

Children in Scotland

every child - every childhood

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Media Release

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Children in Scotland welcomes EC guidelines for early years services

Universal fully integrated services from birth serve children best

Scotland's youngest children risk missing out on social, economic and educational benefits associated with the best early education and care services, set out today (Wednesday 16 February) in Brussels in the first European Commission Communication on early childhood education and care.

The Communication advocates fully integrated, universally accessible services, with funding available to European member states through Structural Funds to invest specifically in the early years.

The guidelines reject targeting services and benefits to vulnerable groups as an effective means of improving services, on the grounds that it is difficult to "identify the target group reliably", it can create stigma, and may "lead to segregation at later stages of education".

Welcoming the focus on integrated services, Children in Scotland's chief executive Bronwen Cohen said:

"We know so much about the important contribution of services to the learning, social and emotional development of children under 3, yet we still only offer entitlements to a service for over 3s – and then only a limited entitlement, with many 3- and 4-year-olds attending only part time. Parents are still facing a fall in the number of preschool centres, rising childcare costs and a reduction in support available through the Working Tax Credit. A rising birth rate means the outlook is bleak unless action is taken.

"We need to ask Scotland's politicians how they plan to use the European Commission's Communication on Early Childhood Education and Care to tackle the inequalities in our current system and help our youngest citizens more effectively."

Androulla Vassiliou, European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth, said:

"Investing in early education and care is one of the best investments we can make for our children – and for Europe's future. Investing in quality preschool education is much more effective than intervening later. It gives our youngsters a better chance in life and actually

saves money in the long run. Breaking the cycle of poverty and disadvantage also means lower costs for the taxpayer for health and hospital services, remedial schooling, welfare and policing.”

Notes to Editors

1. *Early childhood education and care: providing all our children with the best start for the world of tomorrow* is published today in Brussels. EC Communications are not legally binding, but provide guidelines for member states and support in delivering objectives.
2. EU Structural Funds are financial tools set up to reduce disparities in income, wealth and opportunities across Europe. All European regions are eligible to apply.
3. Children in Scotland's recent report *The Costs of Childcare in Scotland* looks at the impact on early years services of a rising birth rate, falling numbers of preschool centres and a reduction in the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit. Copies of the report are available from the Children in Scotland website.
4. *Working for Inclusion: the role of the early years workforce in addressing poverty and promoting social inclusion*, led by Children in Scotland, considered Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) systems, particularly the ECEC workforce, at local, national and European levels. The programme's final report, *Working for Inclusion: how early childhood education and care (ECEC) and its workforce can help Europe's youngest citizens*, is available from Children in Scotland.
5. **Children in Scotland** is the longstanding national agency for the whole of the children's sector, reaching over 250,000 individuals through our extensive membership of more than 450 statutory agencies, voluntary sector organisations, professional associations and community groups. For further information visit www.childreninscotland.org.uk.

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