



# Improving the Lives of Children in Scotland - are we there yet?

Submission by British Naturism to the  
Children, Young People and Social  
Care Directorate

February 2009

# Introduction and Background

1. British Naturism is the representative organisation for naturists in the United Kingdom.
2. Well over a million people in the United Kingdom describe themselves as being a naturist<sup>1</sup> and there are about ten times that number who practise naturism to at least some extent. In Scotland there are several tens of thousands of people who would describe themselves as being a naturist and several hundred thousand people who are naturists to at least some extent.<sup>2</sup> There is a surprisingly high level of acceptance by the public though there are also some who are deeply prejudiced against nudity. Fear of prejudice ensures that few people realise how numerous we are.<sup>3</sup> In Scotland attitudes are significantly less liberal than they are for the United Kingdom as a whole.
3. There is a commonly held view that most people are opposed to nudity and that most people are so ashamed or embarrassed by some parts of the body that they must be kept secret and never talked about. This discrepancy between perceived attitudes and actual attitudes<sup>4</sup> allows people who look upon the human body as something to be ashamed of to wield influence out of all proportion to their numbers. It also allows taboos and prejudices to take precedence over social good.
4. The consequences of body embarrassment are well established and the mechanisms well understood but there is incredible reluctance to face up to the implications. Anecdotally we know that attitudes in Scotland and the USA are similar. The statistics show that many key indicators, for example teenage pregnancy, are also similar. That is part of a pattern which repeats time and time again across the western world. The least liberal countries have the worst outcomes.<sup>5</sup> The correlations are strong and the differences in outcomes enormous. Attempts to improve outcomes which neglect the need to change underlying societal attitudes will find the achievement of significant and sustained improvement very difficult.
5. A recurring theme of the consultation document is the stigma associated with the human body and with some parts of the human body in particular. We note with concern that the holistic approach advocated falls well short of being truly holistic. There are many areas of legislation and public policy which due to lack of appreciation of the side effects, or because they are driven by prejudice rather than

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1 NOP poll. 2001. *“and would you describe yourself as being a naturist?”*

2 See *“Naturism in Scotland - Statistics”* and *“Statistics Briefing Note”*.

3 When a naturist gets dressed the disguise is perfect. The Statistics Briefing Note provides further information.

4 Ibid

5 See *“Adolescent Sexual Health in Europe and the U.S.—Why the Difference?”*

fact, conspire to create a climate which contributes significantly to poorer outcomes for a wide range of body image related issues such as eating disorders and sexual health. For example there is not a single mention in the consultation documents for the Sexual Offences (Scotland) Bill concerning the impact that the prohibition of nudity on beaches and other public places has on societal attitudes and hence on health issues. It was quite clearly not even considered.

## Supporting documents

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- [\*Naturism in Scotland - Statistics - A British Naturism Briefing Paper .\*](#)
- [\*Statistics - A British Naturism Briefing Paper .\*](#)
- [\*Children and nudity - A British Naturism Briefing Paper.\*](#)
- [\*Adolescent Sexual Health in Europe and the U.S.—Why the Difference?\*](#)  
ADVOCATES FOR YOUTH, Washington, USA.

## Response

7. The numbers in the headings below refer to the row numbers in the consultation document.

### **15. Nondiscrimination – minority groups**

8. We are pleased to note the statement that discrimination on any grounds is unacceptable.
9. Most naturist children know that it is prudent to keep the lifestyle of their family secret so few people realise how many there are. We know of specific instances of discrimination by public bodies and there is generalised discrimination across many areas of both public and private life.

### **16. Nondiscrimination – protection from prejudice**

10. We entirely agree that discrimination must be addressed effectively. In particular the development of policy must be evidence based but at present most policy towards naturism and nudity has no evidential base and hence it is indistinguishable from prejudice.
11. Article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights quite rightly contains a catch all provision but we find that it is almost invariably overlooked and in practice it provides very little protection.

12. The Westminster Bill is flawed because it only addresses the 6 equality strands. Consequently it devalues the harm done and the suffering caused by discrimination on other grounds. Measures to redress the balance are necessary.

### **21 to 23. Respect for the views of the child**

13. We trust that children will actually be asked for their views. Where nudity is concerned many adults make unjustified assumptions on their behalf. If children are asked then great care is required in designing the questions to ensure that they do not introduce bias. We enclose a briefing sheet on children.

### **37. Protection from abuse and neglect**

14. We have encountered professionals who assume that nudity, of either adults and/or children must constitute abuse. This results in institutional abuse of families. Explicit advice is essential.

### **76. Health and health services - breastfeeding**

15. Policies to encourage breastfeeding will face an uphill battle so long as society continues to treat many parts of the body as being dirty or shameful. Breasts are not quite as frowned upon as "*naughty bits*"<sup>6</sup> but attitudes are similar.

### **77. Sexual Health**

16. Sex education is essential and it can make a valuable contribution but it can at best have only limited success when it is fighting the attitudes of a society. The research findings in this area are very clear. Countries with relaxed attitudes towards the human body have much better outcomes than do less liberal countries and it is well established that considerable harm is done to children by restricting knowledge. Hence we endorse the recommendation that protecting children from harm must take precedence over adult prejudices and we are disappointed that the government response equivocates. There is little point in the guidelines stating that health education is the responsibility of all the adults concerned when a lifetime of conditioning makes it impossible for some adults to act responsibly.
17. Scotland has much worse outcomes than the UK as a whole and it is also much more censorious of anything concerning the human body. The UK is generally more taboo ridden than the rest of Europe and it has significantly worse outcomes than the rest of Europe. That pattern repeats time and again across the western world. Anyone who advocates prudery should be required to stand in front of a group of pregnant

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6 We use the phrase "*naughty bits*" quite deliberately in order to illustrate the absurdity of some attitudes. The harm that such language causes should be obvious.

teenagers and explain why it is that in countries such as Denmark or The Netherlands most of them would not be pregnant.

### **81. Health and health services – teenage pregnancy and sexual health**

18. We welcome the move towards a holistic approach but we note with regret that the focus is still overly narrow. There needs to be a fundamental shift in societal attitudes towards the body if “*the stigma and negative culture associated with sexual health and wellbeing in Scotland*” are to be overcome. The euphemism “*naughty bits*” well illustrates the problem.
19. Facing up to the societal attitudes which make progress so difficult does require confronting some very deep seated taboos and prejudices. There is a lack of research at the level of individuals but international comparisons show very strong correlations and very large effects. It is not coincidence that the countries with the worst outcomes, for example the USA and Scotland, are some of the least body tolerant of western countries. Conversely the countries with the best outcomes, for example Denmark and The Netherlands, are amongst the most liberal. The legal position of nudity serves to illustrate the enormous differences in attitudes and state policy. Nudity is legally permitted on almost all of Denmark's beaches but in Scotland there is only one clothes optional beach and that is a remote spot on one of the islands. Please see our response to row 104 for a further illustration of the difference in attitude.
20. We are not arguing that naturism produces better outcomes. Rather that the same attitudes that make nudity acceptable also result in much better outcomes for sexual health and wellbeing. There is a synergistic relationship.

### **86. Health and health services – eating disorders**

21. A significant contributory factor is lack of knowledge. Many children have some idea of what a few children of their own age and gender look like.<sup>7</sup> They do not usually have a realistic impression of what people from other age groups and the opposite gender look like. Much of their information is obtained through the distorting lens of the airbrushed media or worse. Indeed for many young people pornography is their main means of finding out what people supposedly look like and how their own bodies will change as they get older. The consequences are obvious so honesty and openness about the body is essential. Policy must clearly distinguish between pornography and nudity and policy must be determined by

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<sup>7</sup> However it is probable that for most children the available sample is small and it may be non-representative. They are unlikely to be able to appreciate either the diversity of normality or the variations in how fast individuals develop.

objective evidence of what is harmful and what is beneficial. That a prejudice is thought to be popular, or indeed is popular, does not make it any less a prejudice.

22. Censorious attitudes towards any part of the body contribute to censorious attitudes towards the body in general and hence exacerbate eating disorders.

#### **100. Bullying**

23. Most naturist children know to keep quiet about their lifestyle and hence we rarely hear of bullying but it does happen. Keeping a lifestyle secret should not be necessary.

#### **104. Right to rest, leisure, play, cultural life and the arts**

24. It is near impossible to obtain naturist use of facilities such as swimming pools in Scotland. When organisers do occasionally succeed it is commonplace for the council or pool managers to ban under 18s which, in actuality, is a ban on families. Hence naturist children are unable to participate in an often important part of the family lifestyle.
25. The excuses given by councils and swimming pool managers are completely spurious. For example "*What if a life guard has to rescue a child?*" Less often it is concerns about child protection but as the chairman of the Cambridgeshire Child Protection Committee said, "*There is no evidence that children are any more at risk at naturist swimming sessions than at any other.*" There are several thousand naturist swimming sessions each year in England, most of them essentially open to the public, and we are not aware of any untoward incidents in recent decades. Likewise we are not aware of any incidents in Scotland but there are only a couple of dozen sessions per year so the number is too small to be statistically significant.

#### **121. Sexual exploitation and sexual abuse – collection of data**

26. We trust that the criteria determining what constitutes abuse will be based on evidence. There are many people, often people who should know better, who just assume that anything even hinting at nudity must be child abuse.

British Naturism

[www.british-naturism.org.uk](http://www.british-naturism.org.uk)

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