

Children

IN SCOTLAND

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working for children and their families

15 May 2007

MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release

New Scottish administration "needs child-centred approach to early years services"

The new Scottish government needs to be child-centred in its approach to early years services, a special Children in Scotland conference has heard.

Starting Strong II in Scotland, Too: Early childhood education and care in Scotland, held in New Lanark on 14 May, discussed the best way forward for the early years over the next decade.

The conference follows last autumn's publication of a report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Starting Strong II: Early childhood education and care*, which described the social, economic and research factors that influence early childhood policy in 20 European countries.

John Bennett, the principal author of the report, argued at the conference that Scotland should join an international network aimed at breaking down barriers dividing early childhood education and care.

He said: "England and Northern Ireland are among 19 other countries that have agreed to join the OECD's new network, which is helping members develop their early years services by pushing forward policy in their country. Scotland is very welcome to join the group, which has its next meeting in June on social inclusion and diversity. We are witnessing a new period in Scotland's policy for very young children, a time when a real difference can be made to their lives."

During the recent election campaign there was agreement among Scotland's political parties that early years services needed to be improved. Children in Scotland hopes this consensus is the starting point

for significant progress in the early years.

Bronwen Cohen, chief executive of Children in Scotland, said: "The SNP promised a minister for the early years. Together with the chair of our early years forum, I will be seeking an early meeting with the minister in the new administration, to outline the key issues that came from the conference."

"We will be suggesting a timetable for when Scotland could join the network – and using this to take forward commitments featured in the SNP's manifesto. A priority for the new administration should be to recognise the OECD Starting Strong II report and to join the new OECD network that is working together to build on the issues outlined in the report."

She added: "We will also be suggesting a new advisory group that includes a wide range of stakeholders working in the early years in Scotland. Such a grouping could follow the model of the Scottish Childcare Board, set up in 1998, which oversaw the successful early fulfilment of the target to provide part-time nursery education places for every three and four year old."

Linda Kinney, head of early years services, Stirling Council, who also spoke at the conference, said: "We need to re-examine early education and childcare because these definitions are adult constructions. If we sat with children and considered where they are and what they need we would have a very different picture."

"Children are constantly rich and resourceful in their learning, for them the divisions between childcare and early education are meaningless. We need to bring these different concepts together and focus on where the child is."

Notes for editors:

- *In my own words: services for young children in a multilingual society*, a special conference to be held in Edinburgh on 1 June, will address how services for children can affect their experiences of being multilingual and will consider how the EU should be approaching linguistic diversity.

For more information, go to www.childreninscotland.org.uk/eur

- Children in Scotland is Scotland's national children's agency, bringing together voluntary, statutory and professional organisations and individuals to improve the lives of Scotland's children and their families.