

The Commission for Childcare Reform

25 June 2015

Ms Nicola Sturgeon MSP, First Minister of Scotland
Rt Hon David Mundell MP, Secretary of State for Scotland

COMMISSION FOR CHILDCARE REFORM: FINAL REPORT

In March 2014, I was asked by Children in Scotland and the Scottish Council for Development and Industry to chair a Commission on Childcare Reform to investigate and make recommendations on how childcare is organised, delivered and paid for. We have published our report today and I enclose a copy.

We have engaged widely across Scottish civic society, with parents, employers, providers and local authorities and with academic experts and third sector bodies. Our report presents a vision for childcare in Scotland and makes recommendations on how it can be achieved. We have tested that vision and recommendations and we believe they command wide support.

We warmly endorse the commitment of both of your governments to invest significantly in childcare, through increasing the resources available for direct provision (mainly through providing more early learning) and cash support for families (mainly through tax free childcare). We do not underestimate the significance of these commitments at what is a challenging time for public finances.

We believe that, to enable our shared aspirations for childcare to be realised, a number of key challenges need to be addressed:

- to establish a long term vision for childcare, which we recommend is based on an entitlement to access up to 50 hours per week throughout the year of either affordable, convenient childcare or free educational provision;
- to make further progress on ensuring affordability for all families, noting that even after your current commitments, many families in Scotland will still pay much more for childcare than they would in other countries;
- to take steps to ensure local availability and flexibility that enables families to match work and study patterns with childcare;
- to simplify a funding system (both for supporting families and for paying for direct provision) that baffles many who try to make sense of it, creates perverse incentives and is one of the causes of lack of trust and collaboration between funders and providers.

- to broaden the focus of local authorities from 'providing a fixed amount of free early learning to some children' to 'ensuring the availability of affordable all day childcare for all families, within which some children receive an agreed amount of free early learning';
- to address the specific issue of the support given to families with very young children, where the duration of statutory maternity leave compares reasonably well with other countries, but cash support from the state lags far behind many other European countries; and
- to provide strategic leadership that drives forward a coherent programme of change and does not address issues in isolation from each other.

We offer the following observations on funding issues.

Funding flows from both Governments to support childcare in Scotland and one of the problems for families is that funding does not add up to a coherent package of support. Unless there is full devolution of all relevant tax and benefits, tackling the funding and affordability challenges will require your two governments to work effectively together to create a coherent approach to funding that is simple, fair and easy for families to understand and access.

We note that the UK Government has indicated that it will review the funding arrangements for the free early learning provision in England. We urge Scottish Government to carry out an equivalent review in Scotland.

We do not underestimate the complexity and difficulty of this agenda, but we have taken heart from the very positive responses we have had to our proposals and the evident commitment from all political parties to making real progress.

In an event held in Scottish Parliament in summer 2014, senior politicians from all the main parties urged us to be bold. We believe we have been. We look forward to seeing your responses.

Yours sincerely



Colin MacLean
Chair, Commission for Childcare Reform