

Scottish Out of School Care Network (SOSCN)

A Blueprint for 2020: The Expansion of Early Learning and Childcare in Scotland

Response to consultation on expansion to 1140 hours Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) 19 December 2016 - deadline 9 January 2017

The Scottish Out of School Care Network is the national charitable organisation supporting the development of high quality out of school care, which includes holiday and breakfast clubs, across Scotland. All of our work is underpinned by our commitment to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

We welcome the opportunity to respond to the detailed questions below on the proposed expansion to 1140 hours of Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) in Scotland. While our specific expertise is on out of school care (OSC), around one third of school age childcare places are delivered by services which may combine ELC and OSC and sometimes family support services too.

We submitted the following response:

1. How do we ensure children are fully supported at the transition stages throughout their early-learner journey?

Anyone involved in caring for young children in ELC, especially the youngest two year olds, but applicable to all, should have a sound grounding in child development and how children learn through play and relationships with others. Attention should be paid to transitions throughout the day or week from one form of care to another with a need to ensure there is consistency of carers in terms of attachment relationships which are so crucial to the developing child. A recognisable routine for the child should be established which delivers the funded (and perhaps non funded) ELC centred on the needs of the child as well as their parents.

A particular interest for the out of school care workforce is in supporting the transition of children from ELC to primary school and out of school childcare and holiday provision, indeed some children may join the service's holiday provision in June before starting school in August. Anecdotally, a child getting to know a range of other children of different ages from the school they are about to attend helps ease their transition from ELC to school. Even if they have not been at the holiday club, again, attending the breakfast or after school care service also helps children with the transition from ELC to primary in terms of building a range of relationships with other children from across the school.

In our report *Learning about Play* (Audain and Shoolbread, 2015), we pointed out that the Curriculum for Excellence and supporting materials all emphasised that for primary 1 and 2

children the transition to school from ELC is supported by the use of play based learning techniques. However, it was also found in this report that while teacher training and childhood practice courses at Scottish Vocational levels do cover early years, and often in depth, much depended on the choices the learner made about for example, teacher placements, or choosing SVQ modules which were not core practice requirements. Therefore, we recommend for this question that all who already work in ELC or manage others who do so, must all have a thorough grounding in how young children learn and develop; this includes those working with older children in out of school care and head teachers responsible for ELC staff.

The Lessons of Building the Ambition (Scottish Government, 2014) should be shared beyond ELC to those teaching primary 1 and 2 and those taking care of children of this age range in out of school and holiday care (SOSCN already shared this with out of school care but further accredited courses should be considered). The play based learning processes recommended as part of CfE might mean refresher courses for teachers. Conversely, the need to support, especially disadvantaged children, in closing the attainment gap, might mean that ELC and Out of School Care staff learn more about using purposeful, planned play interventions to assist children's development of creativity, literacy and numeracy.

What support should be provided to ensure that the ELC workforce and teachers have the skills, knowledge and capacity to support transitions?

See recommendations above and also ensure that qualification routes, training courses for professional development include compulsory child development training and the importance of secure attachment relationships, especially during transitional periods for children.

2 What support is required to ensure that the ELC workforce have the skills, knowledge and capacity to deliver high quality provision for two year olds? How can the ELC sector best meet the specific learning, developmental and environmental needs of two year olds? What approach should be taken on the transition for these children when they turn three?

In terms of the proposed expansion it is quite important to point out that it is only eligible two year olds who will be included in the first instance, therefore, while general comments about the developmental needs of this age group apply, this group are eligible through experiencing some form of inequality or disadvantage. There is no need to reiterate here the vast amount of evidence which shows that, for example, the large vocabulary gap between children from disadvantaged backgrounds and others is in place by the time they start school. So, we are not just talking about any two year olds here.

First, of course, every child is an individual and has their own particular circumstances, so there must not be assumptions or stereotyping made either. Nevertheless, the environment and the relationship with the carer, as well as the qualifications, knowledge and skills of the carer, are vital to ensure quality provision for this age group; this includes being very attuned to the developing

child, being affectionate and consistent, and forming a secure bond and routine that takes account of their developing capacities and learning needs.

Children this young, as well as older children with some disabilities, also need practical support, nappy changing, help with feeding, washing and dressing, and support in activities and play. This should not be divided amongst different staff, but by the child's assigned worker, who should be skilled in supporting this age group. Whether in group ELC or childminders, it is important that the carer knows how to support this age group and give extra help where a child might need it, or to spot developmental delay and address this too.

3 How can the qualification routes and career paths that are open to early learning and childcare practitioners be developed to ensure that the ELC sector is seen as an attractive long-term career route?

Anyone working in ELC or out of school care should be able to follow a qualifications route which enables their work experience with children, and the training they have undertaken within their qualifications, to be counted towards sideways or upward progression. For example, to move into primary school early levels classes should not be a great leap for degree level staff, except in terms of the difference in pay and conditions between ELC and Out of School Care staff and teachers. Sideways routes might be in developing particular skills in working with children and moving into health or social work roles.

The ELC and Out of School Care childhood practice courses should be open to graduates from a range of disciplines. For example, at SOSCN we have a part time employee who delivers physical activity and wellbeing training to staff in our sector, he has a degree in this subject and also works in another job in secondary schools as a careers advisor. His post with us started as a living-wage internship for a recent graduate in the physical activity field. What was interesting, in the range of applicants for the post, was how many young graduate found it hard to get permanent posts, yet, people with this background and training would be invaluable in childcare across the age range. Even post qualified in this field the jobs in leisure centres etc were not particularly highly paid either.

Again, other specialisms such as music or dance graduates could be encouraged as not everyone can get a job teaching in schools.

The biggest barrier to bringing in this graduate workforce is of course the pay and conditions of the sector which has to improve.

Not everyone who works in ELC needs graduate level education but we would say definitely higher education levels or standards are needed; personality, warmth and caring are highly important too. If we are expecting the youngest and indeed, for two year olds, more disadvantaged children, to be supported in how to learn through play, and in playfully gaining literacy and numeracy skills, then we do need people who are more than competent in such areas themselves.

4. How can we increase the diversity of the ELC workforce, in particular increasing the gender balance in the sector?

We have around 8% of men in the out of school care workforce which is much higher than the ELC sector. It is also the case that Out of School Care is even less well paid than ELC and often has part time hours in term time at least for many staff. However, our annual workforce survey consistently shows that staff are happy in their work and do so because they want to work with children of this age range.

There needs to be societal education about men in childcare just as even in addressing gender imbalances we need to show girls and women in technical and engineering roles, we need to promote men as fathers, and as carers of children. This has to start from an early age, in the ELC itself, we should support campaigns like “Let Toys be Toys” and ensure gender neutral labelling of activities and resources. When men do work in ELC, we have found in our discussions with them that they have to resist sometimes being pigeon holed into doing the “football or sports” activities as opposed to less “Masculine” pursuits.

“Men in Childcare” groups have also pointed out that underlying suspicion about their motives for working with children can be very off putting, therefore this might also be a reason why men do not even apply in the first place for ELC posts. Again, it likely also comes back to pay, conditions, and in not even thinking they would actually be very welcome in this field.

In our work we have also met with out of school care staff who are not originally from Scotland and the diversity they bring as well as their different training background is always a bonus for the services involved. Scotland is a diverse country therefore again there should be specific encouragement and case studies of good practice of the benefits this diversity brings. We should encourage this at student exchange level – we have, through the EU, had a number of Danish pedagogue students here on six month placements with services, and this was generally successful and interesting all round.

5 How can payment of the Living Wage and wider Fair Work practices be encouraged across the ELC sector?

We recommend that ELC services are an accredited Living Wage employer. It all comes back to funding of places – it might be easier understood in relation to Out Of School Care which is not core funded – therefore all costs, including wages, have to be met from parental fee income. Put this up too much and parents just cannot afford it, and, even at current quite high child care costs, compared to other countries, services struggle to pay decent wages on that income alone.

In funded ELC, the “stick” might be, you must pay the living wage to access this funding, but then it must be beyond doubt that the funding is sufficient to cover this. A “carrot” approach might be

some kind of bonus payment to those who meet such standards. Other than this, keep leading by example, and also ensure to use this as a measure of quality of a service too.

6 What actions should be taken to support increased access to outdoor learning, exercise and play?

As mentioned above we employ a physical activity and wellbeing trainer to support the out of school care workforce in learning how to support children's physical activities, health and wellbeing – so two things here, first the staff have to have this type of knowledge and training and second the environment of the ELC setting should have space indoors and out for physical play and activities, and provide outings and experiences where children get to know the natural world, where food comes from etc. Where possible they should have gardens or allotments to grow their own food or to help others. For some urban services it might be the case that more land for allotments for children should be found and such resources created. We should have supported children's gardens too in schools and other public spaces.

There are outdoor ELC and Out of School Care services, however, every service should be able to take a lot of their activities outside – this might mean building ELC and Out of School Care settings in parks and gardens, being creative within cities with limited outdoor space, even closing off the roads near the school or ELC setting (where possible).

We are aware that the new Care Inspectorate standards emphasise the importance of the outdoors and this will also help as part of the standards applicable to ELC.

Staff training should also cover play/ outdoor learning and how important this is to children's development and wellbeing. To support transitions this type of training should include early primary school teaching staff.

7 How could accountability arrangements for early learning and childcare be improved?

Over the years, SOSCN has experienced different funding models in relation to the out of school care sector. Our insights from this are that ring fenced budgets, without too onerous detailed reporting, are one way to ensure funding is used for the purposes it is designed for, and as a mechanism to be able to demand specific information, as a condition of funding.

8 What factors must be considered in delivering flexible ELC provision, while continuing to ensure a high quality service? To what extent could funded ELC support parents and carers with non-standard working hours, such as working shifts and weekends?

The quality of the service in terms of meeting the needs of the child must come first. For young children, later evening care is likely best carried out in their own home, therefore a model such as the One Parent Family Scotland Sitter Service might work. For weekends, really this is a capacity issue for premises, staff and resources of current and future ELC. Where it is stand-alone premises for ELC there should not be many barriers, but for services based in schools it would depend on local authority janitorial and kitchen access issues.

This is an area where expertise from other countries might be looked at. In Finland, for example, overnight care for their young children is provided e.g. for nurses working shifts.

9 How can we ensure fair and sustainable funding for all providers offering the ELC entitlement?

One way to do this might be to set a national “floor” of a minimum payment perhaps worked out through negotiation with intermediaries and providers; but recognising that some areas are more costly than others, e.g. specific needs of areas of high disadvantage, rural areas, or a higher number of children with additional support needs. This however, would take away the flexibility and autonomy of local authorities in deciding their own local rates which often do also include support, training and regulatory activities too. A compromise would be a set national minimum funded with an understanding that LAs have additional support costs on top of that.

10 What more can we do to promote and support the involvement of childminders in the entitlement to ELC? What are the barriers, if any, to becoming a childminder? How can we ensure quality while preserving the unique value of home-based care?

For many children, especially the youngest, there is indeed a unique value to home based care. However, where eligible two year olds are concerned, following our comments at the beginning of this consultation, about why they are eligible, it is vital that their carer knows and understands their specific needs and has the training and relevant higher level qualifications to demonstrate this. Such suitably qualified childminders would be a valuable addition to the ELC workforce.

11 How do we ensure that the voice of children and their families is heard as we plan this expansion?

There should be regular consultation events and online forums where parents can express their views. Using a case study approach of different models of ELC there are researchers trained in eliciting very young children’s views so this could be carried out as part of evaluation processes.

SOSCN will be consulting with parents and children as part of out of school care policy development.

12 How can we ensure equality of access for all children? What barriers do children with disabilities and additional support needs currently face in accessing early learning and childcare? What further action is required to address these barriers?

Many barriers on terms of disability and ASN are in the lack of specialist staff training and environmental considerations, including the suitability (or not) of group care settings, depending on how a child responds to such situations. Every child is unique, therefore, successful specialist settings, like the Yard in Edinburgh, or integrated, like the out of school care, the Royal Blind School, Kidscene, should be consulted on how to roll out their models of delivery. This is again an area where trained specialist community childminders or home sitter service staff could have a role.

13 How can we support higher take-up rates amongst eligible two year olds, and other groups less likely to access entitlement?

It is important to make this non-stigmatising. It must first be wholly framed as an entitlement for the family and leaflets given out by GPS, Health Visitors, others such as kinship carer organisations, and the Department of Work and Pensions, where they are in contact with the parent. A television advertising campaign/ bus posters could also work, although the danger of that would be in raising expectations for all parents of two year olds.

14 How can more social enterprises, and third sector providers, be encouraged to enter the early learning and childcare sector?

Of the thousand plus services providers of out of school care In Scotland, about a third also provide childcare for younger children, e.g. are nurseries which also provide out of school care, some of will be also partner ELC providers – they are mainly in the private sector. However, we have at least one public sector example, of partly integrated ELC/ Nursery/ Out of School Care and know of a third sector provider, whose main classification is out of school care but which also provides ELC. In many rural areas services have to be integrated for both ELC and Out of School Care as they could not staff two different services and to be sustainable they need the numbers of different ages children attending; CALA in Highland is such a model.

The workforce in out of school care has to meet the same qualifications standards, including the childhood practice degree level qualification, as the ELC sector. Therefore suitably qualified staff may not be an issue in expanding to taking on younger children in ELC. The biggest practical barrier is premises. More than half of services operate in school buildings. Some may have a designated space they could adapt to include younger children, but many others access spaces already used by the school during the day.

Certainly at least one service we know of is potentially taking part in a potential trial to expand to ELC in new bigger premises.

The incentive which is badly needed for current providers of out of school and holiday care to expand to younger children would be to set up integrated children's centre buildings/ spaces, e.g. an investment in premises. Going back to what we said in terms of looking at different models, perhaps creating centres which provide ELC during the school day, after breakfast for all, after school care for school age children, and weekend and later evening care where needed.

(It has been done, back in the 1980s, in a not well off community, in a playhouse made up of modular porta cabins welded together, was set in an area of green space on a housing estate. This space provided a playgroup in the morning, an after school club in the afternoon and a youth club later on – as well as various other community activities in between. It was later superseded, in that time and place, by a more solidly built community centre).

15 How can the governance arrangements support more community-led ELC provision particularly in remote and rural areas?

A lot of community led provision in terms of playgroups and out of school care services depend on a model of governance which is the parent led committee. In out of school care we are eternally grateful for parents who give up their time in this way. In order to meet their own needs for children they have to provide the governance of their service. Whilst some may be keen and happy enough in this role for many it really is as needs must – someone has to do it.

At SOSCN we suggest that paid managers be given enough hours, training and operational power to actually run the service, do the administration and accounts etc. nevertheless, the trustees or board or committee still have legally a lot of responsibility.

There are some models where a larger charity organisation provides that governance function and perhaps admin and payroll, on behalf of the board or committee – however, especially for remote and rural areas; this still can lead to management from an unacceptable distance.

Sometimes it is best to change the model when the strain of recruiting a new committee or board is too much. There used to be many funding advantages of charitable status, but for many services this is not much of an advantage now, therefore some may create a workers co-operative or private partnership to recreate the service. Certainly we would want to see workers co-operative models as being classified as community led.

16 How can the broader system for promoting, accessing, and registering for a place in an ELC setting be improved? Please give examples of any innovative and accessible systems currently in place?

No comment

17 Do parents and carers face any barriers in accessing support with the costs of ELC provision (beyond the funded entitlement)? What more can we do to ensure additional hours are affordable?

Even in a low waged sector the cost of providing childcare means that fees in the UK are amongst the highest in Europe. This is also because such support with costs, where it is available, is via the parents not the provider.

Support with the costs of childcare is not devolved which hampers the development of a much more integrated ELC and Out of School Care system in Scotland.

For low income working parents they have to negotiate the complexity of the tax credits system, and know what they are entitled to. At SOSCN we encourage all services to keep up to date information on childcare tax credits available for parents as many will not know what they can claim.

Local take up campaigns are useful for maximising access to tax credits.

The “Tax free Childcare” new UK government voucher scheme comes into force next year, 2017, for the youngest children at the start of the year and gradually to school age children later in the year. Again an information campaign will be needed to help parents take up this help.

We are aware that the Scottish Parliament has not been given much in the way of control of new powers in the benefit system. The one area where there are new powers and a difference could be made is in disability and additional support needs help with the costs of care. Perhaps this new power could be used in letting parents use any care or respite allowances to purchase childcare beyond their ELC and indeed for Out of School Care and Holiday Care. This could also apply to children who themselves are young carers in terms of paying for places for them in out of school care/ holiday care to get some respite care for themselves.

18 How can ELC providers, particularly private and third sector providers, be encouraged to extend capacity?

Support the costs of extending or providing premises, training and qualifications, backed up by national recruitment campaigns, access to modern apprenticeships for all ages and creativity and flexibility in looking at different models, including inspiration from other countries.

19 What funding model would best support our vision for high quality and flexible ELC provision, which is accessible and affordable for all?

We can only answer this in relation to our experience in out of school care development.

There is no doubt that in the distant past when a number of services were almost fully core funded, set in disadvantaged areas, this provided maximum accessibility for the children who

needed it, as even parents working only a few hours, and some not working at all, but with other needs, could still send their children to gain the benefits of this community resource.

Therefore maximum accessibility for all families is that ELC is there in your community, just like the school it is free or very low cost, and you do not have to apply for specific funding to access it.

The idea of a third (although it would be a second as a parent could not get tax credits and childcare tax vouchers it is one or the other) parental application for ELC costs – or another voucher type or bank allowance scheme is interesting but seems more about full time working parental interests e.g: those who want to use a nursery which also provides the rest of their childcare. For low income families an issue could be in terms of how would this interact with tax credits, especially in terms of “universal credit” where every penny from elsewhere is deducted.

We talk about Early Learning and Childcare as inseparable, and we would agree with that, however, it does seem to be the case that the parental account or voucher idea is more about parental childcare needs, while the ensuring the ELC is directly funded is more about what we used to call pre-school or early education or children’s needs.

The issue is really about ensuring, as the 1140 hours roll-out that LAs and partner providers, across sectors, come together to ensure families have local choices especially where they may need to buy additional childcare hours. It overcomplicates an already complicated process, to issue a new voucher/childcare account type scheme. How it will interact with the other two in place is also a question. In terms of redirecting funding – presumably local authorities will still be the biggest providers of ELC – therefore they would need new whole teams to administer and process parental payments, and how would that be funded/costed? What charges might they set?

On balance therefore, while understanding the reasoning behind the ELC allowance idea, we should invest in ELC as we invest in schools without expecting parents and providers to process another form of a voucher scheme. Furthermore, in a purely practical level, given local authorities must already have started work on the proposed expansion by now, the change the funding model at this stage at least would, no doubt, cause unnecessary delay.

20 If it were possible for aspects of the entitlement to be phased in ahead the full roll out by 2020, how should this be implemented?

We would consider that this has to happen anyway, expansion is a gradual process, if we are working towards a full roll out by 2020, then the work infrastructure, premises, resources, staff training, qualifications and recruitment, expansion of courses at colleges and placements has to already be happening now. Therefore, apart from the pilots, it is in everyone’s interests, that as a site is ready, it begins to deliver increased provision. It would be helpful if this is monitored to assist with an assessment of timescales and resources required.



**A Blueprint for 2020: The Expansion of Early Learning and Childcare in Scotland
A Scottish Government Consultation
RESPONDENT INFORMATION FORM**

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- Individual
 Organisation

Full name or organisation's name

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