

PRESS RELEASE

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## JUSTICE MINISTER OPENS TOP LEVEL SUMMIT BETWEEN DISABLED PEOPLE AND SCOTTISH JUSTICE SECTOR

Disabled people will unite with professionals and practitioners from the justice sector on Monday 16 November in a national conference aimed at improving disabled people's access to justice in Scotland.



Opened by Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Communities, Kenny McAskill, Monday's summit will be an open forum for discussion and debate enabling disabled people and justice sector practitioners to come together to address every area of access to justice.



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Justice Secretary Kenny MacAskill said: "There should be no barrier to justice in Scotland.



"Whatever the reason for entering our justice system, whether as a victim, witness, suspect or accused, we want to make sure everyone in Scotland has access to justice whenever they need it.

"If that is not happening, we want to do something about it.



"This is the first project of its kind in Scotland and never before have such a wide range of organisations been asked for their views in this way – jointly, about their experiences, the barriers they have faced and what would make a difference.

"There has been much progress made in recent years, but we want to identify what more needs to be done and take action to ensure everyone has equal and fair access to Scotland's justice system."



The first event of its kind anywhere in the UK and with delegates travelling to Edinburgh from across Scotland, the conference is a unique opportunity to tackle the barriers to justice encountered by disabled people, build on current good practice and confront a variety of issues to propel a way forward.



The conference sees the culmination of six months of involvement and consultation events co-ordinated by Capability Scotland in partnership with representatives of the Scottish Justice Sector, Scottish Government and Scottish Disability organisations. Launched in August, this unique partnership saw public bodies come together for the first time to meet their duty to involve disabled people in policy making.

Capability's Chief Executive Alan Dickson said: "Through this conference and the involvement events which have already been held, the justice sector in Scotland is proving its commitment to ensuring disabled people can have true equality. Capability is very proud to have played a key role in co-ordinating this programme which has involved individuals with experience of all areas of the justice sector from disabled prisoners to disabled victims and witnesses, to disabled people who themselves are justice professionals."

Neil Stevenson from the Law Society of Scotland added: "This conference is by no means the end of the process. It will give both people who have already been involved in the programme of events and some who are new to it, a chance to review the findings so far and plot a course for the future. We have an opportunity to cement Scotland's position as a pioneer in this area and set a strong precedent for the rest of the UK."

Representatives of the Scottish Government, the Law Society of Scotland, the Scottish Legal Aid Board, Scottish Court Service, Crown Office & Procurator Fiscal Service and the Scottish Prison Service will be in attendance on Monday, along with disabled people with direct experience and knowledge of justice issues.

**ENDS**

**NOTES TO EDITORS:**

Capability Scotland campaigns with, and provides services to, disabled children and adults across Scotland, supporting them to achieve equality and have choice and control in their

lives. It has been commissioned by the Scottish justice organisations to manage the involvement process with organisations including:

- Black and Ethnic Minority Infrastructure in Scotland
- Guide Dogs Scotland
- Inclusion Scotland
- Scottish Association for Mental Health
- Scottish Consortium for Learning Disability
- Scottish Council on Deafness
- Scottish Disability Equality Forum

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**Photographs of the conference will be available late afternoon 16 November 2009.**

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