

**Professionalising Playwork Conference, Cumbernauld, Glasgow  
19<sup>th</sup> February 2008**

**Minister for Children & Early Years, Adam Ingram**

## **SPEAKING NOTE**

### **Introduction**

I would like to start by thanking Skills Active and the Playwork Education and Training Council Scotland for inviting me to address the conference today. It gives me the opportunity to outline some of the key objectives for this government and the contribution Play and Playworkers can make to our Skills Strategy and Early Years Strategy.

From what I saw and heard when I arrived, the morning session has stimulated lots of discussion and enthusiasm. I hope that I can maintain that feeling for you this afternoon.

I hope that all of us here today have at least one fond memory of when we were kids and played with our friends.

Perhaps, like me, it was during the sunny, summer school holidays when you played outside all day, every day. Only popping into the house for something to eat and drink, and desperate to get back out the door in case you were missing out on the fun.

And I'm sure I'm not alone when I think back and remember some of the falls, the scrapes and the near misses I had from jumping burns and climbing trees.

As an adult today, the thought of children taking these risks can fill us with fear, but as a kid I can remember how we laughed and joked about our adventures without realising we were learning valuable lessons for later life.

The importance of play is something we should not underestimate and I will say some more about this later on. But first I would like to focus on the importance of the people delivering playwork.

This is an exciting time to be involved in working with children and young people. The support we give to children through play has the potential to make an important contribution to the kind of country this Government wants Scotland to be. One which is:

wealthier and fairer,  
healthier,  
safer and stronger,  
smarter,  
and greener.

As the needs of children and their families continues to change and become more complex, I believe it will be impossible to deliver the types of services we want for our children, if we do not invest in the skills and career opportunities of the workforce.

## **Skills Strategy**

The support we give to the workforce will go a long way to delivering our ambitions in our lifelong skills strategy – “Skills for Scotland”.

Investing in our people’s skills, ensuring that skills contribute as much as possible to sustainable economic growth, is central to unlocking our potential as a nation.

The skills strategy focuses on 3 themes:

- Individual Development – placing the individual at the centre of learning and skills development
- Economic Pull – increasing demand for skills and improving the utilisation of skills
- and, Cohesive Structures – making it easier for people to access the learning, training and development they need

The Skills Strategy is a framework for Government to work with people, communities, our institutions and our employers in achieving these aims.

We need employers that demand, value and make best use of their workforce's skills and we need to ensure that everyone can see clear and tangible benefits from investing in their own development and that of their workforce.

I am delighted therefore, to see so many employers and managers from across the public, private and voluntary sector represented here today. Along with training providers and SQA. There is clearly a great deal of interest and support for Playwork in Scotland.

## **Registration**

Today's conference and workshops show the growing range of resources now available to help the Play workforce gain appropriate qualifications.

Networking, sharing your experiences and access to these resources are all part of a more professional approach being taken by playworkers.

But of course our sector has been professionalising for a number of years now as the early years and childcare workforce undergoes a period of rapid change.

Registration with the Social Services Council has been a key driver of that change and I am pleased that so many of you - over 6000 so far - have grasped the opportunity to register with the Council. This again demonstrates your professionalism, in a time when the profile of early years and childcare services has never been higher.

## **Early Years**

Playworkers work with a broad age range of children. I believe some of their most important work happens with our youngest children. The evidence is mounting about the key influence that a child's early years have on outcomes later in life.

More than ever before, we can trace some of our current social problems – violence, poor physical and mental health, and too many children not achieving their potential – to experiences in early years.

Play has a big part to play at this stage in life. We all know that through play, children develop their social skills and build up the confidence they need to get involved in activities, try new things and learn about themselves and the world around them.

Play supports emotional and physical development and teaches children about relating to each other and it provides an opportunity to learn about risk. Developing these skills early on in life puts young people on a positive path and increases their ability and opportunity to fulfill their potential in later life

Delivering on early years is therefore at the forefront of our initial priorities, which is why we have announced the development of a long-term early years strategy, to be published this year.

As a first step we will be looking at play within the broader context of early years policy and we will be engaging with the play sector as part of the development of the early years strategy.

It is important to point out that we will not be limiting our work on play to the early years but the strategy does provide us with an opportunity to make early progress.

I want to launch an initial paper around Easter time, setting out the themes, scope and principles, and to encourage lots of stakeholder engagement to help us achieve a final version of the strategy this autumn.

The recently established Scottish Play Commission is also examining play in Scotland and gathering a wide range of views from across the country.

I was kindly invited to officially launch the Commission in November and I look forward to seeing their report and recommendations over the coming months.

### **Outcome agreements**

A new relationship now exists between local and national government. The Concordat, signed by the Scottish Government and CoSLA in November last year, signals a greater focus on shared outcomes. We must work together across the public, private and voluntary sectors if we are to deliver for Scotland's children.

The 15 national outcomes and 45 indicators will provide the national context.

The development of Outcome Agreements in each local authority area will provide the local context.

Play has strong networks and a strong voice in Scotland. Through Skills Active, Play Scotland, the Scottish Pre-school Play Association, the Scottish Out of School Care Network, Barnardos – the list goes on - you can be assured the views of the sector are being communicated to both central and local government.

## **Conclusion**

Of course Play is not unique to Scotland. I was recently invited to attend the International Play Association conference in Hong Kong. As appealing as it sounds, unfortunately I wasn't able to attend.

This conference takes place every three years and brings countries from across the world together. Play Scotland and Skills Active flew the flag for Scotland at the conference and I was delighted to hear that a Scottish candidate, Theresa Casey was voted in as World President of IPA International.

Recognition again of just how much progress the sector has already made.

Play has come a long way in Scotland and I am sure it will continue to progress with such an able and enthusiastic workforce.

I hope you enjoy the workshops and the rest of your afternoon.

**END**

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