

Children in Scotland

every child - every childhood

MEDIA RELEASE

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Children's sector debates future of the workforce

As debate on reform of the children's sector workforce across Europe widens, an international conference in Edinburgh will provide an arena for the children's sector workforce, across the early years, education, health, social work and other areas, to consider how best to meet the challenges facing child and family services today.

Working it out: helping to shape the future of the children's sector workforce, on Wednesday 4 March, is the flagship event in Children in Scotland's year-long Government-funded workforce programme, intended to encourage debate on the future shape and qualifications of the children's sector workforce.

The debate so far has revealed considerable interest in finding ways to develop a simpler and more coherent system of initial training and professional development for the children's sector workforce. Learning from other countries' experiences of developing a workforce able to work with children, families and communities in a holistic way has also been considered very valuable. There is particular interest in the potential offered by the European pedagogue model, which focuses on the 'whole child approach'. A new cross-European programme (see notes), led by Children in Scotland, will look more closely at this and other models.

Bronwen Cohen, Chief Executive of Children in Scotland, said: "There is an appetite for ambitious change in order to create a children's sector workforce that is more flexible, with a better understanding of how to work with children in a holistic way. This is an opportunity to be bold and creative."

Professor Jill Bourne, Dean of the Faculty of Education at University of Strathclyde, will chair a focused discussion at the conference. She said: "I welcome the opportunity for key workers in all the agencies that impact on young children's lives to come together to focus on improving learning and care across society. Creating a common core across children's services, education, health and social care, offers an opportunity to make a real difference to children's lives and Scotland's future. Higher education institutions have an important role to play in producing the teachers, social workers and health professionals of the future."

The conference next week will bring together key thinkers from a range of professional areas, to discuss how best to proceed with building a childcare workforce in Scotland that is strategic, child- and family-centred, and which values young people as participants in their learning throughout their early life.

Adam Ingram, Minister for Children and Early Years, is a key-note speaker. Keir Bloomer, Vice Convenor of Children in Scotland, and former Chief Executive of Clackmannanshire Council, will chair the conference with contributions from Alan Blackie, Chief Executive of East Lothian Council, and Myra Pearson, Head of School of Education at the University of Aberdeen. There will also be an examination of models from across Europe, including the pedagogue model, and a series of parallel sessions, examining significant areas of the debate.

Speaking ahead of the event, Mr Ingram said: "Developing the skills and career opportunities of those delivering early years services is key to helping us give every child in Scotland the best possible start in life. That's why our Early Years Framework – which will help improve the life chances of all Scotland's young

people and tackle inequalities – outlines how we can help improve training and opportunities in the early years workforce. This exciting programme will help us share good practice from across Europe as we move that forward and promote excellence in the sector.”

The conference will also mark the official launch of a new two-year European programme, led by Children in Scotland. *Working for inclusion: the role of the early years workforce in addressing poverty and promoting social inclusion* will work to focus attention and strengthen understanding at every level, on the vital role that a well-planned early years workforce can play in supporting inclusion and addressing poverty.

The programme is managed by Karen Mountney, Head of Programme and Practice Development at Children in Scotland, who said of the launch: “Improving the qualifications and skills of those working with our youngest children has a vital impact on the extent to which they are able to support social inclusion amongst children and address the poverty affecting vulnerable families. This programme will open the debate between all levels of the workforce from policy makers to practitioners.”

Notes for Editors –

Working it out: helping to shape the future of the children’s sector workforce is a one day international conference at the Edinburgh Conference Centre, Heriot Watt University.

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

Working it out is a 12-month programme (from November 2008) supported by the Scottish Government to invite the children’s sector workforce, with employers, planners, universities, colleges and other stakeholders to join in debate about future children’s sector workforce development. The programme encompasses a series of four newsletters, an international conference in March 2009 and three seminars focusing on different aspects of workforce reform. For further information visit: www.childreninscotland.org.uk/workforce

New cross-European programme: Working for inclusion: the role of the early years workforce in addressing poverty and promoting social inclusion, will examine how improving the qualifications and skills of those working with our youngest children can help reduce poverty and improve social inclusion. Similar research will take place simultaneously in Poland, Norway, Italy, Slovenia, France, Denmark, Portugal, Sweden and Hungary and will offer an overview of developments throughout the EU. The programme is funded by the European Commission, is directed by Dr Bronwen Cohen, Chief Executive of Children in Scotland and project managed by Karen Mountney, Head of Programme and Practice Development at Children in Scotland. For further information email kmountney@childreninscotland.org.uk.

For further information, or to attend the conference in a press role, contact Tracey Francis, Children in Scotland, 0131 222 2419, tfrancis@childreninscotland.org.uk or Lynn Gilmour, 0131 222 2443, lgilmour@childreninscotland.org.uk