

# United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) Report 2026-29



# Foreword

## Foreword from the Chief Executive

Every child in Scotland deserves to live in a society that enables them to reach their full potential, with the right support in place to ensure that this happens.

In today's world, that support can play an absolutely crucial role, as a myriad of external factors from the economy to the emergence of new technologies can have a significant bearing on a child's life.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) provides the framework and ambition for every child's full potential to be reached in the face of such challenges, and SDS is proud to embed it into everything we do. We recognise the importance of upholding the UNCRC so that we get it right for every child in Scotland.

We take great pride in supporting Scotland's children, to help them make informed decisions around their learning and work experiences.

Taking a rights-based approach to our work helps ensure that we recognise, respect and promote children's rights in all that we do.

As we near the end of our 2022–2027 Skills for a Changing World Strategic Plan, it is an important moment to reflect on the progress we have made in supporting Scotland's people and businesses. This

report ensures that children's rights remain central to our thinking as we begin to shape the next phase of our strategic direction.

This report updates our 2023 edition and is the first since the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act received Royal Assent in January 2024.

Through our new commitments, we aim to demonstrate our continued ambition to strengthen and improve how we uphold children's rights over the next three years.



**Damien Yeates**

**Chief Executive**  
**Skills Development Scotland**

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# 1. Introduction

## About Skills Development Scotland

Skills Development Scotland (SDS) is the national skills agency.

Our ambition is that skills contribute to a thriving, productive and inclusive Scotland. We help inspire and enable Scotland's people and businesses to develop the right skills for a changing world.

We achieve this through intelligence-led delivery of Scotland's Career Service, Apprenticeships, and other learning and skills interventions in support of Scottish Government ambitions. Through the sharing of expertise, intelligence, and extensive partnership working, particularly with our agency colleagues, we enable the development and delivery of innovative solutions to Scotland's skills and labour market challenges.

Further details on SDS' strategic approach and operational activities can be found in our [Strategic Plan](#), and in our latest [Annual Report](#).

## What is the UNCRC?

The [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), or UNCRC, is the most complete statement of children's rights and the most widely ratified international human rights treaty in history. It aims to ensure that children can grow up in the spirit of peace, dignity, tolerance, freedom, equality and solidarity. There are [54 UNCRC articles](#), the first 42 of which describe what every child and young person from birth to 18 years old should experience. The rights contained in the articles are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated.

The UK ratified the UNCRC in 1991 but did not incorporate it into domestic law<sup>1</sup>. Application of the UNCRC and children's rights are primarily a devolved matter in Scotland, with the Scottish Government responsible for the advancement of children's rights, in legislation and public services in Scotland<sup>2</sup>.

The [UNCRC \(Incorporation\) \(Scotland\) Bill](#) was passed unanimously by the Scottish Parliament in December 2023 and came into effect on the 16 July 2024. The Scottish Government affirmed that the UNCRC is at the heart of the Scottish Government's commitment to ensuring that all children and young people have the best possible start in life, regardless of their circumstances.

The UNCRC Act followed over a decade of legislation and policy that protects and promotes children's rights, including the [Human Rights Act 1998](#), [Getting It Right For Every Child](#) (GIRFEC), the [Children and Young People \(Scotland\) Act 2014](#), and the [Children \(Scotland\) Act 2020](#).

Children's rights, within the broader context of human rights, are also embedded in Scotland's National Performance Framework (NPF). The 2018 version of the NPF, includes the following outcomes: "We respect, protect and fulfil human rights and live

<sup>1</sup> [Together Scotland: About the Convention](#)

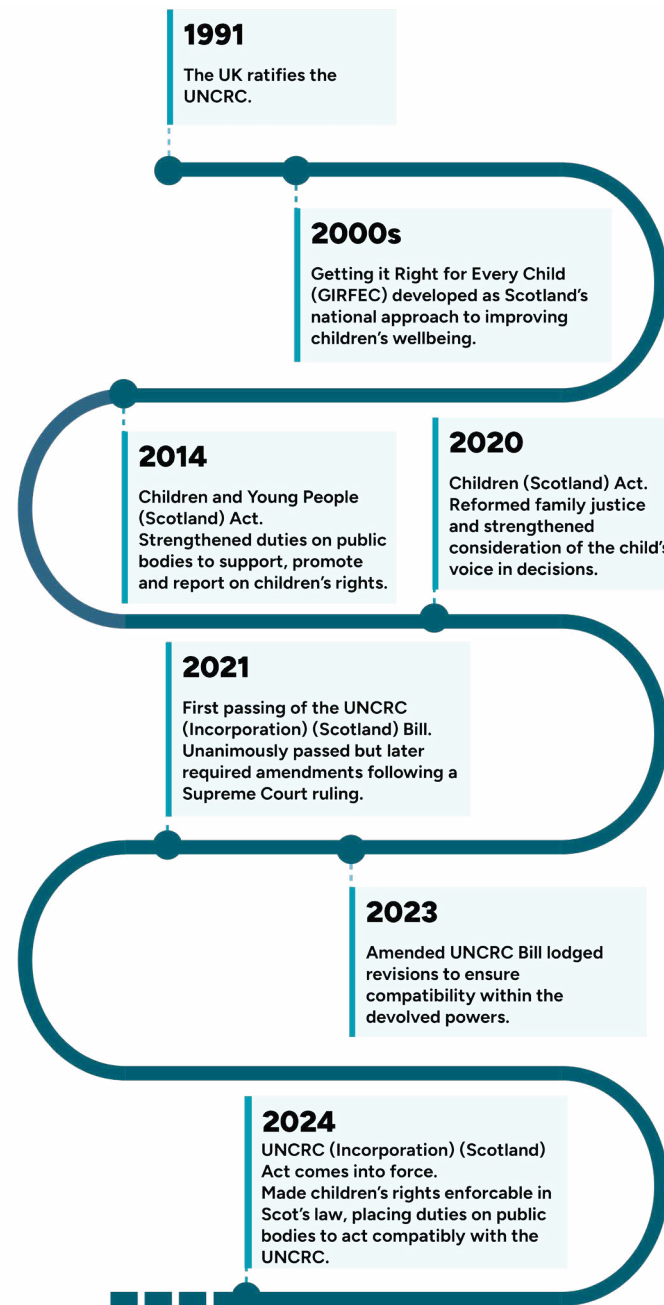
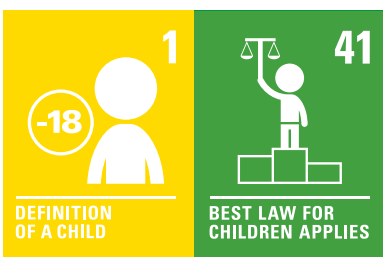
<sup>2</sup> [Scottish Government: children's rights](#)

free from discrimination” and, in relation to the rights of the child: “We grow up loved, safe and respected so that we realise our full potential”. The NPF is currently being updated and is expected to be released following publication of this report in 2026. Also aligned to children’s rights is the Supporting Children’s Learning Code of Practice that provides statutory guidance on the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004. The act aims to ensure that all children and young people are provided with the necessary support to help them work towards achieving their full potential. A refreshed Code of Practice is anticipated following the publication of this report, which SDS will regard when exercising our functions.

## Upholding universal rights

SDS understands the importance of upholding all children’s rights according to the requirements within the Act. In line with Article 1 we recognise that children’s rights apply to all young people up to the age of 18, and in line with Article 41 where we have another statutory obligation or expectation which goes beyond the UNCRC requirements, we will work to the higher standard.

Fulfil	Protect	Respect
Article 1		
Article 41		



## Our responsibilities

The Act sets out a range of requirements on named public sector organisations that they must ensure they comply with. Central to this is a duty to integrate children’s rights into the design, delivery and evaluation of public services. Within public sector organisations, these principles must shape decisions, influence policies, and guide interactions with children and young people. The legislation gives children, young people and their representatives the ability to challenge organisations in court if they believe their rights have been breached.

As a listed body under the Act, the legislation requires SDS to publish an account of the actions taken during the previous three years to demonstrate compatibility with the UNCRC, as well as the steps taken to advance children’s rights. We must also set out the actions we intend to take over the next three years to ensure ongoing compliance with the UNCRC requirements and to further strengthen or enhance the effect of children’s rights. This publication is SDS’s three-yearly report, upholding our duty as a listed body under the Act.

We recognise that some of the UNCRC Articles are more directly linked to our remit. We apply the [UN’s framework](#) of “fulfil, protect, and respect” to express the articles through which we can have the greatest impact in upholding children’s rights:

- **Fulfil:** these are rights we proactively uphold through the delivery of our products and services.
- **Protect:** we have a defined approach to upholding these rights when we become aware of any infringement during our service delivery and operations.
- **Respect:** although for some areas we may not play a lead role, we are aware of the rights and would act to uphold them if we encountered any infringement.

Throughout this report we highlight our mapping of each Article to these three definitions. For ease of reference, this is also provided in a single table on pages 38-42.

The Act aligns with GIRFEC principles, National Practice Model and well-being indicators. Our career guidance teams utilise the model to help understand, assess and support wellbeing in conjunction with partners. We also operate in accordance with the National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland 2023.

## Education and Skills Reform

The Scottish Government’s post-school education and skills reform is impacting the future remit of SDS. Our responsibilities for national training programmes, including apprenticeship delivery, will move to a redesigned Scottish Funding Council within the timeframe of the action plan on page 35. Further reform decisions made by the Scottish Government over this period may also impact SDS, and the products and services we deliver, which in turn could affect how we are able to deliver the ambition of this report. We will monitor this closely and outline any necessary changes made through our 2029 Report.

## About this report

To help the young people we support, our staff and wider stakeholders to understand how we uphold children's rights we use SDS-specific groupings for the Articles. These are:

- We listen to what you say and value your opinion
- We won't discriminate against you
- We care about your safety and wellbeing
- We give you the information you need
- We help the adults in your life support you
- We support you to access learning and development
- We embed children's rights through everything we do.

Children's rights are integral to our work. In the following sections, we take each of these commitments in turn, providing examples of how we have upheld children's rights in each of those areas over the past few years. We outline intended actions we feel are required to build upon our existing good practice, and improve how we uphold and advance children's rights for the coming three years.



## Evidence

In developing our children's rights report, we reviewed a wide range of evidence sources including performance data and direct feedback from customers. This included consideration of those groups who may be more at risk of not engaging with our services and/or not making a successful post-school transition. We recognise that sometimes certain groups may need more support to realise their rights than others, as highlighted by Scottish Government:

**“ To succeed [in improving people's lives] we must take action to tackle inequality and to advance equality of opportunity for everyone in Scotland, supporting those who are most disadvantaged and who face the greatest barriers to realising their rights. ”**

**First Minister John Swinney's Foreword Programme for Government 24/25**

The main source of evidence used to understand the educational and labour market outcomes for groups with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010, and for Care Experienced customers, comes from [SDS Equality Evidence Review 2025](#) (this is updated every two years in line with reporting on our [Equality and Diversity Mainstreaming Report](#)). In addition, the Scottish Government's [Bringing Hope, Building Futures: Tackling child poverty delivery plan 2026-2031](#) identifies [six priority family groups](#) who are most at risk of experiencing poverty.

Through consultation with our staff and reviewing the evidence, we identified other customer groups who may also be at risk of not engaging/requiring support to engage with our services and/or not making a successful transition post-school, including those who:

- have interrupted learning or are disengaged from education
- are within Armed Forces families
- experience digital poverty
- are young carers
- are homeless
- experience drug/alcohol misuse
- have experience of the justice system
- are refugees, asylum seekers or New Scots

For all of these groups, it is recognised that some children and young people will experience multiple, overlapping circumstances, highlighting the intersectional nature of children’s rights and reinforcing the importance of a person-centred service offer based on the needs and experiences of each individual customer.

A full **Integrated Equality Impact Assessment** (including a section on children’s rights) will be published alongside this report giving further detail on the consideration given to those with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010, children’s rights and wellbeing, and Islands Communities when developing this report.

## 2. What we do to uphold the rights of children in Scotland

### We listen to what you say and value your opinion

At SDS, we make sure young people’s perspectives and lived experiences directly inform how we design and shape the services we provide.

This collection of articles reflects our commitment to ensuring that every young person we work with feels assured that their voice will be heard and that their views are genuinely valued.

We listen to what you say		
Fulfil	Protect	Respect
Article 12	Article 14	Article 15
Article 13		



## **Progress to date: How we listen to what you say and value your opinion**

We offer a wide range of products and services for young people across Scotland, and their feedback is essential to ensure that our services remain inclusive, relevant and accessible. We analyse research responses by protected characteristics to understand the distinct needs of different groups and use these insights to improve service design and delivery.

We carry out multiple research projects with young people to capture their opinions at critical transition points to understand their experiences and views. A list of our surveys can be found in Table 1 (p.12) detailing the survey purpose, respondents and key findings. Young people's feedback, especially their suggestions for how we can improve, plays a vital role in shaping and refining our career information, advice and guidance (CIAG) service offer in schools and beyond. By gathering feedback from apprentices about their apprenticeship experience, we can drive improvements in the quality of apprenticeship development and delivery.

## **Transformation and co-design**

As part of its commitment to the Young Person's Guarantee, Scottish Government commissioned SDS to lead a review of Scotland's career services. Co-designed with partners and more than 80 young people under the age of 18, the ten recommendations outlined in the [Careers By Design report](#) summarise how Scotland's career services need to respond to the rapidly changing world around us. Further, in line with our Strategic Plan 2022-27, we launched Transform 27 to support and accelerate our move towards a sustainable operating model by 2027/28.

Building on the Career Review and as part of Transform 27, we have refreshed our school career service offer to strengthen the universal entitlement to career information, advice and

guidance. The emerging model prioritises person-led, collaborative discussions with pupils, parents/carers and partners to agree the appropriate level and frequency of support, moving away from system-driven intensity levels and giving young people greater choice and control over how and when they engage. Informed by what children and young people told us works best for them, we are increasingly tailoring support to individual needs, circumstances and aspirations, with a stronger focus on earlier intervention and access to high-quality career information, advice and guidance. A safety net is embedded to proactively support pupils to access their entitlement - particularly those with additional needs, protected characteristics or identified need factors - through flexible formats, timings or locations. We ensure frontline staff actively seek, listen to, and use the views of the young people they directly support to shape the services they receive. This is embedded in everyday career guidance practice, with support designed around continuous listening, placing the young person's voice at the centre of day-to-day decisions and support. This approach demonstrates how we listen to and act on young people's views, ensuring an inclusive and genuinely universal CIAG offer alongside targeted support to enable access and participation.

We are committed to working with children and young people to shape the services that support them. Through consultation and co-design, we ensure their ideas, experiences and feedback directly influence how our services develop, recognising that young people are experts on their own lives. This approach reflects our commitment to upholding children's rights, particularly their right to express their views and have them taken seriously and strengthens our ability to continually improve what we do.

The new [Learner Profile](#) is a digital space being developed within [My World of Work](#) that helps young people explore and record their individual skills, strengths and career interests. Delivered by

SDS in partnership with Education Scotland and Qualifications Scotland, the Learner Profile brings together tools such as Skills Explorer, My Strengths and career ideas, allowing young people to track progress, build a narrative on progress and reflect on real experiences. Learners can also showcase achievements and goals, and securely share their profile with advisers, teachers or parents to support meaningful, joined-up guidance. As of February 2026, close to 50,000 Learner Profiles have been created.

The Learner Profile feature was co-designed with over 300 learners and educators to allow us to tailor our services to the needs of different groups, demonstrating our person-centred approach to designing our offer. We regularly have dialogues with various stakeholders and customers, and incorporate their feedback into our service design, ensuring their voices are heard every step of the way. For example, young carers from across schools in South Ayrshire were consulted on how they engaged with the new profiles. Their valuable feedback has helped our Digital Services team better understand what language and tools would be best for this group. We will also draw on this research for use in future service design. This co-design approach ensures that our Learner Profiles feel modern and easy to use and supports our drive for a service offer that can be used by any young person, regardless of their background. Co-design and involvement are a fixture of the design process across the organisation.

In response to the Career Review, SDS ran a pilot project in 2025 – focused on developing skills essential for the future world of work and helping school students to undertake experiential career education – both being key recommendations from the [Career Review](#). This approach came in the form of a ‘skills challenge’. A skills challenge is a form of experiential career learning which runs in schools that incorporates direct employer involvement and group career coaching to inspire and connect young people to the world of work.

SDS collaborated with three schools across Scotland and their partners to co-design three distinct skills challenge pilots. The co-design groups brought together pupils, teachers, careers advisers, local employers and Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) Scotland. Diverse groups of school pupils were sought after as part of the co-design process, to ensure a range of experiences and voices were captured. Challenges related to different industries, such as designing their own farm considering livestock, land use and sustainability, and designing a wind-powered car with a trip to Whitelee Windfarm. Learning from this phase has informed further development of this type of experiential career education, which is now being delivered with a wider group of careers advisers and schools with a wider roll-out planned.

## **How we listen to what you say and value your opinion**

### **Our 2026-29 outcome is:**

Young people’s views are consistently sought, listened to, valued, and acted upon in the development and delivery of our services.

### **Action:**

- **We will use an inclusive approach to service design and make sure children and young people receive feedback on how their views shaped our services.**
- **We will bring together and share customer insight and analysis from across SDS in a clear and accessible way, so staff can easily understand the needs and experiences of different customer groups and use this knowledge to shape the support/ services they provide.**
- **We will routinely gather feedback from young people and use it to drive continuous improvement, and actively identify where our understanding of customer experiences is limited and take steps to address these gaps.**

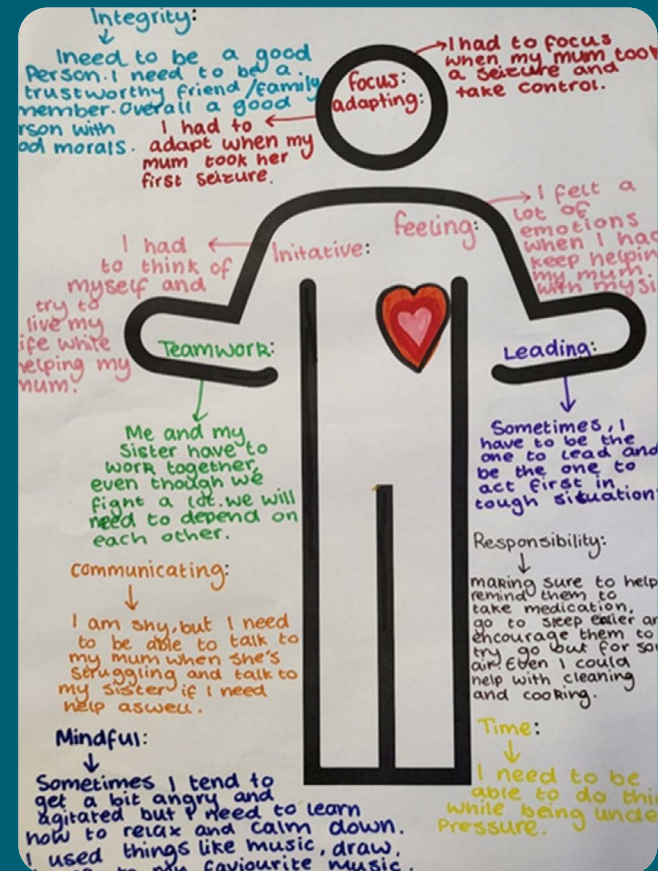
### Learner Profile co-design session supported young carers to recognise the value of their everyday responsibilities, and SDS to better support this group

SDS worked with partners in South Ayrshire to better understand how young carers' skills and achievements are recognised and articulated through the My World of Work Learner Profile. South Ayrshire Council identified that many young carers did not recognise the value of the skills they develop through caring responsibilities, and that existing tools did not reflect their lived experience. To address this, SDS used a co-design approach with young carers to create guidance to help teachers and voluntary sector organisations to support young carers in future learner profile delivery sessions.

SDS facilitated two co-design sessions with 14 young carers from S1-S6, where participants reviewed co-produced videos, tested different skills templates, and completed sections of their Learner Profile with structured support. These sessions created space for young carers to discuss what helped them recognise their strengths, highlighting the importance of visual tools, relatable examples, peer discussion, and using their own language to describe skills. These young carers directly shaped how the Learner Profile could better support them by sharing what worked in practice and using their own language to describe their skills and achievements.

Young carers' feedback has directly informed practical changes to how the Learner Profile is supported and delivered. SDS developed new visual templates, video prompts, and adaptable lesson plans resources for schools and youth settings. This

approach ensured young carers' views shaped services designed to support them, helping them feel seen, valued, and better able to articulate their achievements. By embedding these co-designed methods and expanding resources across settings, SDS services can better support young carers into positive outcomes.



# Table 1: Summary table of SDS research

Survey title	Purpose	Respondents	Key findings
<b><u>Young People's Career Ambitions</u></b> (2026)	SDS conducts the YPCA survey to discover the aspirations, influences, and motivations that are influencing young peoples' career decision making in Scotland.	<b>2,919</b> (68% 16 to 18-year-olds)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Most young people reported feeling supported at school to make their own decisions, as well as encouraged to reach their full potential with the career support they received.</li> </ul>
<b><u>Pupil Voice Research (S4-S6)</u></b> (2025)	This survey explores young people's views of the SDS service offer and is the largest senior-phase school pupil research initiative in Scotland. This feedback has a vital role in the shaping our service development.	<b>8,714</b> (94% 16 to 17-year-olds)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Young people were generally positive about their ability to access support when needed, the amount of support available, and the range of services we provide.</li> </ul>
<b><u>Pupil Voice Research (S1-S3)</u></b> (2025)	Sharing similar goals with the senior phase research, this pilot programme was also intended to gauge the feasibility of collecting feedback from pupils earlier in school.	<b>712</b> (12 to 15-year-olds)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ This was a pilot project and was not intended to be representative of Scotland.</li> <li>■ Looking ahead, we plan to expand and scale up this survey.</li> </ul>
<b><u>Apprentice Voice</u></b> (2025)	Three AV surveys provide live data on our Modern Apprentices at three stages. "In-Training" covers six months after starting a role, "leavers" is three months after finishing, and "short-term outcomes" for 15 months after leaving. These give vital feedback on their experiences and destinations with our various learning providers.	<b>11,028</b> (27% 16 to 19-year-olds)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ 95% of 16 to 19-year-old in-training apprentices were satisfied with their experience.</li> <li>■ 90% of 16 to 19-year-olds are employed in the same sector 15 months after completing their apprenticeship.</li> </ul>

## We won't discriminate against you

At SDS we strive to deliver services that meet the needs of children and young people from all circumstances and backgrounds, in ways that helps them to achieve their full potential.

This group of articles relates to our commitment to ensure equality and fair work practices are embedded across everything we do. We remain committed to proactively addressing disadvantages faced by children and young people on their learning and career journeys.

We won't discriminate against you		
Fulfil	Protect	Respect
Article 2	Article 40	
Article 22		
Article 23		



## Progress to date: How we ensure that we won't discriminate against you

### Service provision

As a public body, SDS has responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations across protected characteristics. Through our [Equality and Diversity Mainstreaming Report and Equality Outcomes for 2025–29](#), we set out how we embed equality considerations into decision making, service design and delivery. We use evidence, lived experience and ongoing monitoring to improve access, participation and outcomes for children and young people from diverse backgrounds.

[Corporate Parenting](#) means that public bodies, like SDS, have a responsibility to support the wellbeing of Care Experienced children and young people with the same commitment, care and ambition that any parent would. Since becoming a Corporate Parent, we have worked to understand and respond to the individual needs, strengths and circumstances of Care Experienced people, ensuring our services help them to feel heard, valued and supported. Through an entitlement to enhanced career guidance at school and beyond, and by offering flexible, accessible opportunities, we aim to improve equality of opportunity and outcomes for Care Experienced young people and uphold their right to the support they need to thrive.

SDS is dedicated to providing an impartial CIAG service, that meets the needs of customers, including those from equality groups. Our careers advisers demonstrate a person-centred approach to every interaction, using inclusive practices and making reasonable adjustments so that each young person can engage with our services in a way that best reflects their individual needs and circumstances.

Our careers advisers ensure equality, diversity and inclusion is embedded into their delivery. Our careers advisers hold a postgraduate qualification in Career Guidance (QCD) which is rooted in the [National Occupational Standards](#) as well as the Career Development Institute (CDI) [Code of Ethics](#), ensuring sector standards are achieved and the quality and consistency of practice is maintained.

We have undertaken work to embed the [Principles of Good Transitions](#) for young people with Additional Support Needs (ASN) ensuring our career service contributes to the support required to make a successful post-school transition. Alongside [ARC Scotland](#), we are working to build consistent use of the principles across CIAG delivery. We will continue to build on this approach by gathering insight from staff to understand any additional support or resources they require to deepen their understanding of how to support young people with ASN during transition periods.

Our 'Next Steps' service offer ensures that those who do not make a successful transition from school to a positive destination, such as education or employment, are provided with additional intensive support to do so. This offer is targeted to those in their late teens, and further supports inclusion being embedded into our work, as those with protected characteristics are more likely to find themselves not going to a positive destination after school. The support extends into adult life for those with Care Experience, as part of our Corporate Parenting commitments. This offer also provides support to young people who need it to sustain their post-school destination where required. The level of support they receive is based on their individual need and circumstance.

SDS also delivers its career guidance expertise at a local level to help improve outcomes for young people who have experience of the justice system. As a [Community Justice Statutory Partner](#), we work closely with the other statutory partners to jointly support the

national community justice outcomes and ensure young people are helped to desist and reintegrate post-sentence.

SDS has a national approach to equality stakeholder engagement, including our regular Focal Point Groups (FPG) with third sector organisations. These FPGs represent different equality groups including women and girls, disability, Care Experience, and race. This approach helps us engage stakeholders in our service design and development, and in identifying any access barriers our customers may encounter. We recently brought FPG members together for a consultation event to draw on their expertise and lived experience, supporting continuous improvement of our career services. This included discussion of recent changes to our service delivery approach, future ambitions to develop group career coaching in schools, and the ongoing development of our digital offer through the Learner Profile.

As part of our commitment to non-discrimination and fair work, we proactively seek to address under-representation and improve outcomes for children and young people from equality groups within work-based learning, including apprenticeships. SDS provides a programme of continuing professional development (CPD) for learning providers to strengthen their understanding, skills and confidence in supporting diverse learners. CPD topics over the last three years have included neurodiversity; religious diversity; mentoring Care Experienced apprentices; anti-discrimination, inclusion and anti-racism; men and mental health; and tackling sexual harassment. This activity supports inclusive learning environments and helps ensure providers are equipped to respond effectively to the needs of all learners.

SDS offers additional funding to learning providers to support apprentices who are disabled, Care Experienced, or from a minority ethnic group who face additional barriers in learning and work.

This funding helps uphold their right to non-discrimination and to fair access to meaningful learning and work opportunities. We recently enhanced this funding to better support New Scots, recognising the barriers they may face in accessing fair and meaningful employment opportunities.

### **Our organisation**

At SDS, we foster a working environment where every colleague is treated with fairness, respect and consistency. Guided by the principles of the Equality Act 2010, we actively promote a culture of dignity and inclusion, encouraging staff to confidently challenge any attitudes, behaviours or language that fall short of these values. Our ambition extends beyond meeting legislative requirements, we aim to lead by example across the public sector. To support this, there are various CPD opportunities available for staff, including mandatory e-learning for all colleagues on equality and diversity, Corporate Parenting and Children's Rights. Other CPD is available covering Additional Support Needs, disability, Care Experience, minority ethnic groups, gender and LGBTI+ inclusion in the workplace.

### **How we will ensure that we won't discriminate against you**

#### **Our 2026-29 outcome is:**

The diverse needs and circumstances of every customer are recognised and respected by our staff and through our service delivery.

#### **Action:**

- **We will ensure our staff have the knowledge and confidence to support the diverse needs and circumstances of every customer by providing access to regular training and resources.**
- **We will use data, evidence and the lived experiences of customers to understand the uptake and experience of our services, and take targeted action to improve outcomes for customer groups identified as facing persistent barriers.**

## Careers advisers adapt service delivery to meet individual needs, support inclusivity, and prevent discrimination

Careers advisers regularly adapt their delivery to respond to meet the individual needs of customers, ensuring a person-centred approach so those who require additional support can access and benefit from our services. This helps SDS recognise and build upon individual strengths, regardless of background, and prevents unique needs from being overlooked..

Careers Adviser Lesley Niven, along with colleagues across her team, use a range of creative resources to encourage customers with additional support needs, including neurodiverse young people, to reflect on and articulate their skills.

“Every individual brings a unique set of needs, and as career practitioners, it is essential that we recognise and respond to them. By tailoring our approach, we help remove barriers, build confidence, and enable people to visualise a positive future. Adapting our practice ensures that each person is supported to identify their strengths, skills, interests, and talents, important elements in shaping meaningful and achievable ambitions for their future.” **Lesley**

Examples of these adaptive, person-centred ideas from within Lesley’s team include Adviser Fiona Callan designing interactive group work sessions, such as adapting game shows to engage students with diverse learning styles. This approach proved

particularly effective with neurodivergent young people, who were more comfortable engaging with a familiar concept. Lesley also described a time when a spinning prize wheel helped a neurodivergent pupil engage with careers advice, removing the pressure to maintain eye contact or remain still.

Similarly, colleague Robert Andrew recognised that the young person he worked with, who had additional support needs, loved television and used this information to tailor his approach:

“I quickly realised that a traditional approach wouldn’t work, and after learning about their interest in a particular soap opera, I used that as a way to discuss careers. The programme featured characters tied to specific occupations and businesses, so I created picture cards with these characters, different workplaces, and scenarios that might occur there, and the pupil enjoyed sorting and discussing them, and was much more open and communicative as a result.” **Robert**

Lesley’s team members regularly share effective ideas and examples at team meetings, and this collaborative approach supports the continuous improvement of the team. Alongside this, reflective practice is embedded into the team in a supportive culture that openly discusses what does and does not work. In turn, this all helps to ensure that every young person in Scotland can be supported to reach a positive outcome, as the person-centred approach to our service delivery means our staff adapt to their unique needs.

## We care about your safety and wellbeing

The safety and wellbeing of all children and young people is essential for allowing their full potential to be achieved. SDS is committed to ensuring this, and to upholding the related articles. We have embedded a 'culture of care' to our safeguarding approach, which focuses on the prevention of harm and supporting resilience, allowing young people to succeed.

We care about your safety and wellbeing		
Fulfil	Protect	Respect
Article 6	Article 9	Article 7
Article 16	Article 11	Article 8
Article 32	Article 19	Article 10
	Article 20	Article 21
	Article 26	Article 24
	Article 27	Article 25
	Article 33	Article 35
	Article 34	Article 36
	Article 37	
	Article 38	
	Article 39	
	Optional protocols 1 & 2	



## **Progress to date: How we care about your safety and wellbeing**

Prioritising the safety and wellbeing of children and young people underpins our commitment to the protection and safeguarding of children, young people and vulnerable adults at risk of harm. The protective principles that guide our work are aligned with Scotland's refreshed Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) framework and the National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland. In addition, all SDS colleagues who work directly with children or young people hold PVG (Protection of Vulnerable Groups) certification, in line with the Disclosure (Scotland) Act 2020.

SDS supports the safety and wellbeing of children and young people through a GIRFEC-aligned approach to service design and delivery. The [wellbeing indicators](#) used as part of GIRFEC help practitioners to consider how our services contribute to children and young people feeling safe, nurtured, included and supported to develop skills and confidence. Our career services play a key role in supporting wellbeing by enabling individuals to understand themselves, make informed choices and participate as active contributors in learning, work and wider society.

SDS employees have a responsibility to promote the wellbeing of young people, remain alert to any signs of harm or concerns about their welfare, and take the appropriate action to keep them safe. We apply a robust protective layering approach to safeguarding, ensuring that CIAG staff at all levels receive mandatory training and regular refresher updates. This learning is delivered/supported by sector experts. Our network of Nominated Protection Officers provide ongoing leadership and oversight to ensure consistent, confident and informed safeguarding practice across SDS.

We have provided Trauma Informed Practice awareness training across our CIAG teams so that advisers, within the context of delivering career guidance services, can better understand how trauma impacts individuals and the role our advisers can play in recovery. This approach helps our CIAG teams recognise the impact of adverse experiences on decision making, confidence and participation, and supports them to be more trauma aware, recognising the importance of trauma language and skills that support sensitive and respectful communication. This helps advisers play a potentially important part in supporting recovery while also reducing the risk of re-traumatisation for the young people they meet.

SDS's contract management and quality assurance activity strengthens how we uphold children's rights across the work-based learning opportunities we facilitate by ensuring that every provider delivers apprenticeship programmes that are safe, inclusive and centred on learner experience. This expectation is reflected in the [Quality Assurance and Improvement Hub](#), which outlines the standards, documentation and review processes that providers must meet, including self-evaluation, action planning and regular progress reviews to ensure consistent quality for children and young people. As well as running a Community of Practice on safeguarding for our contracted learning providers, we support them with a number of resources and signposting to support learner safety and wellbeing. SDS also provides CPD training for our Modern Apprenticeship providers on topics such as mental health, going beyond our own organisation to encourage UNCRC upholding practices with our partners.

## **Privacy**

Children and young people have a right to privacy in both physical and digital spaces, including the protection of their personal

data and the confidentiality of their interactions with our CIAG services. We ensure that any personal information we collect is handled fairly, lawfully, accurately and securely, and only for specific purposes, with informed and explicit consent from the young person and/or their parent or carer.

Our Evaluation and Research team also follows strict ethical and procedural guidelines when conducting research with under 18s, adapting methods to suit younger participants and ensuring clear processes for consent and privacy.

We provide comprehensive privacy statements across our services on our [corporate website](#). These explain individuals' rights under current legislation, how and why their information is used, and how long it is retained.

SDS is committed to ensuring that customers know how to raise concerns and are supported throughout the complaints process. [Our complaints procedure](#) is designed to be accessible, fair and responsive, reflecting customer's rights to be heard, taken seriously and treated without discrimination. Young people can make a complaint by phone, online or through any SDS careers centre, and we encourage early, direct conversations so issues can be resolved quickly wherever possible. We support individuals through each stage of the process by explaining what will happen next, what information we need and how we will work to put things right.

## **How we will care about your safety and wellbeing**

### **Our 2026-29 outcome is:**

Staff across SDS are confident and skilled in trauma-aware approaches, so that young people feel safe and supported when accessing our services.

### **Action:**

- **Guided by developing national policy, we will strengthen our approach to trauma-informed practice across SDS by developing and delivering an SDS trauma roadmap that identifies improvements and steps required to embed trauma-informed practice across SDS.**
- **We will continue to ensure all frontline staff receive up to date mandatory protection/safeguarding training so they can confidently identify, respond to, and escalate concerns, helping young people feel safe and protected when engaging with our services.**

## SDS promotes safeguarding and child protection practices across delivery partners

Safeguarding is a critical responsibility for all learning providers delivering Modern Apprenticeships and Foundation Apprenticeships. Providers and employers delivering Modern Apprenticeships operate across diverse sectors and settings and must navigate evolving safeguarding and children's rights requirements. To help providers strengthen their good practice SDS offered a one-off Safeguarding Community of Practice event in partnership with **The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC)** and **His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIE)**.

This event brought over 170 participants together, both in-person and online, and included colleges and employers from across Scotland. The event included presentations from SDS, HMIE, and the NSPCC alongside facilitated discussions and case study-based workshops focused on practical examples of effective safeguarding.

Participants were invited to reflect on current practice, share challenges, and discuss how safeguarding is embedded within their organisations. Signposting to specialist resources and support occurred throughout the event, including NSPCC training and helplines, as well as information on the UNCRC.

This approach enabled providers to learn from one another while also engaging with national guidance, legislation and specialist safeguarding expertise.

The Community of Practice event demonstrated the value of peer-led, practice-focused learning. This helped providers leave the event with practical tools, clear points of contact, and increased knowledge in applying safeguarding responsibilities across apprenticeship delivery, while promoting the safety of young people using SDS services.



## We give you the information you need

All children must have access to impartial and reliable information in order to accurately inform their decision making. This group of articles relates to the information we provide young people with, in order to help them make those informed education and career choices.

We give you the information you need		
Fulfil	Protect	Respect
Article 17	Article 30	
Article 42		



### Progress to date: How we give you the information you need

Our professionally qualified careers advisers deliver a comprehensive CIAG service in every state secondary school in Scotland, including specialist settings. From the P7/S1 transition through to S6, advisers support young people to access clear, impartial information so they can make informed and confident

decisions about their future learning and career pathways. Young people can access career information, advice and guidance through a range of channels, including personalised one-to-one sessions, coaching for those needing intensive support, group activities at key transition points, and open drop-in opportunities for quick advice. In line with professional standards, advisers help young people to find, interpret and apply robust, reliable career information tailored to their needs.

Our digital services give young people clear and accessible information that helps them explore learning and employment opportunities. The [Apprenticeships.scot](https://www.apprenticeships.scot.nhs.uk/) website supports those who are keen to find out more and get involved with apprenticeships. It details what different apprenticeship routes are available, practical guidance, inspiring stories from other young people, and apprenticeship opportunities that can be searched and applied for online.

[My World of Work](https://www.myworldofwork.scot.nhs.uk/) is Scotland's national career information and advice website, offering clear and reliable information to help people explore learning, training and employment opportunities. It provides advice on option choices, apprenticeships and job routes, and supports users to understand the steps involved in planning their future. The site includes tools, tips and up-to-date advice that help individuals make informed decisions at key transition points. [My World of Work](https://www.myworldofwork.scot.nhs.uk/) acts as an accessible and trusted source of career support with it receiving 1.7 million visits in 2025.<sup>3</sup>

We also provide educational content to help young people understand what exactly skills are, which ones they have already, and how they can further develop them. This includes tools such as a CV builder to support young people in preparing professional applications, online tools that link career interests to relevant

<sup>3</sup> This data is provided using Google Analytics which uses third-party cookies. Users who do not explicitly choose to accept these cookies when using the site cannot be tracked and are not included in this reporting. This means reported data reflects a sample, and acts as an indicator for further investigation rather than a firm value.

subject choices at school, and assessments designed to help young people explore their strengths and ambitions, ranging from light touch, interactive quizzes to more in-depth assessments for those approaching key decision points.

In line with children's rights, including the right to access information in a language they understand, we take steps to ensure our information is accessible. This includes the introduction of a My World of Work translation tool, which enables online content to be accessed in 19 languages and has had 85,508 translation requests since December 2024. This provision sits alongside established processes for providing translation of materials and interpretation support for one-to-one career information, advice and guidance sessions. Further, our [Gaelic Language Plan 2026-29](#) includes details of our commitments and actions to increase the use and learning of Gaelic in education and business. This plan is provided in English and Gaelic. Together, these approaches help ensure young people can access the information they need in ways that reflect their individual circumstances and support informed choices about learning, work and their future.

My World of Work Live is an interactive career education programme that helps young people explore different industries and future career pathways through hands-on, technology-based learning experiences. It is designed for school pupils from P5 to S6 and aims to bring the world of work into the classroom in a fun and curriculum-aligned way. Sessions include introductions to cyber security as well as video game design, all led by experts in their field. SDS has used innovative mediums for teaching, from education on space technology careers being delivered in Minecraft, to teaching children about renewable energy with Lego.

The Results Helpline provides support to young people and their families during the school exam results period. Staffed by SDS careers advisers, the helpline offers impartial advice on course vacancies, apprenticeships, employment options, and next steps

for those whose results were unexpected. In 2025, 92% of those accessing the helpline felt that the CIAG support they had received enabled them to consider and explore their options further and 87% felt more empowered and confident about their next steps following the call. Alongside phone support, learners can also access advice through [My World of Work](#) or receive face-to-face support via their local SDS career team, ensuring everyone has access to clear, trusted information at an important and sensitive time.

We are continuing to build our labour market intelligence on skills supply and demand through our Skills Planning activity, including Regional Skills Assessments, Sectoral Skills Assessments, Skills Action Plans, and Regional Skills Investment Plans. We work in partnership with industry, education providers and regional stakeholders to identify and articulate current and future skills needs, and how these vary by area, sector and occupation. This research helps to inform approaches to apprenticeships, education and the wider skills system across different regions, for example through the [Regional Skills Investment Plan](#), which aligns skills provision with employer demand and inclusive economic growth. Through [My World of Work](#) and via our careers advisers, we share this information to parents/carers, teachers and pupils in formats that are accessible, easy to understand and can be practically used to highlight local opportunities and support informed career decisions.

## **How we will give you the information you need**

### **Our 2026-29 outcome is:**

Young people can access clear, easy-to-use and reliable information to help them understand our services and make informed learning and career decisions.

### **Action:**

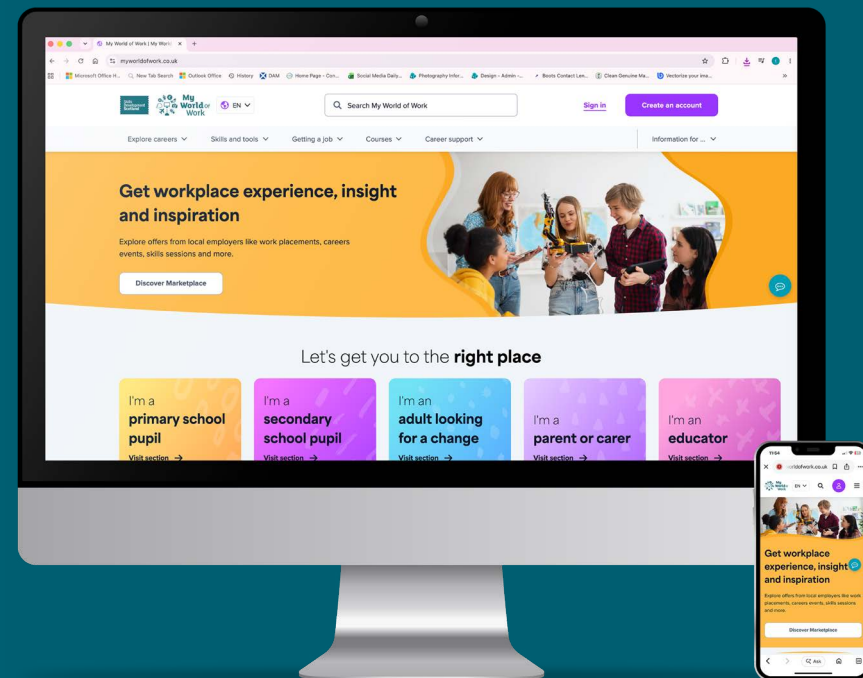
- **We will further develop our digital offer so all young people can access trustworthy information, giving particular consideration to digital inclusion and the barriers young people may face accessing online services.**
- **We will continue to work with young people to understand how best to communicate information about SDS services by involving them in developing our marketing and communication approaches.**

## Getting information to young people, where they really are

SDS reviewed its marketing approach to ensure young people have access to clear, reliable information about career pathways and how to engage with SDS services. This work focused on making information more relevant, accessible and aligned with how young people and their career influencers prefer to receive content.

Feedback gathered through customer surveys and the Career Review showed that young people favour digital communication, including short-form social media content. SDS used this insight to shape the format and design of its marketing, focusing on sectors that most interest young people and presenting information in ways that will more likely be engaged with. This includes the redesign of the **My World of Work website**.

Young people were actively involved in shaping this approach. SDS works in ongoing partnership with Young Scot's Young Creator Network and uses consultation and survey insight to inform marketing decisions. This ensures career information reflects young people's views and supports them to make informed choices with relevant information.



## We help the adults in your life to support you

Children and young people thrive when their parents and carers take an active interest in their learning and development. The support and guidance of parents and carers remain the most significant influence on the choices young people make about their future careers.

We help the adults in your life to support you		
Fulfil	Protect	Respect
Article 5		
Article 18		



### Progress to date: How we help the adults in your life support you

To help our customers navigate the changing world of work, parents and carers can receive information and practical support to guide the children they look after when they are making important choices around their education and career journey. When young people move from P7 into S1, our careers advisers attend parent and carer events to explain the support available from SDS. In S2 or S3, depending on the year option choice activity takes place in school, careers advisers attend parent and carer events dedicated to this process. These sessions help

parents and carers support their young person to reflect on their career management skills and make informed decisions. Advisers also attend parent/carer events throughout the senior phase of secondary school to support decisions around post-school options. Parents and carers also have the chance to have a one-to-one with a careers adviser so they can receive tailored support to meet the needs of themselves and their young person.

We provide clear, accessible information on Foundation Apprenticeships to parents, carers and partners through regular national, local and school-level engagement. This includes published information on course content, delivery models, availability and progression pathways through [Apprenticeships.scot](https://www.apprenticeships.scot), alongside parent and carer webinars and Communities of Practice for schools, colleges, learning providers and local authorities.

[My World of Work](#) has a dedicated parents and carers section so they can access advice and discover tools to help empower young people. Guides and support include how to start a career conversation, how to look after your child's mental health and support them if they need additional support, how to help your child get work experience, a guide to option choices, support for your child as they leave school, and information on the Results Helpline for when their child gets their exam results. There are also a range of webinars parents and carers can access which cover these topics.

Parents and carers are a key influence for young people with the decisions and choices they make about their education and career. It is therefore important that we understand the experiences of parents and carers when they are supporting young people with their decision making. [The Parents and Carers Voice Research 2025](#) asked this group their perceptions on SDS services and work-based learning, and their knowledge of careers and career conversations with their child. This research found almost three in every five parents feel confident in discussing career and learning options with their child. Despite young people naming parents as a

key influence, many parents do not see themselves in this way, highlighting a need to raise awareness among parents and carers of the important role they play in young people's decision making. Gaining this insight helps inform how we communicate and develop information and resources for parents and carers.

We recognise that some parents and carers may have barriers to engaging, or not engage in traditional communication channels via schools, so we recently consulted with equality stakeholders via our Focal Point Groups to understand how we can improve the reach of our information for parents and carers. We will continue to develop our approach to engaging parents and carers to ensure they have access to relevant information and advice to support them to have career conversations with their young person.

### **Partnerships**

SDS works with partners across the wider skills system to contribute our knowledge and expertise to inform future planning of learning and employment opportunities available for young people. Using our knowledge of the barriers faced by some young people in accessing the labour market, we work with partners to influence approaches aimed at supporting smoother post-school transitions. This includes Local Employability Partnerships and Community Planning Partnerships.

### **Our organisation**

SDS is a Carer Positive organisation, with a range of family-friendly policies which go well beyond legal minimum, benefitting employees and their children. We have also recently refreshed our forum for colleagues with child-caring responsibilities. This offers opportunity for employees to come together to offer moral support and practical advice.

In recent years, SDS has strengthened its approach through enhanced family leave and flexible working policies, including

improved maternity and paternity pay and the introduction of full pay neonatal care leave. These measures support colleagues to respond to family needs and attend medical and education related appointments, helping to strengthen the support networks around children and young people.

### **How we will help the adults in your life support you**

#### **Our 2026-29 outcome is:**

Parents, carers, teachers and other influential adults are better equipped to support young people to access opportunities that are right for them.

#### **Action:**

- **We will develop a structured approach to parent/carer engagement across all services by engaging with parents and carers who may need extra support, and using national and local opportunities to engage them in the SDS offer.**
- **We will use evidence and insight to equip our staff and inform partners about the needs and experiences of young people, enabling confident advocacy, stronger partnership discussions, and collective action to provide holistic support to progress young people into positive outcomes.**

## Advisers go the extra mile to support parents and carers to help their children

SDS works with caregivers to help them feel more confident when supporting their child to make decisions about their future.

Some young people face interrupted learning due to various factors (e.g. health and wellbeing, experience of trauma, being young carers). This can make decisions about their future challenging. As parents and carers are hugely important influencers in young people's lives, careers advisers can work with them to support their young person to make the right decision and access the best support.

Careers Adviser Joanne, worked with a parent to find positive next steps with their child who had not attended school for all of S4. The careers adviser spent time building up a trusting relationship with the parent so they could find out more about how to support their child. The parent shared their child's motivations and interests with the careers adviser so they could receive personalised support. This led to the sharing of targeted options, shared by the adviser and presented by the parent, for taking small initial steps. Having the parent share information in this way, acting as a gateway, made the young person feel comfortable but also in control of the choices they could make. This approach led to the young person undertaking an educational support programme.

SDS are currently piloting materials for use with parents and carers of young people who have interrupted learning.

This approach contains a QR code that links to community-based provision and how a parent or carer can make contact. Taking time engaging with parents, and adapting how support is offered, can contribute to young people feeling more supported in their decision-making and helps to ensure their rights to receive information and guidance are upheld.

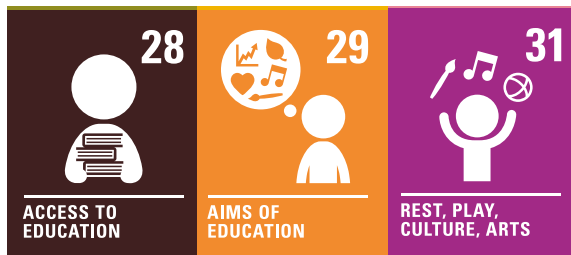


## We support you to access learning and development

All children and young people should have the opportunity to engage with the learning pathways available to them so they can thrive in education, work and life.

This group of articles reflects our commitment to ensuring that every young person in Scotland, regardless of their background or circumstances, can access the support to help them build the skills, confidence and readiness they need for the world of work.

We support you to access learning		
<b>Fulfil</b>	<b>Protect</b>	<b>Respect</b>
Article 28		Article 31
Article 29		



## Progress to date: How we support you to access learning and development

As part of our commitment to supporting all young people to access meaningful learning and development, we recognise that developing strong career management skills is essential for navigating change and thriving in education, work and life. We understand that some young people may need different levels or types of support to build these skills with confidence.

Our move to more community-based delivery involves offering our services from flexible locations, often sharing space with relevant partners to make it easier for individuals to access support from different organisations in one space. In recent years, we have strengthened our understanding of evolving customer preferences, patterns of engagement and ways of working. Evidence from the Career Review, informed by our customer voice, highlighted the need to expand community-based provision. Hybrid working arrangements and closer partnership working will further enable services to be delivered in local settings, increasing flexibility and choice in how, when and where individuals engage with learning and development support.

To support access to learning and development, SDS provides flexible, short-term financial assistance through the Customer Engagement Fund, which careers advisers can use to help remove practical barriers that may prevent children and young people from engaging with career support, learning or progressing towards employment. The fund can support costs such as travel or interview related expenses, helping to ensure that financial circumstances do not limit access to learning pathways or employment.

SDS plays a key role in ensuring young people can access high quality work-based learning through Scotland's apprenticeship system. We administer Foundation and Modern Apprenticeships

and work closely with the Scottish Funding Council on the delivery of Graduate Apprenticeships. Through direct engagement with employers, industry bodies and learning providers, we design and develop apprenticeship frameworks that reflect real labour market needs and provide meaningful pathways into skilled work. By overseeing quality, commissioning delivery, and supporting providers, we help ensure that apprenticeships remain accessible, inclusive and responsive to the diverse needs of Scotland's young people. This work directly supports children's rights by widening access to learning opportunities, reducing barriers for those who may face disadvantage, and enabling young people to build the skills, experience and confidence they need to progress and thrive in education, work and life.

Through our approach to skills planning and sector development, we turn evidence into action across Scotland's skills system. Our distinctive value is that we combine skills intelligence, networks and expertise in a way that is collaborative and integrated across SDS and with regional and sectoral partners. This is to support collaborative skills planning activity, with strong strategic engagement across Scottish Government policy teams and agencies. This in turn helps us and partners understand future skills needs and develop opportunities and pathways for young people to move into work.

We also work closely with employers to help them understand the skills needs of their business and promote the benefits of recruiting and developing young people. We work impartially with employers, promoting fair work as well as mentoring and coaching, to help them tailor young people's journeys and support successful learning and development outcomes.

## **Our organisation**

Our Young Talent Programme supports young people to access early career opportunities across the organisation, including apprenticeships and graduate roles, while enabling SDS to benefit from the skills, perspectives and ideas that young people bring to our workforce. Reductions in budget combined with inflationary pressures have had an impact on our recruitment, however we are pleased to have supported 28 young people in the 2025/26 operating year, including Foundation Apprentices and Modern Apprentices, some of whom were under 18 when appointed.

SDS remains committed to its role in supporting fair access to employment and development. As part of this commitment, recruitment through the programme includes inclusive measures to reduce barriers for under-represented groups. This includes extending age eligibility in our Young Talent Programme for Care Experienced applicants, offering guaranteed interviews to disabled candidates who meet the minimum criteria for a role and providing interview questions in advance. These approaches promote non-discrimination and equal access to progression, while supporting young people's learning and development through paid roles, workplace learning and structured support.

With positive destinations at 91% through our 2025/26 programme we ensured all young people departed with the onward job search skills and networks required to seek future employment.

## Local career support opens doors for Skye

Flexible support offered by Skills Development Scotland (SDS) in the community has been life changing for 17-year-old Skye Paterson, who has gained confidence and qualifications.

Skye spent much of her time in her room at home and suffered with mental health challenges. On leaving school, she was volunteering with Fife Voluntary Action (FVA), who referred Skye to the local SDS team for coaching with Debbie McCreary.

To help Skye feel comfortable leaving the house, Debbie arranged to meet Skye with her mum at nearby Rothies Halls community space in the shopping centre.

Skye said: "I had assumed any help would need to be based at the school, so it was really good to find out that I would be meeting Debbie in a place I knew and used."

The two met regularly at the same venue for over a month and a half, where Debbie worked with Skye to understand her strengths, networks and relationships to build her confidence and help her consider her options. Skye is dyslexic and so Debbie tailored the support to be discussion based.

During this time, Debbie and Skye looked at the benefits of taking an employability skills course that the King's Trust offered at Fife College.

To support with Skye's transition into the course, Debbie moved the meetings to the college, where SDS is based five days a week, and introduced Skye to the woman who would be taking interviews and managing the course.

With Debbie's help to apply and prepare for the interview, Skye was accepted on to the course.



Skye explained: "When Debbie first suggested we investigate college as a next step I shut the idea down but, once I found out more and I started to visit her there for meetings, I got used to the environment and realised it's not the same as school. I saw the other students expressing themselves and I knew it would be a place where I could be myself."

Since then, Debbie has been there to support Skye on all her next steps, helping her successfully apply to take a childcare course, which she is on track to complete.

Debbie has also used her connections to help Skye access a volunteering role at a community café and youth club, which has enabled her to gain certificates in Food Hygiene and First Aid.

Skye added: "What I've achieved is because of Debbie's support. She's very kind and understanding, reliable and I can trust her with anything. I am always recommending to my friends in college that they drop in to speak to Debbie if they need the help she can give."

## How we will support you to access learning and development

### Our 2026-29 outcome is:

Young people are supported to access quality learning, development and employment opportunities, particularly those at risk of having poorer outcomes.

### Action:

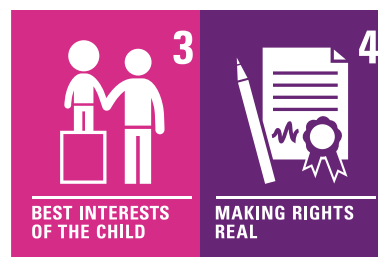
- We will continue to provide person-centred support for young people to help them access learning and career pathways that are right for them.
- We will work with partners across the education and skills system to improve equitable access to learning and development, using learning from regional skills plans and Workforce North.
- We will continue to take steps to improve the achievement of apprenticeships by young people, particularly those from equality groups.
- We will continue to support employers to understand good practice in recruiting and developing young people.

## We embed children's rights through everything we do

We recognise the importance of ensuring all colleagues have a good understanding of children's rights and how it applies to our work.

### Embedding children's rights through everything we do

Fulfil	Protect	Respect
Article 3	Article 4	



Aligned with our children's rights-based approach, we uphold and respect all UNCRC articles, including those that fall outside our direct areas of activity or authority. If we become aware of any potential breach of a young person's rights, we will take appropriate action.

To embed children's rights across our planning and decision-making, we use Integrated Equality Impact Assessments (IEIAs). IEIAs help us to understand how our decisions may affect different groups of young people and ensure that every child's needs and experiences are fully considered. IEIAs are a way of systematically and thoroughly assessing the effects that a proposed or existing

policy or practice is likely to have on different protected groups. As part of implementing the UNCRC into our organisation, we have incorporated Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessments into our IEIAs. While not required by law, this helps ensure we fully consider children's rights and strengthens our commitment to designing and delivering services that do not discriminate and reflect the needs of all young people.

We have also introduced dedicated UNCRC training to strengthen colleagues' understanding of children's rights and how these rights impact decision-making and our interactions with young people. The training explores the core principles of the UNCRC and the associated Scottish legislation, encouraging reflection on how fairness, participation and children's wellbeing shape our work. [SDS partnered with Together \(Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights\) to develop practical resources](#) that translate the principles of the legislation into everyday activities undertaken by colleagues across the organisation helping staff to understand what children's rights mean in practice and how they can embed and advance those rights through their day-to-day work.

Children's rights are embedded through our governance arrangements, providing clear oversight and accountability for how equality and children's rights considerations are integrated across the organisation. Our Equality Programme Board (EPB), comprising of leaders from across the organisation, has responsibility for overseeing the implementation of equality and children's rights activity and supporting SDS in meeting its duties as a public body. The EPB reports to the Performance Board, ensuring that children's rights and equality considerations are embedded within governance, planning and approval processes, and that these considerations inform decision making across service delivery and SDS's role as an employer.

## **How we will understand and respect your other rights as a child**

### **Our 2026-29 outcome is:**

Our staff understand and act upon their duties under the UNCRC

#### **Action:**

- **We will continue to raise awareness, and build staff capability, to uphold and advance children's rights through their work.**
- **We will explore approaches to help us better consider how to allocate our resources in a way that support those whose rights may be at risk, including through the use of children's rights budgeting.**
- **We will continue to consider the children's rights implications for our work through our Integrated Equality Impact Assessment process.**

## **SDS raised awareness and strengthened support for young people from Armed Forces families**

Our colleague training resources highlight the importance of embedding children's rights through the everyday practice of our colleagues. SDS is a partner in the Military Liaison Group (Education) (MLG) in the Highlands, which brings together partners to co-design and develop different materials, and to share information and best practice with each other to improve support for Armed Forces families. As part of the MLG, training was delivered by Forces Children Scotland which focused on the UNCRC and articles relevant to young people from Armed Forces families. Engagement with Armed Forces families and young people showed that children from these backgrounds can be overlooked while facing circumstances that affect education, wellbeing and their future. Children described experiences such as frequent school moves, often at critical times, alongside long periods of separation from parents and limited involvement in decisions that shape their lives.

In response, SDS developed case studies based on lived experience reflecting these realities and incorporated them into careers adviser training and reflective practice. The case studies contain fictional scenarios of family members that have contact with SDS. They detail frequent challenges an Armed Forces child can face, including systemic issues surrounding information sharing between different schools or local authorities, inconsistent mental health or learning support, and a limited understanding of their situation from schools. There are also personal challenges of feeling misunderstood, gaps in

their learning from changing schools, and anxiety from being separated from their parents.

In the case studies, relevant UNCRC articles are highlighted which clearly link the articles to the challenges faced by the fictional young people. These scenarios encourage advisers to think more carefully about the UNCRC articles, how they can support young people with these particular experiences, and focus on understanding individual circumstances rather than following fixed approaches.

We understand how important it is that all colleagues understand children's rights and how they apply to what we do. By using real situations faced by Armed Forces children to develop staff learning and directly link this to UNCRC articles, SDS is strengthening how children's rights are embedded across everyday practice.

This commitment to helping the armed forces community has been recognised through our MOD Employer Recognition Scheme Silver Award.

## Measuring our progress and performance

We have a number of existing evidence sources and performance measures that we use to monitor and analyse uptake and experience of our service offer, as well as evidence showing the longer-term learning and employment outcomes for customers.

This includes:

- monitoring uptake and usage of our career information, advice and guidance services (including digital services)
- monitoring starts and achievements on our apprenticeship programmes
- gathering insight through our customer surveys
- monitoring post-school outcomes
- gathering feedback from stakeholders.

Where possible, we will monitor uptake and experiences of our services for groups more likely to require additional support or who are less likely to make a successful post-school transition. Where data cannot be disaggregated, we will draw on alternative evidence sources, including partner research, stakeholder and staff feedback, and targeted research or consultation where gaps are identified. Addressing these evidence gaps is a specific action within our children's rights outcomes and actions for the next three years.

# Appendix 1: Action plan

Theme	Outcome	Actions
<p><b>We listen to what you say and value your opinion</b></p>	<p>Young people’s views are consistently sought, listened to, valued, and acted upon in the development and delivery of our services.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ We will use an inclusive approach to service design and make sure children and young people receive feedback on how their views shaped our services.</li> <li>■ We will bring together and share customer insight and analysis from across SDS in a clear and accessible way, so staff can easily understand the needs and experiences of different customer groups and use this knowledge to shape the support/services they provide.</li> <li>■ We will routinely gather feedback from young people and use it to drive continuous improvement, and actively identify where our understanding of customer experiences is limited and take steps to address these gaps.</li> </ul>
<p><b>We won’t discriminate against you</b></p>	<p>The diverse needs and circumstances of every customer are recognised and respected by our staff and through our service delivery.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ We will ensure our staff have the knowledge and confidence to support the diverse needs and circumstances of every customer by providing access to regular training and resources.</li> <li>■ We will use data, evidence and the lived experiences of customers to understand the uptake and experience of our services, and take targeted action to improve outcomes for customer groups identified as facing persistent barriers.</li> </ul>

Theme	Outcome	Actions
<b>We care about your safety and wellbeing</b>	Staff across SDS are confident and skilled in trauma-aware approaches, so that young people feel safe and supported when accessing our services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Guided by developing national policy, we will strengthen our approach to trauma-informed practice across SDS by developing and delivering an SDS trauma roadmap that identifies improvements and steps required to embed trauma-informed practice across SDS.</li> <li>■ We will continue to ensure all frontline staff receive up to date mandatory protection/safeguarding training so they can confidently identify, respond to, and escalate concerns, helping young people feel safe and protected when engaging with our services.</li> </ul>
<b>We give you the information you need</b>	Young people can access clear, easy-to-use and reliable information to help them understand our services and make informed learning and career decisions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ We will further develop our digital offer so all young people can access trustworthy information, giving particular consideration to digital inclusion and the barriers young people may face accessing online services.</li> <li>■ We will continue to work with young people to understand how best to communicate information about SDS services by involving them in developing our marketing and communication approaches.</li> </ul>
<b>We help the adults in your life to support you</b>	Parents, carers, teachers and other influential adults are better equipped to support young people to access opportunities that are right for them.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ We will develop a structured approach to parent/carer engagement across all services by engaging with parents and carers who may need extra support and using national and local opportunities to engage them in the SDS offer.</li> <li>■ We will use evidence and insight to equip our staff and inform partners about the needs and experiences of young people, enabling confident advocacy, stronger partnership discussions, and collective action to provide holistic support to progress young people into positive outcomes.</li> </ul>

Theme	Outcome	Actions
<p><b>We support you to access learning and development</b></p>	<p>Young people are supported to access quality learning, development and employment, particularly those at risk of having poorer outcomes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ We will continue to provide person-centred support for young people to help them access learning and career pathways that are right for them.</li> <li>■ We will work with partners across the education and skills system to improve equitable access to learning and development, using learning from regional skills plans and Workforce North.</li> <li>■ We will continue to take steps to improve the achievement of apprenticeships by young people, particularly from equality groups.</li> <li>■ We will continue to support employers to understand good practice in recruiting and developing young people.</li> </ul>
<p><b>We embed children's rights through everything we do</b></p>	<p>Our staff understand and act upon their duties under the UNCRC</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ We will continue to raise awareness, and build staff capability, to uphold and advance children's rights through their work.</li> <li>■ We will explore approaches to help us better consider how to allocate our resources in a way that support those whose rights may be at risk, including through the use of children's rights budgeting.</li> <li>■ We will continue to consider the children's rights implications for our work through our Integrated Equality Impact Assessment process.</li> </ul>

## Appendix 2: Articles and mapping

Right	Theme	Fulfil/Respect/Protect
<b>Article 1</b> – Everyone under the age of 18 has all the rights in the Convention.	Upholding universal rights	Fulfil
<b>Article 2</b> – The Convention applies to every child without discrimination, whatever their ethnicity, sex, religion, language, abilities or any other status, whatever they think or say, whatever their family background.	We won't discriminate against you	Fulfil
<b>Article 3</b> – The best interests of the child must be a top priority in all decisions and actions that affect children.	We embed children's rights through everything we do	Fulfil
<b>Article 4</b> – Governments must do all they can to make sure every child can enjoy their rights by creating systems and passing laws that promote and protect children's rights.	We embed children's rights through everything we do	Protect
<b>Article 5</b> – Governments must respect the rights and responsibilities of parents and carers to provide guidance and direction to their child as they grow up, so that they fully enjoy their rights. This must be done in a way that recognises the child's increasing capacity to make their own choices.	We help the adults in your life to support you	Fulfil
<b>Article 6</b> – Every child has the right to life. Governments must do all they can to ensure that children survive and develop to their full potential.	We care about your safety and wellbeing	Fulfil
<b>Article 7</b> – Every child has the right to be registered at birth, to have a name and nationality, and, as far as possible, to know and be cared for by their parents.	We care about your safety and wellbeing	Respect
<b>Article 8</b> – Every child has the right to an identity. Governments must respect and protect that right, and prevent the child's name, nationality or family relationships from being changed unlawfully.	We care about your safety and wellbeing	Respect
<b>Article 9</b> – Children must not be separated from their parents against their will unless it is in their best interest (for example, if a parent is hurting or neglecting a child). Children whose parents have separated have the right to stay in contact with both parents, unless this could cause them harm.	We care about your safety and wellbeing	Protect

<b>Article 10</b> – Governments must respond quickly and sympathetically if a child or their parents apply to live together in the same country. If a child’s parents live apart in different countries, the child has the right to visit and keep in contact with both of them.	We care about your safety and wellbeing	Respect
<b>Article 11</b> – Governments must do everything they can to stop children being taken out of their own country illegally by their parents or other relatives, or being prevented from returning home.	We care about your safety and wellbeing	Protect
<b>Article 12</b> – 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. This right applies at all times, for example during immigration proceedings, housing decisions or the child’s day-to-day home life.	We listen to what you say and value your opinion	Fulfil
<b>Article 13</b> – Every child must be free to express their thoughts and opinions and to access all kinds of information, as long as it is within the law.	We listen to what you say and value your opinion	Fulfil
<b>Article 14</b> – Every child has the right to think and believe what they choose and also to practise their religion, as long as they are not stopping other people from enjoying their rights. Governments must respect the rights and responsibilities of parents to guide their child as they grow up.	We listen to what you say and value your opinion	Protect
<b>Article 15</b> – Every child has the right to meet with other children and to join groups and organisations, as long as this does not stop other people from enjoying their rights.	We listen to what you say and value your opinion	Respect
<b>Article 16</b> – Every child has the right to privacy. The law should protect the child’s private, family and home life, including protecting children from unlawful attacks that harm their reputation.	We care about your safety and wellbeing	Fulfil
<b>Article 17</b> – Every child has the right to reliable information from a variety of sources, and governments should encourage the media to provide information that children can understand. Governments must help protect children from materials that could harm them.	We give you the information you need	Fulfil
<b>Article 18</b> – Both parents share responsibility for bringing up their child and should always consider what is best for the child. Governments must support parents by creating support services for children and giving parents the help they need to raise their children.	We help the adults in your life to support you	Fulfil

<b>Article 19</b> – Governments must do all they can to ensure that children are protected from all forms of violence, abuse, neglect and bad treatment by their parents or anyone else who looks after them.	We care about your safety and wellbeing	Protect
<b>Article 20</b> – If a child cannot be looked after by their immediate family, the government must give them special protection and assistance. This includes making sure the child is provided with alternative care that is continuous and respects the child’s culture, language and religion.	We care about your safety and wellbeing	Protect
<b>Article 21</b> – Governments must oversee the process of adoption to make sure it is safe, lawful and that it prioritises children’s best interests. Children should only be adopted outside of their country if they cannot be placed with a family in their own country.	We care about your safety and wellbeing	Respect
<b>Article 22</b> – If a child is seeking refuge or has refugee status, governments must provide them with appropriate protection and assistance to help them enjoy all the rights in the Convention. Governments must help refugee children who are separated from their parents to be reunited with them.	We won’t discriminate against you	Fulfil
<b>Article 23</b> – A child with a disability has the right to live a full and decent life with dignity and, as far as possible, independence and to play an active part in the community. Governments must do all they can to support disabled children and their families.	We won’t discriminate against you	Fulfil
<b>Article 24</b> – Every child has the right to the best possible health. Governments must provide good quality health care, clean water, nutritious food, and a clean environment and education on health and well-being so that children can stay healthy. Richer countries must help poorer countries achieve this.	We care about your safety and wellbeing	Respect
<b>Article 25</b> – If a child has been placed away from home for the purpose of care or protection (for example, with a foster family or in hospital), they have the right to a regular review of their treatment, the way they are cared for and their wider circumstances.	We care about your safety and wellbeing	Respect
<b>Article 26</b> – Every child has the right to benefit from social security. Governments must provide social security, including financial support and other benefits, to families in need of assistance.	We care about your safety and wellbeing	Protect

<b>Article 27</b> – Every child has the right to a standard of living that is good enough to meet their physical and social needs and support their development. Governments must help families who cannot afford to provide this.	We care about your safety and wellbeing	Protect
<b>Article 28</b> – Every child has the right to an education. Primary education must be free and different forms of secondary education must be available to every child. Discipline in schools must respect children’s dignity and their rights. Richer countries must help poorer countries achieve this.	We support you to access learning and development	Fulfil
<b>Article 29</b> – 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.	We support you to access learning and development	Fulfil
<b>Article 30</b> – Every child has the right to learn and use the language, customs and religion of their family, whether or not these are shared by the majority of the people in the country where they live.	We give you the information you need	Protect
<b>Article 31</b> – Every child has the right to relax, play and take part in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities.	We support you to access learning and development	Respect
<b>Article 32</b> – Governments must protect children from economic exploitation and work that is dangerous or might harm their health, development or education. Governments must set a minimum age for children to work and ensure that work conditions are safe and appropriate.	We care about your safety and wellbeing	Fulfil
<b>Article 33</b> – Governments must protect children from the illegal use of drugs and from being involved in the production or distribution of drugs.	We care about your safety and wellbeing	Protect
<b>Article 34</b> – Governments must protect children from all forms of sexual abuse and exploitation.	We care about your safety and wellbeing	Protect
<b>Article 35</b> – Governments must protect children from being abducted, sold or moved illegally to a different place in or outside their country for the purpose of exploitation.	We care about your safety and wellbeing	Respect
<b>Article 36</b> – Governments must protect children from all other forms of exploitation, for example the exploitation of children for political activities, by the media or for medical research.	We care about your safety and wellbeing	Respect

<b>Article 37</b> – Children must not be tortured, sentenced to the death penalty or suffer other cruel or degrading treatment or punishment. Children should be arrested, detained or imprisoned only as a last resort and for the shortest time possible. They must be treated with respect and care, and be able to keep in contact with their family. Children must not be put in prison with adults.	We care about your safety and wellbeing	Protect
<b>Article 38</b> – Governments must not allow children under the age of 15 to take part in war or join the armed forces. Governments must do everything they can to protect and care for children affected by war and armed conflicts.	We care about your safety and wellbeing	Protect
<b>Article 39</b> – Children who have experienced neglect, abuse, exploitation, torture or who are victims of war must receive special support to help them recover their health, dignity, self-respect and social life.	We care about your safety and wellbeing	Protect
<b>Article 40</b> – A child accused or guilty of breaking the law must be treated with dignity and respect. They have the right to legal assistance and a fair trial that takes account of their age. Governments must set a minimum age for children to be tried in a criminal court and manage a justice system that enables children who have been in conflict with the law to reintegrate into society.	We won't discriminate against you	Protect
<b>Article 41</b> – If a country has laws and standards that go further than the present Convention, then the country must keep these laws.	Upholding universal rights	Fulfil
<b>Article 42</b> – Governments must actively work to make sure children and adults know about the Convention.	We give you the information you need	Fulfil
<b>Optional protocol 1</b> – the protection of the child from the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography	We care about your safety and wellbeing	Protect
<b>Optional protocol 2</b> – the protection of children from involvement in armed conflict	We care about your safety and wellbeing	Protect

**Skills Development Scotland**

1st Floor, Monteith House

11 George Square

Glasgow G2 1DY

[www.sds.co.uk](http://www.sds.co.uk)

