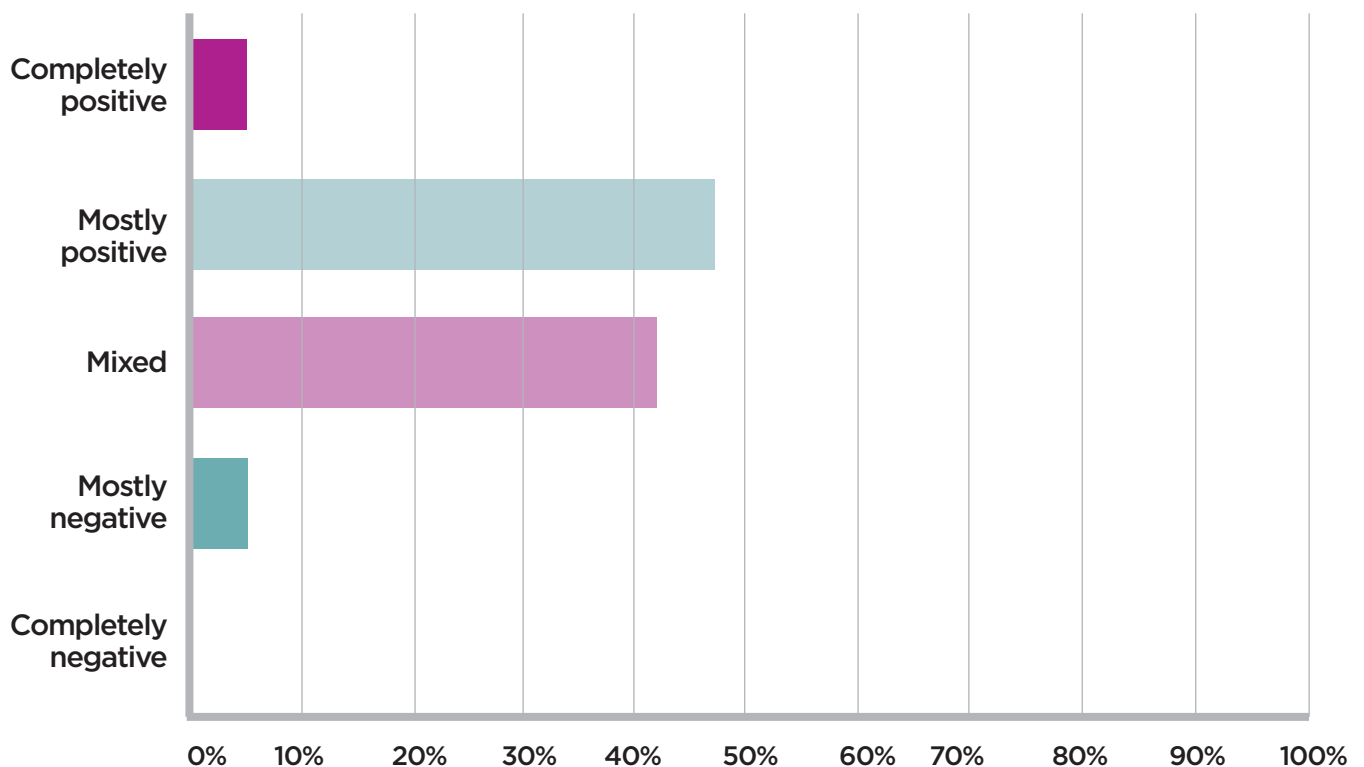
After the event, all participants were invited to submit their comments on what they'd heard via an anonymous online survey. They were asked:

- how they feel about the future for children and young people in Scotland;
- what the key message from the event was for them; and
- what they would do if they had the power to anything to ensure a positive long-term future for children and young people in Scotland.

They were also asked to describe their hoped-for society in 2030. Below is a selection of their comments.

## Overall, how do you feel about the future for children and young people in Scotland?

Although most people were positive about the future for children and young people in Scotland, almost half had mixed feelings. The balance of positivity was this:





## What was the key message for you from the event?

That we need to do things differently if we want different results.

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The importance of recognising the strength and capability that children and young people have in shaping their community and their futures.

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More must be done to raise children out of poverty.

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That government is listening.

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The importance of genuine neighbourhood collaboration.

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That all children and young people have rights; and should have options, choices, opportunities and be encouraged to be confident, valued and heard.

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Reading books is still better for developing a child's brain.

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Need to ensure equality of education and opportunity is facilitated for children of all abilities within our increasingly technological world.

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We need to work collaboratively, listen and respond to children and young people.

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There are key issues (developing agency and tackling poverty) which need to be addressed now.

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## If you had the power to do anything to ensure a positive long-term future for children and young people in Scotland, what would it be?

Make sure everyone understood that implementing a rights-based approach means children have a far greater likelihood of receiving consistency in their relationships and experiences, which leads to improved outcomes.

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Incorporate the UNCRC into Scots Law, and educate and raise awareness of what the UNCRC means in real terms. I would love to see a shift which places the happiness, health and wellbeing of our younger citizens as a priority.

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Ensure equity of opportunity for all children.

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Ensure that Scottish Government not only listen but act creatively, with bravery and conviction to really make the changes we need to make.

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Develop a different culture within our schools which values "softer" skills equally (or more than?) with exam success.

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Ensure that every child growing up in Scotland has equal access to opportunities, facilities, culture, sports and education.

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Ensure every child is raised in a safe happy environment and valued.

## If you had the power to do anything to ensure a positive long-term future for children and young people in Scotland, what would it be?

Fully inclusive subject-by-subject and extra-curricular (including life skills) teaching for children with special educational needs.

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Re-connect Scotland: if we can build a connected, attached (and re-attached), compassionate and kind Scotland with adults, children and young people who feel secure and loved, then we will make genuine progress on so much of what have been the problems over and over.

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Ensure that secondary school aged children have genuinely enticing and adequately resourced community spaces where they feel welcome.

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Change the education system and the way it focuses on academic achievement to the detriment of other aspects.

### Aspirations for 2030

Finally, participants were asked to choose three words to describe their hoped-for Scottish society in 2030. The major themes emerging were health, fairness and positivity:



**This event, the discussion at it and afterwards, and this report all feed into the Futures Forum's Scotland 2030 Programme. The next event in the series is due to be on our working lives in 2030. Find out more at our website: [www.scotlandfutureforum.org/scotland-2030-programme/](http://www.scotlandfutureforum.org/scotland-2030-programme/).**

*Report written by Una Bartley and designed by Emma Quinn Design ([www.emmaquinndesign.co.uk](http://www.emmaquinndesign.co.uk)) for Scotland's Futures Forum*

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