

Growing Up in Scotland Annual Event 10 May 2012

Ministerial Address

Aileen Campbell, MSP, Minister of Children and Young People

Thank you very much Shirley [Shirley Laing, conference chair], and thank you to the organisers for inviting me here today. It is really great to see so many of you in this splendid building and good to see some very young members in the audience as well, it is really nice to see. I am sure you are all eager as well to have further discussions at the breakout sessions about the latest findings in this study.

Growing Up in Scotland is an important study as it provides us with valuable, uniquely Scottish, evidence that will contribute to our understanding of what makes the best start in life, how to achieve this for our children, and to demonstrate the progress that we have made. We know many of you here today already use the findings in your work and we hope you will continue to do this. This is why we have committed further funding to the study to continue to follow up the children and their families over the coming years.

The Scottish Government is very clear, we want our children to have the best start in life and we want Scotland to be the best place for children to grow up. In order to fulfill this ambition we need all of you here today, from teachers, early years and health practitioners, to local policy makers and the voluntary sector. And not just in your capacity as professionals, but also as parents and as members of the communities in which our children grow up.

In 2010 the Scottish Government published our strategy for tackling obesity. The Route Map made it very clear that focusing on the early years was a critical step in helping us achieve our aims.

The findings from the GUS report on 'Overweight and obesity and activity' underline the pressing need to establish life-long healthy habits in our children.

In January last year, the *Improving Maternal and Infant nutrition: A framework for Action* was published. It supports NHS boards, local authorities and others to improve the nutrition of pregnant women, babies, and young children. It is the first framework which looks at the nutrition of mothers before and during pregnancy. Research evidence shows the importance of maternal nutrition before and during pregnancy, and the impact of maternal obesity on the immediate and long term health of the mother and baby.

Some of the action points identified in the Route Map also focus on making sure schools set an example as health promoting environments. As part of the action plan, we will build on the work to encourage the uptake of a balanced and nutritious school meal and at the same reinforce the messages for parents and for teachers about the content of school lunchboxes. Schools can equip children and young people with the skills to choose healthy snacks and raise the awareness of healthy weight through the *Curriculum for Excellence*, which has health and wellbeing as one of its core themes.

But we have to take our message beyond the school gates and into our homes, the workplaces and into the communities. If we were to successfully tackle obesity then we need to focus on changing our culture and the environment in which we live to one that promotes and encourages healthy options. In these difficult financial times, these options can often be the most cost effective as well. But there is undoubtedly a long long way to go.

As said, health and wellbeing forms an important part of the *Curriculum for Excellence*, the most important and exciting reform of our education system in a generation.

The *Curriculum for Excellence* aims to help learners develop the knowledge, and skills and attributes they will need if they are to flourish in life, learning and in work, now and in the future. Because we are ambitious and aspirational for our children we want them to be successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors, and responsible citizens.

Curriculum for Excellence develops understanding and makes links between knowledge in one subject area and another, helping children and young people understand the world around them. It develops skills so that children and young people can tackle challenging problems, think for themselves, make sound judgements, challenge, enquire and find solutions. It recognises that learning takes place both in and outwith our schools.

Parents and carers are key to the successful implementation of *Curriculum for Excellence*.

Strong parental involvement is built on good communication and engagement and we are committed to ensuring that parents receive information about *Curriculum for Excellence* to enable them to support their children's learning effectively. We are making changes to the information that parents receive from school known as the school handbook, to provide opportunities for parents to be far more involved with their child's school and their child's learning. This will be based on what parents have told us on what they need and what they want.

We will continue working closely with the *National Parent Forum of Scotland* to see how we can improve parental involvement at school, as well as in local areas and at a national level. We want a partnership with parents which respects the vital role they have in their children's education, and importantly listens to those parents as well.

The foundation for learning is laid in the children's early years. The Education Scotland's national *Pre-Birth to Three guidance* aims to support those working with children in early years settings to nurture and develop the capacity of young children to learn from the very start. The early level of the Curriculum for Excellence builds on this foundation by providing the key principles for continuing the child's learning journey from age 3.

We know from a wealth of evidence, including GUS, that it is the early years where we can make the biggest difference for children and their families, and that high quality early learning and childcare provision has a vital role to play in laying the

foundations for the future of a child's learning. That is why this government is committed to increasing the range of flexible, affordable and high quality early learning and childcare provision.

The uptake of the pre-school entitlement is already almost universal at 99%, and through legislation we will be putting in place a minimum of 600 hours of free, flexible and family friendly early learning and childcare, up from the 475 hours currently available to all 3 and 4 years olds and looked after 2 year olds.

However, it is not about simply adding additional hours per week of pre-school provision under the current arrangements. It will be fundamentally about transforming the way in which early learning and childcare is delivered. We will work with local partners to deliver this increased offer of early learning and childcare in a way that will meet the needs of children and their families.

We also understand that education from the earliest point in a child's life is vital to their development and we recognise that children learn through simple, everyday interactions. Through the PlayTalkRead campaign we offer parents and carers free practical support and ideas on how to create the best foundations for children's learning, and encourage them to learn and have fun from day one.

However, we also recognise that play has an important role throughout childhood and we have shown our commitment to this through the £4 million investment in the *Go Play* fund, and its successor, *Go2Play*, which places greater emphasis on the provision of quality play spaces and play rangers and includes a further commitment to capacity building in the play sector through a further £3 million package over the next three years.

The GUS findings also show the involvement of grandparents. They help with homework, take the children out and make an important contribution to childcare around the school hours. It is good to see that the report shows that many grandparents support their grandchildren and their families in these ways, and we should value the role they play. And indeed, as the mother of a wee boy myself, I

certainly know through experience how important grannies and granddads are with helping with childcare.

The importance of grandparents and other carers is why we are supporting kinship carers and have done more than any other previous administration to address their needs. Through the Children's Services Bill we are determined to tackle the inconsistencies faced by kinship carers across the country and ensure they receive fair financial support for caring for some of Scotland's most vulnerable children.

The findings of the reports also reinforce the message that if we want the best for our children, we need to support parents, and this does not just mean the child's parents, mums and dads, but also others with a parenting role, including grandparents and kinship carers and others, because we know that it is what parents do that is more important than what they have or who they are.

That is why the National Parenting Strategy we are currently developing is for every parent. The Strategy will encourage agencies to work together to support parents and allow them to develop their parenting skills.

As some of you will know through your own involvement, a programme of engagement with parents has been taking place over the last couple of months. I have recently attended some of the discussions parents held and it was interesting to hear what different parents had to say about the support they would like for their important parenting role. We are looking to publish a report on what parents have told us this summer, which I am sure will be of interest to many of you here today.

This Government is also committed to driving forward the early years and early intervention and prevention agenda, across policy areas. As a Government we have set out a programme of ambitious reform. We have an early years policy which is based on a commitment to bring about transformational change in the way services to children and young people are delivered. We are developing an Early Years Change programme, which is led by the Early Years Task Force and supported by a

change fund of £270 million. The Early Years Task Force will consider how we prioritise and focus investment activity to achieve real change across the early years, family centres, early learning and play opportunities and many other areas that affect children and young people. They have now published a paper laying out the Vision and Priorities, and you will hear more about that, I think, as the conference goes on, particularly from Tam Baillie, who is down to speak later today.

However I am interested in hearing your views and I hope you will have fruitful discussions around the report findings in the breakout sessions which follow, and I am looking forward to reading about them. And I am really vexed that I can't be here to hear them in person.

So I really do want to say that we value your contribution and recognise the importance that you play in this agenda across all sectors and the important contribution that you will make when we take forward some of the key elements that we are working on, such as the parenting strategy and the children's legislation. This government is absolutely committed to supporting children and families and recognises that getting it right in the very early years is key. We will work with you to drive forward the early years agenda because together I do think we have an opportunity to create the kind of Scotland that we want to see our children grow up in and flourish in as well.

So thank you very much for inviting me here today. I look forward to hearing some of your thoughts and your views and look forward to working with you as we take forward a very inspirational agenda that will help children in Scotland, not only just now but also in the years and generations ahead.

Thank you very much.

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