



Observatory of Children's Human Rights Scotland: Terms of Reference

The Observatory of Children's Human Rights Scotland is a collaborative of Scottish organisations working to drive implementation of children's human rights in Scotland, with local impact and global learning.

Vision

That children's human rights are fully implemented in all areas of children and young people's lives in Scotland, in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and broader international human rights treaties. This will help to ensure that children's human dignity is respected and all children are supported to thrive and reach their full potential.

Purpose

- To deploy the dynamic relationship between academia and global and local learning to stimulate change to achieve our vision.

Objectives

- Bring together lived experiences, academic, inter-disciplinary and cross-sector contributions, to exchange and amplify ideas, evidence and expertise, in order to accelerate progress.
- Foster spaces to critique and grapple with the contentious and complex challenges inherent to implementing children's human rights.
- Identify and share progress in implementing children's human rights, in terms of particular areas, practices and systems, and how to address gaps.

Scope

The Observatory seeks to 'add value', rigour, support and capacity to further children's human rights implementation in Scotland.

In particular, the Observatory can provide: strategic challenge and critical reflection; evidence, concepts and approaches; and horizon scanning.

Founder members

The founder members of the Observatory came together in 2019 through: their mutual prioritisation of children's human rights; their engagement, influence and experience in implementing children's human rights and expertise in implementation; and their Scotland-wide reach. They are:

- CELCIS
- Childhood and Youth Studies, Moray House School of Education and Sport, University of Edinburgh
- Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland
- Children's Parliament
- Inspiring Children's Futures, University of Strathclyde
- Scottish Youth Parliament
- Together (Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights)

Core Action Group

Core Action Group members are drawn primarily from the founder members of the Observatory. The Core Action Group members provide a balance of expertise and experience across academia, civil society, policy and children's participation.

The responsibilities of Core Action Group are to:

- Bring expertise and insight to the Observatory.
- Provide leadership and commit to taking forward agreed objectives as individuals.
- Commit to regular attendance at meetings and contribute agenda items to the Secretariat in advance.
- Ensure a strategic work programme for the Observatory is identified and carried out.
- Take an active role in the work of the Observatory by contributing in meetings and undertaking specific tasks as agreed.
- Identify potential Associate Members to contribute expertise to discussion items.
- Be committed to promoting the rights of all children in Scotland in their day-to-day role.

New Core Action Group members can be drawn from the pool of Associate Members as required. All current members of the Core Action Group must agree.

Independent Advisor

The Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland ('the Commissioner') supported the Core Action Group in the founding vision, purpose and objectives of the Observatory.

The Commissioner and representatives from their office support the work of the Observatory on an advisory basis. In recognition of their independent status, the Commissioner and their representatives do not take part in the governance, management or strategic decision-making of the Core Action Group of the Observatory. They attend meetings as guests of the Core Action Group, contribute agenda items to the Secretariat in advance, take an active role by contributing to discussions in meetings, and undertake specific tasks as agreed.

Associate Members

Associate Members are invited to participate in Core Action Group meetings as appropriate to contribute specific expertise to work on Observatory projects. Associate Members are individuals or organisations that share the vision and purpose of the Observatory, are committed to supporting the

implementation of its objectives and are directly involved in the strategic work of the Observatory. Associate Members are not part of the decision-making process.

Core Action Group members are responsible for identifying and responding to requests to become Associate Members. Suitability for Associate Membership is assessed against the extent to which the candidate is able to support delivery of Observatory projects. It is expected that the Core Action Group members will prioritise an inclusive approach to considering requests for Associate Membership. Associate Membership runs in line with relevant projects' timelines or ended by mutual agreement.

Project partners

Project partners are organisations or individuals that work with the Observatory on a specific project in an operational and/or planning role. Project partners do not participate in Core Action Group meetings and are not part of the decision-making process for the Observatory as a whole.

Project partners have a line of communication to the Core Action Group via a nominated Core Action Group member, through which they are able to raise concerns and feed into Core Action Group discussions.

Governance

- The Core Action Group meets at least 6 times a year.
- Chairing is shared between Core Action Group members.
- Action notes from the meetings are shared with all Core Action Group and Associate Members.
- Currently, the Observatory agrees a lead organisation and person for commissioned tasks. The lead organisation takes responsibility for financial and contractual arrangements, ensuring due consideration of other contributing organisations and people. The Observatory is not a legally constituted body and thus does not hold finances in its own name. As the Observatory grows and evolves, we will continue to review financial management on an ongoing basis and we commit to be transparent with our decision-making across the Core Action Group.
- We share information on membership, key projects, funding and activities on the Observatory's website.

Decision-making

Outputs and publications

Any outputs and publications in the name of the Observatory (e.g. funding application, press release, position statements and including, training and marketing materials) should be tabled at a Core Action Group meeting or circulated as agreed. To provide fast turnaround, agreements and decisions require having 50% of Core Action Group members present to be quorate. Any Core Action Group member should raise any concerns that must be addressed before publication.

Outputs and publications in the name of the Observatory must clearly state that they may not represent views of all Core Action Group or Associate Members. The Observatory logo will be used in all outputs and publications, with Core Action Group / Associate Members listed as appropriate.

Joint initiatives

With the agreement of the Core Action Group, the Observatory may be involved in joint activities with other organisations and individuals. Proposals for involvement in initiatives should be discussed at Core Action Group meetings and agreed and require having a majority of Core Action Group members to be quorate.

Observatory-only activities

With agreement of the Core Action Group, certain activities can be undertaken as Observatory-only ones. In such cases, the expectation would be that the individual or a nominated person from the lead organisation would be an Associate Member.

The Core Action Group can decide to delegate to a sub-group specific tasks. This sub-group can make decisions in taking forward its remit.

Secretariat

The secretariat to the Observatory is Childhood and Youth Studies (MHSES) at the University of Edinburgh. This will be subject to review. The secretariat arranges the group meetings, agrees agendas with other standing members, issues invitations and shares minutes and actions arising from the meetings.

Childhood and Youth Studies at the University of Edinburgh is responsible for updating and maintenance of the Observatory webpages on the University website, in order to continue to build provenance and reputation of the Observatory and its resources online.

Review

The Terms of Reference, and in particular where the secretariat is held, the Core Action Group and the Associate Membership, will be reviewed by the Core Action Group on an annual basis.

Core Action Group members can opt out of the Core Action Group by providing notice to the wider Group.

Should an individual or organisation not be acting in congruence with the vision, objectives of the Observatory or expectations in this Terms of Reference, who is an Associate Member or Core Action Group member, this will be raised and discussed with a view to resolution. Should the remaining members of the Core Action Group determine that a satisfactory resolution is not achieved, they can unanimously decide that the individual or organisation ceases to be a member.

Last reviewed: 23rd September 2025