



“Every kid in Scotland should get free milk, it’s healthy, good for you and mums and dads might not be able to afford it”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P4, Clackmannanshire

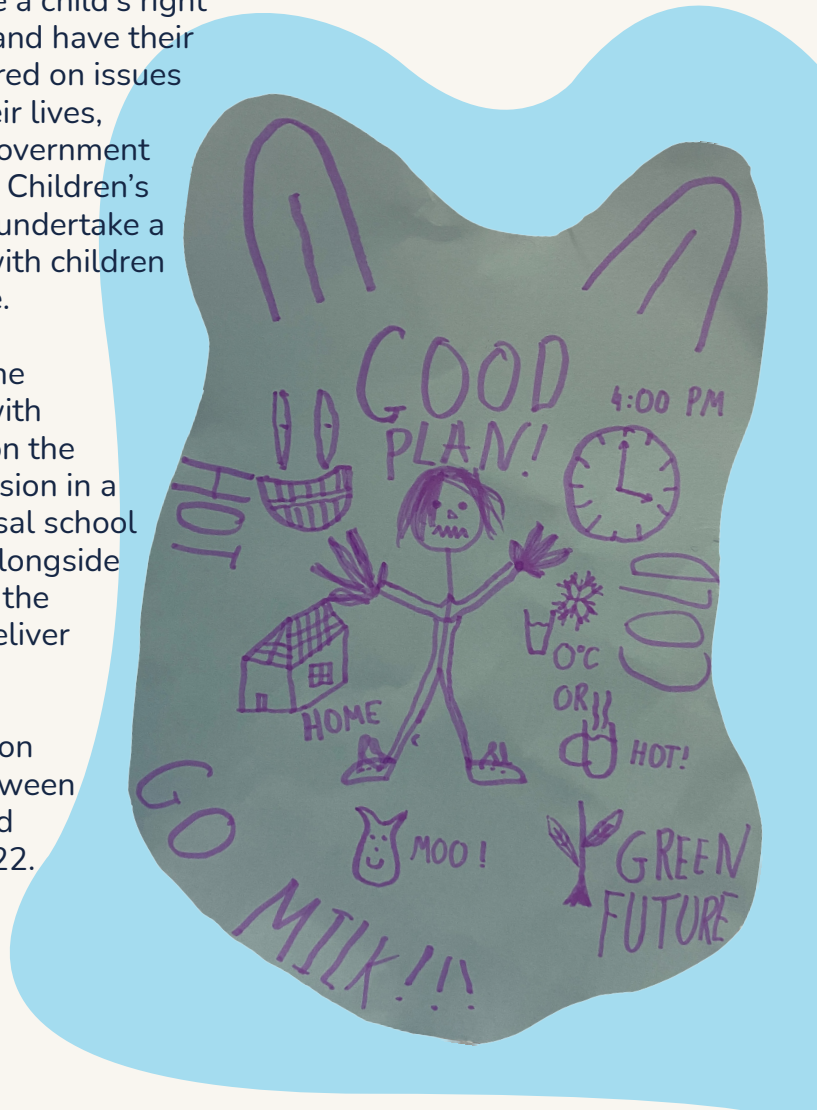
Consultation on the universal school milk scheme for primary schools in Scotland

Introduction

The Scottish Government is revising the universal milk scheme for primary school children. Given the importance of school milk to children's lives alongside a child's right to have a say and have their views considered on issues relevant to their lives, the Scottish Government commissioned Children's Parliament to undertake a consultation with children on the scheme.

The focus of the consultation with children was on the equity of provision in a revised universal school milk scheme alongside their views on the approach to deliver the scheme.

The consultation took place between September and November 2022.



A Children's Rights Approach

Children's Parliament takes a children's rights approach, meaning our work is guided by the principles and furthers the realisation of the rights of all children as outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

The UNCRC states that children have the right to be listened to and taken seriously. This consultation highlights the importance of fulfilling children's human rights in Scotland by including and valuing their contributions to policy areas which have a direct impact on their lives.

With pending legal incorporation of the UNCRC into Scots Law, the meaningful participation of children in decisions which affect their daily lives is an essential step in ensuring children in Scotland are able to live happy, healthy and safe lives. Children's human rights are universal, they are not earned, and they cannot be taken away. Dignity is central to children's human rights. These principles have informed and guided this consultation.

Children's Parliament uses creative arts-based activities when working with children to help build relationships, give children space to express their ideas, to share their views and opinions and to have fun.



Methodology

Children's Parliament engaged with over 100 children aged between 6 and 11 from 3 primary schools across Scotland. In each school a different age group participated:

- Stonewood Primary School in Aberdeen - Primary 2 children
- St Serf's Primary School in Clackmannanshire - Primary 4 children
- Bruntsfield Primary School in Edinburgh - Primary 6 children

The key questions that the commission asked, and which the programme of activities were planned around, included:

- What do children think about a universal milk offer?
- When in the school day should children get milk?
- How should children receive the milk?
- What works and what does not work about the current milk offer and why?
- To seek children's views on the milk offer in relation to sustainability and climate change



The children participated in two fun and participatory one day workshops.

Workshop 1: Children's Human Rights

This workshop was an introduction to children's human rights where children heard about the UNCRC and shared their views on being Happy, Healthy and Safe. They then learned about the importance of sharing their views with decision makers

and were introduced to the consultation topic. The session developed the children's knowledge and skills on rights and participation, building relationships and confidence for the next workshop.

Workshop 2: An exploration of the school milk scheme

The children explored their views on the universal milk offer through fun and creative activities. This included children designing "cow-patches" for a giant milk carton, sharing their views about drinking milk at school, and what they like or do not like about milk. The children also created beautifully

decorated cows, to show and share where and how children like to drink milk at school. In addition, the P6 children created adverts to demonstrate their ideas on what makes a good universal milk scheme, which they acted out in front of their class for discussion.

Children's Parliament felt that the research question relating to milk provision and sustainability and climate change would benefit from working with children who had a level of prior knowledge on these issues. Running concurrently to the milk consultation, staff from Children's Parliament were working with 12 children from across Scotland who were

investigating the Learning for Sustainability (LfS) curriculum. The children from this project took part in an online discussion on the topic of milk and sustainability in addition to their LfS work. Their insights on the topic of milk and sustainability were invaluable in looking at how children considered the environmental impact of traditional cow's milk and its alternatives.



THE CHILDREN'S VIEWS ON A UNIVERSAL MILK SCHEME

During the initial workshop, to determine their feelings on milk both in and outwith school the children were asked the question “On a scale of one to ten, how much do you like drinking milk?”. The responses from the children were clear, they either liked or did not like milk. When asked about how the milk was provided in their schools, the finding was that the children who did not receive milk were unable to clearly describe the milk provision in the school, some of them could not tell you when children received the milk, how it was provided to the children and who would receive it. Whereas those children who did currently receive milk (free or paid for by parents/carers) were able to talk quite clearly about how they got their milk. The implication of this difference in understanding of how milk is distributed in schools is that those who currently receive free school milk risk feeling different to those who do not receive free milk.

The current school milk subsidy scheme allows Scottish Local Authorities to claim for subsidy towards the milk they offer to children as part of their local schemes. Approximately two-thirds of Scottish Local Authorities currently claim. Other local authorities offer local schemes, but do so without claiming for subsidy towards the milk they provide. Local Authorities can also offer other food and drink (for example, fruit or plant-based drinks) should they wish, but the costs are not eligible under the school milk subsidy scheme.

However, when talking to the children on their views on how a universal milk scheme could be provided in their respective schools, the children shared clear views on who they would drink it with, where they would drink it and how it would be delivered in school and these ideas had a level of commonality across the schools and age range.

The children's views on how future milk provision would work in their school were informed by their understanding of their school's current milk provision, alongside their own views on how milk should be provided in their school.

“Friends make you happy, so you don't need to be alone at break and lunch”

- Member of Children's Parliament, P2, Aberdeen

The children spoke of a safe place to enjoy their milk, time with friends and feeling comfortable, warm and relaxed when drinking their milk. Friendship and relationships loomed large in their ideas of who to enjoy their milk with showing that the children would want to enjoy having their milk together.

Regardless of age and location, the children associated the drinking of milk at school with relaxing and chilling with their friends and peers, highlighting the importance of relationships in their lives. The importance of friendship was strong amongst all children whether it was to have fun or to not feel alone when at school.

“I would drink with X as he's my best friend. It would be relaxing and fun.”

- Member of Children's Parliament, P2, Aberdeen

[Have milk with friends] “to make friends so you are not alone” MCP, P2, Aberdeen

- Member of Children's Parliament, P2, Aberdeen

“Having a chillax”

- Member of Children's Parliament, P2, Aberdeen

Some of the children spoke about having milk with a sibling or family member in the same school in order to feel safe, as this relationship was familiar and reassuring.

“I would like my milk with my brother as he is nice and kind”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P2, Aberdeen

The older children spoke of wanting to drink milk with their “buddies” (children in P1 that the older children mentor) as they associated this relationship with helping younger children to feel part of the school community. The older children considered being with younger children to be important as it meant they could mentor the younger children in order to make them feel part of the school community:

“[drinking milk while] Helping them [p1] with their spelling or reading and helping them to learn a bit more.”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P6, Edinburgh

The place and the feeling of the environment in which children wanted to drink milk was an important issue. The library was cited by many children as a place for children to enjoy their milk as the children associated the library as a relaxing space and where there would be opportunities for children who would or would not get milk to take part in a shared activity such as reading:

“The library is quiet, and you can read while you drink”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P4, Clackmannanshire

“The people who don’t get milk can just read”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P6, Edinburgh

Younger children spoke of sharing their milk time with adults in the school including PSAs either to show that they would want some quiet time with an adult they trust and feel safe with or that it provided an opportunity to ask an adult for help with something they were finding difficult. The importance of adults in school to younger children is examined in more detail below.

“You might come here for a quiet time with a PSA.”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P2, Aberdeen

Other areas within schools to drink milk were those associated with relaxation. The names vary in many schools but are generically known as the “quiet rooms”. These spaces enable the children to be with their friends while drinking milk and to participate in gentle activities.

[The quiet room] “It’s a colourful, nice place, you can read books, chill with your friends, there are tables and chairs, and you can doodle on the whiteboard”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P6, Edinburgh

Some of the children associated their school’s quiet spaces with peacefulness - a place free of any loud noise. The anxieties that some of the younger children had about drinking milk are shared below.

[The quiet room] “is a good place, where no one is screaming and shouting”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P2, Aberdeen



When asked about a suitable time to drink their milk, the majority of children spoke about their break time, as it was time away from the classroom. Younger children also made a connection between milk and energy, and how it would be appropriate at certain times of day in order to give health benefits and to assist with their overall learning:

[You should get milk] “at lunchtime, it might make you have more energy”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P4, Clackmannanshire

“Morning” [would be a good time for milk] “If you are sleepy, the milk might wake you up”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P4, Clackmannanshire

Some of the children spoke about the connection between play and drinking their milk as they would see this as an important break from the classroom to give them time to reset to help with their learning.

[you could drink milk while] “playing with the train set”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P2, Aberdeen

Some of the older children suggested using their milk time to take part in a shared activity such as watching “Newsround” as they felt this would give their milk time structure and it would include children who did not want to have milk:

[you could drink milk] “After break while watching Newsround”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P6, Edinburgh

[you could] “Play games together e.g. I-Spy or ‘Would you rather’ while drinking milk”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P4, Clackmannanshire

Alongside their desire to be with their friends in a familiar setting, the children recognised that some children may not like or want milk, whether that was down to the child’s dietary requirements, possible allergies or they simply did not enjoy milk.

“Maybe it’s a type of milk they don’t want”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P2, Aberdeen

Temperature and taste were also a consideration when drinking milk. When the children were asked about their current milk provision in school the responses ranged from the milk being too warm to too cold and some of the children raised concerns about the way in which the milk was stored as it was sometimes spoiled. This suggests that in the case of any future universal milk provision the children would like the milk to be well looked after and fresh.

“I don’t think we take good care of our milk.”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P6, Edinburgh

Children recognised that some children have allergies and not all children can drink cows’ milk. They also acknowledged that some children don’t like milk and that there should always be a choice about whether to have milk or not. The theme of choice is examined in greater detail below, but the children felt strongly about options for children if they were to be offered milk in school.

“They might not like the taste”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P6, Edinburgh

“When I drink it too much it makes my tummy hurt.”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P4, Clackmannanshire

The children spoke of the positive associations they may have with drinking milk, but amongst the younger children in particular there was a feeling of anxiety related to drinking milk. Some of them felt worried about a space being noisy and it would cause them to spill their milk:

“If it’s too noisy, you could be frightened and might spill it”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P4, Clackmannanshire

Some others felt anxious about drinking milk and its potential to cause a mess, with some feeling they would need the presence of an adult in case of spillages:

“She (playground supervisor) helps us if we spill our milk”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P4, Clackmannanshire

Overall, the children had clear views on how a universal school milk programme should be delivered in not only their school but other primary schools across Scotland.



THEMES FROM THE CONSULTATION

The children shared their views on the logistics of how a potential universal school milk scheme could be provided in their school. In addition to this, several themes emerged from the consultation with children, these were fairness, cost, health, choice and sustainability, with concepts of fairness cutting across all these themes.

FAIRNESS AND INCLUSION:

“It would be fair if we all got it”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P4, Clackmannanshire

Throughout the consultation, fairness was the overarching theme. The children were keen to emphasise the importance of all children having the opportunity to access a universal milk scheme. The issue of fairness also informs the other themes surrounding cost and choice.

Children talked about the fact that the manner in which milk is provided in school does not exclude or stigmatise anyone. For example, some children on Free School Meals (who are eligible for free milk) felt self-conscious when they had to collect their milk from the front of the classroom. It

was evident across the three schools that the children who did not receive free school milk did not have much information on the milk offered in their school and were not always able to describe when the milk was offered, how, or to whom. The children’s views on how it should be provided sought to address this lack of transparency in universal milk provision.

The concept of fairness was observed when the children talked about the financial help universal school milk would give to families, the health impacts of milk and the need for choice.

COST

“You should give free milk because some people are poor”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P4, Clackmannanshire

When discussing the potential for a universal school milk scheme in primary schools in Scotland, the children overwhelmingly agreed that it would be good for all children to be provided with free school milk and their reaction

was informed by a sense of fairness. Children recognised that milk provision can have the potential to create differences between children as some got the milk due to a families’ financial situation:

“At the moment, everyone doesn’t get milk but that’s not fair, it needs to be the whole school”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P2, Clackmannanshire

Cost and the impact of families’ financial situations informed the children’s understanding of free milk provision. Children spoke of the financial pressures their parents may face and how the universal provision of

milk would support families currently experiencing financial hardship in the cost of living crisis. Recognising that all children have the right to food, children were able to make the link between restricted finances and provision of food:

“Prices are going up and if you don’t like milk, you might still want to take it home for someone in your family”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P4, Clackmannanshire

“Parents sometimes have to save their money, so you don’t have to pay for milk”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P4, Clackmannanshire

To enable the P6 children to explore a range of views surrounding the provision of free school milk, they were asked to create a set of adverts to perform to the class. A discussion afterwards produced clear messages

about the importance of free milk in schools showing how they would implement a universal free milk scheme. A clear message which emerged from the adverts was to ensure milk is free in schools.

“I haven’t been paying attention to prices lately, but now I see they’ve really been going up”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P6, Edinburgh (quote from a role play looking at free school milk)

The economics of milk provision were also taken to the level of the impact it can have on the producer, with one MCP recognising that:

“It (universal school milk) will help support farmers since I live on a farm and my grandpa is a dairy farmer. The people who buy it off him are pushing the prices down, so it’s quite hard”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P6, Perth and Kinross

The children recognised that a universal milk provision would help families experiencing financial difficulties.

HEALTH

“I think children should get free school milk as it keeps you healthy”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P2, Aberdeen

The associations the children held between milk and health were also evident. Younger children in particular associated milk provision with their development:

“Children like milk because it keeps your bones strong”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P2, Aberdeen

Again, notions of fairness infused the children’s understanding of milk provision and its link to health, leading to the conclusion that exclusion from milk provision would be detrimental to children’s health:

“If everyone doesn’t get milk some people might feel bad as it’s good for your teeth”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P4, Clackmannanshire



Fairness again informed the children's sense of what type of milk would be provided to the children. During the consultation, we stressed to the children their views on alternatives to dairy milk, such as vegan options, would not be sought as these requirements

had already been set by the Scottish Government. But the children were insistent on looking at this through the lens of fairness, to include those who would not be able to drink dairy milk, and to take into account their health needs:

“They don't like milk – they might be allergic; they might just not like it.”

- Member of Children's Parliament, P4, Clackmannanshire

“Some children are allergic to milk but might want to take part!

- Member of Children's Parliament, P2, Aberdeen

The effects of the types of milk offered informed the children's views on the impact it would have on children's health.



CHOICE

“There should be other drinks offered as it’s [milk] boring and repetitive”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P6, Edinburgh

The children were keen to emphasise the importance of choice when considering universal school milk provision. The children across the age range recognised that individual needs such as allergies, dietary requirements and personal tastes would need to be considered when offering free school milk to

primary school children. As previously mentioned, when working with the children, they were advised that the type of milk provided was not part of the consultation, but they were adamant that all types of milk alternatives as well as choices such as water and smoothies were included in the offer.

“We should have all types of milk.”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P6, Edinburgh

Older children associated personal choice with implications for waste and felt that children should be able opt into free milk provision so that they did not feel pressurised to always take milk:

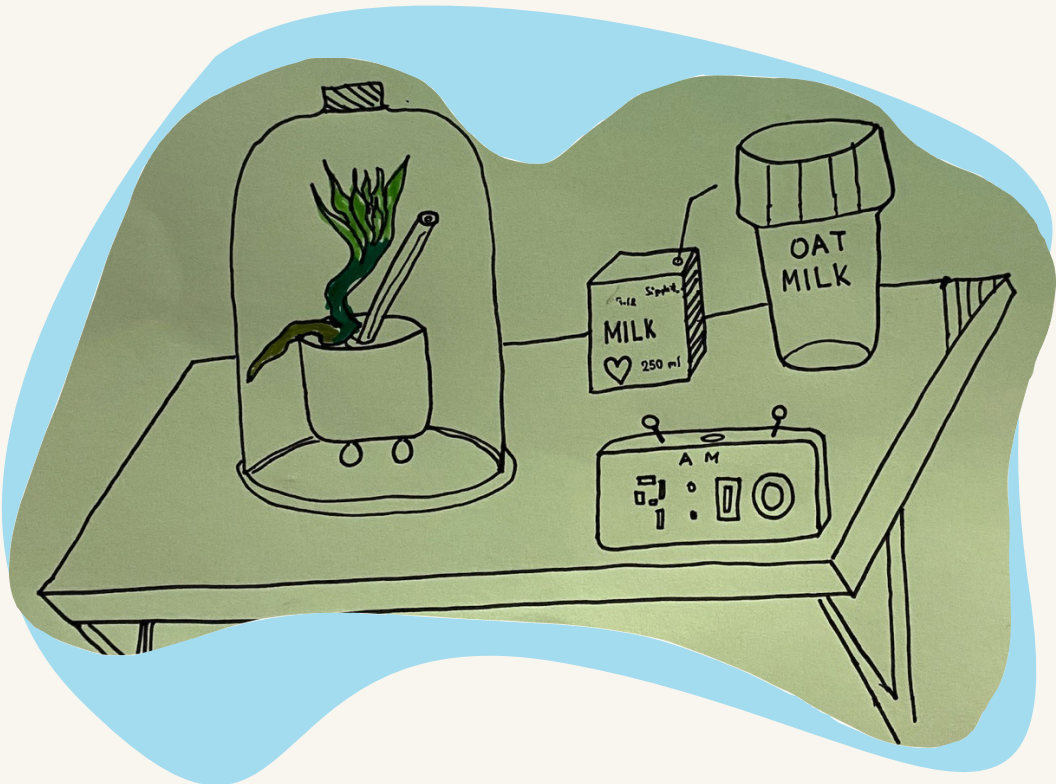
“Give people a choice as you may end up with wasted milk”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P6, Edinburgh

While most of the children felt that a break or lunch time would be an appropriate time to have their milk, there was a feeling amongst some of the children that there should be a level of choice over when they received their milk – with

some preferring the start of the school day or during the afternoon. The children also cited a level of choice in where they drank their milk - whether it was the library, the quiet room, in the playground or in the classroom.

The overall implication from this theme of choice would be that in any future delivery of universal milk provision in primary schools, children and their schools should develop their own milk delivery plan.



SUSTAINABILITY

“You feel torn about being sustainable, about the packaging, or there might be hungry children who need it. The cows make lots of methane too”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P5, Edinburgh

Questions surrounding sustainability, climate change and milk provision loomed large, especially amongst the older children. The complexity of the issue led to a variety of views amongst the children and while considering the impact of milk production on people and animals their overall message was the impact it can have on the environment.

As we worked with children in both urban and rural areas, we were able to see the complexities this relationship can raise, particularly amongst children who were from farming families.

Children spoke about the packaging used for milk and even suggested alternatives to prevent waste:

“use recycled bottles”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P4, Clackmannanshire

“At our school, we get a big drum of milk that goes into a plastic cup, which goes into a dishwasher”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P6, Perth and Kinross

Children recognised the impact dairy milk production can have on cows and the need to offer non-dairy alternatives:

“Cows are treated badly – we should stop milk and have oat milk. Alternatives are different but good”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P6, Edinburgh

The children recognised the links between milk production, transportation and climate change:

“Make sure it’s [Milk] organic and fresh and from Scottish cows as it will be fresher and will use less transport”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P6, Edinburgh

The children were also able to suggest changes to farming practice that would reduce the impact of milk production on the environment:

“There is a study, that cows can be fed seaweed and produce 70% less methane”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P5, Edinburgh

However, there was an awareness amongst the children that plant-based alternatives to milk were not the simple answer and their production also raised questions surrounding sustainability and climate change.

Plant based milk] “can take water from farmers in other countries to make it”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P6, Perth and Kinross

Key Messages

The key messages which emerged from the consultation on universal milk provision in schools were:

- **Milk should be free and available to all children** - Children recognised that families are experiencing financial hardships and universal school milk provision would support them.
- **Ensure choice** – Children and schools should be able to choose where, when and how they receive their milk and there should be transparency over how milk is provided in school.
- **Use the milk offer to make children happy** - Children welcome the opportunity to drink milk during the school day to help them relax and socialise with their peers; to increase their energy to learn; and to drink milk as part of a shared activity.
- **Be inclusive** – The universal milk scheme in school is an opportunity to demonstrate fairness and inclusivity, ensuring all children who want milk can access it and that the way the milk is given doesn't exclude children, or make them feel anxious, self-conscious or stigmatised.
- **Make sure there are alternatives to milk** - Milk alternatives or water should be offered to include children with allergies, dietary requirements or those who simply don't like milk.
- **Think about the environment** - The sustainability of the milk offer must be taken into consideration in order to reduce the impact the production and consumption of milk has on the environment.

Thanks

For this consultation, Children's Parliament spoke to over 100 children across Scotland to find out their views on universal milk provision. We would like to say a huge thank you to all the children involved. Their opinions and thoughts have been invaluable.

Children's Parliament is looking forward to sharing the consultation's findings with the children and feeding back to them the Scottish Government's response to the children's views.

A massive thank you to all the staff from Bruntsfield Primary School, St Serf's Primary School, and Stoneywood

Primary School for welcoming us into their schools and taking part in our activities. We would also like to thank the staff from Forgandenny Primary School and Sciennes Primary for enabling the children involved in the Learning for Sustainability Investigation to contribute to the questions surrounding milk, sustainability and climate change.

This consultation would not have been possible without the support of Scottish Government, we would like to thank them for their support throughout this project.

About Children's Parliament

Established in 1996, Children's Parliament is Scotland's centre of excellence for children's human rights, participation and engagement. Through our rights-based, creative practice, we provide younger children from diverse backgrounds across Scotland with opportunities to share their experiences, thoughts and feelings so that they can influence positive change in their lives at home, in school and in the community. Our dream is that children grow up in a world of love, happiness and understanding. Our mission is to inspire great awareness and understanding of the power of children's human rights and to support implementation of the United Nations on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) across Scotland.