

**MEDIA RELEASE**  
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**Getting the best for parents and children: the early years workforce joins the debate**

Join the debate is the message for early years service providers in Scotland as early years specialists from across Europe meet today in Edinburgh for a seminar marking the end of a 4-day study visit examining diversity in disability, gender, race and culture in early years provision.

Delegates at 'Working for inclusion: the diversity dimension' will hear the workforce is central to strengthening universal services for parents and young children, and delivering the best possible support.

This week Children in Scotland, who are hosting the visit, launched a new community webpace to make it easy for practitioners throughout Scotland and Europe to join the ongoing discussion on the role of the early years workforce.

The visit, and the webpace, are part of *Working for inclusion: the role of the early years workforce in addressing poverty and promoting social inclusion*, a 2-year programme funded by the European Commission and supported by the Scottish Government, and led by Children in Scotland. Key points from the seminar and the online forum will feed into a final report to be submitted to the European Commission.

Speakers at today's event include Adam Ingram MSP, Minister for Children and Early Years; Rami Ousta, Chief Executive Officer, BEMIS; Carole Wilkinson, Chief Executive, Scottish Social Services Council; and Morag Alexander, Commissioner, Equality and Human Rights Commission. Key themes are Additional Support for Learning and gender diversity in the workforce and delegates will have opportunities to share experiences and practice from their own settings.

Children in Scotland Chief Executive Bronwen Cohen said:

"Early years services can play a crucial role in promoting social inclusion, but their contribution can't be taken for granted: poor quality services or variable access widens inequality and diminishes their ability to support young children and their families. The most significant variable is the workforce: how well qualified and supported they are and how able to work effectively with young children, their families and communities. The *Working for inclusion* programme will inform debate within and across the EU."

Adam Ingram said:

"We firmly believe that our children's early years represent a golden opportunity, when action taken has the biggest influence on chances throughout their lives,

which is why the Scottish Government is driving an unprecedented focus on support during this period through our Early Years Framework. The workforce is central to our efforts which is why we have been so encouraged to see hundreds of people embarking upon the new early years degree course this year. Our groundbreaking framework is moving to strengthen universal services for parents and young children, ensuring they deliver the best support possible, and it's gratifying that so many delegates from overseas have come to see the good work going on in Scotland. This seminar is also a great opportunity for us to share experiences and successes to help give our children the best start in life."

### **Notes to Editors**

1. *Working for inclusion: the role of the early years workforce in addressing poverty and promoting social inclusion* began in February 2009 and is considering the role of the early years workforce to encourage discussion, debate and information-sharing across 10 EU Member States.
2. The programme focuses attention on Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) systems, particularly the ECEC workforce, at local, national and European levels. It gives the opportunity to open dialogue on critical issues affecting the workforce and enables Scotland to learn from and contribute to debate and development across Europe.
3. Each partner in the programme (Scotland, Norway, Poland and Italy) is hosting a study visit and national conference on one of the programme's themes. A wider network of organisations in Slovenia, France, Denmark, Portugal, Sweden and Hungary will participate as project associates.
4. As part of the programme Dr John Bennett, who will speak at today's seminar, is co-leading research taking place simultaneously across all the participating countries, with Professor Peter Moss. The research will produce a clear picture of qualifications and skills levels in early years services across the EU, and how these relate to levels of poverty and social inclusion.
5. The new webspace will run until 2011 and will promote discussion on the project's four themes: the child as protagonist; working with diversity; rural and remote areas; and working in an inclusive way. It will also provide a resource library of relevant publications to download. It is accessed through Children in Scotland's website at [www.childreninscotland.org.uk/wfi](http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/wfi), and anyone who registers will be able to contribute to the discussion.

For a full programme for the visit, or for any further information, please contact Tracey Francis, 0131 222 2419.

**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)