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## **SNP promises minister for early years**

The Scottish National Party will introduce a minister for the early years if it becomes the largest single party at Holyrood following May's election.

The minister would be part of a new department for education and training in a proposed shake-up of the Scottish Executive's structure, SNP leader Alex Salmond told Children in Scotland.

In an interview published in the latest issue of *Children in Scotland* magazine, Salmond said: "We're trying to suggest a departmental structure that will ensure childcare and education and social work link up with each other. We're going down to six departments in total."

Deputy leader Nicola Sturgeon, also interviewed, highlighted the early years as a priority.

She said: "In the early days of the parliament there was some welcome progress on early years education, but that's an area where there has been a faltering and a need for renewed action."

The SNP's proposed revamp of the Scottish Executive would see the number of departments cut by a third, from nine to six.

Three core departments – Finance and Sustainable Growth, Health and Wellbeing (both headed up by cabinet secretaries) and Education and Skills – would drive forward government policy in these areas.

Sturgeon also highlights some aspects of education policy in the interview. "The new community schools concept was a very good one," she said. "That integration of services around a school campus is I think hugely important."

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Notes for editors:

- Also in the February edition of Children in Scotland: a personal insight in to the impact custody can have on young offenders, by former prison governor Andrew Coyle; and Lord James Clyde on how 'youth conferencing', a new form of restorative justice being pioneered in Northern Ireland, could reap rewards for both victim and offender.
- 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.