



PRESS RELEASE
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‘Invest in early years to ensure they learn for life’
CHILDREN IN SCOTLAND ANNUAL CONFERENCE
2005

Equipping children with the skills they need to be successful in the world of work begins before they even start school, a major national conference will hear today (Friday).

Alan Sinclair, senior director of skills and learning, Scottish Enterprise will tell delegates attending Children in Scotland’s annual conference *Learning for Life* that job training programmes, whether public or private, “work with what families and schools supply them’. He believes that a greater investment should be made in early years care and education and that Scottish skill formation policy “should be based on this basic principle”.

He said: “Nine per cent of all workers are judged not to be proficient and young people leaving school are one of the groups that causes most concern. When we quiz employers about their workplace issues they tell us people are poor at oral communication, working with customers, elementary problem solving and working with one another. In short, what we might call ‘soft skills’ or ‘life skills’.

“Scottish Enterprise programmes are designed to meet the needs of employers, and most usually targeted at 16 to 23-year-olds. However, research shows that although remedial work can get a meaningful result at this stage, it requires a very large investment.

The question we should be asking is ‘where do you get the greatest financial return spent on education and training?’ and the answer is the early years – the very early years. With three and four-year-olds the rate of return is astronomical. As children get older, higher levels of investment are needed. By 20 and 21 years-of age, return is limited.

“Of course there is a role for employers, schools and training programmes to play their part in addressing soft skills. But the most significant omission in Scotland is what happens in early years.”

The conference, *Learning for Life: nurturing enthusiasm and confidence in children*, held in Dundee on 3 and 4 November, is held in association with Dundee City Council and supported by Scottish Enterprise. It focuses on what motivates children and young people’s learning and how positive learning experiences early on can last a lifetime.

It will consider the concept of lifelong learning in its very broadest sense, not only considering the opportunities that children have to learn skills at school, but also the important role of families and the wider community. Delegates will visit a number of services in Dundee, including an integrated community school that has forged links with the wider community, a project that aims to help parents improve their relationship with their young child in order to improve the child’s development and a project that uses football to introduce vulnerable young people to an alternative curriculum and re-ignite their enthusiasm for learning.

Bronwen Cohen, chief executive of Children in Scotland, said: “We need to equip children with the skills they need to be inquisitive, so that they grow up knowing that their mind can achieve results if only they have the confidence to explore.

“It is easy to assign this considerable challenge to the education system and there is no doubt that the school setting plays a considerable and crucial role. However, the education system as a whole cannot succeed in ensuring enjoyment and motivation in learning without commitment to the same from professionals in all sectors, working with all age groups, as well as parents and carers. There is scope for a very wide range of people to nurture enthusiasm for lifelong learning among children.”

John Lannon, Dundee City Council’s integration manager, who will host a visit to one of the city’s integrated community schools as part of the conference, said: “The term ‘life-long learning’ means inspiring a commitment to learning by providing children with continuous opportunities to learn – when they are at school, at home with their family and socialising with their friends”.

The local services and projects taking part in this year’s conference include:

Kick It Kick Off - Run by a partnership incorporating representatives from education, social work, Dundee Football Club and Tayside Police. It aims to divert vulnerable children and young people between the ages of eight and 16 from offending and misusing drugs.

The Shore – Offers a diverse range of opportunities in partnership with young people. Aims to reduce experiences of exclusion and minimise risk-taking behaviour.

Integrated community school – delivers a range of services to children and young people within the school context.

Video interactive guidance – A technique that uses video to help parents understand and promote their children’s

educational and developmental needs. The learning is personalised and takes place in the family home.

Peer education – Research suggests that children may trust and value their peers more as information providers than adults.

Young people in S4 are trained to work as peer educators for pupils in P7.

Xplore – Provides a range of learning, leisure and social activities to address issues of disengagement, exclusion and social isolation.

Kirkton nursery school and family resource centre – provide a wide range of programmes for pre-school children and their families.

Laurelbank family resource centre – Run by children 1st to help vulnerable children and their families by providing intensive therapeutic, individual and family support to prevent abuse and neglect.

Further information on all projects is available on request

Notes for editors:

- **Children in Scotland** is Scotland's national children's agency, bringing together voluntary, statutory and professional organisations and individuals to improve the lives of Scotland's children and their families.
- ***Learning for Life: nurturing enthusiasm and confidence in children*** will be held at the Hilton Hotel, Dundee on 3 and 4 November.
- Contact Nicola Pay on 0131 2222419 or 0131 2288484