

## **Commission on Widening Access**

### **Submission from Early Years Scotland**

Early Years Scotland would like to congratulate Professor Peter Scott on his appointment as the new Commissioner for Fair Access to Higher Education.

We look forward to working with him as we continue the critical task of striving to ensure that children born into our most disadvantaged communities have the same chance of going to university as children from the most affluent.

We welcomed the fact that the Commission on Widening Access included Early Years, and also that Early Years Scotland was invited to represent the sector. All too often, our shameful attainment gap is regarded as a 'school' issue. Strategies to address the gap then begin half way up the ladder of cause, rather than focusing on a more preventative approach at the very earliest stages. By starting with pre-birth and babies where seeds are sown, we could truly achieve transformational change and stop the gap well before a child starts school, and when the roots have become established.

Early Years Scotland acknowledges that there is no single magic bullet. However, there are combinational factors and a plethora of research pointing to particular conditions, which, if present, provide a fairer start and more positive outcomes for children.

We would therefore appreciate if the Commissioner's office could ensure that there is a continued and explicit emphasis on early years as a priority as this critical work goes forward.

In particular, we would welcome a significant and ongoing focus on the following:

- The importance of family learning and parents being engaged and involved in their child's learning from the earliest possible stage.
- The need for higher and further education and SQA to ensure that initial training programmes and ongoing professional development for the early learning and childcare workforce include a strong emphasis on the impact of deprivation and disadvantage on a child's learning, and also an emphasis on how to work with parents to support the enrichment of the home learning environment.
- The need for the workforce to be upskilled with regard to working most effectively with Scotland's babies and children under 3 years of age and their families. This is of particular importance with the forthcoming expansion of government funded Early Learning and Childcare for all 3 and 4 year olds and eligible 2 year olds.
- A greater shift towards all Early Learning and Childcare providers ensuring that meaningful parental engagement, which can lead to the improvement and enhancement of the home learning environment, is an integral part of all provision.
- Increased efforts and energies towards more collaboration between higher and further education providers working with Early Learning and Childcare settings to engage with young children and their families, especially in areas

of disadvantage. We know that this engagement can help familiarise parents and their children to the idea of higher education and this in turn can support parents' aspirations and expectations for young children to participate in higher education.

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