

**MEDIA RELEASE – 9/12/08**

**Embargoed until 11/12/08**

## Public policy and investment are crucial to better lives for young children

Children in Scotland applauds UNICEF's *Report Card 8: The Childcare Transition* released today. It makes a compelling case for the UK and Scottish Governments to invest far more in a universal system of early years services and family support.

The fundamental message from the Innocenti Centre's *Report Card 8* is that **governmental policy, practice and investment do matter** in giving babies and young children the best possible chance of experiencing happy, healthy childhoods. Trying to make up later for what was missing early in children's lives has proven to be much less effective and much more expensive in all countries studied.

*Report Card 8* produced by UNICEF's Innocenti Centre reviews and analyses how the world's wealthiest nations have dealt with two changing realities:

- ❖ a dramatic increase in the number of young children having out-of-home learning and care experiences on a regular basis; and,
- ❖ extensive research confirming the common sense wisdom that what happens (or fails to happen) during the first years of life strongly shape child well-being, later educational success and adult life chances.

The report shows that Scotland and the UK meet only five of the ten early years benchmarks established by UNICEF.

Four key quotes from *Report Card 8* are particularly relevant for Scotland and the UK:

- *“on the grounds of both equity and efficiency, a move towards universal programming – as in education - is attractive , if flexibility and attention to vulnerable groups can be developed within universal services”*
- *“direct public funding of services brings, in the majority of countries reviewed, more effective control, advantages of scale, better national quality, more effective training for educators and a higher degree of equality in access and participation than consumer [parent] subsidy models”*
- *“neuroscience is beginning to confirm and explain the inner workings of what social science and common experience have long maintained – that loving, stable, secure, stimulating and rewarding relationships with family and caregivers in the earliest months and years of life are critical for almost all aspects of a child's*

*development . . . Adequate parental leave helps to create the conditions for the constant, intimate, reliable, reassuring, one-to-one interaction with parents that all infants need -- and sidesteps the enormous practical and financial difficulties in recruiting, training, remunerating, retaining and supervising the large numbers of skilled staff that would be needed to guarantee adequate care and stimulation for the under ones”*

- *“there is today no convincing reason for spending less on early childhood education and care than on schools and teachers for older children . . . Only six OECD countries meet eight or more of the [UNICEF Report 8] benchmarks and they are the same six countries that top the table of government expenditures on early childhood services (Sweden, Iceland, Denmark, Finland, France and Norway)”*

Bronwen Cohen, Chief Executive of Children in Scotland, said:

“The new Early Years Framework to be published a day earlier than the UNICEF report Card 8 will offer Scotland the opportunity to address the issues raised by the UNICEF report. It will require a significant shift in resources to the early years if Scotland is to get its early years services right - and give many hard pressed families the support they need and deserve.”

#### **Notes to Editors:**

For press quotes or further information, please contact Lynn Gilmour, 0131 222 2443 (Thursday), or Nicola Pay, 0131 222 2448 (Wednesday and Thursday).

**Children in Scotland** is the national agency for voluntary, statutory and professional organisations and individuals working with children and their families in Scotland. It exists to identify and promote the interests of children and their families and to ensure that relevant policies, services and provision are of the best possible quality and able to meet the demands of a diverse society. For further information visit: [www.childreninscotland.org.uk](http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk)