

Children in Scotland

every child - every childhood

Children in Scotland's response to the Scottish Government's *Transforming children's services agenda*

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/Young-People/legislation/engagement-events>

Children in Scotland attended the Scottish Government's recent series of consultation events on transforming children's services and is keen to continue to contribute to this ongoing work.

The Scottish Government will be familiar with much of our work that is very relevant to this agenda and direction of travel. One example is our activities on understanding and improving the children's sector workforce: www.childreninscotland.org.uk/workforce. Another is our recently completed European research and policy project examining how the workforce in early years can contribute to reducing child poverty, and increase wellbeing, as outlined in Working for Inclusion: www.childreninscotland.org.uk/wfi.

The SG's Child and Maternal Health Division – along with the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation – also supports our Early Years Policy Project (EYPP). This is a continuing programme of early years work, which includes a series of briefings, special reports and a quarterly e-newsletter on early years issues and actions. The content of these is all highly pertinent to the development of legislation to transform the lives of young children in Scotland: www.childreninscotland.org.uk/earlyyears. The current list of Children in Scotland's EYPP publications can be found at the end of this document.

We set out below, in brief, two main elements we consider key to bringing about the high and welcome aspirations expressed by the Scottish Government for the early years across Scotland. These points are expanded upon in more detail in the briefings and special reports noted above.

Transformational change in the early years

The early years framework, the SNP manifesto and the ministers' blog on the Engage website all talk about '*transformational change*'.

It is clear that this goal, by definition, cannot be achieved by 'business as usual'. Children in Scotland believes that Scotland should be working to a truly transformational vision; one that sees the full integration of high quality early childhood education and care, embedded within a system of public investment ensuring universal entitlement to flexible, affordable high quality provision following the end of maternity and paternity leave.

Investment in early childhood education and care would result in short term gains for families able to access paid employment, and medium and long-term gains for children's health and wellbeing. But quality is key - poor quality childcare can have negative impacts upon children.

The European Commission's Communication on Early Childhood Education and Care reflects the consensus and research evidence for investment in early childhood (influenced by two major OECD *Starting Strong* publications, as well as its 2009 report, *Doing Better for Children*).

The EC and the OECD both strongly recommend that Member States invest in universal, high quality, subsidised, integrated early childhood education and care. Equally important, they cite the evidence that such transformational change is not only desirable, but also practical and attainable by a wide variety of nations. They provide a clear vision and a path forward that Scotland should emulate.

Children in Scotland has evaluated the Scottish system in light of European recommendations, and provided a detailed and concrete outline of what changes need to be made. Our report: *Early Childhood Education and Care: developing a fully integrated early years system* can be found online here:

http://www.childreninScotland.org.uk/docs/CIS_ECECSpecialReport2_001.pdf

We have also analysed how other European countries have achieved or are working towards integration and this is set out in some of our briefings (details below). These countries did not achieve transformational change in the early years overnight – but, they are achieving it now through a shared vision that has universal entitlement and child well-being at its core.

Investment in preventative approaches to child health

A universal entitlement to high quality, well-resourced early childhood education and care services would assist with more than early childhood education and care and associated services. It would also

provide more robust support for the health and wellbeing for babies and very young children (and their families) by improving preconception, antenatal and postnatal health and health care throughout Scotland.

The Scottish Government has recognized the gap in support for the health of young children. It has already produced and promoted *Equally Well* – and refreshed or improved some key policies in child and maternal health. We support these and the stated intention that health boards reintroduce a universal health check for all children between 24-30 months. This earlier diagnostic check would benefit many young children and families if they are rigorous enough assessments to identify significant health risks/problems soon enough to make early intervention possible. Done well, these renewed checks could put mothers/fathers/carers and their children in touch with the extra support they need to thrive.

However, such health checks are still taking an approach that is concerned with the identification and treatment of child development or parenting deficits or difficulties after they have happened. More support available earlier on – in preconception, during pregnancy and postnatally – would enable parents to be the best parents that they could (and wish to) be. After all, a variety of serious life-long obstacles to well-being (from fetal alcohol harm to spina bifida) simply cannot be prevented (or cured) after children have been born. Prevention means a reduced need for more intensive, and expensive, help later on in that individual's life.

Life changes quickly in families. The positive circumstances of a family considered not to be at risk at birth might not be stable – and might deteriorate during the early years. Good relationships between mothers/fathers/carers and local early years services would mean that negative developments in a family's circumstance might be picked up on quickly and damage to the whole family (as well as the public purse) limited.

Therefore, developing community health services, whether that be a mix of GPs, midwives, and health visitors – alongside a range of integrated community services for early childhood education and care – is vital to ensure we actually achieve *transformational* change for Scotland's young children and their families.

Children in Scotland - Early years policy project

An ongoing series of free briefings and reports to challenge and inform everyone wanting to make a difference to the lives of young children and their families.

www.childreninscotland.org.uk/earlyyears

Quarterly early years newsletter

Case studies, reports, research, events, policy and analysis in three themes: early learning and learning environments; supporting parents; and working together. An online newsletter that informs and challenges.

Newsletter 2 (Oct 2011) – includes reflection on the need for competent systems as well as competent people

Newsletter 1 (May 2011) – an emphasis on how outdoor learning in nursery and primary settings can change children's lives

Regular Briefings and reports

Special Report no.2: Early Childhood Education and Care: Developing a fully integrated early years system (September 2011) European research repeatedly finds that integrated systems of early childhood education and care were highly correlated with low child poverty and high child wellbeing. So what does this mean for Scotland? Children in Scotland has published a detailed report with recommendations for how to develop a fully integrated early years system in Scotland. The first recommendation is that the Scottish Government should use the European Commission's Communication on Early Childhood Education and Care as a policy framework for Scotland.

Special Report no.1: The cost of childcare in Scotland Produced by Children in Scotland, in association with The Scottish Out of School Network. (February 2011) Cost is a key component of the whole experience of non-parental care for children and the positive or negative impact it has. High quality care is not cheap. This report looks at the impact on families and suggest ways to change the way we pay for early childhood education and care in Scotland.

Early Years Briefing Paper 7: How they did it: Slovenia and Norway's Early Childhood Education and Care policy (September 2011) Scotland can look to other EU nations for inspiration to change systems to better support the pockets of inspirational practice across the country. Slovenia and Norway are very different countries sharing

similar aims for young children and families, and both used legislation to get there.

Early Years Briefing Paper 6: Legislating to improve outcomes for young children in Scotland (September 2011) Having considered other EU nations, what might Scotland's approach be?

Early Years Briefing Paper 5: Scotland's Additional Support for Learning Act as a resource for young children (and their parents) and for early years providers (August 2011) Legislation exists to support young children with additional support for learning needs. How can we make better use of the good intentions put into existing legislation?

Early Years Briefing Paper 4: Scotland's new government and its promises for young children and their families (July 2011) A reminder of the high aspirations the new government set out for young children in Scotland

Early Years Briefing Paper 3: The European Commission's Communication on Early Childhood Education and Care (June 2011) This is a framework that links economic growth, equality, and a reduction in poverty - ambitions of the European Union shared by Scotland. European recommendations for member states sets out the policy approach that Scotland could follow.

Early Years Briefing Paper 2: Preconception Health (April 2011) and **Early Years Briefing Paper 1: Fetal Alcohol Harm** (April 2011) When should we start preventative spending? The health of newborn babies can be changed if women, and men, are supported and encouraged to improve their own health before conception. Instead of waiting for acute care for babies to trigger extra healthcare investment, we should be investing in support for potential parents and pregnant women and their partners.

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