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Dear Convener

Thank you for the opportunity to provide evidence to the Committee at your session on 17 December 2025. On behalf of myself, Ms Don-Innes and Mr Macpherson, I have included some further detail on points touched on during the Committee session, which I trust members will find useful.

**PROMISE – WORK ON DECLUTTERING THE LEGISLATIVE LANDSCAPE,  
INCLUDING TIMESCALES**

As the Committee will be aware, the Minister for Children, Young People and the Promise wrote to the Committee on 12 January 2026 with the Scottish Government's response to the points and recommendations made in the Committee's Stage 1 Report in respect of the Children (Care, Care Experience and Services Planning)(Scotland) Bill.

This letter acknowledged the Scottish Government's continued concerns about the existing legislative framework, often described as cluttered and complex, and the impact this may have on the ability of children, young people and their families to navigate the landscape and understand their rights and entitlements.

As part of this letter, the Minister announced an independent review of the current legislative framework for children's care to explore how its simplification or further reform could deliver and maximise practical benefits for children, their families and the professionals who support them.

This independent review will be led by Professor Kenneth Norrie and the Centre for Excellence for Children's Care and Protection, and is expected to conclude within the next 12 months.

The findings of this independent review will be key to informing the next Parliament and Government on whether the current legislative framework needs to be revised and, more importantly, how.



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## **PETITION PE1979 ON COMPLAINTS AND WHISTLEBLOWING – NEXT STEPS**

I acknowledge that this petition has raised concerns in relation to complaints and whistleblowing processes and Ministers are actively considering this issue.

Alongside concerns raised through the petition, as you will be aware, during consideration of the Education (Scotland) Bill, several amendments were proposed, but not passed, in relation to functions of the Chief Inspector linked to child protection and safeguarding. As I set out to the Committee and MSPs throughout the legislation's passage, I am committed to further exploration of issues relating to oversight of child protection and safeguarding within education. I therefore took a discussion to the Education and Childcare Assurance Board (ECAB) on 9 September focused on complaints, whistleblowing and the raising of concerns in education.

The discussion at ECAB was helpful. Scottish Government officials provided an update to the Board on the issues raised during the progress of the Education (Scotland) Act 2025 regarding existing safeguarding and complaints processes following a child protection concern, or when allegations of abuse are made against a local government employee. I took this opportunity to underline the assurance I require about the robustness of these important processes, and the key role that local authorities, COSLA and the Association of Directors of Education Scotland have in providing this assurance.

Work is ongoing to understand complaints and whistleblowing processes across organisations (including those within education). This issue also has been discussed by the National Public Protection Leadership Group (NPPLG). The group was established in June 2024 to act as a multi-agency forum to drive continuous improvement of public protection arrangements across Scotland through creating a supportive environment for the sharing of best practice and the development of national initiatives. Its remit includes child protection, adult support and protection, violence against women and girls, multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA), alcohol and drug related harm/deaths, and suicide prevention.

NPPLG members acknowledged the complexities associated with complaints and whistleblowing procedures, especially in terms of clarity and confidence among staff to raise concerns, and agreed to consider in more detail at their next meeting on 27 January.

Scottish Government officials have also met with the General Teaching Council for Scotland and COSLA in recent months to explore what further action could support a more consistent and robust approach. I hope the information set out above provides reassurance that Scottish Government is taking these issues seriously.



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## **INDEPENDENT CHAIR FOR COLLEGE PAY NEGOTIATIONS**

The Scottish Government is committed to delivering an education system with excellence and equity at its core. Seeking improved industrial relations across the college sector has therefore been a key focus for the Scottish Government.

Following a period of lengthy industrial action, the Scottish Government instructed a Lessons Learned exercise with a view to improving industrial relations across the sector. As you know, pay and terms and conditions within the college sector are negotiated via voluntary national bargaining processes agreed between college employers and trade unions. It is therefore not for the Scottish Government to impose the recommendations from this exercise upon the sector.

A number of recommendations, including the appointment of an Independent Chair of the National Joint Negotiation Committee (NJNC), were made. The Scottish Government does not have the power to appoint a Chair to the NJNC: the appointment of such would need to be agreed by both the employers and trade unions.

I have been pleased to hear of improved industrial relations between college employers and trade unions recently. The Scottish Government will continue to play a convening role in supporting meaningful progress towards improved relations, in the interests of staff, students and the sector.

## **MEETING WITH CHAIRS OF COLLEGES UNDER UHI BANNER**

As you will be aware, UHI has embarked upon the development of a Full Business Case (FBC) for its transformation programme, supported by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC). Once the Scottish Government has had sight of the FBC and received advice from the SFC, the Minister for Higher and Further Education is keen to engage with UHI and its academic partners.

The Minister's preference therefore is to arrange meetings with UHI and its partner colleges once he has had the opportunity to consider UHI's future transformation plans in more detail, and is happy to do so alongside MSPs in the Highlands and Islands.

## **CLARIFICATION BEING SOUGHT RE THE STRATEGIC GROUP MINUTES**

As the published information sets out, Professor Alexis Jay wrote to the Cabinet Secretary for Justice, following the debate on the Victims and Witnesses Bill in September. Officials contacted Professor Jay who agreed with the approach to minuting her quote at the October meeting of the National Child Sexual Abuse and



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Exploitation Strategic Group. The relevant information can be accessed on the Scottish Government website: [Professor Alexis Jay correspondence with the Scottish Government: FOI release - gov.scot](#). This information has been in the public domain since the minutes of the October meeting were published on 18 November. The minutes are also available on the Scottish Government website: [National Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation Strategic Group minutes: October 2025 - gov.scot](#)

## **NATIONAL IMPROVING WRITING PROGRAMME**

During the committee session on 17 December 2025 I said I would provide some information to committee on the National Improving Writing Programme.

The programme aims to improve children's attainment in writing at First Level Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) by scaling an evidence-based change theory originally developed in one local area. It focuses on local authorities where writing attainment is below the national average, using a quality improvement approach to help get subject matter expertise in to practice. Teachers participate in a 12-week programme that breaks down writing development into manageable elements. They are guided through tools to explore what is needed in the context of their classrooms, while being taught data analysis to understand the direct impact their work is having on children's outcomes daily.

Since its launch in September 2022, the programme has expanded from five local authorities to 20, involving 362 schools. Wave 1 achieved its initial aim early, with all five authorities reaching  $\geq 70\%$  attainment by June 2023 and sustaining this in 2024. Wave 2 saw similar success, with four out of five authorities meeting targets and notable improvements of 10 and 12 percentage points in two areas. Teacher confidence rose dramatically, from 36% to 89% for teaching writing and from 29% to 88% for assessment, while pupils' enjoyment of writing increased from 25% to 89%. Success from the programme has also led to the development of a new **Quality Improvement for Senior Leader Programme**, enabling central and school leaders to apply QI to locally identified priorities.

Beyond quantitative gains, qualitative outcomes include improved motivation among children and teachers, consistent use of Learning Intentions and Success Criteria, children understand how they are improving and see themselves as writers, while teachers feel empowered to adapt their practice to meet individual learner needs. Work is currently underway to identify schools for **Wave 5**, ensuring continued spread and scale of this impactful approach.

Evaluations from the first two years of the programme are available [here](#).



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## **ASN PROVISION AND ACCESS IN GLASGOW**

Mainstreaming is a central pillar of our approach to education. Our inclusive approach celebrates diversity and allows all children and young people to develop an understanding and recognition of differences, contributing to the development of an increasingly inclusive, empathetic and more just society.

The four key features of inclusion - present, participating, achieving and supported - support the creation of an inclusive learning environment for all children and young people that enables them to reach their full potential. However, we recognise that children and young people should learn in the environment which best suits their needs. The legislation on the presumption of mainstreaming has clear exceptions to enable children and young people to learn in a special school or a specialist unit and guidance for authorities is provided by the statutory supporting learners code of practice and guidance on mainstreaming.

## **FORRES ACADEMY SCHOOL LOCATION**

Any proposal to change the site location of a Learning Estate Investment Programme (LEIP) project is a matter for the local authority, not the Scottish Government. However, any delays arising from such changes may require review and agreement by Scottish Ministers. Support for a LEIP project is not tied to a specific site, and there are precedents where the original location has been altered - for example, Beattie School in West Lothian.

Ultimately, it is for Moray Council to determine the location of the new Forres Academy. The LEIP funding provided by the Scottish Government does not prescribe site choices for local authorities. That said, Scottish Futures Trust and my officials remain in close contact with the Council regarding this project. Furthermore, I would be happy to meet with you and representatives of the local community should that be helpful.

## **SHORT SHARP REVIEW OF ASN**

I made a statement to Parliament on ASN setting out the terms for such a review on 15 January.

## **RESTRAINT AND SECLUSION IN SCHOOLS (SCOTLAND) BILL**

As the Committee will be aware, Mr Johnson consulted on his draft proposal between June and September 2023 and lodged his final proposal in September 2024. During this period, I had several constructive discussions with Mr Johnson about his draft proposal and Scottish Government policy work underway in this important area.



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In October 2024, following lodging of the final proposal, the Scottish Government wrote to Mr Johnson to indicate its support for the intent behind Mr Johnson's proposal. Given the option in Standing Orders for the Government to commit to legislate to give effect to a final proposal for a Members Bill within a certain timeframe, the Government carefully considers all final proposals lodged.

At that time, the Scottish Government considered the policy work underway to publish our national guidance on Physical Intervention in Schools in November 2024, our commitment to review the effectiveness of the guidance 1 year after publication before further consideration of whether legislation was required. Given the policy work underway and the limited level of detail available on Mr Johnson's proposal, the Scottish Government advised Mr Johnson that we would not commit to legislate to give effect to his proposal at that time, but would consider further details as and when they became available.

Following the introduction of Mr Johnson's Bill in March 2025, I wrote to the Committee and Mr Johnson on 26 June to confirm that the Scottish Government supports its general principles.

I trust this further update is useful to the Committee.

Yours sincerely,

**JENNY GILRUTH**  
Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills

**NATALIE DON-INNES**  
Minister for Children, Young People and The Promise

**BEN MACPHERSON**  
Minister for Higher and Further Education