

EDUCATION TIMES

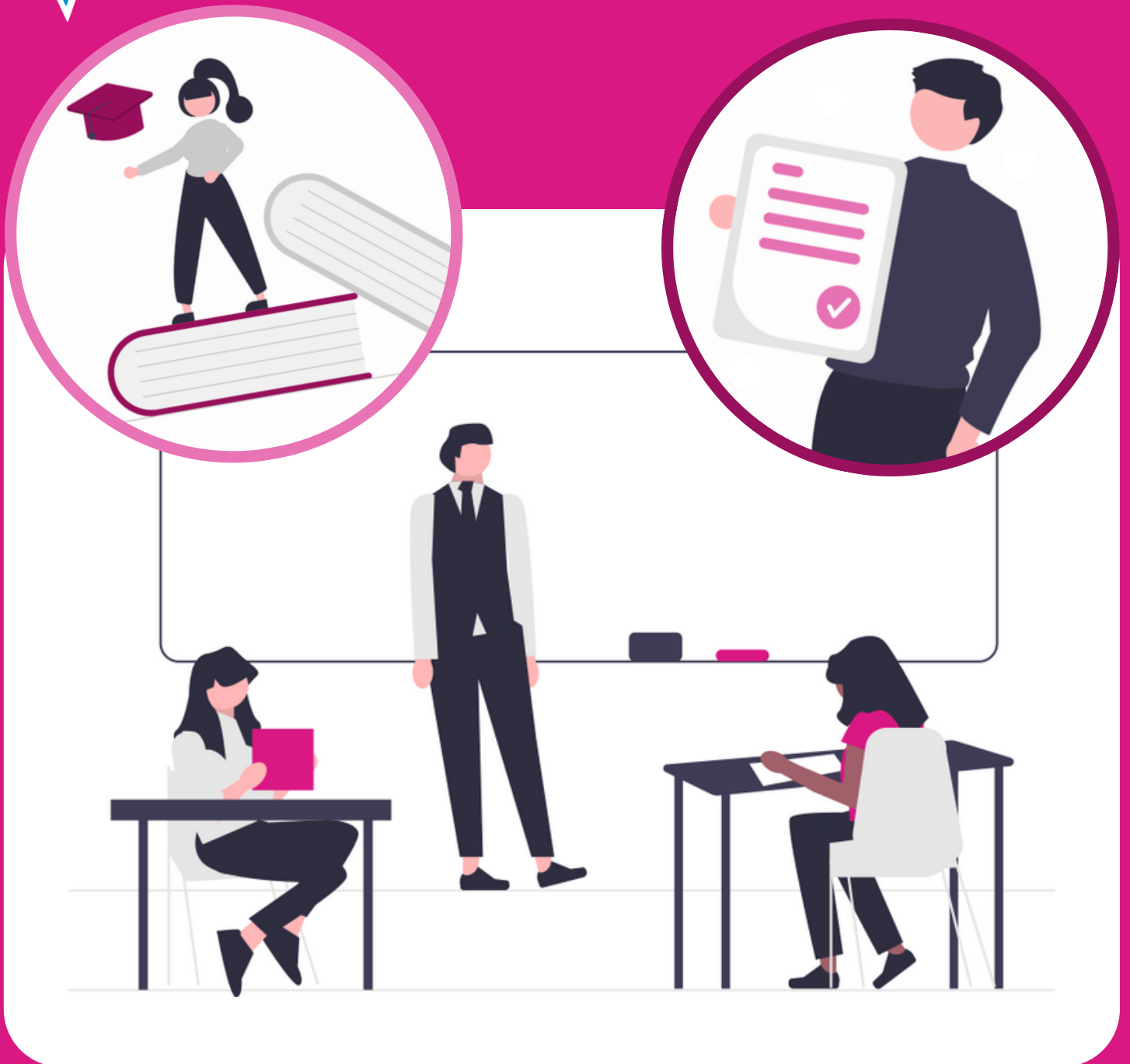
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Educational Attainment



WELCOME

Tamsin Gold MSYP &
Olivia Brown MSYP



Hello, and welcome to SYP's education magazine! MSYPs have worked hard to put this together so you can see precisely what SYP has gotten up to over the last few months regarding our education campaign, and the numerous education projects that have taken place. In March 2022, MSYPs voted for educational attainment to be a campaigning priority of theirs.

MSYPs have taken part in numerous education-related projects and have undertaken work to improve the education system for young people all over the country. The educational attainment gap has long been an issue in Scotland. Exacerbated by the pandemic and contingency exams, young people from less privileged backgrounds have consistently experienced poorer educational outcomes than those in more advantaged positions.

SYP's key focus has been to highlight this gap and encourage decision-makers to close it.

Finally, we'd like to thank MSYPs for their hard work and dedication to the education space over the last two years.



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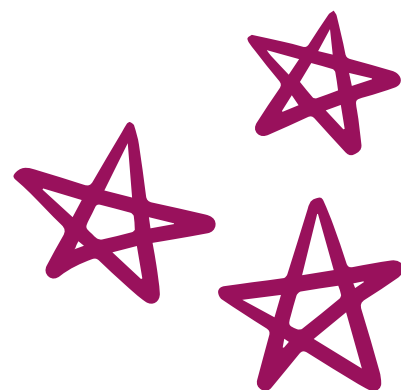
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UN COMMITTEE EVIDENCE

Beau Johnston MSYP &
Daisy Stewart Henderson MSYP



In 1991 the United Kingdom ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child is the body set up by the UN to monitor the progress of States in fulfilling their obligations through something called a ‘reporting cycle’ which takes place continuously over around 5 years.

In February 2023, the UK ‘Pre-session’ - when the Committee invites children, young people, and human rights defenders to discuss the situation of children and young people’s rights in that country - was held. In May 2023, the UK ‘Session’ - when the Committee meets with Government representatives to review and discuss how each country is fulfilling its children and young people’s rights obligations - was also held. Following both of these meetings, the UN Committee published their ‘Concluding Observations’ - which include the Committee’s recommendations to the State to address the rights issues raised throughout the process.

We, Beau Johnston and Daisy Stewart Henderson, formed part of #TeamScotlandUN who, alongside Members of the Children’s Parliament Arden and Omima, represented Scotland’s children and young people at the February Pre-session and the May Session meeting.

From December 2022 through to the Session in May, we spent time preparing for these two meetings with support from staff at SYP and Together: Scotland’s Alliance for Children’s Rights.

At both the pre-session in February and the session in May, we raised the issues of mental health, climate change, incorporation of the UNCRC, the right to food, the importance of youth work funding, and last, but not least, education. Education was a key issue we raised at the UN as it is one of the four national campaign priorities we have here at SYP. We decided that by focusing on our campaign priorities, we could effectively represent the issues that matter to young people the most. This is because our campaign priorities are selected and voted on by the membership from our manifesto, which we consulted 10,000 young people to form in 2020.

We also decided education naturally linked to the themes of community-based mental health and the importance of youth work, so by advocating for changes in education we were able to cover as many bases as possible with the time allocated to us.

AUTHOR



When discussing the issue of education at the UN, we used evidence from our campaign priority selection, for example, the fact that 10,000 young people were consulted to form our manifesto statements. We also used personal experience and our current education policies and work such as the Hayward review to advocate for improvement in the education system.

From our work at the UN, we both hoped to grow in confidence and influence the recommendations that the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child made in their concluding observations to the UK and Scottish Government. Now that these concluding observations have been published, we hope to campaign for the Government to implement the changes that have been suggested by the UN to ensure they are upholding the rights of children and young people in Scotland.

Scotland's education system is undergoing reform, which means there is no time better than the present to bring it more in line with the principles of the UNCRC, particularly Article 29, which stipulates that a child's education should develop their interests, talents, and abilities to the fullest.

However, a child's educational development is by no means confined to the classroom.

We emphasised the value of youth work to the Committee in supporting children and young people to reach their potential and to develop their skills and interests beyond the scope of the curriculum. After all, it was youth work that enabled us to visit and speak at the United Nations not once but twice, an experience of incredible educational value. 72% of young people consulted by SYP believed that youth work should be invested in by local and national governments and protected from budget cuts, and yet we continue to see a decrease in funding for this vital service.

We also stressed the positive impact of community-based mental services as a preventative means of preventing children and young people from developing more severe mental health issues which would force them to enter extremely long waiting lists for treatment from CAHMS, causing their education as well as their general wellbeing to suffer.

Ultimately, in the Committee's Concluding Observations, they stated that the UK must:

“End practices, including academic selection and testing measures, which contribute to the high levels of stress owing to academic pressure, and ensure that children benefit from a creative learning environment.”

If they intend to honour their commitment to the UNCRC, the Scottish Government cannot maintain a system that is not fully in line with children's rights, as stipulated by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. The Committee's 23 pages of recommendations to the UK make it clear that we have a long way to go with regard to upholding children's rights, and now that the UN Reporting Process is over the ball is in the Government's court to take action to remedy these failings. We hope that this will be conducted in a way that is based on Article 12 of the UNCRC, which entitles children and young people to participate and to be heard on matters that impact them, by involving a diverse range of young voices in a meaningful way.

Daisy's reflection

Going to Geneva not once, but twice, was utterly life-changing. I learned so much from the people I met and the opportunities I was given, grew in confidence, and formed lasting friendships. Now that the Committee's Concluding Observations have been released, I hope that the Scottish Government will recognise the Committee's comments as human rights issues, demonstrating that reform to the education system in Scotland to bring it in line with Article 29 of the UNCRC, as well as more investment in community-based mental health services and youth work, is essential if we truly want to be a rights-respecting nation.

Beau's reflection

Being invited to the UN was the most surreal experience I've ever had. Not only has it improved my confidence, my ability to work under pressure and my communication skills, but it has allowed me to form lifelong connections and incredible memories that I will cherish forever. Now that #TeamScotlandUN's work is done in Geneva and the concluding observations have been published, we hope to see Scottish Government take action on the reform to the education system in Scotland to ensure it aligns with Article 29 of the UNCRC. We also hope they prioritise and streamline investment in community-based mental health services and protect youth work from budget cuts, as both community based mental health services and youth work hold essential roles in the education of children and young people.



NATIONAL DISCUSSION

Fraser Cronin MSYP



As young people, we rely on a quality education to help us understand, interpret, and engage with the world. Yet, the education system in Scotland needs improvement and it can no longer be ignored.

In 2022 I was fortunate enough to work with other MSYPs to consult with our Members to feed into the National Discussion on Education.

The National Discussion was established in response to the March 2022 report by Professor Ken Muir, Putting Learners at the Centre. It was independently facilitated by two academics, Professor Carol Campbell and Professor Alma Harris, and consulted children, young people, parent and carer groups, and more to present a report to the Scottish Government on the future of Scottish education.

Being a part of this Consultation really opened my eyes beyond my own experience, it helped show me the extent and universality of the problems plaguing the Scottish Education system.

Whilst it is never pleasant to talk about the difficulties we face as young people, particularly within our education, it was encouraging to see the positive and constructive approach MSYPs brought to the discussion.

Right after the workshop I facilitated, I wrote this in a blog post:

“The highlight of the National Discussion on Education sessions was being a part of intense debate with people who truly cared.

Facilitating discussions with the actual users of education - the young people - gives me hope that change truly is just around the corner.”

As a rights-based organisation, with rights at the very core of our principles, SYP focused our response on calling for an education system fundamentally based on two articles of the UNCRRC:

- Article 29 - summarised as: “Education must develop every child’s personality, talents and abilities to the full. It must encourage the child’s respect for human rights, as well as respect for their parents, their own and other cultures, and the environment.”
- Article 12 - summarised as: “Every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously.”

As well as the views of young people from our focus groups and the Articles of the UNCRRC, we also used other consultations we had done in the past to form our response.

Article 31 of the UNCRC upholds activities and leisure as an inalienable right of every young person - our recommendations clearly show a need to further support this right in our schools and communities.



Notably, we surveyed 3,889 12-18-year-olds and designed a toolkit for facilitating conversations around educational reform which reached 394 school-aged young people as part of our work on the Ken Muir review with Together: Scotland's Alliance for Children's Rights and Children's Parliament in 2021.

To specifically respond to the questions in the National Discussion I worked with Ellie Craig to hold 2 focus groups of 10 to 15 MSYPs.

Activities were designed to rank priorities in educational reform and spark passionate debate about the most important issues. For instance, a traffic light system was given to the participants where green represented things to keep in the education system, amber areas for improvement, and red things that needed to be gotten rid of.

Our most interesting activity was an open debate where consultees discussed what would be their one recommendation if they had to choose.

From these activities we were able to form an eye-opening and informative response on the state of Scottish education and, I believe, a strong vision for the future.

For decision-makers or anyone interested in the future of Scottish education reading this article, some of these recommendations will come as no surprise, however, I believe they move us towards a very different vision of the future.

The main aim of this new vision is to 'broaden our understanding of what education is'. An idea repeated within both workshops was a skills-based approach to education. Instead of education preparing young people for university or further academia this method would see the very definition of a 'successful learner' shift towards someone prepared for an increasingly complex world - a student who views cultural differences as a global citizen and a young person who has a breadth of diverse experiences. For instance, recognising the value of youth work was included as one of our recommendations, demonstrating the importance of learning through activities and projects outside the school environment.

Article 31 of the UNCRC upholds activities and leisure as an inalienable right of every young person - our recommendations clearly show a need to further support this right in our schools and communities.

In our workshops, young people also expressed a desire to be embedded into the iterative process of improvement, not just as consultees every 20 years when large reviews take place. Young people, now as always, continue to show a commitment to being part of the change our education needs.

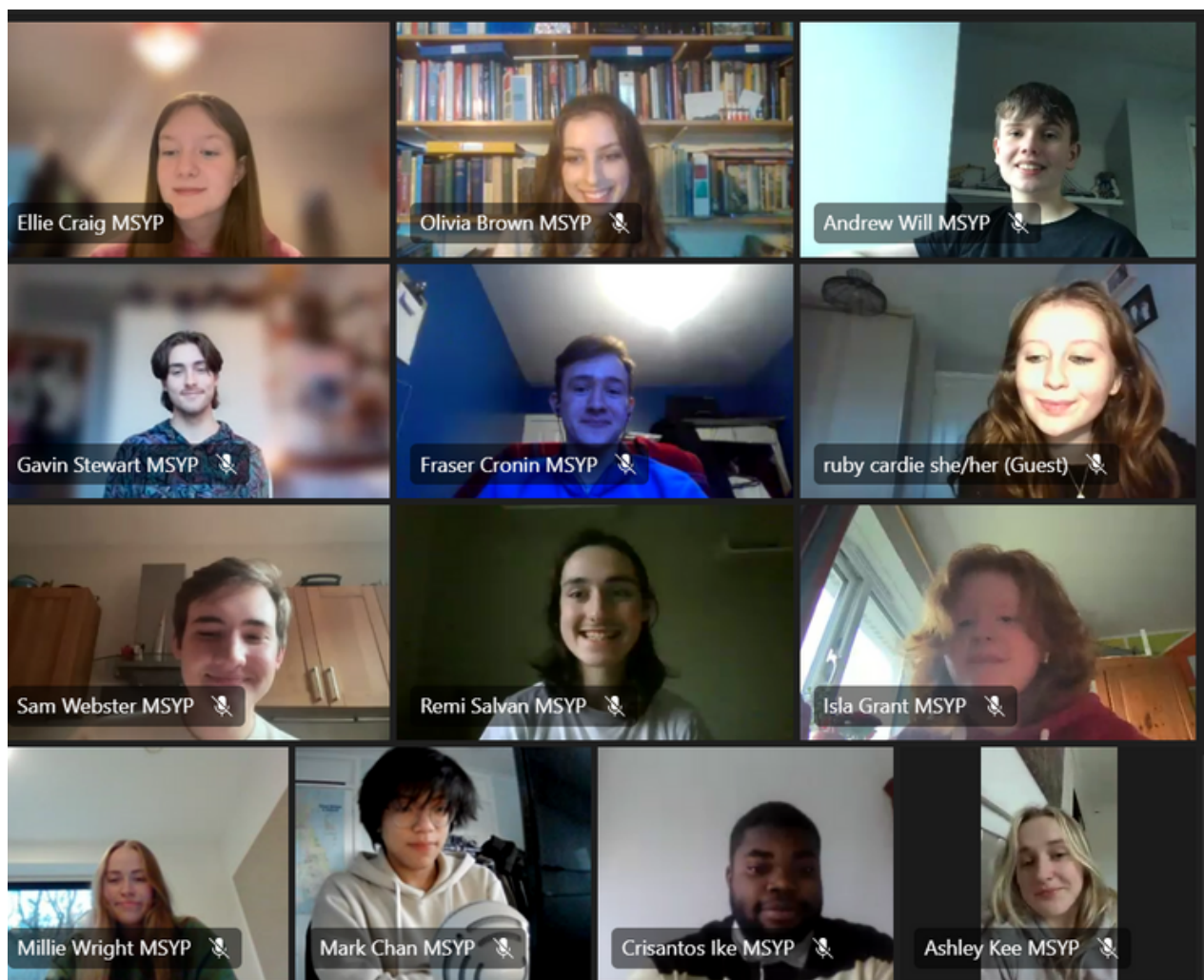
Nevertheless, in our consultations and workshops, many positives of the Scottish Education system were continually pointed out.

Firstly, teachers continue to be a life-changing aspect of being a young person, many teachers were mentioned fondly with warmth and genuine appreciation. In a discussion that appears at first to be quite negative, this, along with other factors, brings a warm smile.

Moreover, the ability to retake or take exams at a time that suits the specific student was something that many praised in our discussions. Whilst many aspects of the exam system are flawed, the ability to be flexible with qualifications appears to be highly valued by young people. These two factors continue to show us that our education system really does do things well, even if some aspects have a long way to go until they live up to the standard young people deserve.

In summary, the National Discussion was a point for SYP to highlight this: Young People desperately need to see changes made to a system that is stressful, ineffective and inefficient. However, MSYPs and young people in general are extremely willing to continue to be a part of these conversations, to continually improve the institution most central to our daily lives for 12-18 years. Decision makers must take note of our recommendations.

Let us not leave our next conversation for another two decades, let's make changes today that will impact the future generations of our country for the better.



INDEPENDENT REVIEW GROUP

Ruby Cardie MSYP



Beinn Grant and I were part of the Independent Review Group (IRG) on the Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessments in Scotland, which was led by a Professor from the University of Glasgow called Professor Louise Hayward. This project ran for a year from May 2022 to May 2023 when a report with recommendations was published for the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, Jenny Gilruth MSP to review.

As members of the IRG, we attended monthly meetings in Glasgow where we represented the views of learners

There were also members representing other key stakeholder groups in education like parents, teachers, employers, and further education providers. SYP was involved in the independent review group to have a direct and personal link between young people and the review itself. This was done by creating a Collaborative Community Group (CCG) comprised of different learners with diverse experiences to reflect on our views of qualifications and assessments.

We also held consultations with wider groups of learners throughout each of the three 'phases' of the review. This included MSYPs at our winter education event. The outcomes of these various stakeholder consultations can be found in the It's Our Future: Report of the Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment report.

Alternatively, we have made a video aimed at young people explaining the key recommendations of the report and what this would look like for learners, this will be shared with you all soon.

The introduction of the Scottish Diploma of Achievement (SDA) would mean a reduction in the number of examinations in the senior phase.

Examinations are one important way of gathering evidence, however, we know the current system has too many examination points. The aim of the SDA is that there will be no external examination at SCQF levels 1- 5. Assessment will be internal only.

External examinations, alongside continuous assessment, will remain part of National Qualifications at SCQF Higher Levels 6 and 7. We believe this will result in a reduction in pressure on young people and staff in educational settings and will promote opportunities for greater depth in learning and less stress too!

Recommendation

The Review recommends the adoption of a new approach to qualifications and assessment in Scotland. The Scottish Diploma of Achievement (the Diploma).

The Scottish Diploma of Achievement (the Diploma) is comprised of three areas, Personal Pathway, Programmes of Learning and Project Learning.

The SDA is designed to inspire learning; offering learners a wide and flexible range of opportunities to build knowledge and to develop skills in areas of interest and significance to them (Programmes of Learning).

It will allow learners to apply their knowledge and skills to support their progress beyond school or college; in life, learning and employment (Project Learning).

These recommendations are currently sitting with the Scottish Government who are completing further consultation before the future of the recommendations are decided, we hope that the rights-based and inclusive recommendations are brought into action in line with SYP's priority of educational attainment.



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SCOTTISH EDUCATION COUNCIL

Marcus Flucker MSYP



The Scottish Education Council (SEC) was set up as the Scottish Government's main forum for overseeing education in Scotland. Its role was to bring together key decision-makers, educationalists, and representatives of children and young people to discuss and agree on ways to improve education in Scotland.

Myself and Tamsin Gold MSYP, Convener of the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee, are tasked with bringing the voices of young people right into the heart of decision-making. This was sometimes quite challenging to do amongst a sea of highly experienced, highly respected education professionals and Scottish Government officials but we know how important our roles were in this space, emphasising the importance of involving young people in decisions which affect them.

Tamsin and I took over from SYP's former Chair, Sophie Reid, and the previous Convener of the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee, Beinn Grant MSYP. During their time on SEC Beinn and Sophie championed for young people to have a role in education reform and called for a fair and equitable appeals system.

In the time that I joined SEC, we have seen several things change in education spaces. We have a new First Minister who appointed an entirely new ministerial team to the Education portfolio, the SQA has held its first "normal" exam diet since 2019 and we have seen the publication of the long-awaited Hayward Review of Qualifications and Assessment and the Withers' Independent Review of the Skills Delivery Landscape. All these events signal that Scotland's education system is moving from talking about reform to carrying out that reform.

Having young people at the table in spaces like SEC represents a unique opportunity for SYP. It allowed me as an MSYP to engage with the highest level of decision-making for Scottish education policy and gain new skills in the process. Just a few years ago groups like SEC were not being opened to us.

LEARNER ADVISORY PANEL

Tamsin Gold MSYP &
Finlay Anderson MSYP



We are both members of SYP's SQA Advisory Group and formerly the SQA Learner Panel, and we are going to discuss the evolution of the SQA Learner Panel to the Advisory group.

Learner Panel

We first both got involved in the SQA Learner Panel through SYP's education and lifelong learning committee in October 2022. The SQA learner panel consisted of roughly 10-15 learners, Jacqui and Claire from the SQA, and was also supported by SYP staff Aimee and Isla. The learner panel was a great opportunity for a wide range of MSYPs from all across Scotland to share their voices and the experiences of their constituents on a number of topics on education that were central to the concerns of learners across Scotland. The learner Panel met together on Teams on a monthly basis from October through until February 2023.

In advance of each panel meeting, MSYPs were provided with an agenda/briefing which allowed them to prepare for the discussions and consult with their constituents.

Then they could gather any comments they had in relation to the topic in advance to ensure that our discussions encapsulated as many unique and diverse learner experiences as possible.

Topics

In October 2022, the SQA learner panel convened to advise the SQA on Additional Support Needs. In this session, we considered questions such as how we could raise awareness of additional support needs and who should be involved in improving support as well as any general recommendations for the SQA.

Recommendations included consulting directly with these learners, fostering collaboration among teachers, students, parents & carers, medical professionals, and others, and emphasising the importance of effective communication. Following the recommendations that the SQA received from MSYPs, the equalities team at SQA uploaded information to their website on support for learners with additional support needs.

In November 2022, the panel discussed transitions. This included the transition from junior to senior years, national 4/5s to Highers, and Highers to Advanced Highers. We also discussed post-school transitions and all different kinds of career pathways incorporating the #NoWrongPath campaign providing suggestions for direct learner consultations, accessible career advice, and ensuring easy transition support.

But most importantly, it allows us to share our voices and the voices of our constituents directly to the SQA on the topics which impact us.



In January 2023, the panel was joined by a number of SQA staff to discuss appeals and results, advocating for efficient communication, empathy in exceptional circumstances, and fairness across socioeconomic areas. In February, the panel met for a final time where discussions spanned communications, employability, and life skills, and also evaluation.

Advisory Group

During March and April 2023, we were asked to feedback to the SQA and SYP about our thoughts and experiences having been members of the SQA learner panel. This was all taken on board by SYP & SQA and resulted in the reformation of the learner panel to the SQA Advisory Group, allowing for a more youth-led panel. The SQA Advisory Group consists of 10 MSYPs and works with SYP and SQA to plan and support Learner Panels and feed into SQA learner communications.

For each meeting, there is a chair and co-chair, that is a young person who works with SYP to lead and facilitate meetings.

Learner panels now take place in person in various schools and colleges across Scotland every 3 or 4 months, as well as online during those times.

The Advisory Group aims to help to recruit around 20-30 young people to gather a wider range of views and opinions. To ensure impact and relevancy, the topics are decided with the SQA calendar and include areas such as appeals, design of your exam's booklet, learner communications, school transitions, assessment, attainment and equality. This project aims to run into 2024 and gives MSYPs like us the opportunity to have training and greater experience in facilitation and chairing, as well as session planning, creating resources, report writing and presenting.

But most importantly, it allows us to share our voices and the voices of our constituents directly to the SQA on the topics which impact us.

Following the establishment of the SQA Advisory Group, the group convened for the first time in May 2023, chaired by two MSYPs the panel discussed the return of Coursework & information regarding modifications for the upcoming academic year 2023/24 and how the SQA could ensure that this information is accessible, available and easy to access for all learners.

This discussion also included SQA's social media content around Results Day & Appeals for 2023, to make certain they were undertaking the correct approach and did not overwhelm learners who were anticipating their results. In June, the advisory group got together to begin preparations for our first upcoming in-person learner panel in September. This involved activity planning for the day by reflecting on our own individual learner journeys and designing fun and engaging activities for the young people to participate in.

This was a fantastic opportunity for us all to participate in some forward planning, but particularly it was a great chance for us to develop our leadership skills.

We were able to work with SYP staff in advance of the Advisory Group meeting to prepare and coordinate what we wanted to achieve during the meeting and how these outcomes would help us all collectively prepare for our in-person panel in September.

MSYPs continued to work throughout the summer holidays to prepare for our in-person learner panel in late September as well as our upcoming meeting with the SQA's Executive Team.

The meeting allowed the panel to meet with the executive team of SQA and speak about the importance of youth engagement. The panel members used resources from SYP's The Right Way project to highlight the need for youth-friendly meetings and recommendations from previous panels about the new education body.

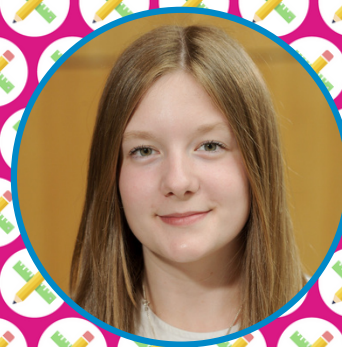
The in-person panel took place in late September at St. Ambrose High School, Coatbridge in North Lanarkshire, facilitated by three MSYPs, Tamsin, Marcus, and Beau. The event had three sessions, with learners from S1 all the way to S6. Holding the event in a secondary school allowed the panel to have more outreach and gain a deeper insight into the views of young people.



This was a fantastic opportunity for us all to participate in some forward planning, but particularly it was a great chance for us to develop our leadership skills.

GENDER EQUALITY IN EDUCATION

Ellie Craig MSYP



The Gender Equality Taskforce in Education and Learning was set up by the Scottish Government and it aims to identify measures to address the lack of gender equality which remains evident in education and learning settings. This includes advising on potential changes in practice and actions to support a gender-competent experience of education and learning for all girls and women. A really important part of the work of the task force is seeking the views of young women and girls to inform the strategy and theory of change model.

I first took up SYP's place on this taskforce in November of 2020 and have gained a lot of knowledge from being in this space. In October 2022, SYP published the Gender Equality in Education report which informed the Taskforce's theory of change model. This was commissioned by the Equality in Education Team, which is part of the Scottish Government's Teacher Education, Leadership, and Reform Unit.

The Children's Parliament and the Scottish Youth Parliament undertook engagement with Children and Young People to gather views on how Scotland can achieve gender equality in education and learning.

There were a lot of conclusions in this report. For example, research showed that in schools, there is an impact of gender stereotypes on subject and career choices.

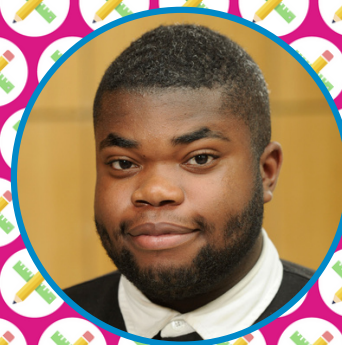
Participants in the research also expressed that any work on these issues must be intersectional to create meaningful change. Additionally, it is important to not look at the issue of Gender Inequality solely in education but to assess how these stereotypes and attitudes play into the wider societal problems on this issue.

Throughout my time on the task force, I have championed the importance of meaningful engagement with young people in this work. For Gender Equality in education to be achieved it is essential that young people feel empowered to be a part of the changes which must take place, and this can only happen if there are opportunities for us to have influence.

Being a part of this task force has been a very beneficial experience. I have learned a lot from working with other partners and stakeholders in the group. The task force is doing amazing work to promote gender equality in education, and I hope that it is part of the wider work toward a more gender-inclusive society.

ANTI-RACISM IN EDUCATION

Crisantos Ike MSYP



Diversity and inclusion is one of our core values here at the Scottish Youth Parliament, and for some time now, SYP has had a big focus on making the organisation as inclusive and supportive as it can be. My trustee portfolio of diversity and inclusion, alongside the spotlighting of education as one of SYP's campaigning priorities this year, has brought more opportunities to raise awareness of racial issues, especially in school environments.

Even though the anti-racist work we have done and continue to do has started to create great changes, I cannot emphasise enough the importance of more work on these anti-racist structures taking place. After all, this is not a 'one-person job', and I hope that a strong legacy has been built to continue the advocacy of inclusivity and anti-racism.

How did it start?

The first root of what allowed me to focus on essential issues within education was the success of a motion put forward and presented by former MSYP Victory Ekpekurede and I in 2019. Reforming the Scottish Curriculum for Excellence was something we were both keen to work on, as we listened to the voices of young people who felt that there were 'gaps' in the curriculum.

Our aims were that, one day, young people of colour would see their experiences more accurately reflected in the curriculum, touching on issues like Scotland's role in the slave trade and colonisation.

The success of this motion led to the creation of our very own campaign named The RISE Project (Racial Inclusivity in Scottish Education). The RISE Project has its own Twitter/X account, where I can engage with young people on polls and deliver educational information. However, there are further plans for this campaign to actively engage with MSYPs of colour and how we all, in general, can shape the education system effectively.

Externally, I have been part of the Anti-Racist in Education Programme Board (known as AREP), which is a Scottish Government-led group that aims to embed and promote anti-racism in the Scottish education system. Previously I had been part of the AREP curriculum subgroup alongside two other MSYPs, making sure that positive changes to the curriculum were made. Through these groups, we have made a difference by ensuring the representation of young people of colour and highlighting the importance of UNCRC rights.



Through my role on the AREP Board and subgroups, I was involved in creating a set of principles for educators and young people developed by AREP members titled ‘Breaking the Mould.’ This term encompasses a vision I identified whilst working together with other members. It is about breaking old structures and creating principles that mirror a more progressive and representative curriculum where all learners can be seen and heard throughout their learning experience

One way we are doing this is through ‘The Movement’, a group of MSYPs that contributes to SYP’s work on inclusion and diversity by focusing on anti-racism. This group was created in November 2022. The group, which I lead, is made up of six MSYPs of colour, with support from SYP staff member Suki Wan.

The aims of this group are based on making SYP a more inclusive organisation by shining a light on anti-racism, understanding the experiences of MSYPs of colour, raising awareness of the importance of equality, and taking steps to become a more anti-racist organisation.

I truly believe I have found ‘my place’ at SYP. Since I joined the organisation, I have been incredibly inspired by the number of MSYPs and the work they focus on and truly noticing how passionate they feel about what they do. I found that in this work, and being a Trustee, I can contribute to the task of making sure both SYP and the world beyond, including systems of education, are inclusive and progressive places where all young people can thrive without being hindered by the complexion of their skin or where they come from.

THANK YOU!

We want to say a massive thank you to all MSYPs who have been involved in our National Campaign Priority on Educational Attainment, whether that be nationally or locally, through projects or through action days, or anything else you've done.

You have all helped to shape the campaign and create change and you should be really proud of that.

Finally, we want to thank those who have written articles for this magazine - we really appreciate all the work that has gone into them.





Acknowledgements

The articles in this magazine were written by Tamsin Gold MSYP, Olivia Brown MSYP, Beau Johnston MSYP, Daisy Stewart Henderson MSYP, Fraser Cronin MSYP, Ruby Cardie MSYP, Marcus Flucker MSYP, Finlay Anderson MSYP, Ellie Craig MSYP and Crisantos Ike MSYP.

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