

UK Government's Crime and Policing Act 2026 Part 4 – Child Criminal Exploitation provisions Donna McEwan

Purpose

This information sheet provides an overview of the Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) provisions in the UK Government's Crime and Policing Act 2026 (the Act). Whilst the Act uses Child Criminal Exploitation as the statutory term, at CYCJ we use Criminal Exploitation of Children (CEC) deliberately to ensure children are seen as children first and emphasise criminal exploitation as the form of child abuse they are being harmed by.

Scotland has a range of existing legislation, policy and guidance to respond to CEC as outlined in the [Framework for Practice](#). These new measures should be seen as increasing the tools we can use to protect children and place responsibility firmly on adults who abuse children through this form of exploitation.

New CCE Offence

[S.48](#) of the Act introduces a new specific criminal offence of child criminal exploitation (CCE) across the UK. The offence is aimed at adults who intentionally use children to commit criminal activity. An adult will commit an offence if they do something to, for or in relation to a child with the intention of causing the child to become involved in criminal activity. Once implemented it will be an offence for any adult to act in a way in respect of or to a child intending them to engage in criminal activity or make it easier for a child to become involved in criminal activity later. The offence can include recruiting, grooming, directing, controlling, arranging or facilitating a child's involvement in criminal activity. It also applies where an adult uses another person, including another child, to involve the child in criminal activity or cause a child not to do something they are legally required to do.

The offence is designed to target the imbalance of power that is exercised by an adult who uses a child to commit criminality through what could include a broad and non-specific range of behaviours.

It is worth noting that:

- the offence only applies to adults aged 18 or over;
- the child does not need to commit a crime for the offence to apply;
- it does not matter if the adult did not know the person was a child under the age of 18;
- the offence also protects children who are below the age of criminal responsibility.

Examples of where an adult may commit the offence include:

- recruiting a child into an organised crime group
- directing a child to commit criminality
- coercing a child to transport or sell drugs
- pressuring or threatening a child into criminality
- providing opportunities for a child to commit an offence

CCE prevention orders (CCEPOs)

CCEPOs are civil orders that can enable prohibitions or requirements to be imposed by courts on adults abusing children through CCE. These orders can be used to place restrictions or prohibitions on an adult's behaviour to prevent their criminal exploitation of children. Each prohibition or requirement can only be contained in the order if it is deemed necessary to protect children from being exploited.

CCEPOs will be available upon application (i.e. without a criminal trial) and at the end of criminal proceedings irrespective as to whether an individual was convicted or acquitted. CCEPOs can be granted by the court against persons over the age of 18 years for offences related to CCE and/or where court is satisfied there is evidence that an individual has acted in a manner associated with CCE. Interim CCEPOs are also provided for and can be imposed while an application for a CCEPO is being considered.

Because these are civil orders the court will consider the matter on the balance of probabilities, and must be satisfied that there is a risk of the adult engaging in CCE and that it is necessary to make the order to prevent the adult engaging in and to reduce the likelihood of the adult engaging in CCE.

Commencement of the new CCE offence and CCEPOs

The date of commencement of this legislation in Scotland is still to be set by Scottish Ministers. This requires a Scottish Statutory Instrument (SSI) to be laid in the Scottish Parliament to bring the orders into force. The Scottish Government alongside the Home Office and Northern Ireland Department of Justice are aiming to commence the provisions in Autumn 2026.

The Home Office is issuing statutory guidance on the provisions to Police forces in England and Wales, the National Crime Agency, British Transport Police and Ministry of Defence. However, the guidance will not apply to Scotland but can be used by Scottish organisations to draft internal guidance for officers and staff. Home Office is also issuing non-statutory guidance on CCE, which can be used by agencies across the UK. Timescales for both guidance documents are still to be determined by Home Office.

What does this mean for you?

Once implemented, these new offences and civil orders give us more ways to act against those who exploit children. They do not replace child protection. Both responses must happen together: protecting and supporting the child while disrupting and holding to account those causing the harm.

For further info/support contact CYCJ on 0141 444 8622 or cycj@strath.ac.uk