



The Scottish  
Government

# Early Years and Early Intervention

A joint Scottish Government and COSLA policy statement



COSLA

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# FOREWORD

We have always known the earliest years of life are crucial to a child's development. However, it is increasingly evident that it is in the first years of life that inequalities in health, education and employment opportunities are passed from one generation to another. The early years framework signals local and national government's joint commitment to break this cycle through prevention and early intervention. In short we aim to give every child in Scotland the best start in life.

The framework will mark a fundamental shift away from dealing with the symptoms of inequality – violence, poor physical and mental health, low achievement and attainment at school – and rebalances our focus towards identifying and managing the risks early in life that perpetuate inequality.

Improving outcomes and tackling entrenched inequality will not be achieved overnight. We recognise that we cannot simply stop dealing with social problems that are with us now. This is why we are jointly committed to develop for the long term a strategic approach to early years. The benefits of early intervention can only be realised by prioritising resources across local government, the health service and the entire public sector. However, the transition to prioritising early years and early intervention will be managed carefully to ensure it is deliverable and affordable.

A child's world in the early years of life is largely defined by the family. We know that a child brought up in a stable and nurtured environment is better placed to succeed in life, than a child from a less secure background. We therefore believe that the biggest gains in improved outcomes and reduced inequality will come from supporting parents – to help them help themselves – and by creating communities which are positive places to grow up.

The approach behind *Getting it Right for Every Child* supports this intention and indeed the whole early years framework. We will continue to develop services which are integrated across the public sector and centred around the needs of children and families.

This statement sets out our joint vision for the early years framework. In keeping with its importance the framework will be developed jointly and will be the responsibility of both local and national Government.



*“This framework represents the first joint policy development between national and local government since the new relationship was established by the Concordat in November 2007 and illustrates our determination to work together for the benefit of Scotland.*

*Early intervention is a hallmark of this Government’s approach to improving the lives of Scots and delivering the better Scotland that we all want to see. Early intervention has relevance across a wide range of social policy, and children and young people will be a natural focus of early intervention work.*

*The early years framework will be a central element of our approach to early intervention, not least because the early part of a child’s life is a key opportunity to build resilience and to seek to prevent the appearance of problems later in life.”*

Adam Ingram,  
Minister for Children and Early Years



*“There is a growing consensus that early intervention is the way forward for tackling Scotland’s long standing social problems. We have been deliberately ambitious in our aspirations for the early years framework, for we believe that inequality in Scotland is such that we need to be bold. However, we are also realistic about what can be achieved, especially in the short term. This is because even though it is common sense to do everything possible to prevent problems before they occur, we can’t simply stop dealing with the problems that are with us today.*

*This is the challenge which as partners, local and national Government have agreed to address in the long term. We are jointly committed to early intervention and the early years, and I believe that together we can deliver real improvements to the lives of Scotland’s children.”*

Councillor Isabel Hutton,  
COSLA Spokesperson on Education, Children & Young People



# INTRODUCTION

The Scottish Government's Purpose is to create a more successful country, with opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish, through increasing sustainable economic growth.

Our people are our greatest asset and we believe that investment in early years and early intervention can contribute to both economic and social objectives. Giving children the best start in life and improving the life chances of children, young people and families at risk will make a major contribution to delivering the solidarity and cohesion that we want to see in Scottish society.

This can only be achieved if we change the way we do business. A major part of that change, alongside the new relationship between national and local government, will be to focus on early years and early intervention policy.

The early years are a period of rapid development and can have a major influence on the rest of a person's life. The early years provide the first and best opportunity to set children off on the right trajectory and reduce the need for later interventions that are more costly in both financial and social terms.

Delivering a policy of early intervention will mean fundamental changes in the way that policymakers and practitioners, both at national and local level, think and act. We will move away from a focus on 'picking up the pieces' once something has happened, towards prevention, becoming better at early identification of those individuals who are at risk and taking steps to address that risk. Early intervention must start in the early years, where it is most effective, but we must also look for opportunities to deliver early intervention through a broader range of policies. This reflects the fact that, for some people, the intervention will need to be sustained beyond the early years and for others, risks will only become apparent at a later stage.

Our focus on early years and early intervention will mean a shift of resources from dealing with past failure to addressing the root causes of our current social problems, including underlying causes such as poverty and inequalities. This is a long term approach and many of the benefits will only become apparent over the course of a generation. We need to start investing now in order to change outcomes for the better for all Scotland's people and into the long term.

# 1. THE PURPOSE OF GOVERNMENT

The Scottish budget document, published in November 2007, defines a central purpose of *focusing Government and public services on creating a more successful country, with opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish, through increasing sustainable economic growth*. Sustainable economic growth does not just mean building up a rich economy – it will also mean building up a rich and responsible society.

The new Government Economic Strategy is central to the delivery of our overall Purpose. The delivery of the government's Purpose will be supported by five strategic objectives – to make Scotland wealthier & fairer, smarter, healthier, safer & stronger and greener. These, in turn, are supported by fifteen national outcomes which describe in more detail what the government wants to achieve over a ten year period. Early years and early intervention will contribute to all five strategic objectives and most, if not all, of the national outcomes.

Within the Government Economic Strategy five strategic priorities have been identified as being critical to economic growth. These are learning, skills & wellbeing; a supportive business environment; infrastructure development and place; effective government; and equity. The contribution of early years and early intervention is most readily identifiable through the learning, skills and wellbeing strand, and they will be major contributors to achieving equity.

The Government Economic Strategy sets out targets for improving solidarity and cohesion. These are: to increase overall income and the proportion of income earned by the three lowest income deciles as a group by 2017; and to narrow the gap in participation between Scotland's best and worst performing regions by 2017. Again, we believe that early years and early intervention will be critical to achieving these objectives.

## **Concordat**

The concordat between the Scottish Government and local government, published on 14 November 2007, set out the terms of a new relationship based on mutual respect and partnership.

This new relationship is represented by a package of measures, that includes an agreement to work together to develop policy. While the Scottish Government must set the direction of policy and the overarching outcomes, under the terms

of the new relationship it will stand back from micro-managing service delivery, thus reducing bureaucracy and freeing up local authorities and their partners to meet the varying local needs and circumstances across Scotland.

The early years framework is one of the first examples of joint policy development between local and national government, and will be fully consistent with the underlying principles of the new relationship.

## **Delivering Transformational Change**

There is a clear sense that the Purpose and the national outcomes cannot be fulfilled through a 'business as usual' approach and that transformational change is needed. We believe that transformational change will come through a focus on early years and early intervention, which sets high ambitions for all, while ensuring early identification of risks to those ambitions not being achieved and taking action to address those risks.

A number of common themes are emerging that underpin a wide range of current activity to improve outcomes for Scotland's people. These include:

- linking strategy and policy clearly to the national performance framework
- working more closely with delivery partners on strategy and action
- positive opportunities, empowerment and capacity building
- focus on prevention, risk identification and early intervention
- opportunities for action at individual, environmental (family, community, society) and service level
- personalisation of services and joining up at individual level to address a range of needs
- breaking cycles of poor outcomes
- managing transitions effectively.

## 2. EARLY INTERVENTION

It is important to make clear that early intervention does not mean early interference by the state at national or local level. A key part of any early intervention policy is building the capacity of individuals, families and communities to secure the best outcomes for themselves. It is about moving from intervening when a crisis happens towards prevention, building resilience and providing the right level of support before problems materialise.

### Early Intervention Principles

In developing a strategic approach to early intervention, Ministers and COSLA have identified some key principles. These build on the principles of solidarity and cohesion set out in the Government Economic Strategy.

These principles provide an important bridge between what the Scottish Government and local authorities want to achieve (the Purpose, outcomes, indicators and targets) and how we will achieve it (specific policies and actions). The principles are –

- Our ambitions are universal – we want to reduce inequalities in a variety of policy areas, to have the same outcomes for all and for all to have the same opportunities.
- We take action to identify those at risk of not achieving these outcomes or having these opportunities and take action to prevent that risk materialising (action is not limited to those most at risk but applies to risk at whatever level identified).
- We make sustained and effective interventions in cases where these risks have materialised.
- We shift the focus from service provision as the vehicle for delivery of outcomes to building the capacity of individuals, families and communities to secure outcomes, and addressing the external barriers which they may face in seeking to maximise their life chances, making use of high quality, accessible public services as required.

## **Embedding the Principles of Early Intervention in Policy**

In moving forward to develop more specific strategies and policies based on these principles, a number of common challenges are emerging. These will need a co-ordinated effort across a range of social policy strategies –

- Developing processes and roles for co-creation of strategy and action plans between the Scottish Government and delivery partners and users. Developing a common view of the right balance between strategic policy and specific actions within such strategies.
- Delivering more differentiation and personalisation of services, with an emphasis on identification of risk, need and resilience and providing an appropriate intensity of support related to need. Developing packages of support at the individual/family level.
- Developing pathways of education and care from universal services to much more targeted support.
- Maintaining and improving quality of services through training and qualifications and developing leadership.
- Developing new roles/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.
- Improving engagement with service users, particularly those who need the most support. Encouraging service users to participate actively, where appropriate, in decision making and planning.
- Developing success measures and accountability structures for delivery partners.
- In partnership, supporting infrastructure development and use which enables flexible, transformational working practices.

Children and young people will be a natural focus of early intervention. Many risks start to become apparent during childhood and there is good evidence to suggest that the earlier the action to prevent or mitigate risk and harm, the better.

## Early Intervention for Children and Young People

Policy for children and young people will sit within the context of the Purpose, strategic objectives, national outcomes, indicators and targets. It will contribute to all five strategic objectives, to the strategic priorities within the Government Economic Strategy and to the solidarity and cohesion of Scottish society. There are three national outcomes that relate specifically to children and young people –

- Our children have the best start in life and are ready to succeed.
- Our young people are successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens.
- We have improved life chances for children, young people and families at risk.

The contribution of policies for children and young people is not limited to these outcomes. They will also contribute to all of the other outcomes, in particular –

- We realise our full economic potential with more and better employment opportunities for our people.
- We are better educated, more skilled and more successful, renowned for our research and innovation.
- We live longer, healthier lives.
- We have tackled the significant inequalities in Scottish society.
- We live our lives safe from crime, disorder and danger.
- We have strong, resilient and supportive communities where people take responsibility for their own actions and how they affect others.
- We take pride in a strong, fair and inclusive national identity.
- Our public services are of high quality, continually improving, efficient and responsive to local people's needs.

Within the learning and wellbeing and equity strategic priorities of the Government's Economic Strategy we have identified key actions to:

- help parents and carers provide a nurturing and stimulating home environment, including help for parents with any literacy and numeracy issues of their own so that they can in turn help their children;
- join up the education experience for children, managing more effectively the transitions from pre-school to school and onto further and higher education or work;
- ensure that we equip young people with good literacy and numeracy skills – giving them the confidence and ability to continue to learn and develop other skills whether they choose to enter work or continue with their formal education;
- take forward the *Curriculum for Excellence*, enabling all children and young people to develop as successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors, helping young people develop and appreciate the importance of the essential skills and capacities so critical to work and later life;
- ensure access to public services, including business support and transport, is enhanced across Scotland and that equity of provision is a central consideration in decision making;
- focus the Government's policy across our strategic objectives on reducing inequality in Scotland and influence the UK Government to ensure welfare reform addresses Scotland's social equity issues;
- ensure that support is provided to improve the life chances of those most at risk;
- ensure that young people who need more choices and more chances have access to these; and
- provide high quality, reliable childcare that can give those furthest from employment confidence to take initial steps towards employability.

In order to deliver the Purpose, strategic objectives, national outcomes, indicators and targets we need:

- action by a wide range of services to support all of our children and young people, recognising that responsibility for their development lies principally with their families; and
- action by universal and targeted services to identify risks to individuals (and their families and communities) as quickly as possible and ensure these are addressed, recognising that:
  - action to support the youngest children and their parents is likely to be most effective; but that
  - risks do emerge for older children and young people; and that
  - services need to continue to support older children and young people who are already in need of support.

It is also vital that we engage providers and users of services fully in the development of the policy and in its delivery.

By embedding the above principles within a range of policies for children and young people we can bring a coherent approach that can also extend across the wider social policy landscape. This process has already begun. The *Getting it Right for Every Child* programme is founded on the principles of early intervention, that is, appropriate, proportionate and timely intervention and provides a framework for putting them into action for all children and young people at the individual level. Similarly, we are already some way down the road to putting these principles into action within the education system through *Curriculum for Excellence* and within the NHS through *Health for all Children*. These principles will also underpin work to provide *More Choices and More Chances* for children and young people at risk.

## 3. GETTING IT RIGHT IN THE EARLY YEARS

### Scope

The focus of the early years framework will be from pre-conception through pregnancy, birth and up to age 8. It will be a framework for the long term, with a time horizon of 10 years. Our ambition is to build a public and political consensus about the priorities over that period which will sustain the policy through successive Parliaments.

By combining the Purpose, the principles of solidarity and cohesion and an early intervention approach with the needs of children and parents in the early years, we have identified four themes for the early years framework. These are –

- Building parenting and family capacity pre and post birth.
- Creating communities that provide a supportive environment for children and families.
- Delivering integrated services that meet the holistic needs of children and families.
- Developing a suitable workforce to support the framework.

Because these themes are drawn from the higher level principles, it is readily apparent that they need not be confined to the early years and potentially have relevance for children, young people and families more generally.

### An Evidence-Based Policy

The early years framework will be based on what works and on evidence-based approaches to supporting children and families. The evidence base is complex, and it is clear that action will be needed across many fronts in order to improve outcomes.

## Tasks

In seeking to identify a set of tasks to take forward the early years framework, we have drawn on the Purpose, the national outcomes and the strategic priorities within the Government Economic Strategy. We have combined these with the themes and principles set out above and an analysis of Scottish, UK and international research. The list of tasks identified through this process is as follows –

- Identifying effective interventions to target high risk groups before conception.
- Identifying risk early in pregnancy and moving to put supports in place immediately. Improving access to antenatal care for parents with higher needs; linking this to improving outcomes for children by addressing key factors such as maternal nutrition and breastfeeding rates, and reducing tobacco, alcohol and drug use.
- Developing a clear view of the most effective approaches to supporting families and how these can be applied at local level in Scotland. Helping parents and carers provide a nurturing and stimulating home environment, including help for parents with any literacy and numeracy issues of their own so that they can in turn help their children.
- Examining the use of key workers, family care workers and pedagogue roles and multi-disciplinary structures in early years services.
- Improving workforce skills in engaging with families, especially those with higher needs.
- Increasing the contribution of adult services to supporting families, especially those with young children.
- Identifying specific measures that would improve the physical and social environment for young children.
- Identifying measures to encourage more mutual support between parents and from others in the community.
- Examining various models for delivering more integrated services e.g. children's centres, networks or partnerships, etc. Consider the practicality of a holistic family support service approach and the role of advice and information services.

- Implementing existing pre-school commitments and examining targeted additional services for 0-3s.
- Refreshing the direction in childcare including reducing fragmentation and addressing cost/funding issues. Considering the future role of childcare partnerships in the new strategic context. Providing high quality, reliable childcare that can give those furthest from employment confidence to take initial steps towards employability.
- Joining up the education experience for children, managing more effectively the transitions from pre-school to school including the wider applicability of approaches such as nurture groups.
- Implementing the planned reduction in class sizes to 18 in P1-3 in a way that has greatest impact on outcomes for children.
- A continuing focus on equipping children with good literacy and numeracy skills.
- Optimising health protection and health promotion for pre-school and school children, including the proposed phased introduction of free school meals.
- Developing a sense of how to sustain the intervention beyond early years and how the early years framework will connect to *Curriculum for Excellence*, the *More Choices, More Chances* agenda and *Getting it Right for Every Child*, with the aim of improving outcomes for all children.
- Developing success measures and accountability arrangements for implementation of the framework.
- Securing the place of Gaelic within early years services. Embedding equality and diversity principles within all the work on the framework.
- Developing an approach to support for disadvantaged and vulnerable families that integrates with the Government's development of a framework for tackling poverty, inequality and deprivation.

## Consultation

The Scottish Government and COSLA believe the National Performance Framework plus the themes, principles and tasks put us in a strong position to launch a phase of more detailed policy development. But we are conscious that the tasks in particular would benefit from the active contribution of all those with an interest in early years before this detailed policy work commences. We are therefore launching a short period of consultation on the tasks for the early years framework that will last approximately one month. We will be aiming to involve a wide range of stakeholders from early years and beyond in this process, including frontline staff from across various sectors.

**If you have any comments on whether the list of tasks on pages 10 and 11 is comprehensive, and covers what the early years framework should cover, you can email us at [earlyyearsframework@scotland.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:earlyyearsframework@scotland.gsi.gov.uk) by 18 April 2008.**

In parallel, we will be actively engaging children and families in development of the framework, seeking their views on current services and analysing the supports they think they need at various ages and stages. We will use this approach to test the definition of the tasks and to ensure the needs of end users are central in the policy development phase.

## Launching the Policy Development Phase

The Scottish Government and COSLA will establish a number of task groups, each taking forward consideration of one of the themes for the framework set out above –

- Building parenting and family capacity pre and post birth.
- Creating communities that provide a supportive environment for children and families.
- Delivering integrated services that meet the holistic needs of children and families.
- Developing a suitable workforce to support the framework.

These task groups will involve a broad range of stakeholders, from the full range of early years interests, including all sectors and all levels. The groups will be supported by a team of policymakers, service managers, researchers, economists and statisticians from within the Scottish Government and local government.

Each group will be asked to identify:

- where we are now;
- where we want to get to;
- what we need to do to get there;
- how we need to do it;
- who needs to do what to ensure delivery;
- what the resource implications are and how those resources will be secured;
- what the barriers are; and
- in the context of the National Conversation, identify those areas of reserved responsibilities where a distinctive Scottish approach would bring benefits and identify how this can be achieved.

Each group will be asked to set its work clearly within the context of the Purpose, the strategic objectives and Government Economic Strategy and will be asked to identify how their proposals will contribute to the achievement of the Purpose and the national outcomes.

The outputs from the task groups will provide us with the material from which we can identify a set of short, medium and long term priorities/actions that will provide the basis for a final framework document to be published in the Autumn.



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