

# Universal Entitlements: How investments in the early years should be informed by research evidence about universal approaches <sup>[1]</sup>

The early years: what practitioners and policy makers need to know, Briefing Paper 8

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**Source:** Children in Scotland

**Publication Date:** 1 Feb 2012

## AVAILABILITY

Briefing paper in pdf <sup>[2]</sup>

### Excerpts:

Universal support for babies and young children ends at around 6 weeks for most children in Scotland, when health visits to all parents cease, continuing only for those judged most in need and interrupted only by universal immunisations. Health and social care staff are the main providers of the limited support available during the period from birth to 3, until universal support for learning and early education begins the term after a child's third birthday, when all children become eligible for part-time, publicly funded early education provided by nurseries/pre-schools.

Therefore, between 8 weeks and around 40 months, there is no universal support for learning or health promotion provided in Scotland. Services are geared around responding to problems, rather than providing universal support with a preventative approach. This means some difficulties, for example in children's language development, might arise and reach a crisis before help is sought or provided. Earlier contact with a knowledgeable early years specialist might have prevented or mitigated the problem.

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Targeted services are often short-term, and based on a deficit model; one where families are defined by their failings. Sometimes they are linked with punitive approaches, such as the withdrawal of benefits if paid work isn't taken up, that work against the development of strong relationships between parents and professionals. As a result, families needing support can be overlooked, and others become mistrustful.

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Even when targeted approaches work for individual families, their success can come at the expense of increased social solidarity and integration. Targeting can perpetuate an 'us' and 'them' mentality. Public support for investment in high quality, universal services is most likely to come when everyone feels they have a stake in the investment, and if achieved, universal provision would help prevent the need for specialised, expensive targeting. Moreover, universal approaches responding to perceived mainstream needs, such as providing care to enable parents' employment or supporting children's learning and development, can be more appealing to traditionally marginalised groups.

**Region:** Europe <sup>[3]</sup>

**Tags:** children's rights <sup>[4]</sup>

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### Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/research-policy-practice/12/07/universal-entitlements-how-investments-early-years-should> <sup>[2]</sup>

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