

Media release
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Hand in hand: good early years services and low child poverty

Fully integrated early years education and care services that are universally applied and coordinated by a single government department across access, funding, regulation and workforce are more beneficial for children and go hand in hand with reduced child poverty and inequality.

That was the key finding of a report *Working for inclusion: an overview of European Union early years services and their workforce*, released at a conference in Norway this month as part of the cross-European programme 'Working for Inclusion', in which Children in Scotland is a lead partner.

Statistics from 28 European countries were analysed to produce the report, prepared for *Working for Inclusion* by John Bennett, former co-director of the OECD's Starting Strong reports, and Peter Moss, Professor of Early Childhood Education at the Institute of Education, University of London.

Working for Inclusion is a two-year, 10-country strong, European information and practice sharing programme examining how the early years workforce can support social inclusion and address poverty.

Launching the findings of the report at the conference, hosted by the Nordland Research Institute in Bodø, Norway, *Working for Inclusion* programme director Bronwen Cohen said: "Integration matters: that is the key point we should take from this research, which clearly shows that fully integrated and universally available early years education and care services are much more effective in tackling child poverty and promoting social inclusion."

"Early education and childcare services are not a magic cure for poverty and inequality but countries with fully integrated systems – where services for under-threes have been brought up to the same levels as those for older children – are also the countries with the lowest social differences in the use of services. There are particularly big gains for children under three, who are more likely to be attending properly regulated, well-staffed services which cost less, and where there is virtually no difference in attendance rates between children of parents with higher and lower educational qualifications. By contrast, in countries with split or only partially integrated systems – such as the Netherlands and the UK – children of those with high levels of education are more than three times as likely to attend formal services as those from less educated families."

Researchers Peter Moss and John Bennett said: "Fragmented early childhood education and care services, found in most countries, offer low quality employment (including low pay) and unequal access, contributing to child poverty. By contrast, fully integrated services which children are entitled to from an early age generally provide good quality employment and more equal access for families from more disadvantaged backgrounds."

Scotland's Minister for Children and Early Years, Adam Ingram said: "The Scottish Government has supported the *Working for Inclusion* programme because we believe it is important that we learn with and

from other countries. This research study offers us valuable information and we will be considering how it can help us in developing our policies, in particular the early years framework which is currently being implemented.”

The key indicators of high quality early years systems and services that make a difference to inequalities resulting from parental income and education background are:

- Fully integrated government system of service delivery, which takes responsibility for services and access, funding, regulation and workforce
- A well-educated and well-paid workforce that works with children from birth onwards
- A unified workforce that is not divided into working with different age groups (ie under three and over three)
- Strong parental leave that is connected to entitlement to early years services from six months to one year

The report is being launched at the conference, ‘Working for inclusion’, taking place as part of the programme, in Norway on 28-29 January. The event will focus on how to develop models for holistic services for children, young people and their families, as well as examine models for education, and the recruitment and retention of a well-qualified workforce, issues pertinent to the Scottish Government’s Early Years Framework.

Notes for editors

Children in Scotland is the national ‘umbrella’ 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

The Working for Inclusion programme

The research forms part of the two year *Working for Inclusion* programme, funded by the European Commission under the EU Progress (Employment and Social Inclusion) programme with the support of the Scottish Government. The programme is led by Children in Scotland with partners and associate partners in nine other countries. The main partners and countries are:

- Scotland and UK : Children in Scotland
- Italy: La Bottega Di Geppetto
- Norway: Norland Research Institute
- Poland: Comenius Foundation for Child Development

Other partner countries are Denmark, France, Hungary, Portugal Slovenia and Sweden
www.childreninscotland.org.uk/wfi

Report Briefing

The Briefing document on the ‘Working for Inclusion’ research findings, *Working for inclusion: an overview of European Union early years services and their workforce*, January 2010 is attached with this press release.

The Early Years Framework (EYF)

The Early Years Framework is part of the Scottish Government’s wider work to address poverty and inequality.

www.scotland.gov.uk/earlyyearsframework

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