

**Presentation by Adam Ingram, Minister for Children and Early Years, at the Growing Up in Scotland annual event, 29 April 2010.**

Good morning everyone and thank you to Val Cox [the conference chair] for welcoming me here today. It is fantastic to see so many people who work with and for young children and their families. Whether you are from the voluntary sector, a local authority, a health practitioner, an academic, a teacher or from another professional background; we all share the same goal: contributing to giving Scottish children the best start in life.

I would like to thank the Scottish Centre of Social Research, in collaboration with the Centre for Research into Families and Relationships at the University of Edinburgh for their continuing commitment to carrying out this important and interesting research. The Growing up in Scotland study has now been running for 5 years, and is generating valuable data about how children's lives evolve over the first few years and about how early experiences influence later outcomes for children. There can be no doubt about the importance of the GUS findings year on year, which have already helped influence the development of our Early Years Framework and I'm sure will continue to influence policy and practice in years to come.

I know you are all keen to hear more about the findings from the authors of this year's four reports on persistent poverty, health inequalities, maternal mental health and characteristics at primary school entry; as well as from the other speakers, Sally Haw and Jean Carwood-Edwards, who will be offering their view on the results from a health and teaching and learning perspective.

These experts are obviously better placed than I to comment on the latest findings, but I do want to pick out a couple of important broad themes which are emerging and indicate to you how the Scottish Government is dealing with these.

At a strategic level, all of the reports emphasise the importance of early intervention, which is, of course, a key plank of the **Early Years Framework** and of the other two social frameworks – **Equally Well** and **Achieving Our Potential**. The Growing Up in Scotland reports also emphasise the complex and multi-faceted nature of the

challenges faced by some of our children and families, making clear that these challenges cannot be dealt with by a single agency, but require multi-agency collaborations aimed at multiple targets. This, of course, is precisely what our three inter-connected and mutually-reinforcing social frameworks are intended to secure.

The GUS findings show that children's early outcomes are affected by a range of factors including their own and parent's health, family relationships and social support; and perceptions of the local neighbourhood. Thus, to tackle inequalities a broad range of issues need to be addressed. We are clear that, together, the three social frameworks provide the broad –based, collaborative approach necessary to tackle the problems of childhood disadvantage and I am confident they will contribute to an improvement the outcomes of young Scottish children, by not just focusing on individuals, but also paying attention to the role of their wider families and communities.

It is just over a year since the publication of our Early Years Framework, with its radical 10-year vision for transformational change in Scotland. Along with the Scottish Government's two other social policy frameworks, it forms part of our strategy for tackling Scotland's long-standing problems of poverty and inequality.

Much has been achieved in that year. The **Play Talk Read** campaign has been launched to recognise the importance of the home-learning environment and encourage parents, grandparents and carers to value positive interaction with their child during the first three years of life through simple, free and fun activities. Evidence collated since the campaign was launched in September shows that the Play Talk Read message has reached 90% of our target audience and achieved positive results on parental interaction with their babies and toddlers.

The **Inspiring Scotland 'Go Play' Programme** has also been launched to increase opportunities for children aged 5-13 to engage in free play activities, contributing to their physical and mental health outcomes and social cohesion. 'Go Play' targets specific local authority areas where children are least likely to have opportunities to develop through play; improve the infrastructure of the play sector on a local, regional and national level; and encourage creative opportunities to play such as

those that incorporate risk. We will also be working with organisations to develop a system to measure the impact and benefits of play.

We are of course, working closely across Government to help secure better outcomes for children. Many of you will be aware of the work of the Equally Well Task Force, on which I sit with other Ministers, and you will be pleased to know that the Task Force has recently agreed that Early Years should be one of its key priorities for action. We are already seeing interesting work in the East Lothian test site, focussing on early years, and I am delighted that the approach has recently been extended into Midlothian. The Task Force decision to prioritise early years should provide further impetus to local innovation of this nature.

We know that many of the health inequalities experienced across an individual's life are influenced or predetermined by poor maternal health and social circumstances during pregnancy. Supporting women to have as healthy a pregnancy as possible is a vitally important aspect of early years work, as is helping women access a range of support services. The Maternity Services Action group is in the process of refreshing the framework for maternity services to strengthen the role of these services in reducing health inequalities and improving health- particularly amongst women with the greatest needs.

Because the pregnancy period is so important, the Scottish Government is fully funding the testing of the Family Nurse Partnership Programme in NHS Lothian. The programme will support first time teenage mothers and their partners in the City of Edinburgh to become the good parents they want to be. An evaluation of the programme will enable us to share the learning from the Programme.

On the workforce side, the University of Strathclyde has started work to create a common core of skills for everyone working with children, young people and families. I want to ensure that the entire workforce is supported and skilled to lead this challenging agenda. Later this year employer representatives, professional bodies, regulators, education providers, trades unions and more, will be invited to agree the core skill-set. They will also need to agree an implementation plan to ensure that workers, at every level, have the necessary skills in the future.

Across Scotland, Community Planning Partnerships have also prioritised implementation of the Early Years Framework as a priority activity, recognising that investment in the early years and in early intervention pays dividends for the future and can help ALL our children achieve their potential and be ready to succeed. We know from visits and from looking at the Single Outcome Agreements that there is a vast amount of activity on Early Years , but we must ensure that this activity harnesses the efforts of all the local players, using the GIRFEC approach which has been shown to reduce bureaucracy, streamline services and deliver better outcomes for children.

I don't want to delay you hearing about the latest findings, so let me just conclude by saying that the Growing Up in Scotland study will continue to provide us with important evidence to inform our policies. The Scottish Government is funding the start of a new cohort of GUS babies which will provide us with information about how babies in Scotland are doing in 2011 compared to 2005. Let me leave you with the exciting thought that the babies who will be part of the new cohort are being born at this very moment!