

Policy Briefing



Draft Integrated Strategy for the Early Years Consultation ends 13th June 2003

Introduction

The Scottish Executive issued the Draft Integrated Strategy for the Early Years for consultation in March 2003. The consultation ends on 13th June 2003.

The draft Strategy further develops some aspects of the Scottish Childcare Strategy (published in 1998) and has been drawn up with reference to several recent reports and initiatives including *For Scotland's Children* (2001), *Towards a Healthier Scotland*, the Changing Children's Services Fund, The Child Protection Review 2002 and *Growing Support* (vulnerable children) (2002), all of which emphasise the need for better integrated services. It also refers to significant evidence of the effectiveness of early intervention in improving long-term outcomes for children. In setting out its overarching aims the draft Strategy emphasises closing the opportunity gap and ensuring that all children are able to achieve their full potential.

Headline issues

The Executive has invited comments on the draft Strategy and has highlighted 6 consultation questions (see Annex 6 of draft Strategy). There are however a number of initial issues to be considered;

1. Is the Strategy sufficiently ambitious and does it offer a clear vision?
2. Should the Strategy refer only to children under 5 years of age?
3. Does the Strategy address the fragmented nature of current care arrangements for young children?
4. Does the Strategy retain sufficient focus on the role of education and in particular the relationship between education and social care?
5. Will the approach taken to the early years workforce deliver the best results for young children, families and professionals themselves?
6. Does the Strategy address the needs of children with additional support needs?
7. Does the Strategy go far enough to ensure efficient joint working between sectors, agencies and professional groups, and what is the role for Early Years Planning Forums in developing this?
8. Do the plans for monitoring and evaluation give sufficient weight to qualitative indicators?

KEY POINTS OF THE STRATEGY

- **The central aim of the draft Strategy is to set out a framework which draws together existing policies from across the Executive in the area of services for young children (from pre-birth to 5). It seeks to promote greater coherence between these Executive policies to give better**

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support to joined-up delivery on the ground. The draft Strategy outlines the benefits of increased integrated working and a coherent approach to funding as being:

- A better service for users in seamless delivery, early preventative action and reduced risk of people falling through the net – providing the right services at the right time.
 - More flexibility for those commissioning or delivering services.
 - Increased efficiency for agencies, for example by reducing unnecessary repetition of information.
 - Better long-term outcomes for children, for example fewer children needing protection, fewer children offending and reduction of health inequalities.
- **The draft Strategy is aimed at all those involved in planning and delivering early years services (including the statutory, voluntary and private sectors), and applies to children from pre-birth to age 5 and their families.**
 - **Universal services are identified as essential in their own right and as a route through which to identify children and families who may be eligible to receive targeted services.**
 - **The draft Strategy commits to 5 primary objectives:**
 - **Align Executive policies across departments.** This includes several existing policies; Sure Start Scotland, the Childcare Strategy, the provision of free part-time pre-school education, and the range of initiatives funded through the Health Improvement Fund.
 - **Achieve greater coherence in Executive funding.** Agencies (including Local Authorities, Health Authorities and voluntary organisations) will be able to use central funding more flexibly to work towards a common set of agreed outcomes identified under the 5 broad objectives below (for full list of suggested outcomes see page 14, paragraph 43 of draft Strategy).
 - **Develop a common set of agreed outcomes.** To deliver a more joined-up approach where services are being delivered by a variety of agencies using a range of initiatives the Strategy suggests the use of a common set of outcomes by which effectiveness can be measured. These are grouped under the 5 broad objectives that underpin current early years policies;
 - To improve children's health
 - To improve children's social and emotional development
 - To improve children's ability to learn
 - To strengthen families and communities
 - To reduce barriers to employment – especially for lone parents, since work is the best route out of poverty
 - **Support joint planning, commissioning and single system service delivery of early years services in local authorities and NHS Boards and Trusts.** In order to achieve the above outcomes it is necessary that agencies build and develop effective joint working from planning and auditing need to delivery on the ground. The Strategy identifies several measures to encourage this;
 - Provision within the Local Government Scotland Act 2003 placing a duty on local authorities to initiate, facilitate and maintain the community planning process and a duty on key public bodies to participate.
 - Possible creation of local Early Years Planning Fora (see final point below).
 - Joint training for workers from different professions to reduce tensions that can arise from a misunderstanding of on another's roles, or negative experiences in the past, or different professional and organisational cultures.
 - **Provide a framework to monitor and evaluate impact.** Monitoring and evaluation will be carried out using existing mechanisms. In addition research is planned to examine possible new approaches that could be incorporated. Central to this is a feasibility study commissioned by the Executive to establish that there are adequate sources of information available on the indicators

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by which the Strategy will be evaluated.

- The draft Strategy suggests that joint planning at a local level may be achieved through the creation of an Early Years Planning Forum in each local authority area. It is suggested that existing Childcare Partnerships would play a key role in this, either by refocusing their remit and membership or by operating as a sub group of any future Early Years Planning Forum. **The Executive has expressed a particular interest in views on this point.**

FURTHER DISCUSSION OF HEADLINE ISSUES

- 1. Is the Strategy sufficiently ambitious and does it offer a clear vision?** The document is relatively brief and centres on the integration of existing services and policies but does not also include proposals for how to improve upon these or further measures that could be taken. Does the Strategy's vision of 'where we want to be' present a clear view of what is being aspired to?
- 2. Should the Strategy refer only to children under 5 years of age?** The document is limited by its narrow focus on children up to the age of five and could perhaps benefit from viewing the early years as a continuum from 0 to 7 years reflecting developments in several other countries. This would provide scope for issues of school age childcare and compulsory school starting age to be addressed as part of a comprehensive strategy.
- 3. Does the Strategy address the fragmented nature of current care arrangements for young children?** Research demonstrates the need for continuity of care in the early years and at present many young children rely on a combination of childcare arrangements – will the Strategy impact on this? The Strategy does not give a great deal of attention to childcare for children under 3 years of age and indicates that the provision of free pre-school education for all 3 and 4 year olds will remain on a part-time basis. The success of this target could perhaps be built upon with a new target of a full-time place for all 3 and 4 year olds on a 'whole day' basis.
- 4. Does the Strategy retain sufficient focus on the role of education and in particular the relationship between education and social care?** At present only just over a quarter of all pre-school and day care centres provide a mixture of care and education for pre-school children. Questions remain over whether the Strategy will address the way in which education and social care interact (paragraph 56 refers to integrated service delivery by health and social care staff but does not mention education). In particular the role of schools is overlooked – New Community Schools and the extension of this initiative to nurseries could be considered as a means of taking forward integrated service delivery in the early years.
- 5. Will the approach taken to the early years workforce deliver the best results for young children, families and professionals themselves?** In accepting the current diversity of professionals within early years the Strategy maintains the division between the three primary needs of young children; play, care and education. Consideration could be given to developing an integrated approach at the level of training and qualifications.
- 6. Does the Strategy address the needs of children with additional support needs?** Young children with additional support needs are not mentioned in the Strategy and face particular issues including: difficulties in accessing childcare; the need for early identification of additional support needs; and issues of inclusion. The Strategy does not refer to the draft Additional Support for Learning Bill which will affect the services available to this group.
- 7. Does the strategy go far enough to ensure efficient joint working between sectors, agencies and professional groups, and what is the role for Early Years Planning Forums in**

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developing this? The Strategy details ways in which joint working can be encouraged but questions remain over whether the proposals are sufficiently strong to ensure that this happens and how progress will be monitored. What will the role of Early Years Planning Forums and Childcare Partnerships be in developing this?

8. Do the plans for monitoring and evaluation give sufficient weight to qualitative indicators?

While national indicators are necessary the Strategy should also be measured by factors that are meaningful to families with young children. Qualitative indicators should also be valued and in particular the objective of 'improving children's ability to learn' currently emphasises academic outcomes. This is at odds with the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000 where education has to be directed towards 'the development of the personality, talents and mental and physical abilities of the child to their fullest potential'. What is also unclear is how evaluation will distinguish between the effects of integration and that of individual policies – should evaluation first seek to measure the extent to which services have become more integrated as the basis upon which to examine the effects of this?

Consultation on Draft Integrated Strategy for the Early Years can be found at www.scotland.gov.uk or by contacting the Executive at 0131 244 0606.

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