

New group to be established to help reform childcare in Scotland

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EXCERPTS

The Childcare Alliance has welcomed the latest plans for the creation of a new group to lead a childcare reform in Scotland.

Speaking at Children in Scotland's annual conference on Wednesday 4 November, Minister for Children and Young People, Aileen Campbell revealed the plans for the new Early Learning and Childcare Strategic Forum, following the the publication of a report by the Commission for Childcare Reform, published in June 2015.

Commenting on the Commission for Childcare Reform's report on early learning and childcare in Scotland, Ms Campbell said: "The early years are a crucial time in a child's life and evidence has shown access that quality early learning and childcare helps improve educational outcomes. It can also have wider benefits for a family by allowing parents and carers to return to work, education or training.

"That is why this Government has gone further than any other UK administration in its plans to expand funded early learning and childcare, by committing to 1,140 hours per year by the end of the next Parliament.

"We want to develop a high-quality, flexible system of early learning and childcare that is affordable and accessible for all."

The announcement follows the publication of a document in June this year, detailing recommendations from the Commission for Childcare Reform on how best childcare provisions should be organised, delivered and paid for in Scotland.

The Commission for Childcare Reform made several recommendations, including:

- Families should have access to up to 50 hours of free or subsidised childcare a week, throughout the year;
- The net cost to parents of childcare should take into account income, to ensure it is affordable for all families, with priority given to smoothing cost burdens for all families and supporting those families who live in or near poverty;
- A child account should be established for each child, to provide a transparent route through which all money (public or private) that is used to pay for, or subsidise, childcare is channelled to providers;
- The Scottish Government, working with the UK Government, local authorities and providers, should commission a fundamental review of all aspects of childcare funding.

Ms Campbell continued: "I announced the establishment of a new Early Learning and Childcare Strategic Forum to help us develop these plans and ensure they are realistic, achievable, sustainable and most importantly, are high-quality at their core. This was one of the recommendations from the Commission and the forum will include representatives from the private, public and third sectors with parents also represented.

"I'm pleased the Commission recognised our commitment to improving access to flexible, high-quality early learning and childcare. They also shared our belief that more powers over tax, benefits and welfare spending should be devolved to Scotland.

"The Commission suggests that some of their recommendations would take between five and ten years to implement. We too are mindful that our expansion should be done sustainably to ensure there is capacity both in local authority infrastructure and in the early years workforce. We have also been clear that we will not sacrifice quality to implement the expansion.

"The report's recommendations were wide ranging and detailed and will provide a useful starting point for the new group in considering how we continue our preparations for our ambitious plans."

The Childcare Alliance established the Commission for Childcare Reform in Spring 2014 to investigate how childcare should be provided and paid for to suit children and their families in Scotland.

Chief executive of Children in Scotland and chair of the Childcare Alliance, Jackie Brock, welcomed the plans to create a new group to review the current childcare system in Scotland. She said: Ms Brock said: "We welcome this new group and look forward to reporting on

the progress of the recommendations that are in the Commission's report, and which make up the group's remit.

"Reforming childcare is a key route into supporting vulnerable children and their families and ensuring that profound inequalities are addressed. Maintaining the status quo is not an option.

"We look forward to more detailed proposals from the Scottish Government."

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