

Early Years and Early Intervention A joint Scottish Government and COSLA policy statement

Introduction

Children in Scotland welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation on the Early Years and Early Intervention Framework. This response is informed by, and represents the comments made at, a consultation with members from the public, private and voluntary sectors.

The prioritising of early years policy in a majority of political party manifestos offers a unique opportunity to establish an ambitious and progressive early years agenda in Scotland. Consultees welcomed the progress this document makes towards that goal but felt that the Framework would benefit from a more explicit and ambitious '10-year' agenda in order to give leadership and direction to policy development at a local level. The Framework needs to explain a common direction of travel with key but broad milestones linked to specific outcomes for all children over a ten-year period.

More broadly, Children in Scotland's members believe that the early years agenda must emphasise a view of childhood and early years provision that encompasses a vision of the 'rich child' (instead of continuing to rely on a 'deficit' model)¹. Children's rights should be at the heart of both national and local early years policy development with reference made to the principles of 'Getting it Right for Every Child' (GIRFEC), 'For Scotland's Children' (2001), 'Birth to 3 – supporting our youngest children' (2005) and the 'Gender Equality Duty' (2007) enshrined in the Equality Act 2006. It also should reflect the recommendations made in the OECD *Starting Strong II*² report and take account of both the recently published Children in Europe policy paper, *Young children and their services : developing a European approach* but also the forthcoming UNICEF Report Card 8 on the transition to childcare.³

¹ *Children in Europe* policy paper, 'Young children and their services : developing a European Approach' April 2008 <http://www.childrenineurope.org/en>

² OECD, *Starting Strong II: Early Childhood Education and Care*, Paris, 2006 <http://www.oecd.org>

³ UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre report card 8. 'The childcare transition'

Finally, the Framework offers an opportunity to establish a common terminology and a common understanding of the early years agenda that will help to deliver a common vision for children and their families across the 32 Local Authorities. The Government must be clear about what it means when it uses terms such as early years, early intervention, prevention and 'holistic' if children across Scotland are to experience comparable and cohesive service delivery.

Key points for consideration

- The Framework should offer clear leadership and direction with regards to the overall goals of a 10-year early years programme.
- The underpinning values and key terminology used in the Framework must be clearly defined.
- The Framework needs to explicitly view every child as a 'rich child' with entitlements.
- CiS believe that to be successful, early years services should provide universal, positive support with additional services for those with additional needs.
- CiS supports a universal and positive approach to pre and post-birth services and education that encompasses mothers/fathers/carers.
- The Framework must more clearly address the necessary integration of health, education and care services.
- Reference to numeracy and literacy should be expanded to include more creative methods of improving the development and experiences of the whole child.
- CiS welcomes the mention made of a Scottish Pedagogue model and believes that this model is the key to delivering a joined-up, child-centred service.
- Workforce development and the mixed economy of service delivery cannot be adequately addressed (so as to improve the quality of early years services) without addressing pay and conditions within, and across, sectors and providers.
- CiS welcomes the focus on positive parenting and family support. We believe that in order to be preventative, this policy must be universal - driven by parents and supported by government.
- CiS is concerned about the lack of effective 'crossover' between adult and child services. The Government must ensure that children's service providers are trained to work with parents and vice versa.
- The Framework must join up with, and take account of, relevant UK and EU policies
- The Framework also needs to be more obviously informed by cutting edge OECD, UNICEF and EU-wide research. The Government should also be involved in and contribute to international policy development in this area.
- The process of consultation must be democratic, transparent and accountable, with balanced representation and an adequate timeframe.

Terminology – the principled foundations of a strategy

Early years and Early Intervention

Consultees were concerned that the document currently uses the term Early Years and Early Intervention interchangeably when they are distinct areas of policy. What is meant by Early Years, Early Intervention and Early Prevention needs clarifying. For example, early years policy encompasses all children and all childhoods while early intervention operates on an assumption or expectation of 'risk' and 'deficit'. The concept of early intervention implied in the paper has particular significance. It may be that this term should be dropped in favour of a more positive and supportive value base.

Prevention

The document currently seems to imply that prevention will occur within the context of the early identification of 'risk'. This, however, conceives of prevention as an aspect of targeted early intervention, rather than in its positive form delivered to all children through integrated, universal services. This is inconsistent with the approach taken under *Getting it Right for **Every Child***.

Holistic

Consultees welcomed the Government commitment to providing an early years and early intervention Framework with a holistic approach. However, the document is unclear over what is meant by 'an holistic approach', e.g., this could be a holistic view of the child or a holistic view of service provision. Consultees felt that '*holistic*' should imply a universal (plus additional) approach to children's services and an integrated and flexible approach to the workforce. Again, the early years and early intervention Framework needs to be consistent with, and built upon, the agreed principles of GIRFEC.

Finally, the Framework should view children as 'rich' and as the central point of an 'holistic approach'. That is, "*a child born with great potential that can be expressed in a hundred 'languages', an active learner...a co-creator of knowledge and identity, culture and values, a child that can live, learn listen and communicate*"⁴ For every child, this means recognising they both have universal needs, and inevitably at some point, additional needs.

⁴ *Children in Europe* policy paper, 'Young children and their services : developing a European Approach' April 2008 <http://www.childrenineurope.org/en>

Entitlement

The Early Years and Early Integration Framework provides an opportunity to state the intention and goal of extending pre-school provision to a full-time, 'whole day' basis (i.e., enabling children to arrive at 8am and stay until 6pm for a charge, when parents can afford it). This would ease the difficulties faced by working parents, particularly women, and would have a significant impact on reducing child poverty (highest for families with children under the age of five).

Many young children currently rely on a combination of childcare arrangements – some moving between services during the course of the day or attending a number of services throughout the week – despite evidence of the need for continuity of care in the early years. This issue is particularly pronounced in rural areas where the distance between services is often significant. *The suggestion of 'whole day' pre-school education is not intended as an extension of formal education into earlier childhood.* Instead it refers to provision offering young children a variety of experiences throughout the day encompassing relaxation, free play and stimulus on a basis that adequately meets the childcare needs of parents in full-time work.

References made in the document to numeracy and literacy are understandable, but emphasise the absence of other, equally valuable, issues such as emotional well-being and creativity. This focus also raises concerns about the 'schoolification' of early years policy; thereby making academic achievement the focus of pre schools services, rather than giving priority to the developmental needs of the whole child from pre-birth to 8 for example through the innovative use of play, the arts and nature.

Pre and post birth

Children in Scotland's members welcomed the reference made to re-examining the knowledge, advice and support offered to expectant or prospective parents. It is clear that Government policies on maternal health need to be reconsidered in light of progress made on issues such as breastfeeding, nutrition (during and after pregnancy) and drinking alcohol during pregnancy. However, more clarification is needed over the use of the term '*intervention to target high risk groups before conception*'. Children in Scotland would support any focus on universal pre-conception services through GPs, adult support services for drug and alcohol abuse or awareness raising about the responsibilities of planned or unplanned pregnancy among young boys and girls. However, these policies should be developed within the context of a positive and preventative dialogue, rather than a targeted intervention that may be alienating and stigmatising.

Workforce Development

Child development research consistently shows that what children require from early years services are qualified, well-paid, early years professionals and a low turn-over of staff. However, the current workforce is fragmented, under-qualified, part-time and, in most cases, underpaid. Not much can be achieved for the early years sector without addressing pay and work conditions. This has a direct impact on the attractiveness of the early years as a career choice, especially for men. It also needs to be assessed within the context of other professions such as youth and play workers, residential care workers and classroom assistants (recently the subject of a formal EOC investigation).

The Scottish Pedagogue model

Consultees noted that the Scottish pedagogue model described in the forthcoming Children in Scotland publication, ***Working it out: developing the children's sector workforce***,⁵ offered the possibility of a new qualification at both graduate equivalent level and SCQF level 7. This would build on the work undertaken by the Scottish Social Services Council on developing the Standard for Childhood practice and would upskill a variety of other groups within the children's sector workforce, including those in school-age childcare, residential care, play and youth services, family daycare, foster care family support and in the classroom alongside teachers. It would also offer a means of providing everyone working within the children's sector with some shared courses in initial education and continuing professional development to assist in developing common values, understanding and language in meeting the needs of children and young people.

Community and parenting support

The early years is a prime time to build positive supporting relationships between service providers and mothers/fathers/carers. We recognise the benefits of, and support proposals to, establish a more positive and supportive environment for parents. We believe that this system would offset the costs incurred by the current inadequate recognition of the support that all mothers/fathers/carers require. Government needs to explore models of early years provision (such as nature kindergartens) which encourage parental involvement and help to establish a 'whole family and community' approach.

Support is however, needed for those professionals employed and trained to work with children who are then required to engage with parents. National standards for people working with parents exist in England and the Government should consider whether this is a model that could be applied effectively in Scotland. Financial support for the training of practitioners in adult services who also engage with children is imperative, too.

⁵ *Working it out; developing the children's sector workforce*. Children in Scotland 2008

The crucial impact of fathers (biological or *de facto*, present or non-resident) on the well-being of all children during their early years should be taken into account more explicitly and systematically through this Framework. Too often among policymakers, professionals and service providers, the operational meaning of 'parent' is 'mother'. Research evidence, existing good practice and the new Gender Equality Duty all point to the benefits and necessity of including fathers (or father figures) and the detrimental impact of failing to do so. The Early Years Framework should be based on an understanding of the importance of fathers (as well as mothers) in children's lives. Unless there are good reasons for their exclusion -- there should be a presumption in favour of expecting, encouraging and assisting fathers to playing a full, positive role in their child's development, care and education.⁶

The Government and COSLA also need to be clearer over the role of the State and the role of the community in generating support mechanisms. The State cannot and should not rely or expect the community to behave in a certain way in order to deliver services to children as part of a Government policy. Rather, the State should welcome and support action as additional to their efforts within the community. Any attempt to direct the actions of the community could have a detrimental effect and is unlikely to produce sustainable models of support. However, consultees accepted that it is difficult to see how social capital in certain areas will develop without State encouragement. Careful thought needs to be given to future policy development and its implications in this policy area.

Responsibility and roles within the Framework

The Framework needs to endorse and encourage the professional responsibility to act, rather than simply to refer. Empowering professionals to make this type of culture change requires a wider definition of the roles and responsibilities of the various actors in early years policy:

- National Government
- Local Government
- Service providers (child and adult)
- Workforce (is their overall aim to be universal support, targeted intervention or preventative support?)
- Mothers/fathers/carers

National level

- Require clear national vision, guidance, models, frameworks and timescales. Also require guidance on the workforce needed to deliver the agenda and the funding to support it.

⁶ *Making the Gender Equality Duty real for children, young people and their fathers*. Children in Scotland, 2007

- Supporting LA's to deliver within a Framework, getting 'buy in' from LA staff at decision-making/political level and practitioners (including voluntary sector).
- Sharing good practice among LA's, as well as monitoring delivery.
- Ensuring that local delivery still provides equity of outcomes for children nationally.
- National guidance on data sharing.
- Reference to, and interface with, Westminster-led areas of relevance to early years services, including current employment provisions relating to the care of young children and any prospect of extension and payment for parental leave.

Local level

- Identify a base-line.
- Be responsible for auditing service delivery
- Realign and deliver services
- Bring together all service deliverers (e.g. LA's, health, voluntary and private) in partnership

International Level

- Look to the "Arc of Prosperity" nations for best practice and policy direction⁷
- Learn from national and international research to explicitly underpin the Framework for example the principles contained in the OECD report '*Starting Strong II: early childhood education and care*'⁸
- Contribute to and learn from EU activity in relation to children and early years; for example, the EU communication on 21st Century Schools⁹, the expected report on the Barcelona targets 2002¹⁰ and the Children in Europe position paper on services for 0-10 year olds¹¹. The European Commission is also currently involved in a cost/benefit analysis of modifying current EU legislation on the reconciliation of professional, private and family life. This includes directives on the health and safety at work of pregnant women and parental leave. The Commission is also assessing whether there is a need for new EU-wide legislation on adoption, paternity and care for dependent family member leave.

⁷ '*Northern Lights - building better childhoods in Norway*' Children in Scotland 2007

⁸ OECD, *Starting Strong II: Early Childhood Education and Care*, Paris, 2006

<http://www.oecd.org>

⁹ European Commission EU Communication on 21st Century Schools, Brussels, 2006

<http://ec.europa.eu/education/school21/consultdoc.en.pdf>

¹⁰ Barcelona, European Council, March 2002

¹¹ *Children in Europe* policy paper, '*Young children and their services : developing a European Approach*' April 2008 <http://www.childrenineurope.org/en>

Future Processes

The composition and support of the new Early Years task force is critical. It was felt that the Scottish Government should make sure the task groups involve all sectors. The working groups must be allowed sufficient time to adequately address the policy implications of their work and specific thought needs to be given to how the task groups link up. The membership, deliberations, conclusions and future role of the national task forces need to adhere to democratic principles and be transparent. It would be useful to have an annual /bi-annual review conference once the Framework is established to track and disseminate progress.

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, 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 over 450 members, including 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 the European Union.

The work of Children in Scotland encompasses extensive information, policy, research and practice development programmes. The agency works closely with MSPs, the Scottish Executive, local authorities and practitioners. It services a number of groups such as: the Cross Party Parliamentary Group on Children and Young People; the National Children's Voluntary Forum; the National Early Years Forum, the Rural Advisory Group and the Additional Support Needs Network. Children in Scotland hosts Enquire, the national advice service for additional support for learning.

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