



The Expert Group on Preventing Sexual Offending Involving Children and Young People

Summary

Why was this group set up?

- The Expert Group was set up by Scottish Ministers at the end of 2017.
- This was following the publication of research which showed an increase in sexual crimes,¹ particularly those involving young people and committed online.

The **Report** of the Expert Group on Preventing Sexual Offending was published on 23 January 2020:

<http://www.gov.scot/ISBN/9781839602481>

The Expert Group was **asked** to:

- Examine the existing responses to harmful sexual behaviour² by young people, for both the young person causing harm and to the person it is directed towards.
- Make recommendations for further actions to
 - prevent and
 - respond to this type of behaviour in the future.

Those involved with the Group included experts from justice, education, health, social work and young people, including Members of the Scottish Youth Parliament³.

Hearing the **views of young people** from different communities and backgrounds was very important to the Expert Group and so the Expert Group sought out the views in the following three ways:

¹ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/recorded-crime-scotland-2016-17/>

² Sexual behaviour which is inappropriate for age, harmful to them or others or abusive towards other young people

³ Suki Wan MSYP, Peter Rigg MSYP and Chloe Whyte MSYP

- The Scottish Youth Parliament (SYP) survey⁴, which asked:
 - *How safe do you feel online?*
 - *Do you feel young people understand the risks around online and offline sexual behaviour?*

These questions were also discussed at an SYP workshop in October 2018.

- A second survey⁵ by Young Scot, asking about online personal safety, sharing of photos and education about sexual issues.
- Focus Groups at the Young Offenders Institution Polmont and three secure care centres⁶.

Young people **told** the Expert Group that:

- The majority of young people feel safe on line, but
- Nearly a fifth of those who completed the SYP survey “don’t know” if they understand the risks around sexual behaviours

The report of the Expert Group has **19 proposals**, on page 12 of the report⁷, setting out further actions which the Group believes would lead to

- Better interventions
- Better responses
- Greater prevention and protection for young people in Scotland from harmful sexual behaviours.

The Group’s broad recommendation is to:

- Establish a **multi-agency group** to oversee the delivery of the proposals.

The report also included two **youth specific** proposals around how young people’s views should be sought:

- The Scottish Government should **commission regular surveys** of children and young people
 - Asking about concerns and personal experiences around harmful sexual behaviours involving children and young people

⁴ #WhatsYourTake, an online survey in September/October 2018, which had 546 responses from young people aged 12-25 across Scotland

⁵ Attitudes Towards Online Sexual Activities posted on the Young Scot website between Jan/Feb 2019. Over 1000 responses in the 11-25 age group.

⁶ Focus group at Polmont (8 males aged 16-18) and within secure care (10 males, 11 females aged 15-17) and residential care (1 male aged 15 and 3 females aged 16)

⁷ The Expert Group on Preventing Sexual Offending Involving Children and Young People

- This feedback from children and young people should then influence policy and the improvement of services
- The survey questions should be designed along with children and young people
- The Scottish Government and statutory authorities should **co-design** prevention of harmful sexual behaviour messages or campaigns with children and young people.

Additional proposals include:

- Funding **research** into the causes and reasons for harmful sexual behaviour in young people.
- Collection of **data** to show the numbers of incidents and needs of those involved.
- The promotion of the **Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenting** web source to practitioners, parents and carers so they know what young people are being taught at school.
- A **pathway** developed to help practitioners identify and find the best supports for young people ensuring early assessment and referrals to most appropriate services
- A **consistent service** should be used across Scotland to manage harmful sexual behaviours

The next thing to happen is that the Scottish Government will study the proposals to decide how to best take them forward. The Scottish Government will **continue to involve** children and young people in taking forward the proposals of the Expert Group.