



Standing Committee for Youth Justice

Our priorities for a youth justice system that respects children's rights and supports every young person out of trouble

The Standing Committee for Youth Justice (SCYJ) is an alliance of over 60 not-for-profit organisations working together to improve the youth justice system in England and Wales. Our [members](#) range from large national charities to grassroots service providers.

WE CALL FOR...



**A LONG-TERM,
CROSS-GOVERNMENTAL STRATEGY
FOR ALL CHILDREN,
INCLUDING THOSE IN CONTACT WITH
THE YOUTH JUSTICE SYSTEM**

SCYJ aims to change the narrative about why children offend, reduce the criminalisation and imprisonment of children, ensure children's rights are protected and they are treated as children first and foremost, and are involved in decisions about their future.

We would like to see the Government:



**SIGNIFICANTLY RAISE
THE MINIMUM AGE
OF CRIMINAL
RESPONSIBILITY**

The minimum age of criminal responsibility in England and Wales is out of sync with the rest of Europe: **10 is one of the lowest minimum ages in the EU**, where the average is 14. The current law **breaches children's rights**, and is inconsistent with evidence on child development.



**MAXIMISE DIVERSION AND
MINIMISE CONTACT WITH
THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE
SYSTEM**

Criminal justice system contact can act as a **key moment when behaviour begins to negatively spiral**. Identifying vulnerable children and diverting them to **services that can respond to the child's needs**, rather than prosecuting them, has a long-term positive impact.



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INVEST IN COMMUNITY-BASED, CHILD-CENTRED RESPONSES TO CHILDREN IN TROUBLE WITH THE LAW

All responses to children involved in criminal justice must **prioritise their best interests**. Children's understanding, engagement and participation must be actively encouraged. **Investment in Youth Offending Teams** is crucial.

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SIGNIFICANTLY REDUCE THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN DEPRIVED OF THEIR LIBERTY, AND CLOSE ALL PENAL CUSTODIAL ESTABLISHMENTS

Custody must only be used as a last resort for children, for the shortest possible period of time, reserved for the most severe cases where it is required for public protection. The **current use of custody breaches children's rights**.

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REFORM CHILDHOOD CRIMINAL RECORDS AND ANONYMITY LAW TO PROMOTE REINTEGRATION

The childhood criminal record system in England and Wales is **overly punitive and disproportionate**. A recent Supreme Court judgment confirmed reform is needed. And too often, a child's identity is revealed when they come into contact with the law, impeding rehabilitation.

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ENSURE COURTS ARE CHILD-CENTRED AND PROMOTE UNDERSTANDING AND PARTICIPATION

Children's courts should be more closely **aligned to family courts** than adult criminal courts – which children should never appear in. Advocates and sentencers must be **properly trained youth justice specialists**. **Video link use should be restricted**.

Further information...

You can **find out more** about our recommendations on priority areas of the youth justice system [here](#). **To arrange a meeting** please don't hesitate to get in touch with our Director, Pippa Goodfellow, at pippa.goodfellow@scyj.org.uk.

