

Early childhood education and care: Developing a fully integrated early years system ^[1]

A special report (No.2: September 2011)

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AVAILABILITY

Report in pdf ^[2]

Excerpts from the report:

This special report clarifies the complex education and care divisions for children under 5 in Scotland, and provides practical recommendations for making integrated early years services a reality so that Scotland's Early Childhood Education and Care provision can match the best in Europe.

Currently Scotland's early years services lag far behind the best in Europe. The European Commission's Communication on Early Childhood Education and Care sets out what EU countries should be doing to support young children and their families in order to meet European poverty and employment targets. Scotland has much to do and is still to meet targets for providing an entitlement for full day care for Early Childhood Education and Care set in Barcelona in 2002.

High quality investment in Early Childhood Education and Care from birth is essential to ensure that the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is implemented for young children. The 2005 UN special early years report *Implementing child rights in early childhood urged countries to recognise young children's right to have government* investment in education, to construct high-quality, developmentally appropriate and culturally relevant programmes and services and to support the central features of positive child rearing and early childhood development. The UN Committee emphasised that it saw the right to education as beginning at birth and closely linked to young children's right to benefit from a standard of living adequate for healthy child development (Article 27).

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Why Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)?

'Early Childhood Education and Care' is the terminology used at European level to describe services that broadly combine education and care in one seamless experience for young children and their families. It is the subject of a European Commission Communication published in February 2011, which offers an important policy framework for all EU countries.

Some countries make such integrated provision universally available. Others, including Scotland and the UK, divide early years provision by making unhelpful distinctions between 'education' (often termed pre-school) and 'childcare'. This divide is manifest in myriad ways: through different mechanisms for funding, access, staffing, guidance, pay and conditions.

Early education, like primary school, is seen as a public good - an entitlement - whilst childcare tends to be treated as a commodity for parents to purchase. This conceptual divide is reflected in the funding and staffing of services, with the private sector mainly dependent on very high parental fees. This contributes directly to inequalities in access to services and high levels of child poverty by pricing many families out of the market and discouraging employment when there is little net financial benefit after paying for childcare. Children under 5 account for nearly one-half of all children and young people in poverty in Scotland because, prior to starting primary school, costly childcare makes work a difficult option.

While acknowledging that there are a range of other important supports and services for young children and their families, we advocate that a coherent, integrated core of universal services is essential. Universal services also allow for the appropriate, efficient use of more varied and specialised provision for those young children and families that require extra support.

Support for young children and families can encompass a range of services, including, parent-run play and toddler groups or drop-in community health clinics, and can be linked to health and social work services. Nevertheless, this report focuses on the varied education and care services provided by teachers and early years workers, and calls for services to offer a holistic approach to make real the aspirations of Getting it Right for Every Child (GIREFC).

Region: Europe ^[3]

Tags: integration ^[4]

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