

## SUBMISSION FROM CHILDREN IN SCOTLAND

We are a partnership of children's organisations, that are deeply committed to increasing and improving childcare and learning for all, from the early years through to young adulthood. We pursue this goal because we know it is an essential step in the route towards improving outcomes for all children and tackling the deprivation experienced by too many of our children and families. However, we also know that Scotland needs a strong economy if we are to fulfil our ambitions for children. The provision of good quality, affordable childcare and learning opportunities should form the bedrock of Scotland's employment and economic regeneration strategies. Not least to enable the skills and talents of so many parents to flourish.

Our organisations have specific areas of expertise. Nevertheless, for this purpose, we are united in wanting to support both the Scottish Government and political leaders across the spectrum, to achieve a transformation in Scotland's childcare provision. We believe there is a sincere ambition to achieve transformation rather than a tinkering around of some policies and resources.

While not comprehensive, we propose that the Scottish Government focuses on three strategic themes and we have suggested specific actions within these themes:

### **1. Integrating the Policy Frameworks, which address childcare and learning**

We believe that childcare services are cross cutting and can assist in meeting a number of the Scottish Government's national outcomes. High quality early education and care that is affordable to parents enables families to balance their caring responsibilities with employment and training. High quality childcare is also an investment in children's futures as it supports educational achievement and helps narrow the gap in inequalities. Childcare is necessary to meeting a range of Scottish Government outcomes across a number of social and economic strategies including Child Poverty Strategy, Early Years Framework, National Play Strategy, Economic Strategy and Employability Strategy.

You will find responsibilities and resources, which have some impact on childcare and learning in every area of Government and ministerial portfolio. This duplication, lack of coherence, mixed and confused objectives is seen across Scottish Government and replicated at Community Planning Partnership level. Scottish Government must lead by example and bring all relevant policies under one Minister, including economic regeneration and employment issues. While we appreciate that there is a Ministerial role specifically for children and young people, we see a need for this role to be expanded to address the above issues.

The welcome announcement by the First Minister that he has asked the Council of Economic Advisers to review childcare costs must be complemented by organisations involved in planning and delivering child care and learning, together with parents.

### **2. Affordability**

You cannot separate cost from quality. There is general agreement that children need good quality services in order to thrive. This is important from birth to three year olds and other stages including out of school services. Investment in these services is paid back many

times over if they are quality services. This comes at a price and this must either be born by the user of the service or through effective subsidy. We know from the existing system that expecting the user of the service to bear the cost has its problems. It is low paid women who suffer most as working tax credit only covers up to 70% of the cost and childcare vouchers will have an adverse effect on their tax credits. It would be more effective if the cost was subsidised to the suppliers of services.

Policy needs to consider in particular how best to support families living on low incomes. Policy needs to consider the extent to which the cost of childcare can be reduced to parents (especially mothers), as this cost currently represents a barrier to employment and/or increasing hours worked. These families struggle to access childcare the most, yet could benefit the most from it. Lone parents, in particular, struggle to access suitable childcare to re-enter education, training and employment. Lone parents and their children are at a heightened risk of poverty, and childcare can often be what makes the difference in being able to find routes out of poverty. At a time when lone parents are facing compulsory measures to return to work (and lack of suitable childcare as a reason for not accepting a job offer has been moved from regulation to guidance), solving the particular childcare problems that face lone parents is crucial.

High childcare costs have a direct impact on child poverty levels. Ensuring childcare does not act as a barrier to parents moving into work or increasing their hours worked is crucial, therefore reducing child poverty.

### **3. Quality**

#### **Low paid women supporting low paid women**

Women, particularly those on low pay, do not have high expectations of having affordable childcare services to hand. They mix and match between family and friends and top up with childcare services if they are available.

Women still provide the majority of childcare. This patchy use of their services leaves them with a limited income in mainly part time work. Despite some minor changes over the years it is women who still take responsibility for using childcare and for providing childcare.

The childcare workforce tends to be predominantly female and lowly paid. A large proportion of childcare workers have children themselves and rely on tax credits and other subsidies to fund their own childcare. We support an expansion of provision, but this should not be at the expense of the workforce. While childcare remains a low status occupation with poor terms and conditions, it will be difficult to drive up quality, reduce staff turnover and encourage gender equality. Improving the status of the workforce goes hand in hand with improving outcomes for children.

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