

## **How will the incoming Government address children's rights?**

On the day the 2010 General Election was called, the Children's Rights Alliance for England (CRAE) wrote to the children's leads of each of the three main political parties to ask how they would approach children's rights were they to form the next Government.

We gave each senior politician the same six questions. Their answers are below: Ed Balls (Labour) and David Laws (Liberal Democrats) answered each question while Michael Gove (Conservatives) declined to respond to the questions and directed CRAE to his Party's Election manifesto.

The questions probe how Government would work for England's 11 million children – would it, for example, have a senior Minister with special responsibility for children's rights? They were designed to put on record how the different political parties plan to broadly address the UK's obligations under international law with regards to children.

With support from all the main political parties, the UK ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1991. The UN body of children's rights experts has examined the UK's progress on implementing the Convention on three separate occasions – in 1995, 2002 and 2008. Each time, it has made numerous recommendations for improvements in the law and public services. At the last examination, the UN also expressed concern about negative attitudes towards children, including in the media. The next UN review will be in 2014.

CRAE wants the incoming Government, however it is made up, to immediately make children's rights a priority.

We are an independent charity with no affiliations to any political party. Our single aim is to achieve the full implementation of the UNCRC in England.

## **The Six Questions**

The questions we asked, and the reasons for asking them, are below.

**1. Will a senior Minister have responsibility for co-ordinating Government action on implementing the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in England?**

Not having a senior Government Minister responsible for children's rights is a sure sign that this is not a political priority. Of 20+ Cabinet Ministers, we believe at least one should be a champion for children's rights.

**2. Will you publish an implementation plan for children's rights in England in response to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child's latest recommendations?**

It is difficult to see how a Government can be acting on the UN's recommendations without having a plan. This should be made public so that people can see for themselves what is happening, and push their MPs and others to take more action when necessary.

**3. Will Government departments have to consider children's rights whenever they make proposals for law or policy affecting children?**

For the past 10 years, Government departments have had to consider how their laws and policies for everyone match up to the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) gives children far more protection than the ECHR – to an adequate standard of living, the right to healthcare and family support, as well as protection from all forms of violence for example. It's now time for Government Ministers and civil servants to also start checking their plans against the UNCRC. Many other countries already do this.

**4. Will you champion the importance of listening to children and taking into account their views – within Government as well as in all public services?**

Children are not voters and their views and interests are often overlooked or ignored. We've seen that with recent child abuse inquiries. We want whoever gets into power to actively encourage health visitors, social workers, doctors, teachers, police officers, local councillors and planners to seek out the views of children when making important decisions affecting them.

**5. Will you support children’s rights training for all those that work with children, as well as the Convention on the Rights of the Child being taught in schools?**

It is now 20 years since the UN adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child. British civil servants and children's rights advocates helped to draft it. It covers all aspects of childhood and sets out the obligations of Government Ministers, civil servants and all those working with children. We believe everyone that works with children in our country should be trained on how to put it into practice. This happens in many other countries. It's a scandal that so few children know about their rights and where they can get help if they need it. Teaching about children's rights can make all the difference to vulnerable children who too often suffer in silence; it also helps spread positive British values like respecting other people and being fair.

**6. Will your Government promote positive images of children and childhood?**

In 2008, the UN observed negative attitudes towards children in our society. Children themselves, especially teenagers, are fed up with the bad press. We want whoever comes into power to actively promote all the good things about children and childhood in our country: the scapegoating has to stop.

**The Answers**

Each senior politician was asked to respond to the questions by indicating YES / NO / NOT YET DECIDED. They were also given the opportunity to provide a short comment for each question. *Responses are given in alphabetical order of the politicians’ surnames.*

**Ed Balls**, Labour's children's lead, answered all six questions and provided additional comments for each one.

**Michael Gove**, the Conservatives’ children's lead, declined to respond to the questions and directed CRAE to his Party's General Election manifesto.

**David Laws**, the Liberal Democrats’ children's lead, answered all six questions. He did not provide any additional comments to the individual questions but submitted the following broad statement: ‘The Liberal Democrat General Election Manifesto is committed to incorporate the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child into UK Law’.

	<b>Ed Balls Labour Party</b>	<b>Michael Gove Conservatives</b>	<b>David Laws Liberal Democrats</b>
<b>1. Will a senior Minister have responsibility for co-ordinating Government action on implementing the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in England?</b>	<p>YES</p> <p>Since DCSF was created we have had a designated Minister to lead on the Convention, currently Baroness Morgan, and we will continue with this approach, which I think has worked well.</p>	<p>Declined to respond to the questions and directed CRAE to his Party's General Election manifesto.</p>	<p>YES</p> <p>See broad statement above.</p>
<b>2. Will you publish an implementation plan for children's rights in England in response to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child's latest recommendations?</b>	<p>YES</p> <p>In 2009 we published an overview document and action plans for the four UK jurisdictions, and in 2010 a big mapping report describing how we are implementing each UNCRC article, which we will regularly update.</p>	<p>Declined to respond to the questions and directed CRAE to his Party's General Election manifesto.</p>	<p>YES</p> <p>See broad statement above.</p>
<b>3. Will Government departments have to consider children's rights whenever they make proposals for law or policy affecting children?</b>	<p>NO</p> <p>I don't think we should require every department to consider children's rights per se but, as our mapping report showed, the Convention is being implemented through laws and policies right across Government.</p>	<p>Declined to respond to the questions and directed CRAE to his Party's General Election manifesto.</p>	<p>YES</p> <p>See broad statement above.</p>

	<b>Ed Balls Labour</b>	<b>Michael Gove Conservatives</b>	<b>David Laws Liberal Democrats</b>
<b>4. Will you champion the importance of listening to children and taking into account their views – within Government as well as in all public services?</b>	<p>YES</p> <p>When DCSF was created in 2007 we established a Children and Youth Board and as Ministers we've met regularly with its members to discuss emerging policy ideas. This has definitely led to better policies.</p>	<p>Declined to respond to the questions and directed CRAE to his Party's General Election manifesto.</p>	<p>YES</p> <p>See broad statement above.</p>
<b>5. Will you support children's rights training for all those that work with children, as well as the Convention on the Rights of the Child being taught in schools?</b>	<p>NO</p> <p>I don't think we should require all staff to be trained in children's rights but we expect everyone to work positively with children, and schools must bring the Convention to life for them.</p>	<p>Declined to respond to the questions and directed CRAE to his Party's General Election manifesto.</p>	<p>YES</p> <p>See broad statement above.</p>
<b>6. Will your Government promote positive images of children and childhood?</b>	<p>YES</p> <p>Our DCSF initiatives to counter negative stereotypes of young people and to promote 'good news stories', for example through the Youth Capital and Media Funds, have been very successful and I'd like us to do more.</p>	<p>Declined to respond to the questions and directed CRAE to his Party's General Election manifesto.</p>	<p>YES</p> <p>See broad statement above.</p>

## **Contact details**

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