**2014 Referendum on Independence for Scotland**

**Guidance for Schools**

**Guidance**

1. The 2014 Referendum on Independence for Scotland will be the first occasion on which a significant number of young people of school age are entitled to vote. For this reason it is appropriate that guidance is issued to all staff involved in the education of children and young people.
2. It is not intended that this guidance will address every situation which may arise. Instead it is intended to provide a framework within which issues can be addressed, and to signpost sources of further advice.
3. It is recognised that staff in schools have delivered education on political literacy in relation to both elections and previous referenda, and that considerable experience and good practice exists that can be deployed in relation to the 2014 Referendum on Independence for Scotland.

**Rights of Children and Young People**

1. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, applying to young people below the age of 18, states that the Child shall have freedom of expression, including the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds (Articles 12 and 13).
2. The Human Rights Act 1998 enshrines in law provisions of the European Convention on Human Rights, including Article 10, which states that “everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority”.
3. The Curriculum for Excellence requires schools to develop children and young people as responsible citizens, with a respect for others and a commitment to participate responsibly in political, economic, social and cultural life.
4. Within schools, the Council must therefore facilitate the rights of children and young people, in an appropriate manner, to seek, receive and impart information relating to the 2014 Referendum on an Independent Scotland; and to develop them as responsible citizens with a commitment to participate responsibly in political life.
5. The role of Council staff will be to:-
   1. Let eligible young people know that they are entitled to take part in the referendum.
   2. Inform young people of how they can do this.
   3. Inform young people of where to get information on the issues and assist them, in an appropriate manner, in obtaining information and considering the issues through the normal education processes.
6. This should be done in a politically neutral and unbiased way.

**Political Neutrality**

1. All Council staff are required to act in a politically neutral and unbiased manner. That is, they must not, in the course of their work, promote one political viewpoint over another, or be seen to favour one political viewpoint over another.
2. This requirement is set out in the Council’s **Code of Conduct for Employees**. Further advice is contained in the **Guidance Note for Council Officers on Statutory Rules Regulating Publicity Produced by Councils** issued by the Council’s Chief Legal Officer in advance of all elections and referenda.
3. In addition, the **GTCS Code of Professionalism and Conduct** sets out the professional standards that teaching staff are required to maintain. These professional standards are consistent with the requirement to act in a politically neutral and unbiased manner.
4. It is the responsibility of all staff in schools to act in a politically neutral and unbiased manner. It is the responsibility of all Head Teachers to draw this requirement to the attention of all staff, and to explain the practical implications of political neutrality.

**Educational Materials and Activities**

1. The 2014 Referendum on Independence for Scotland presents an opportunity for inter-disciplinary learning, for example consideration of opinion polls in mathematics and media studies, and results statistics in mathematics and geography.
2. Politically neutral and unbiased materials are available from bodies such as Education Scotland (**CfE Briefing 14 – Political Literacy**) and the Electoral Commission (**Political Literacy and the Referendum on Independence for Scotland**).
3. It is likely that materials will be produced by both the ‘Better Together’ and ‘Yes Scotland’ campaigns. Such material may be used by schools in an educational context, and to inform young people of the options available to them in the referendum, but it must be used in a politically neutral and unbiased manner. For example, care must be taken to ensure that materials from one campaign are not given greater prominence that materials from the other. If materials promoting one point of view are used in an educational context, materials promoting the other point of view must also be used.
4. Materials gathered from the press, on-line sources, television etc are likely to be relevant to education and inter-disciplinary learning. Once again, staff must ensure that the materials used represent a range of opinions, and that materials promoting one political viewpoint do not dominate.
5. It is normal for schools to consider holding structured debates and mock hustings in the run up to an election or referendum. The 2014 Referendum on Independence for Scotland presents an opportunity for debate both as an end in itself, and to allow young people to explore and express their opinions. The 2014 Referendum on Independence for Scotland will be the first occasion on which a significant number of young people of school age are entitled to vote. For this reason it is particularly important that any structured debate or mock husting is carefully managed in order to ensure that all young people have an opportunity to participate and to express their views, and that an opportunity is given for every viewpoint to be expressed.
6. School based staff may be asked by pupils to give a personal opinion. Staff should consider their answer carefully and ensure that it is appropriately neutral and unbiased.

**Access by Speakers**

1. Head Teachers must follow the **Guidance Note for Council Officers on Statutory Rules Regulating Publicity Produced by Councils**

**Display of Posters/Badges etc.**

1. Posters promoting a political viewpoint should not be displayed in any Council premises, except in school **teaching areas** for **educational purposes** in which case the guidance on political neutrality and bias must be applied.
2. No member of school staff should wear any badges etc. in connection with the 2014 Referendum on Independence for Scotland when engaged on Council business.

**Media Enquiries**

1. All enquiries from the media must be directed to the corporate public relations department.

**Cut off Point for Awareness-raising, Registration and Educational Activities**

1. The Scottish Independence Referendum Bill bans the Council from publishing certain material on the referendum during the pre-election 28 day period before polling day of 18 September 2014. **No activity** related to the 2014 Referendum on Independence for Scotland should take place proactively within schools after the end of the current school session on 3rd July 2014. Any questions or requests for information relating to the holding of the poll (i.e. where to vote and how to cast a vote) may be answered.

**Further Advice**

1. Further advice can be sought from your Area Manager or Jim Steven, Head of Education.