

Children in Scotland

every child - every childhood

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New legislation will be judged by results

Children in Scotland welcomes the Government's new legislative programme commitments to minimum pricing of alcohol and tackling sectarianism, but is disappointed by the 2-year delay in presenting a Children's Services Bill.

Children in Scotland's chief executive Bronwen Cohen said:

“While there is much to applaud in the new legislative agenda, we believe the Government has overlooked the connection between its policy on early years and employment. As the report published today by Save the Children shows, parents cannot work without childcare. The number of under 5s continues to rise, and families with children under 5 are shown to be at highest risk of poverty – yet the lack of good quality, affordable childcare is a barrier to employment for many ordinary families. It is also disappointing that the Government's eight manifesto pledges on the development of early years services has translated into a further 2-year delay in legislation to encourage a holistic and integrated approach to children's services. In the current economic context a much greater sense of urgency is needed.”

Other European countries have already achieved this. Children in Scotland's new briefing *How they did it: Early Childhood Education and Care in Norway and Slovenia* shows how two countries at opposite ends of the national wealth scale have established fully integrated early years systems with legal entitlements to subsidised full day childcare for all children from 12 months. Strong, clear legislation on early years provision supports parents, creates employment opportunities, reduces dependency on benefits – and can have an immediate impact on child poverty, health and wellbeing.

Elsewhere there is much to applaud in the legislative agenda. Children in Scotland welcomes the reintroduction of minimum pricing legislation for alcohol as a way of combating drinking patterns that are unhealthy for individuals and that increase the risk of alcohol related harm – providing prices are raised to a level that is a realistic deterrent, and if the resulting increased revenue is ploughed back into combating the harmful effects of drinking, for example by tackling domestic violence and investigating fetal alcohol harm.

We also welcome the commitment to tackling sectarianism, which is based on divisive and intolerant views of diversity. Taking this forward means supporting families in valuing diversity across a range of areas, including gender, disability and race as well as sectarian background. The role of fathers, particularly, could be significant in combating sectarianism specifically within football. Initiatives in education – for example shared campuses and local twinning projects – are another way to maintain the momentum of work among families and communities.

However to bring the long-awaited change across the children's sector, Scotland needs to urgently press ahead with coordinated legislation to encourage universal, fully integrated services.

Notes to Editors

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

The European Commission's Communication on Early Childhood Education and Care, published in February this year, makes it clear that universal, fully integrated children's services are the most effective means of reducing child poverty, supporting parents into work and improving outcomes for all children.

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