



Edwin Poots & children 'participating' in their own sexual exploitation

Health minister Edwin Poots has formally announced Northern Ireland's inquiry into the sexual exploitation of children following the arrests of 30 people during a major investigation into child sexual exploitation. Kathleen Marshall, a former commissioner for children and young people in Scotland has been named the chair.

We are pleased that Northern Ireland is taking the sexual exploitation of children seriously and has taken such a positive step to protect them. An inquiry into the full sexual exploitation of children is something our campaign supports. However, we have grave concerns about how this inquiry will operate following the public statements made by Edwin Poots.

The following quotes are taken directly from the [BBC article on the inquiry](#)

"I'm not sure in terms of the inquiry as to whether our failings are significant or not - I think that we shouldn't prejudge it," he said.

"However, 22 children, one way or the other, have been the subject of child sexual exploitation and, even if many of them have been willing participants, we need to do more to protect them."

We have several problems with the statements recorded. Firstly, the only reason to have an inquiry is because there are clear failings in child protection. Establishing that failures have occurred should be taken as read. 30 people have been arrested for sexually abusing at least 22 children between the ages of 13 and 18. That is a clear and significant failure in child protection as many of the victims were in the care of the local authority when they went missing or were abused. The point of the inquiry should be to ensure that this never happens again. It should not involve deciding whether or not significant failures took place.

Secondly, children are never "willing participants" in their own sexual abuse. This is a clear and damaging rape myth. We are very disappointed that Health Minister Edwin Poots has made this statement. It is very concerning that the Health Minister would make this statement when announcing that Professor Kathleen Marshall would be heading the inquiry.

Suggesting that children are somehow complicit in their own abuse is extremely troubling. We would like further clarification from Health Minister Edwin Poots on what he meant with this statement.