

Changes to data collection on young children

Children in Scotland welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the proposal to change the way “pre-school and childcare” statistics are collected.

Children in Scotland understands the need to avoid duplication of effort and to make the best use of resources. However, changes to data collection should be based on their use and effectiveness in helping shape policies and monitor their impact on children’s lives. These proposed changes do not appear to have considered these practical matters.

In Scotland, provision of services for children up to three years focuses on care. This provision is mainly overseen by the Care Commission. For children over three, government funds education provision through “pre-school” settings in local authorities nurseries, as well as private or voluntary sector providers.

This age-related division of care and education is mirrored in differences in workforce qualifications and pay, employment terms and conditions, the curriculum, and the provision of additional support for learning for each age group. It is not a sensible or helpful distinction.

Outwith Scotland, other European countries where the same age division exists also have an unequal system that permits poorer care and support for families with children under three than over three. This is widely researched and documented. For examples, read the Working for Inclusion publications www.childreninScotland.org.uk/wfi. In particular, please note the main report and briefing from this new programme of research part-funded by the Scottish Government, as well as the European Commission.

Children’s lives are lived across the artificial boundaries of pre-three and three-plus care and education. They may attend a pre-school and be picked up by a childminder. They may attend a partner provider setting where the same staff care for their two-year-old sibling, and staff move across the age range because they are in one building or

even one room.

While data collection did not create this divide, any move to further entrench the division between education and care by further dividing the collection, timing and sources of data is a backward step that reinforces poorer provision for young children.

The Early Years Framework (as well as the earlier *for Scotland's Children*) asks professionals to work in an integrated way to provide support for young children and their families. If local authorities are to implement the Framework to improve children's lives, then the Scottish Government should be helping provide a complete picture of children's education and care as they are lived, rather than as they previously have been measured through the unhelpful data divisions created by different service providers.

We urge the Government to reconsider the way all data concerning provision of services for children (especially those under five) is collected and used. In this particular case, we encourage one data release, accessible in one place, for all education and care services for children under five. This could provide a significant impetus for the different agencies and government departments to work together in gathering and sharing genuinely useful information on young children's lives.

Children in Scotland is Scotland's national agency for organisations and professionals working with and for children, young people and their families. It exists to identify and promote the interests of children and their families and to ensure that policies and services and other provisions are of the highest possible quality and are able to meet the needs of a diverse society. Children in Scotland represents more than 400 members, including 90% of Scottish Local Authorities, all major voluntary, statutory and private children's agencies, professional organisations, as well as many other smaller community groups and children's services. It is linked with similar agencies in other parts of the UK and Europe.

The work of Children in Scotland encompasses extensive information, policy, research and practice development programmes. The agency works closely with MSPs, the Scottish Government, local authorities and practitioners. It also services groups such as the Cross Party Parliamentary Group on Children and Young People (with YouthLink Scotland). In addition, Children in Scotland hosts Enquire - the national advice service for additional support for learning, and Resolve: ASL, Scotland's largest independent education mediation service.