

PE1838/M

Petitioner submission of 2 March 2021

The Minister sets out the work that would be required to get some sort of system of regulation in place. Some might read that as lack of enthusiasm for the task. Our view is that we are grateful for the explanation of process and can only encourage her or her successor to set to work straight away. The current unregulated or self-regulated system is entirely unsatisfactory and the sooner it is exposed to daylight the better.

The Minister correctly says any new system would have to "consider and assess ... the requirements followed by Women's Aid workers and the principles and standards set out by the SIAA." We would have hoped that these organisations would have taken the opportunity presented by our petition to offer more detail on the principles and standards that cover this kind of work and the qualifications they require of such workers. The Scottish Women's Aid submission in particular was somewhat opaque and general. We feel it is likely to be within the knowledge of the Committee that work of any sort with, we learn, four- and five-year-olds, requires far more than basic social work qualifications and an inhouse approach to supervision. Perhaps the Committee can suggest to any organisations providing children's advocacy services could publish their standards, principles and qualification requirements on a voluntary basis while awaiting government action.

Despite our best efforts in conveying to the Committee and to the Minister that our concerns run far wider than work related to Section 11 court cases, we seem not to have been clear enough. Our concern is far wider where children's workers are engaging with other agencies and professionals whether or not there is an active court case. Examples can be writing with an air of authority to GPs or social workers or schools making assertions about a child's life and alleged experiences without the knowledge of the other parent or members of the wider family. The effect is often to create a cloud of suspicion and caution between those agencies and the other parent. The pernicious effect of this process is to recruit a number of others who communicate with each other giving an impression of corroboration but in fact they are all responding to a single source which is never tested.

We are stunned and suspect some members of the Committee may also be surprised to hear from the Minister that there is at present no PVG requirement in place for such workers with very young and/or vulnerable children and is a matter of choice for the parent organisation to check. It is surely a serious loophole that, as we learn, an adult who states that they are a children's worker for any organisation can regularly spend time alone with four or five-year-olds within a school and be the only person in the building who is not PVG checked.