



Media release - 28 February 2007

10,000 children speaking a language in addition to English is cause for celebration

News that Scotland has 10,000 bilingual or multilingual children, with 137 languages others than English being spoken should be cause for celebration.

Children in Scotland welcomes the call for increased support for language support services, but warns that an approach that sees multilingualism in terms of language deficit rather than valuing linguistic diversity could be damaging.

In the forthcoming *Children in Europe* magazine, early childhood professionals call for a children to be brought up in a learning environment where multilingualism is considered the norm. Speakers at a conference in Edinburgh on 1 June will argue that more training and support should be provided for teachers, especially those working with young children, to ensure learning of more than one language, whatever it be, is valued.

Bronwen Cohen, chief executive of Children in Scotland said:

“Children, perceive at an early age that languages are valued differently and that hierarchies between languages and the people that speak them exist. A learning environment that fails to acknowledge and value a child’s so-called first language can lead them to feel that their ability to speak more than one language is a disadvantage rather than an advantage.”

“At a time when there are moves in England to rethink the traditional, economically valued languages such as French and German to include learning of Arabic, Mandarin and Urdu, Scotland should be building on the wealth of languages present in our communities to enable all children to become more aware of and proficient in languages other than English.

“To consciously promote and encourage language skill development, professionals, especially those working in the early years need to know more about how children acquire and develop language.”

Notes for editors:

- **Children in Scotland**

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.

- **Children in Europe**

“In my own words: services for children in a multilingual society”, *Children in Europe* magazine issue 12, is published on 12 March 2007.

Children in Europe is a joint publication by a network of magazines in 11 languages across Europe. The focus is on services for and work with children from birth-to-ten and their families. The English language issue of the magazine is published by Children in Scotland simultaneously in eight languages twice a year, in March and September.

www.childrenineurope.org

An international conference with the same title will be held in Edinburgh on 1 June. A pre-conference seminar with Australian early years specialist Dr Priscilla Clarke will be held on 31 May.

www.childreninScotland.org.uk/eur