**CONSULTATION ON ENHANCED DATA COLLECTION**

 **RELATED TO THE ATTAINMENT GAP**

**The importance of early child development**

The United Nations defines early childhood as birth to eight. It advises that care and education during this period should prioritise children’s overall development – physical, emotional, social and cognitive – as the best way to build a sound foundation for lifelong learning and well-being.

Since development is a biological process, adults can’t ‘teach’ it. Their job is to provide the best possible environment in which young children can grow and learn. The main ingredients are

 - a stimulating environment for active, social play, as often as

 possible outdoors and in nature

 - sensitive, caring adult support that recognises each child as a

 unique individual.

This is what lucky children have enjoyed throughout the millennia, and it’s what high-quality ‘kindergarten’ education provides today.

Research in Scotland in 2014 established that, at five years old (about half way through early childhood), there is a gap between children from low and high income families of

 - 13 months in language development

 - 11 months in problem-solving skills.

This is not an educational gap – it is a **developmental** gap. All five-year-old children benefit from the developmentally-appropriate approach to care and education described above, but the children who benefit most are those

 - from disadvantaged backgrounds

 - who have any sort of developmental delay

 - for whom English is an additional language.

 **The Right Sort of Data?**

For the last seven years, Scotland’s National Improvement Framework (NIF) has been trying – unsuccessfully – to close the poverty-related educational attainment gap. This summer they are holding a consultation on how to move forward, focusing on the type of data the NIF needs to support children’s learning and well-being.

Since the attainment gap is developmental in origin, data on children’s early development is clearly of great importance. However, the only developmental data the NIF has collected since 2015 comes from a checklist filled in by parents when their children are around three years old, which is widely regarded as unreliable.

The best age for collection of reliable developmental data is five, when all children are in the educational system. The NIF has never collected any data on child development at this age and Scotland urgently needs to rectify this omission. Robust developmental data would help NIF design appropriate targeted services to support children and families *before* problems become embedded. And, since the type of data collected tends to influence practice, it would also highlight the importance of overall development at Primary 1, thus benefiting all children’s long-term well-being.

An internationally-recognised assessment tool for the five-year-old age range (the EDI - Early Development Instrument) has been successfully trialled in Scotland. The Scottish Government could adopt at this or another accredited system of developmental assessment. Until they do so, the attainment gap is likely to yawn ever wider.

**Please respond to the** [**Enhanced Data Collection**](https://consult.gov.scot/national-improvement-framework/a-consultation-on-enhanced-data-for-collection/) **consultation with this information by the closing date of 18-7-22**