

Briefing for Scottish Government Debate on the Expansion of Early Learning and Childcare Provision

29th September 2016

Key Points

- **To best support children and families, and help to close the attainment gap, attention must be paid to the nature of support provided via early learning and childcare, as well as the quantity of provision.**
- **Support needs to be available and properly resourced for those children and families facing multiple adversities.**
- **Intensive work with disadvantaged children and families in the early years should be viewed as part of a continuum of support for better attainment.**
- **Investment in the expansion of early learning and childcare should be carried out in such a way that there is support from the pre-birth period to P1 for the most disadvantaged children and families.**
- **A nurturing approach to early learning and childcare helps children to learn, thrive and ultimately achieve better educational outcomes**

Early learning and supporting better attainment – before the school gates

We welcome the Scottish Government's focus on the early years as part of moves to transform the lives of children in Scotland. We also welcome the focus on closing the educational attainment gap and, through our work with children and families, recognise the role that early learning and quality childcare plays in ensuring that the gap in attainment is not established in the early years.

Intensive work with disadvantaged children and families **needs to take place before children get to school**. This should be part of a continuum of support for better attainment, and in our experience early learning and childcare settings have a key role to play.

We welcome moves to expand the provision of early learning and childcare in Scotland, but believe we must also consider the best ways in which these additional hours can be

used to help disadvantaged children to achieve the best possible outcomes now and in later life.

The continuum of support for better attainment

Families facing multiple adversities are increasingly having to struggle financially to meet their basic needs, in addition to the significant issues such as substance misuse or family breakdown which lead them to require support. It is the children in these families who are more likely to do less well in school.

Nevertheless our experience of working with disadvantaged children and families shows that we can have the most positive impact in helping children to achieve better outcomes, in education and in all aspects of their lives, when support is available before the child starts school.

Barnardo's Scotland works with expectant and new mothers in the home on attachment based approaches. We currently work in nurseries directly with parents and children under 5 in a range of activities which promote healthy brain development and positive parent-child attachment. We also provide support and mentoring to the Early Years workforce in partnership with local authorities to support schools to take a nurturing approach to child development. We call this the **continuum of support for better attainment**. Adopting a nurturing approach across early learning and childcare should make a significant difference to children's attainment levels later in life.

It is crucial that the investment in the expansion of early learning and childcare is carried out in such a way that this continuum of support for the most disadvantaged children and families is a central part of the system.

Conclusion

We welcome the Government's commitment to expanding early learning and childcare provision. However we would like the nature of the support and quality of provision to be a key priority, as noted in a recent Guardian article on the Finnish education system:

"The main aim of early years education is not explicitly "education" in the formal sense but the promotion of the health and wellbeing of every child" ¹

The links between taking a nurturing, attachment based approach to child development and better educational attainment are inextricable. It is vital that investment in expanding early learning and childcare takes this into account and that the needs of the most disadvantaged children and families are addressed.

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¹ https://www.theguardian.com/education/2016/sep/20/grammar-schools-play-europe-top-education-system-finland-daycare?CMP=share_btn_fb