

Scottish Out of School Care Network (SOSCN) 17th March 2016

Response to consultation on expansion to 1140 hours Early Learning and Childcare (ELC)

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 combine ELC and OSC and sometimes family support services too.

We submitted the following responses online:

Question 1

- **What should be the key features of Scotland's ELC model?**
- We know that providing ELC to families has a positive impact on many areas of their lives: these include child development, narrowing the attainment gap, allowing parents to work, train or study, as well as fighting poverty and inequality in our communities.
- What are the features that we fundamentally cannot compromise on within our ELC delivery model?
- Are there additional outcomes not referenced here that our ELC policy should aim to achieve?

Tying together the various policy drivers (CYP Act, GIRFEC, EYF, RAFA) it is clear that the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) should be the absolute foundation of this approach. Therefore, the primary focus of the ELC should be centred on a children's rights approach- it should be the universal right of children to attend high quality, stimulating early learning and childcare services, including school-age childcare (out of school care), which supports child development.

Allowing parents to work, train or study of course is important, however, ELC should put the individual needs of children first. Therefore, an additional outcome should be happy, joyful, confident and resilient children- the ELC model should not shy away from promoting or creating a happy and joyful childhood for all children. The outcomes should also focus on a child's present and not just what they will become- it's not just about Scotland being "the best place to grow up" but "the best place to be a child",

To do this, the quality of provision must not be compromised and this includes ensuring that every provider of state funded ELC has degree level qualified leadership and with staff highly trained in child development, appropriate to the ages and stages of the children in their care.

Scotland's ELC model should be bold, innovative and imaginative.

In our particular field, the issue of premises for school age childcare has been a major issue for over thirty years, this has been less of the case for ELC, but now, with this rapid expansion of ELC projected, similar issues will arise, which is why, now is really the time to address this issue for both the long and short term.

In the rush to expand provision and deliver on policy commitments there is a clear danger that quality could be undermined. An example of that at the ELC summit was the rather depressing image of a well-known supermarket put forward as an "innovative" premises infrastructure solution. This is not innovative at all, and is a very poor quality example of a potential ELC environment. Children might enjoy a short period of play in a supermarket crèche but this is very different from a good quality care and learning environment for longer periods.

The physical environment for ELC is highly important for child development and care, this is borne out in the academic literature on child development and learning, and this includes good quality outdoor play space. We should not be looking at sterile supermarket buildings, but be looking at building new ELC centres in public parks; or other green spaces, in woodland or old railway stations, perhaps starting out with modular buildings, or converting older, currently unused structures within such settings. We should look at examples of provision from other countries, such as the "children's houses" in Denmark or Iceland. Why can't we build large "log cabins" or play huts, in parks and similar settings, or in school grounds where space allows, and where the children's environment is directly tailored to their needs (ages and stages too)?

We should be bold and innovative by holding a publicly funded architecture competition to look for the best imaginative and innovative ELC premises we already have, including ingenious conversions of previously difficult spaces. Designs could be submitted which address issues such as lack of green space in built up urban areas, separate spaces for different age ranges of children (including space for school age children) and, to task their creativity and ingenuity further, to look at how this can be done on tight budgets too.

We should tap into the talents of many other professionals to build on our ambitions for Scotland's children. Local authorities could bring together project teams across building, planning, education, leisure and arts trusts, partners from health and the police authorities too, as they all have a stake in identifying current resources; grounds and (perhaps) unused premises which could be transformed into attractive imaginative spaces for children. Thinking also about the wider community, an ELC centre overlooked or linked with a care home for older people, provides interaction between generations; a centre located in the grounds of an art gallery or museum

could provide rich cultural interactions for children, parents and the community, a centre in hospital grounds could support the ELC needs of health staff or indeed longer term patients.

While there are some pretty depressing, concrete playgrounds, school buildings in Scotland, there also many examples of clever, imaginative use of such spaces, therefore we should share and use such examples for future developments.

In every case we also have to be careful not to displace existing childcare provision as one type is expanded. For some school premises, to expand their ELC provision, might mean giving up the space they currently allow for out of school childcare provision. Therefore, any expansion plans should always map out and monitor such potential knock on effects in order to ensure this does not happen.

ELC should not be seen as a stand-alone solution to fighting poverty and inequality as well as narrowing the attainment gap – parents and carers of the most disadvantaged children might also need tailored support services, as they need to reinforce in the home the children's experiences from within the ELC services.

While it is right and well evidenced based that high quality ELC can do much to help reduce the attainment gap a particular concern is to sustain that early intervention for disadvantaged children and this is where, in partnership with the school, high quality out of school care has a clear role in their future.

In terms of the number of hours- the flexibility and future expansion should not be delivered over a 38 week period but a 50+ week period. Children and families, especially the most disadvantaged, need guaranteed year-round support, care and indeed free midday meals, for their ongoing development.

Question 2

- **Which specific principles of ELC models should be prioritised within our programme of trials?**
- Different models of ELC provision might be better at delivering different outcomes.
- The principles we would like to see provision based on might include (but are not limited to): providing quality, flexibility, fairness, promoting parental choice, accessibility, integration with other services, value for money – for whom? The user, the provider or both? – integration with home life, preparation children for school life, enabling work, addressing the differing needs of 2, 3 and 4 year olds, sustainability,... there are many more.
- Some of these principles may already be more firmly established than others.
- What principles should take priority? Which would you like to see trialled?

The principles which should take absolute priority is the best interests of the child and fulfilling their rights. This then leads to both quality and flexibility of provision- what works best for the child and family- this could include blended models of delivery, partner providers, parent and toddler groups etc.

Whatever the individual model chosen is, it should provide consistency for the child and family with a minimum of daily/weekly disruptive transitions- children within ELC services, especially the youngest need to make secure attachments with the carers in the services. For such consistent care, which support children's development and wellbeing, it follows that the staff must clearly understand and support secure attachments. This means, for example, that services catering for two year olds should ensure that their most, not least, highly trained staff should lead this process.

So for example, in households with full-time working carers, children require full-time care- this should be allowed to be in the one service (all year-round), if the family so chooses. At the opposite end of the scale, in workless households, as part of the ELC 1140 hours, parents/carers could attend parent and toddler groups with the children. It should be about whatever is best for the child and the family as a whole and about creating stronger and happier attachments within families- this is why the primary focus should not be on supporting parents into work. To achieve many of the outcomes mentioned in the first question, much of this needs to come from a secure base which is a strong supportive family.

Where looked after children are concerned, while supporting and building up the family's capacity, it is also highly important to ensure the child has meaningful supportive and consistent attachment relationships with their child carer, reiterating the point that well trained and qualified staff are essential, as part of the network of support provided.

Question 3

- **What do you see as the key barriers to a successful implementation of the 1140 hours commitment?**
- What are the main risks in implementing this commitment by August 2020? Barriers might be financial, organisational, cultural, or might take some other form entirely.
- What stands in the way of this commitment being delivered successfully for users and providers alike?

The key barriers are in stretching current capacity; the projected increase is nearly double the current provision and the experience of the smaller percentage increase to 600 hours, while useful, cannot really prepare for such growth.

The capacity issues are both in infrastructure and in staffing; this includes premises (see our comments on question 1), inspection and regulatory bodies resources and time, local government and national support organisations increase in support and development roles, education and training providers demand for increased numbers of qualifications for staff, and increase in staff numbers and hours of work (this includes administration, payroll, HR and recruitment resources).

While there is considerable financial investment projected from the Scottish Government for this expansion only time will tell if this is enough, given both the direct and more hidden costs involved.

Other barriers, which are already presenting from the 600 hours increase, are the different interpretations of flexibility of ELC on offer and the complaints of parents in terms of choice of provision, and the private sector on not receiving the full cost of providing partnership places.

As we pointed out in question 1 the 1140 hours, while it is a huge expansion of funded ELC, it still does not cover the average full time working week for a parent, therefore to suit them and, more crucially, to suit the needs for consistency for the child, a way must be found to address these emerging issues.

Two extreme counterproductive repercussions could happen: First, actually reducing the numbers of independent nurseries that parents might need to provide the non-funded ELC hours they want, as nurseries close due to financial viability concerns, thus reducing the numbers of places. Second, trained and qualified staff from the voluntary and private sectors might, understandably, be attracted to better paid jobs in the public sector, meaning the PVI sector would have problems with both recruitment and maintaining quality.

Question 4

- **How might these trials be designed to overcome such barriers?**
- We want to know what these barriers are so we can test different approaches, develop critical understanding of what is effective and feasible, and to share best practice amongst all those with a role in delivery?
- How would you like the design of the trials to reflect this?

We are not sure that the trials can really overcome these issues- they will only become apparent once the whole thing is widely implemented. It's the large-scale capacity and implications where the above problems will arise, not the small-scale well-funded trials. However, as we suggested in the reply to question 1, the trials are an opportunity to be bold and innovative. They are also an opportunity to gauge the costs, both overt and hidden, on delivering the expanded commitment to 1140 hours.

Premises: as we suggest in our reply to question 1 this is an opportunity to draw in experts from architecture, planning and design, to look at innovation here and abroad and to present imaginative and workable solutions that utilise public resources for the benefit of our young children.

Infrastructure, development and regulation: the trials could be an opportunity for local authorities, national support organisations and regulatory bodies to measure and monitor the impact on their resources in supporting an increase in hours and new models of delivery, this again could help gauge the investment they might need for the future expansion.

Training and qualifications: this is an opportunity to design different entry routes to the profession, to support FE and Universities and to again measure and monitor the capacity of qualifications providers and the extra resources they might require. Reshaping the workforce and

encouraging more men, or returners to the labour market, is also possible with the 1140 hours expansion. There is a need to examine the barriers they face and find a solution.

The regulatory bodies might have to consider reframing some of their categories and classifications. For example, we will need to quickly boost the number of degree level lead practitioners, and it is planned that ELC in disadvantaged areas should have at least 2 staff qualified at that level. Therefore we need more direct graduate routes, with work placements, rather than necessarily holding a post in ELC or teaching. Also, a role of Deputy Lead Practitioner / manager should be recognised so that more of the current practitioners move up the leadership scale.

Given also the introduction of many more places for two year olds, especially those experiencing disadvantage, there is an urgent need to ensure all courses on offer cover this younger age group's developmental needs and for current staff to be able to refresh or gain further training to ensure they are able to meet the needs of younger children. Therefore, there should be an opportunity for a trial of such courses, as CPD, from the higher level qualification providers.

Staff hours of work and conditions have an impact on the time they have for training and qualifications; this applies right across the ELC, OSC and teaching sector. The trials therefore should contain a robust assessment on the impact on staff time for the training and qualifications they require, and look for ways to ensure staff working conditions allow for professional development.

Recently announced measures such as potential free lunches for ELC places are welcomed, as this supports children's health, wellbeing and development. Once again, there may be capacity and infrastructure issues, so if some of the trials include this aspect of the future offer, this again may help measure the potential impact and resource implications.

Question 5

- **Are there existing examples of best practice within ELC provision that you can share with us?**
- Do you know of innovative approaches to providing high quality, flexible ELC anywhere in the world from which we should be learning?
- Are there existing innovative delivery models in Scotland whose impact you would be interested to see evaluated?

In Highland local authority they are trying to create truly flexible ELC within primary and nursery schools which includes out of school care. This model is particularly relevant for rural, remote rural and island communities as they experience recruitment, retention and access to transport, training and qualifications problems. By sharing resources and staff across the school, ELC and Out of School Care, this maximises their potential to support children and parents across the age range. We would be interested in seeing this model evaluated and we are currently involved in delivering our own quality improvement framework for the out of school care aspects of some of those services, therefore, we could assist, if required.

An innovative example using GIRFEC and an out of school care breakfast club in one LA in Scotland is where head teachers identified children who were often late or missing school. A local out of school care service, which also runs a breakfast club, was commissioned by the LA to provide a pick up service from the child's own home, to the breakfast club, where a nutritious meal and play was provided, then the children were taken to school, on time, every day. It was reported that the children's wellbeing and engagement in school was vastly improved through this practical support.

There may be disadvantaged younger children, especially vulnerable two year olds, whose parents, for one reason or another, are unable to bring their child to the ELC on time or consistently. Therefore this type of pick up and indeed taking the child home too, type of practical service could both support the child in accessing their ELC and assist their family in coping with the circumstances which prevent them from taking up the ELC offer. This could be a trial of good practice.

It would take a whole report to share the innovative approaches to providing high quality flexible ELC from anywhere in the world, which we could learn from, therefore we will confine our comments here to rather broad signposting:

- The Reggio Emilie approach to creativity and the environment for children: "The hundred languages of children"; this has particular relevance in terms of our recommendations on premises as the "environment is the third teacher". <http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/learningandteaching/approaches/reggioemilia/index.asp>
- For comparative data on ELC and education (and sometimes including out of school care) across European countries the following resource is helpful:

https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Main_Page

This web resource gives separate country reports on ELC, including staff training/qualifications/policies and financial support etc.

Question 6

- **What outcomes should we be measuring through this programme of trials?**
- What would a successful trial look like, and how would we measure it?
- What indicators will be needed to inform decisions on future delivery?
- What areas of children's and families' lives might the expansion of high quality, flexible ELC have a positive impact on?
- How would we measure the impact of a particular delivery model on providers and other stakeholders?

A successful trial model needs to be focused on outcomes which can be measured and monitored, therefore a trial could be deemed successful if it yields relevant data to inform future developments, even if it failed to meet a specific set outcome, as long as the measuring and monitoring could explain why this is the case.

Many of the actual outcomes of a successful ELC experience for children are very long term, so shorter term data on current and enhanced wellbeing, happiness and confidence not just of children but also families- family attachments are key to achieving the additional outcomes such as parents accessing work, families moving out of poverty etc. Young children can give their opinions through using researchers skilled in using consultative methods such as the Mosaic approach.

Potential benefits of the expansion could be better attachment relationships through continuity of care provided, children's developmental needs met and families feeling better supported. There are a range of self evaluation measures and external inspection processes which would yield much of this data, while additional skilled researchers could be engaged to work with children and families.

At the same time, providers and partners involved, including the funding supervision, should be gathering input costs data and recording the needs for other resources and support generated by the specific trial. For example, additional staff training, time expended and hidden costs of extended provision, the cost of providing meals, or expanding outdoor resources etc.

Question 7

- **Are there other services for children and young people that the trials should be integrated with?**
- Children and Families use a variety of national and local services, and co-locating or linking these with Early Learning and Childcare provision may bring benefits to users and/or providers of the service – these benefits might mean more integrated services which are better, more convenient and/or easier to access; they might provide better value for money or raise awareness of common interests.
- What opportunities might exist, and how might these be trialled?

Yes, out of school care. If this is about supporting children and families, then children and families need support not just for pre-school but also throughout primary school and beyond. Also, if you increase delivery of ELC you create an expectation that this kind of provision will be available once children start school. We have already suggested that the Highland council run services which integrate Schools and ELC with OSC is one such model, good for rural or island services, but in terms of larger scale services perhaps not directly replicable. Councils which are direct providers of out of school care may be useful partners in providing examples and ideas, e.g. how out of school care staff also work in schools as pupil support assistants etc.

1140 hours over 38 weeks is not in all reality sufficient for a parent/carer to take up full-time employment- it enables part-time term-time (and probably low-paid) employment (probably in the most part for women). It could be said that for truly empowering parents, and women in particular, enabling them to take up full-time (or near full-time) professional employment then the hours and number of weeks needs to be increased even further to meet raised expectations, however, this also has to be balanced by ensuring quality and children's best interests.

Until this is the case, realistically, there needs to be co-ordination with wrap around ELC which parents pay for, and again with out of school care. Given that the childcare tax credits support will be subsumed into the UK universal benefit system, and, in the budget today (16 March 2016) it was suggested that the 2017 roll out of the new (UK) childcare voucher scheme will start with help for the youngest children, keeping parents and providers informed of such help with childcare costs has also to be linked in to the trials. Once again it has been shown that helping parents access financial advice and support is a clear way to address poverty, see, for example: http://www.gcph.co.uk/publications/626_a_pockets_approach_to_addressing_financial_vulnerability

Question 8

- **Are there local/regional characteristics that should be explicitly built into the trials?**
- Scotland is a country with great regional and local diversity, and in order to be successful, the models of ELC provision will need to be cognisant of and reflect these local needs.
- Which local/regional characteristics most preclude a 'one-size-fits-all' approach?
- What responses to specific local challenges might ELC trials need to address to be of real value?

In small local authorities where departments are able to communicate easily and efficiently then it is possible to provide a more integrated service which meets the needs of the local communities. We have already mentioned the challenges for rural and island communities, staffing, transport and premises, and indeed in built up urban areas the challenges of finding good quality environments. In addition, in areas of high unemployment we have mentioned that an outreach approach is needed to support the whole family and to ensure disadvantaged children who may need it more than most, access their ELC. Any such approaches should be non stigmatising and non-judgmental.

A Scotland is a geographically diverse country with a diversity in composition of rural, urban and city local authorities- each with their own unique problems and ways of delivering services. Large-scale models of replication have to be seriously considered and tweaked for them to work.

Question 9

- **How can we design trials in such a way as to ensure scalability?**
- To maximise the value of this programme, we want to ensure that the lessons we learn from our chosen trials can be applied to similar ELC settings in Scotland.
- What do we need to factor into the design of the trials to enable this?

To support this process, look to examples from the Early Years Collaborative and RAFA, in both cases the Plan, Do, Study, Act cycle is followed and small scale measurable interventions are tested before replication on a larger scale. There are a number of experts within and available to the Scottish Government from both programmes, so it would make sense to draw on their knowledge as well of the experience of successful activities already carried out.

An example of a trial might be supporting the transition of disadvantaged children from nursery to school over the summer holiday period, by providing places in a service which is subsidized to both provide OSC holiday care and free nutritious lunches and snacks. Data from the provider, class teachers, parents and, of course, children themselves, could demonstrate the effectiveness of this support, backed up by academic research.

Question 10

- **Would you be interested in being involved in the programme of trials? Yes**
- If so, in what capacity?

Yes, in trials which look at delivering out of school services for the most deprived children during school holidays, or in supporting the quality improvement processes with the small number of services in the integrated model school, ELC & OSC in Highland council.

We would also be interested in being part of the architectural competition we suggested earlier in this paper.