

SPEECH

MINISTER FOR CHILDREN AND EARLY YEARS

**EVENT NAME: WORKING IT OUT: DEVELOPING THE CHILDREN'S SECTOR
WORKFORCE: HILTON EDINBURGH AIRPORT**

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Good morning and thank you to Children in Scotland for giving me the opportunity to speak at today's event on developing the children's sector workforce. The title of today's event, 'Working It Out', is an apt one, given the challenges we face in ensuring the long-term and sustainable development of that workforce. I know there are people here today from a wide range of backgrounds and disciplines. But together, you share an interest, not only in developing the workforce, but ultimately, that which is most important, the development of the child.

It is almost one year to the day since the new Scottish Government came into office. Since I was appointed as Minister for Children and Early Years, I have been privileged to find out more about the varied contributions you make to developing the workforce. As a government, we have set out a strategic framework and begun to develop policies, which will have a strong bearing on what the children's sector workforce will need to deliver in the future. Today is an opportunity to discuss ideas on how that workforce can develop to meet current and future needs of Scotland's children, so that they can get the best possible start in life.

Scottish Government Purpose, Strategic Priorities and Objectives

So what are the Government's priorities for the future of Scotland and Scotland's children? And what contribution can the children's sector workforce make to this? The Scottish Government's central purpose, as set out in the Economic Strategy, is to focus Government and public services on creating a more successful country, with opportunities for all to flourish, through increasing sustainable economic growth. But we do not see sustainable economic growth solely as meaning building a rich economy – it also means building a rich and responsible society.

This core purpose of government is supported by 5 Strategic Priorities. These priorities include Learning, Skills and Well-Being, meaning that not only must we give children a strong start in life, we must equip them with the skills to succeed, and the physical and mental health required to maximise their potential.

We have also set out Equity as another Strategic Priority. That means providing opportunities – and incentives – for all to contribute to Scotland's sustainable economic growth.

The core purpose of government is also supported by five strategic objectives around which our efforts will be focussed – to make Scotland wealthier and fairer, smarter, healthier, safer & stronger and greener. In turn, these are supported by fifteen national outcomes which describe in more detail what the government wants to achieve over a ten year period. For example, we will :

- improve the life chances for children, young people and families at risk;
- ensure our young people achieve the four capacities set out in the *Curriculum for Excellence* – namely that they are successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens;
- and tackle the significant inequalities in Scottish society

The children's sector workforce will contribute to all the strategic priorities and objectives and most, if not all, of the national outcomes.

Early Years and Early Intervention Framework

I referred to improving life chances and addressing inequalities in society. These are two of the key aims of the joint policy statement on Early Years and Early Intervention launched last month by the First Minister and Councillor Isabel Hutton of COSLA; a policy statement which signals the new relationship between central and local government set out in the joint Concordat signed last November.

Despite our egalitarian tradition in Scotland, the harsh truth is that there are divisions in this country which mean that many young people in Scotland have far better opportunities to thrive than others.

It is startling how experiences during a child's early years can have a dramatic impact on their chances in life. Inequalities are quick to take effect and, by the age of three, a disadvantaged child's development can be up to a year behind that of their peers.

Disadvantaged people can also expect to die younger – a young man growing up in Glasgow's east end can expect to die 15 years younger than his counterpart in Bearsden.

The link between early years' experiences and our current social ills – violence, poor physical and mental health, low-achievement – is becoming ever clearer.

Poverty, neglect, poor nutrition, domestic violence, a lack of positive role models or economic opportunities and poor experiences in school all have an effect. Taken in isolation, any one of these could harm chances in later life. Taken together, the effects can be devastating, not just for the individual, but for the nation as a whole.

If we are to build a Scotland that is healthier, safer and smarter, with confident individuals, strong communities and a thriving economy, we must strengthen the positives as well as addressing disadvantage. We can do that by investing in our greatest asset - our people.

However, we know that addressing the gap between the haves and the have-nots will not be simple. There is a clear sense that creating real change, fulfilling the Government's purpose and the national outcomes, cannot be achieved by a 'business as usual' approach and that Transformational Change is needed. We believe that this Transformational Change will come through a focus on early years and early intervention.

This focus will require taking action to identify those at risk of not achieving the same outcomes as others; taking action to prevent the risk materialising; making sustained and effective interventions in cases where risks have materialised; and shifting the emphasis from service provision as the vehicle for delivery of outcomes, to building the capacity of individuals, families and communities to secure outcomes. Working with people in this way, empowering individuals and communities to do things for themselves and to have a sense of control and responsibility can also help public services to play their part in promoting greater wellbeing in Scottish society.

Early Years Workforce

For the workforce, the Early Years and Early Intervention framework will require maintaining and improving the quality of services through training, qualifications and developing leadership. For example, skills in engaging with families, especially those with higher needs, will need to be developed.

With that in mind, ‘Developing A Suitable Workforce to Support The Framework’ has been identified as one of the four themes in taking the Framework forward. More details of this will be published in the autumn.

In the Government's Skills Strategy, we have already recognised the contribution of the early years and childcare workforce in developing children and their skills. We also recognise how important it will be to equip managers with the skills and confidence to act as leaders and key contributors in the complex world of children's services. We are therefore introducing a new SCQF Level 9 qualification for leaders in early years services.

New Roles

The Early Years Framework will also mean developing new roles and structures within the workforce to deliver a more people-centred service that is based on working alongside people and is not constrained by service boundaries.

The policy statement on the Framework points to examining the use of such roles as key workers, family care workers, as well as multi-disciplinary structures within early years services. It also points to the examination of pedagogue roles, which is a key focus of today's event.

Pedagogues are perhaps more familiar to our European neighbours and are not restricted to early years settings. They can work in schools, residential care, family support and youth work, disability services and in some cases in support for older people. Some of the speakers later today will be talking about their experiences of the role in Scandinavia. In the publication accompanying today's conference, Bronwen Cohen has explored the potential benefits of introducing a similar role to the children's sector in Scotland and I know that will specifically be addressed in one of this morning's parallel sessions. I will be interested to hear about a range of views on that type of role and how it could work in Scotland.

Other Policy Areas and Sectors

Early Years and Early Intervention is of course not the only policy area with relevance to those who work with children. We are committed to the "Getting It Right for Every Child" approach, the overarching framework within which public agencies work to build solutions with and around children and families. As a Government we are committed to reducing health inequalities in Scotland and my colleague, the Minister for Public Health has been chairing a Ministerial Task Force to address this. The Curriculum for Excellence seeks to address the development of the whole person. I know that contributors to today's events are considering the workforce implications of all these policy strands in all the relevant sectors.

Listening

We must take time to ensure that the implications of these policy agendas for the workforce are properly considered and that we encourage debate and listen to people's views. So we are using 2008 to take a look at the bigger picture.

I am therefore glad that the Scottish Government are supporting this conference, as we are committed to facilitating discussion about the long term, sustainable development of the children's sector workforce. As part of this, and as part of our commitment to developing the sector, we need to explore new, big ideas – to be frightened of nothing. I am therefore delighted that Children In Scotland are prepared to champion that debate and I would encourage you to make your views known today.

Conclusion

So looking forward, the future development of the children's sector workforce faces a number of challenges. As well as the challenges of making effective early intervention a reality, we must meet the increasing expectations of service users, personalise services to meet complex needs and create a workforce with the right skills and of the right size, set against the issues of changing demography. Today is an early opportunity to encourage debate and generate ideas and that process will continue. Everyone here has an important role to play. Only by working together will we ensure our workforce is equipped to meet the challenges of the future.

Word Count: 1650 words/ 13 minutes (at 125 words per minute)

