

# THE SCOTTISH YOUTH PARLIAMENT



## Child Welfare Reporters and Child Contact Centre Consultation Response

July 2021



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## **Introduction**

The Scottish Youth Parliament has consulted with young people to inform the Scottish Government consultations on Child Welfare Reporters and Child Contact Centres. The Scottish Government have been revising the law around when adults cannot agree on what is best for their children. One of the areas they are looking at is child contact centres. The Scottish Government want to ensure that all child contact centres are safe and child-friendly places. They also want to ensure the people who work at child contact centres are well trained at working with children and families. Secondly, the Scottish Government have been looking at child welfare reporters who help judges make decisions when the adults in a child or young person's life cannot agree on what's best for you. We want to ensure that all child welfare reporters are well trained and experienced.

The Scottish Youth Parliament held a focus group and one-to-one interviews to gather information from young people on questions posed in the consultation and collated these responses in this report to inform the consultation. This report outlines the responses in two parts, firstly Child Contact Centres and secondly, Child Welfare Reporters.

## **Methodology**

A focus group was held with 8 Members of the Scottish Youth Parliament (MSYPs) from across Scotland (11 young people signed up to the focus group 3 did not participate.). In addition to this, 8 one-to-one interviews were held with young people who have particular lived experiences of Child Contact Centres and Child Welfare Reporters (11 young people signed up to participate in 1:1 interviews, 3 did not participate).

The questions used for the focus group and one-to-one interviews were taken from the Scottish Government public consultation on the topic and adjusted to ensure the language is suitable for young people.

Participants used a sign-up link to register their interest in taking part, and we worked with relevant national charities to promote the opportunity. Young people

and practitioners were encouraged to circulate the opportunity, and it was publicised on SYP social media platforms. In order to support as many young people as possible, participants were also offered a voucher for taking part.

The focus group was held on Zoom, and facilitated by a staff member from SYP. Using Zoom as a format allowed participants to make use of features such as the 'reactions', function which they could use to signal to facilitators when they wished to speak. The 'chat' function also allowed participants to add to the conversation in a different way, which many opted to do. Overall, the use of Zoom was helpful in allowing the facilitator to keep track of the conversation, and to ensure that everyone was able to contribute. Some of the one-to-one interviews took place over the phone and recorded with permission given by participants.

The data from the focus group and one-to-one interviews was transcribed and an in-depth analysis resulted in the development of specific themes, across both sections covering Child Contact Centres and Child Welfare Reporters.

All answers from participants have been anonymised and any identifiable information removed to ensure the confidentiality of participants.

## Part 1: Child Contact Centres

### Section 1. Child contact centre buildings

How important do you think it is for child contact centres to:

- Be clean, bright, warm, well-kept and airy
- Be safe and secure
- Have toilets and facilities that are in good condition with hot and cold water
- Have furniture, toys and equipment that are in good condition
- Have enough space for children and families to use, including space outdoors if possible
- Have toys and play equipment for children of all ages

Participants agreed that everything listed above is valuable in a child contact centre. The most discussed concerns among participants were; that the environment be 'friendly' or 'home-like' rather than 'clinical', and that there are age- appropriate facilities, as well as toys, specifically for teenagers and older children. Some participants raised that having an activity to take the pressure off, such as something to watch, computers to do homework on, or even an opportunity to do an activity like baking could be a great help in allowing older children to spend time with a family member while making the experience feel less intense. It was also suggested that as well as outdoor spaces, separate spaces where a child or young person can spend some time on their own might be helpful if needed, ensuring that no child feels trapped in an environment. Other key themes included security, cleanliness, and supporting children with additional support needs.

Below are the key themes that arose from discussions with participants.

Relaxed, friendly environment

In almost every conversation, participants told us that child contact centres mustn't feel 'clinical'. Terms like; 'inviting', 'home-like' and 'comfortable' were repeated

throughout discussions with participants. This was considered to be hugely important as children going to contact centres are likely to feel some degree of anxiety or stress, so the environment should be as nurturing as possible to counteract those feelings, and to set a comfortable and relaxed tone for the child's experience with an adult in their life.

The following quotes speak to this theme:

- “I think a relaxed environment that's quite homelike so that it kinda feels normal and not like clinical.”
- “It should be a comfortable environment for the child... obviously the child will have enough on their plate at the moment, having to spend time with their parent in the space I think it would be good to have a nice comfortable environment for the child without a clinical looking space. If you imagine a primary school, how it's like colourful, like a nursery.”
- “Calm but not clinical. But cluttered; don't fill it with those out-dated posters like ChildLine posters!”
- “I think it should be quite child friendly in the way that it's presented to them, lots of colour just because it's a daunting experience as it is, so if they're more relaxed it will make it easier as well.”
- “Somewhere comfortable. As homelike as possible, inviting, not office like, friendly environment and fun I guess.”
- “It needs to feel comfortable and safe. If it's not clinical, all white, run down, it makes you feel much more comfortable in it”
- “It shouldn't be clinical. Even the furniture needs to feel family friendly”
- “Really nurturing.”

### Safety and security

Some participants spoke out practical, safety measures that might contribute to a child feeling comfortable at a contact centre. These included CCTV, having a staff member at a front desk at all times, and something that clearly identifies staff. This

would allow a child to differentiate between staff and other adults visiting the building, and so that they know who to approach if they need support.

The following quotes speak to this theme:

- “I think it should be a safe space for children to be at, not only for them to have things to do in it, but for them to feel safe and not anxious.”
- “Safety and security are really important but when parents are visiting there should be well hidden CCTV or actually in a case by case basis, maybe there should be some rooms that don’t have CCTV, but at least a room where if a child is feeling apprehensive or a judge has said ‘oh you need to go and see your dad’”
- “In terms of access to the building, a sign in book and someone at the front desk always, should never be left empty, once you have kids in a place like this it can become a hot spot and you need to know that people are booked in, just in case there are other family members who are not supposed to be there.”
- “I think staff need to be identifiable, either with a uniform, a lanyard or a name tag, photo ID, I’m sorry but this is a must. We need to differentiate between normal people so we know that they are staff.”
- “Some form of security but not the police, or else plain clothed police - we don’t need police with Tasers or batons in here. Or even a panic button at the front desk so they know it can be dealt with and maybe a room when they can calm down”
- “Making sure always it’s a safe space for children, and if a parent turns up drunk, no, your visit cannot happen today but another time.”
- “Accessibility is really important too, a ramp, elevator, even visual stuff too is important. I think all the kids should have passes too, with their name and have it on them at all times.”

Activities for young people of all ages, ways to make memories



In addition to the suggestion of toys to play with, participants gave some ideas of ways to make the experience enjoyable for young people of all ages. For example, opportunities to engage in activities and make memories with the adult, like baking or watching something, or making use of computers and WIFI.

The following quotes speak to this theme:

- “Depending on the ages of the children, have a place to draw, play with toys so that all children have things to do rather than focus on younger age ranges.”
- “I would also add even if they had play equipment like swings outside that would be good. It would be good to focus on making memories, like having fun days or family BBQs for the child to make memories about the parent they are visiting.”
- “One thing I’d add is more of an opportunity for the child to bond with their parent, a room like a cinema for the child to have a positive experience out of something that’s so daunting at the moment, or like a kitchen that’s well stocked with recipes that the parent and child can make; to me, what’s key to building a relationship, having a good bond that the parent and child can make to have these facilities.”
- “Free WIFI if it’s an older child they might not want to play with toys”
- “It feels quite restricting to be inside the whole time, so if there was the opportunity to go outside or like what was said with a cinema or baking or something.”
- “Maybe online things would be good. Some people would rather just like watch a movie or something like that instead of toys”

Separate space away from adults

One participant suggested that there be a separate pace for children and young people only, where they can go if they need a break:

- “A space just for children and young people to go to - they might not want to be stuck in with their family, they might want to have somewhere where they

can go. The process can be quite a daunting situation, sometimes you don't want to be sitting there with worried parents or carers, you might want to go sit by yourself"

## Outdoor spaces

Among the listed facilities, outdoor spaces were highlighted as really important in a contact centre. One reason for this was to extend the options of activities that a child and adult can't do together during contact. Another reason was to prevent the feeling of being trapped or claustrophobic, which would have a negative impact on the experience of contact with an adult.

The following quotes speak to this theme:

- "If the centres have the ability to have an outside space to build something there. From personal experience, a lot of children like to bond with parents by playing football or playing outside so it's more than toys. A lot of children would be more interested in doing something to make it a fun experience."
- "Make sure it's not too repetitive, if they're going there every week, I really agree with the outdoor, getting some fresh air if it doesn't feel as claustrophobic. From the things on the list, I think they're all equal and if you took one away it wouldn't be a good environment"
- "Outdoor space is important, with a bit that's rain covered; it is Scotland after all!"
- "Outdoors spaces are really important because some people might feel trapped if they have to sit 1 on 1 indoors."

## Cleanliness

Cleanliness was highlighted as crucial in contact centres. Some participants raised that this shouldn't be on the list, as it isn't up for discussion, and should be a starting point for all government facilities. Further suggestions were made that a contact centre must have sanitary pads and toilets must be checked regularly.

The following quotes speak to this theme:

- “I think being clean and bright and airy is really, really, important. In terms of space and welcoming it needs to be clean and are regularly checked and don’t let toilets gets stinky. There should be showers, hot and cold water, the toilets should be clean, there should be sanitary pads, toothbrush, and towels, shampoo and conditioner.”
- “In terms of the list that was provided... why are they even questions? The things on the list are so basic, like a clean toilet, enough daylight.”
- “Some of these are common sense, it wouldn’t be fair to have facilities where the toilets aren’t in good condition”
- “Yeah it’s a bit odd that it’s a question, ‘do you want it to be clean?’ as if anyone wants it to be dark or cold or not have toilets...”

Defined spaces for older and young children

Some participants suggested that there be separate spaces for teenagers where possible. This was to add to the feeling that the space is special for them, and they aren’t being thrown in with babies and toddlers. However, this may not be practical where families are made up of children of different ages.

The following quotes speak to this theme:

- “We don’t want a space where kids are with teenagers, so maybe teenagers have a space at the top and younger kids have a space at the bottom. It could be that there are parents there who are not that responsible so might need nappies or baby wipes, or even a play pen. For young people that’s where technology comes in, spare laptops while they are there, in case they want to do homework, or even things like SQA books.”
- “Trying to break up the space so there are different areas might be good - also private spaces, young people might want time on their own”

- “In terms of toys and play equipment for children of all ages, that should be extended to say that the whole facility should be prepared for a young person up to the age of sixteen, so that older young people are comfortable in the space and it isn’t just geared towards five year olds.”

### Additional Support Needs

One participant suggested there be a space for children with additional support needs, for example, a sensory room or a calm room:

- “Even thinking about kids who are on the autism spectrum, or don’t like noise, there needs to be a space for them, soundproof and to keep them calm.”

### Further comments

Some participants suggested that contact centres be designed with a particular ethos or culture in mind, taking key words from the above discussion like ‘nurturing’ and ‘homelike’ to define these spaces. One participant said that the space should be somewhere children look forward to going to, an experience that can be fun and enjoyable. It was also mentioned that an accessible location is important:

- “We need to think about the ethos and the culture of what we are trying to do, what is the goal”
- “It should be fun and you want to go there, like it’s something you’re looking forward to”
- “Location wise, make sure they are easy to get to, like on a bus route or something”

## Section 2. People working at child contact centres

How important do you think it is for people working at child contact centres to be good at understanding the following things:

- When a child is at risk of significant harm (child protection)

- Domestic abuse
- The ways an adult can turn a child against another person
- Family conflict
- How to deal with a child's needs and behaviour
- Child development, including learning disabilities
- Making sure contact visits are safe (risk assessment)
- When parents have problems, for example, with mental health or drugs and alcohol
- How to watch contact visits and write reports
- How to deal with complaints

Participants agreed that it's important for staff at child contact centres to have an understanding of everything listed above. Many participants felt strongly that staff should have a thorough understanding a child's needs and behaviour, and child development including learning disabilities. Several participants highlighted the importance of being able to effectively and comfortably support a child with additional needs. It was also raised that staff should be trauma informed and have an understanding of ACES. Finally, participants suggested that the focus be less on skills and more on qualities; it was more important for many participants that staff be friendly, welcoming and approachable to start with, and open to being trained up on the listed skills.

Below are the key themes that arose from discussions with participants.

#### Understanding different needs and behaviors

The most commonly raised theme was understanding different needs and behaviors. Many participants had lived experience of family members with additional support needs using services which were not well prepared to support them. It was raised that staff not only need to be trained, but need to be comfortable interacting with a child with different needs and behaviors, and trained to respond appropriately where needed, such as in de-escalation.

The following quotes speak to this theme:

- “For me, understanding a child’s needs and behaviors is really important. My brother’s got autism, and if we were to go to a service, for me it’s really important that they understand how to support him in the best way and how to make sure he feels comfortable. Sometimes in these services they fling staff into it, and they don’t give staff the full support they need. There’s a balance, staff need to know all this stuff, but they need to support staff as well to make sure they feel comfortable dealing with, for example, autism... it’s all good having training but if they don’t feel comfortable doing it they won’t do it in the best way possible”.
- “Generally, understanding disabilities is really important. You need to be aware of what different things like autism are like and to make sure that all children are comfortable and safe in the space”
- “Knowing if a child has disabilities or if the parents are going through something stands out, watching them interact with each other because parents can influence how a child acts”
- “Staff should be there to deescalate - I don’t mean enforcing more violence but of course we want staff to be protected but how we do that is important and really matters. It has to be a human way of making sure kids are safe.”
- “Training should be given in de-escalation in case there is a physical incident between children or adults”

Qualities are as important as skills

Participants felt strongly that qualities are as important as skills when it comes to staff at child contact centres. Their priorities were that staff be friendly and approachable, that a child would feel comfortable and welcome to ask questions, and that service users are treated with care, respect and time.

The following quotes speak to this theme:

- “It’s all very well having these skills, but they need to actually be able to do it in a way that’s comfortable for young people”
- “They need to be friendly and approachable. Sometimes you go to these government services and it’s not that they’re not nice, but they know they’ve got a number of appointments to get through... it’s about giving people enough time to feel comfortable rather than being like ‘next’. You can always tell when someone walks out and they’re carrying like ten files; don’t make it feel like a conveyer belt, make it feel like a service.”
- “I think that as well as all the above mentioned it should be key that everyone who works at a child contact center should be experienced at making sure the child is comfortable at all times; people who work in child contact centers should share similar key characteristics such as being friendly, patient and understanding. This would help ensure the child feels comfortable in the setting as it can be a very difficult time for them.”
- “Staff should be welcoming and approachable, so you feel like you can go up to them and won’t be annoying them. Good personalities so they aren’t boring. They should be polite and calm and can’t have a quick temper.”

## Diversity

Diversity was raised as another important consideration in a staff team at child contact centres. Some participants highlighted that, in order to deal effectively with a variety of situations and lived experiences, it would be beneficial for the staff team to be made up of people from a range of backgrounds, with varied experiences, and of varied ages. This has a range of benefits, for example, a diverse team may increase the likelihood that a child will feel comfortable to convey any concerns they have to at least one member of staff who they relate to. It might also enable staff members to better understand the culture and behaviour of a family or child.

The following quotes speak to this theme:

- “It can’t just be all white women who have worked in social work aged 40/50 as staff members it’s not going to work. There needs to be diversity of staff across the board - I mean in terms when we look at Scotland’s make up - someone needs to be Black or Pakistani because in terms of translation and all these kinds of things you will find they have already and bring a different life experience especially when we talk about child care, different parents have different models and about what’s acceptable. Safety of the child should be the first thing but I know myself as a Black person I wouldn’t like to walk into a place where all the staff are white. Across the board, staff diversity is important.”
- “It would be good to have a diverse staff team who can deal with different situation, as in certain cases there may be a need for a certain staff member in terms of age or gender needs to be involved”

#### Trauma informed

In addition to the listed skills, several participants suggested that staff at contact centres be trauma informed:

- “Staff really need to be trauma informed. The four pillars of trauma informed work are empowerment, collaboration trust and choice. There’s a reason this child has ended up at a child contact centre and there’s always some psychological trauma involved so it’s really important for staff to be clued up in that.”
- “I think experience in ACES would be helpful, and generally experience working with children”

#### Domestic Abuse

An understanding of domestic abuse was also highlighted as important, and it was raised that that staff must keep the protection of the child as a priority over the comfort of an adult:



- “In terms of domestic abuse, a significant number of people experiencing domestic abuse end up at in the system at child contact centres or child welfare. Staff need to be clued up and trained on domestic abuse as it can be so subtle you know when it’s supervised contact, the video I watched from Relationship Scotland had a staff member said to the parent - “I won’t be looking over your shoulder, I’ll be in the corner” - that is not really supervision and just to be mindful of that and how subtle that abuse can be”

### Quality of training

One participant highlighted that the training process must be thorough, so that staff are genuinely comfortable with the skills they have learned, and must be delivered to all staff, so that knowledge isn’t condensed to one team member. However, another participant suggested that it would be useful to have specialist staff members trained in particular areas, so that the knowledge and understanding of staff isn’t stretched.

- “Child protection training should be more than a PowerPoint, it’s not training it needs to be more. Even if it takes 8 weeks breaking down child protection we are going to do that. And not just one person who knows, because what if then they are off on leave, it doesn’t work”.
- “It’s like that saying, jack of all trades and master of none. You want, for example, someone who’s trained to support parents specifically or support people with drug and alcohol problems. If you have specialists who can support in certain situations, that would make it even better. You wouldn’t expect a teacher to be able to teach every subject, so why would you make a staff member deal with all of those situations?”

### Further comments

Further suggestions of important skills and attributes included; mental health first aid training, knowledge and understanding of attachment theory, communication skills, and the importance of PVG checks for staff members:

- “They should be trained in attachment between a child and another person.”
- “Also communication, how to tell a child if a family member has passed away, all these kinds of things there just needs to be training on that.
- “Mental health first aid training”
- “Every single person needs to be PVG checked within an inch of their life. This is where trust is so important, we cannot have an abuser or someone who is on registered sex offenders list or something like that to happen.”

### **Section 3. Complaints at child contact centres**

If you wanted to complain about the child contact centre or the people working there how would you want to do this?

- By email
- By video
- By drawing
- By writing
- By speaking to someone
- Another way - please say how.

All participants felt that it was important for children to have options of different methods to complain, including the options listed above, as different children and young people will be comfortable with different forms of communication. This may also come down to age groups, for example, it’s unlikely that most children will chose to send an email, however, older children may not feel comfortable to draw how they feel. For more minor complaints, it was suggested that all contact centres have a suggestion box that children can use at any time. It was also suggested that a named complaints person or an independent child advocate would be helpful in enabling a child to access their right to complain. However, it should also be made known to the child that they can complain to any member of staff at the centre, as there might be certain staff members who they feel more or less comfortable speaking to. To make

the process child-friendly, an animated video might be helpful to break down the complaints process, ensuring that a child feels comfortable to make a complaint.

Below are the key themes that arose from discussions with participants.

It's important to have options

All participants agreed that, when it comes to complaints, the more options the better. There is no one set way in which all children and young people will feel comfortable to complain. In addition to the listed methods, it was suggested that a phone or text service would probably be a better alternative than emails for this generation of children and young people. Participants raised that lots of children over 10 have a phone, yet most under 16 are unlikely to be comfortable sending an email. The caveat to this was that children should know exactly where their text is going, and who will be responding to it.

The following quotes speak to this theme:

- “You should be able to complain in any format.”
- “Having different varieties of communicating, when I was a child I drew and that helped the person helping me communicate with me. Having an understanding that what they say won't get them in trouble and having a safe space - there's no harm in saying whatever.”
- “Different age groups have different ways of communicating, from what I have seen before very young children tend to communicate through drawings than words and it's key that adults understand what a child is trying to say through these drawings and to take the child's drawing seriously and maybe look at them in more detail than you normally would.”
- “Everyone should be able to complain. They should be able to do this by any means, by drawing, by play-dough etc..”
- “For older children, if you say ‘you can draw how you're feeling’, it's quite condescending. It'll probably put a young person off. So having an open service

like a website, where it's like an only form, rather than an email. I know I wouldn't email a complaint to a generic email address. Knowing who you're actually complaining to makes it easier.

- “Having a connection with someone builds you up to actually be able to make the complaint.”
- “I don't know any child that's going to email to make a complaint.”
- “A text service, most children have a phone.”
- “Text or phone calls too would be good.”
- “But it needs to be free of charge, and we need to know who it's going to”

#### Independent child advocate or named complaints person

All participants said there should be a named person whose primary role it is to handle complaints. Participants had varied ideas of what this might look like; for example, some participants suggested a 'child advocate', someone who can speak on the child's behalf if they are not comfortable making the complaint themselves. A further suggestion was simply a named staff member for complaints, who is made clear to the child and whose picture and contact details are made clear on posters throughout the centre. However, all participants said that, while a named person is important, it must also be made clear to children that they are allowed to voice their complaint to any staff member, therefore every staff member must be trained and ready to handle a child's complaint effectively. This is because some children will feel comfortable around certain members of staff and not others, and the named complaints person may be the person they wish to complain about.

The following quotes speak to this theme:

- “Having an independent child advocate that is known to the child is so important to give a full and honest answer to a staff member that they don't know. I was watching the video on Child Contact Centers by Relationships Scotland as they have Child Contact Centers, and it was really just the worker asked the child - how did that go [after a visit] whilst standing next to her dad

who she has just been visiting and how is that suppose to generate an honest answer.”

- “So, I think there should be a dedicated role for someone to deal with, I don’t think it should be just any staff member, with this person trained more. If a child is making a complaint then it should be taken seriously.”
- “I think making it reoccurring to talk about feelings to they’re comfortable.”
- “You should be able to get someone to do it on your behalf. Someone the young person trusts.”
- “for more serious stuff, having someone who can speak up for them like an independent advocate.”
- “It’s good to have a named person, but make it’s clear that that’s not the only person they can talk to, as they might not want to talk to them, or they might be complaining about them!”
- “It’s important to have a male and female named person, as some people might not be comfortable going to someone of the opposite gender.”
- “Have a photo of that person on a poster - if you know what they look like you can go find them”
- “If the child or young person isn’t comfortable with the [complaints] person they have been assigned, it’s important that there’s an options to change. Some children might prefer a female or male worker for example, asking the child or young person if they have a preference.”

### Child-friendly complaints procedure

It was very important to participants that the process be child-friendly. Some suggestions to aid this included; making a video explaining the process, visuals such as happy and sad faces to support questions on the child’s experience of the contact centre, and a form with simple questions on it, rather than a simple instruction to email or contact a particular person.

The following quotes speak to this theme:

- “Make sure the children know their rights and they have the right to complain.”
- “Make a video or animation explaining the complaints process, empowering that it’s okay to make a complaint.”
- “Make the whole process child friendly. Don’t hand a child a policy or guidance that’s 30 pages long and say that’s the complaints policy by treating them like an adult. That’s how people are discouraged from making complaints. I think it should be less bureaucratic and not always in writing. A lot of people don’t want to re live or write it all down. Encourage complaints and feedback, rather than discouraging it.”
- “There should be an area where a child can write something confidentially which has child friendly questions, such as Are you unhappy about something? I also think if questions are being asked, visuals would help a lot such as a sad face in regard to that question, as children may respond better to visual questions than words themselves depending on the stage of their education; I think its also key to note that although someone similarly aged may be able to understand something not everyone that age can as some children may be behind on their learning for various reasons.”
- “A form with simple questions on it is helpful: not just ‘email this person’, where you aren’t sure what to include or who it’s going to.”

### Following up

Several participants spoke about experiences they’d had of giving feedback without getting any follow up. They expressed that this was a distressing experience, and that its imperative for a child to be given a clear explanation of who has their complaint and what is being done about it.

The following quotes speak to this theme:

- “The person dealing with complaints are known to the child and that there’s a follow up with the child so that they know something is being done about it.”

- “It’s all about feedback; getting an acknowledgement that you’ve submitted a complaint and then a follow up. I think, quite often, complaint systems give you an automatic reply but it doesn’t actually confirm your complaint or tell you what the next steps are. It’s all about follow up.”

### Suggestion box

Several participants raised the idea of a suggestion box, which is explained to every child while they are in the contact centre. This could be a helpful and low-pressure way to submit concerns, especially more minor concerns:

- “Having different ways for CYP to give feedback ideas they have for new equipment, having a conversation with a staff member about”
- “Suggestion box for new ideas and equipment.”
- “You know in the airport when you get those smiley faces? Like little surveys people can circle? That might be good for more minor things”

### Final thoughts

Final thoughts from participants included concerns that child contact centres must be adequately funded, that staff are properly paid, and that time is taken to implement effective change to ensure that child contact centres are providing the best service for children that they can:

- “I would rather it takes a year and a half to implement or two years to implement and get all the foundations because when doors open - then we are ready to go. Rather than this whole rush to do it because if we looking to make effective change, that will come with time. There needs to be a dedicated team of people working on it and towards this goal.
- “It’s a full project and the government needs to be committed to that. Funding needs to be there, even if there is a recession or a pandemic, the money needs to be there. Also, this work is not easy, please pay them what they are worth, £15 an hour including the cleaners, they need to lead by example.

## Part 2: Child Welfare Reporters

### Section 1. Experience of child welfare reporters

How important do you think the following skills are?

- Communicating with children including obtaining the views of children
- Understanding domestic abuse.
- Report writing
- Understanding the ways adults can influence a child
- Understanding family conflict
- Child development including learning disabilities
- Understanding of child protection issues and the child protection system

It was agreed that everything on the above list was important in a child welfare reporter. The skill that most participants highlighted as fundamental was communicating with children. Participants felt that this skill was the starting point for enabling the reporter to do their job effectively, with one participant summarising; 'you're not gonna get anywhere if you don't understand how to effectively talk to a child'. As such, it was again raised by participants that qualities are as important as skills in this role. The most important attribute for many participants was friendliness and approachability. Additionally to the above list, suggested skills included; a thorough understanding of the UNCRC and children's rights, an understanding of attachment theory, mental health first aid and good listening skills.

Below are the key themes that arose from discussions with participants.

#### Communicating with children

Communication was one of the most prominently discussed skills among participants. Participants felt that communication was the most important skill in the role of a welfare reporter, including communication with young people of different ages, with different support needs and from different backgrounds.



The following quotes speak to this theme:

- “In terms of communicating with children, age-appropriate communication, e.g. don’t talk to a five-year-old the same way you’d talk to a fifteen-year-old and visa versa. Child-friendly material can be over-simplified or condescending for a teenager.”
- “Communicating with children and obtaining their views is of the utmost importance, which is why I think they need a background in working with children. You’re not gonna get anywhere if you don’t understand how to effectively talk to a child”
- “Communicating with children and obtaining their views is important, but also knowing a variety of ways in which to do so, linking that in with additional support needs. For some children, asking them directly can be difficult, for some children giving them options can be easier.”
- “They must have good listening and literacy skills in order to help provide the best possible care for the child.”

### Professional background

It was explained to participants that most welfare reporters have a background in social work, family law or another profession involving children and young people. Some participants highlighted further professional backgrounds which would give a welfare reporter the most important skills and experience for the job.

The following quotes speak to this theme:

- “Youth workers! People who work with vulnerable groups in general like carers. They might need support learning about policy, but it is important that the person isn’t just a clinical lawyer who isn’t focusing on the needs of a child”
- “What’s missing is experience of working with children, teacher, youth worker.”

- “Have the best interest of the child in mind and keeping the child in the loop on decisions made about them.”
- “Previous experience with working with children such as Nursery Teacher, Teacher or teaching assistant allowing them to give a child the best possible help; these experiences could be done as work experience or a placement to ensure that the person is well equipped for the role as a child welfare reporter.”

## Qualities

Similarly to comments made around contact centers, many participants felt that it was qualities, rather than skills, that were the most important in a welfare reporter, making the point that it is easier to train someone up in hard skills, but more difficult to train someone in friendliness or approachability, which will be a crucial factor in a child feeling comfortable enough to give them the information they need.

The following quotes speak to this theme:

- “I think this is something the government are quite bad at; focusing too much on skills for these roles. Like, someone might be able to write a report, but are they able to write a report in terms of legal conversation, or are they able to wright a report in terms of, if a young person was to ask for that report, would they understand it? Sometimes in these jobs and roles, children are the subject, but they aren’t the main part of the job; you might be good at doing your job, but are you good at talking to young people, and specifically young people who are going through a really hard time in their life, who need to feel cared for and need to feel like someone is on their side”
- “Being approachable and friendly - wanting to work with children! They should want to go into the job to help children rather than the policy side of things”
- “It’s really important that child welfare reporters are kind and approachable and they’re not making it feel like a burden on them. Sometimes I don’t think

it's down to training, it's down to personalities. Making children feel comfortable, talking to you etc.”

- “Everyone who works should make sure the child is comfortable at all time.”

## Report writing

One participant expressed that there must be a verbatim note of what a child has said to the welfare reporter, in addition to the final report which includes conclusions drawn by the reporter:

- “Report writing... I don't want them rephrasing what they say, it needs to be verbatim and not interpret what they say. And ask them what they mean by that, and what they want. Start the conversation open ended; it's not all black and white. The child's opinion is what matters not just the professional. So explain the options clearly to them.”

In addition to the listed skills, the following attributes were highlighted as important in child welfare reporters:

- Diversity: “Diversity is really key among these people... we can't just have old white people doing this.”
- Understanding children's rights: “A deep understanding of UNCRC. Specifically; Article 19 - protection, Article 12 - listening to views, Article 3 - best interests of the child. All of the CCC and CWR link back to UNCRC.”
- Mental health and trauma informed: “Have experience of mental health and be trauma informed”; “They need to be trauma informed and to be non-bias and really careful with their words and impact on influencing on the child”; “Basic mental health first aid training would be useful”.
- Understanding experiences of care: “Understanding of the care system and stable relationships”; “They need to understand the complex needs of young people who are in care and what this means to the young person.”

## Section 2. Complaints

If you have a complaint about how a child welfare reporter behaves how would you want to be able to raise this?

- By email
- By video
- By drawing
- By writing
- Another way - please say how.

How can we make any complaints procedure child friendly?

Similarly to the complaints process at child contact centres, it was felt that children must have options of different methods they can use to complain. In terms of making the process child-friendly, participants suggested that an online complaints form, with a clear break down of short, simple questions would be helpful; this may enable child to give the information that adults need in order to process their complaint, and might make the process feel less overwhelming. It was also made clear that security and confidentiality were crucial in a complaints procedure; it was raised that fear of repercussions is a significant barrier to children making a complaint, therefore reassurance that the procedure is confidential would be a big help. Another key point was that it's important to set expectations with children, helping them understand how a child welfare reporter should and shouldn't act, so that a child can identify behavior that is and is not acceptable.

Below are the key themes that arose from discussions with participants.

### Confidentiality

Safety and security were the two most commonly mentioned themes among participants. Children need to feel that they can trust the system and the person whom they are complaining to, and given the assurance that they will be taken seriously if they raise a complaint:

- “I would like the complaint to be made in a confidential manner, where the person being complained about would not be informed about who made the complaint.”
- “They should be able to complain about their CWR if they don’t trust them or like them. We don’t want children abusing this of course but if they really feeling uncomfortable then we have to listen.”
- “Making sure young people feel safe and secure in a system.”
- “Having to tell someone face to face is scary because there’s always the fear of someone not believing or thinking you’re lying. If you’re talking through the phone you can’t tell if their judging you so you feel less worried or anxious”

### Following up

As with contact centres, following up was highlighted as the most important part of a complaints process. One participant suggested that, where a complaint is made about a welfare reporter, they should not be allowed to carry out their duties until the complaint has been effectively investigated:

- “No matter the complaint, if a complaint is made from a child about a child welfare reporter that child welfare reporter should not be allowed to carry on their duties until an investigation into the situation has been completed and an outcome has been decided”.
- “All complaints should be investigated. None of this filing it away to die of slow death, it should be investigated by a team of people who only do complaints.

### Clear questions

Participants raised that the process could be helpfully broken down if a child with a complaint is presented with a few very simple questions, to ensure that they are passing on the key information an adult needs regarding their complaint:

- “Clear questions about what information is required, but also make it clear that it’s ok if they don’t have all the information, just sort of as a starting point for the child.”

### Setting expectations

Several participants mentioned that clear expectations should be set in advance of what a child should expect from their welfare reporter, how they should and should not behave, and questions they should or should not ask. It may otherwise be very difficult for a child to identify unacceptable behaviour:

- “It’s important to set expectation of how a welfare reporter should act, so that children know what’s ok and what isn’t ok, as they might not always be able to identify that, for example, if they’ve grown up in an abusive environment. If you don’t know what they’re meant to do or not meant to do, how would you know if it’s wrong or not?”
- “Make it clear that it’s not a child’s fault, it’s the reporter’s fault, if there’s something that’s gone wrong”

### Further queries from participants:

- Are they going to be registered with Scottish Social Services Council? We’d hope so”



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