

Scottish Out of School Care Network response to:

Social Justice and Social Security Committee

Inquiry into Child Poverty and Parental Employment (closing date 5th April 2023)

1. ***What changes to childcare provision in Scotland could have the greatest impact on child poverty?***

As the Chief Executive of the Scottish Out of School Care Network, www.soscn.org I am responding mainly on the changes required for school aged childcare provision in Scotland, however, many of the overall points we make on behalf of parents and carers, can apply to any age of children and young people (especially those with additional support needs). Nevertheless, there are issues for school age childcare, as a non-statutory sector with very little public funding, not least in terms of poor pay and part time work for mainly women, whose own families may also be in poverty.

School age childcare, often known also as out of school care, is the provision of care before school starts, after school care services and all day care during school holidays and in service days. Services are registered with the Care Inspectorate and staff are registered with the Scottish Social Services Council. Staff must meet the same qualifications and levels for their roles as those working in early learning and childcare. This means, for example, that the manager of the service must obtain a degree level qualification within a stipulated time period.

School age childcare is recognised by the Scottish Government as an important measure to help tackle child poverty.

“We will also build a system of wraparound childcare by the end of this Parliament, providing care before and after school, all year round, and supporting parents – particularly on low-incomes – to have secure and stable employment. Those on the lowest incomes will pay nothing, and others will make fair and affordable contributions. This offer will also reduce inequalities in access to a range of activities round about the school day, particularly for those children who may benefit most.”

[Chapter 2: Scotland as a Land of Opportunity - A Fairer, Greener Scotland: Programme for Government 2021-22 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#) (page 5)

The value of the sector to improving the wellbeing of children, especially during and after the effects of the pandemic on children, was especially recognised in their Progress Report on delivering a new policy framework for school age childcare in Scotland. The value in terms of supporting the six priority groups of very low income families, in ensuring that, alongside other employability and family support measures, they have access to school age childcare, including holiday childcare and food programmes, is also set out in that report. [School age childcare: progress report - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

There will shortly be another updated progress report and information on consultations, tests of change and impact of pilot models of delivery. This is part of working towards a *current target* that, by the end of this parliament – there will be free or low cost access to school age childcare for those on the lowest income and difficult circumstances.

Of course SOSCN welcomes this and the potential considerable investment planned for the future, however, for parents across all socio-economic groups, the situation now is causing families to lose much needed income, halting careers, and stopping the take up of employment or training opportunities, as currently the school age childcare sector is in a workforce crisis, which then affects

every family dependent on access to school age childcare, including lone parents, and indeed, creating unemployment when services have to close down.

While currently there are staffing shortages across the wider childcare and care sectors, school age childcare has always had issues with recruitment and retention of staff due to the nature of the part time hours during term time. Without exaggeration, we can definitely state that there is now a workforce crisis in school age childcare, and, because of this families are unable to access the school age childcare they need and this is, and I quote from a parent here “pushing us into poverty”. Here is a link to a summary paper on the workforce issues: [sac-childcare-workforce-discussion-paper.pdf \(soscn.org\)](https://www.soscn.org/sac-childcare-workforce-discussion-paper.pdf)

Since emerging from the pandemic and associated health measures, the numbers of school age childcare services and childcare places they offer has reduced. Because of staffing shortages some services closed down completely while others, with waiting lists, cannot meet demand from parents as they have insufficient staff to meet higher numbers of places. In recent months we have met with long term, highly skilled and experienced managers, who can barely find time to carry out all of their management tasks as they have had to be “on the floor”, not just to ensure staff and child ratios are met, but because new inexperienced staff need training and to see modelling of good childcare practice.

Given that staff in school age childcare must hold the same qualifications as those in early learning and childcare (ELC), the huge expansion of ELC has meant a constant “churn” of the more skilled, experienced and qualified staff in school age childcare to better pay and conditions and a full time job in ELC., or indeed a less stressful and better paid job in a supermarket. This in turn impacts on the quality of services and causes stress and loss of morale of remaining staff, as well as the many parents on management committees, trying to keep a service they all need themselves. Just under half of services are in the voluntary sector and rely on parents to volunteer for the management committees and SOSCN has been contacted by such parents unable to recruit staff to keep their services open. We also hear from larger school age childcare services, in terms of having to cut some of their provision, or not open planned new services, simply because there are no staff.

At the moment we have a short parent and carer survey, open until the end of March 2023, which asks if they have access to sufficient school age childcare and what is the impact on their families if they do not have that. At the time of writing there are over 300 responses, with a wealth of commentary outlining the stress and guilt parents feel, and the impact on cutting work hours and therefore family income. Given this inquiry closes on the 5th April 2023, we are submitting this evidence in terms of interim results from our survey, and *would ask that we can sent you updated results as soon as we are able to publish the final report.*

Apart from the relative success of the roll out of 1140 hours early learning and childcare, which still has ongoing issues, for parents and carers in Scotland (and the UK) access to properly registered, reliable and of good quality childcare for the youngest children under 3 years old and, especially for school age children 5 to 16, is ad hoc, patchy, unaffordable and often unavailable in major cities and especially very rural areas. In addition, if a child has an additional support need, there is even less access to the type of specialist support many children and young people need.

Although the recent UK Government spring budget made announcements and commitments to extend childcare provision, much of these measures are for the longer-term future and do little to address the current lack of access to childcare for families. While it is welcome that they have proposals for parents on universal credit to be able to claim upfront childcare costs, it is worrying that this is tied into a stricter regime of conditionality to seek work for even the parents of the

youngest children. While, of course, many parents need and want to get back to work, in terms of early child development and attachment some parents want to be home with their young babies and toddlers too.

Given that there is a staffing crisis across the whole childcare sector, in Scotland and the UK, any expansion will have to look at the bigger picture of regulation, qualifications and foremost pay and conditions if we want to make working in childcare attractive to potential staff.

For school age childcare, annualised contracts, which account for the longer working shifts covering school holidays may help only if, at the minimum, the real living wage is paid, and senior staff with the highest levels of qualifications are well rewarded. Our latest workforce survey (pre-publication 2023) shows that in school age childcare a Manager/ Lead Practitioner earns an average of £14.05 per hour, a Practitioner an average of £10.69 per hour and a Support Worker with an average of £9.98 per hour. The real living wage amount in 2023 is £10.90 per hour, [What is the real Living Wage? | Living Wage Foundation](#). Most of these jobs are part time, therefore staff in this field may themselves rely on universal credit and be under pressure to increase working hours through that.

There needs to be a radical transformation in how childcare is valued and rewarded, and for it to be widely available for all ages. We need a greatly expanded workforce of professional staff with access to all the resources required to deliver high quality care, including specialist care for children with additional support needs at any age. Families cannot pull themselves out of poverty without there being an infrastructure of reliable, affordable and accessible childcare, especially school age childcare as so many parents must cut their hours, or indeed leave their jobs, as there is not enough school age childcare available, or it is not affordable, even with help with childcare costs.

We have to address those experiencing the effects of the lowest incomes, but we also must address the fact that more families will be plunged into poverty if they cannot access the childcare they need.

2. *Who should any extension of free or subsidised childcare be offered to? And*
3. *What age groups should be prioritised for further expansion of childcare?*

For parents of the youngest children, up to 24 months, we believe they should have a choice, taking an example from Finland, parents there are paid an allowance if they wish to stay at home to care for their child, or they can access state subsidised nursery care at the end of parental leave. [Financial assistance for families with children - Ministry of Social Affairs and Health \(stm.fi\)](#)

School Age Childcare

Our priority is school age childcare, that is from 4.5 year olds right up to 16 year olds where a young person has an additional support need. That is registered childcare before and after the school day and all daycare during school holidays. In England it is often referred to as “Wraparound care”.

Scottish Out of School Care Network Report on limited or low access to school age childcare, parent and carer survey

Summary of interim results 22nd March 2023

The above survey is live until the 31st of March 2023. The purpose of the survey is to discover whether parents and carers had access to sufficient school age childcare for their families, and the impact on their families where they do not access this to meet their needs. The survey was distributed widely through emails and social media. It was designed to be easily completed in a few minutes. The data below is based on around 320 responses so far.

Access to school age childcare:

When asked do you have sufficient school age childcare to meet your family's needs, 56% said 'yes'. However, 44% did not have sufficient access locally, with 31% only having some access and requiring more hours, and 13% having no access to school age childcare locally at all.

Impact of lack of, or limited, access to School Age Childcare

- 63% experiencing more stress due to lack of school age childcare.
- 51% have had to reduce working hours, with 19% of partners having to reduce working hours.
- 41% have to rely on family and friends for help with childcare, while 38% say this causes more stress on family and friends and 34% say this puts more strain on their relationships with family and friends due to their need for help with childcare.
- 35% have reduced overall household income due to lack of school age childcare and 27% have increased stress due to this lower family income.
- 18% have lost a potential job opportunity, while 16% have been unable to take up potential training or educational opportunities and 13% have had to give up their job or career.
- For others some had to give up training and education, 6%, or their partner did, 6%.
- Some are under pressure to increase working hours as they are on universal credit, 4%.

19% of respondents so far are lone parents, while 3% have a disability, many offered additional comments:

"I've been on the after school club waiting list since May 2021. I have to squeeze my working hours in during the school day, I have a couple of left over hours I have to add on in the evenings. When I'm required to be into the office this eats into my work time which increases the add on time I have to work in the evenings. It is extremely frustrating and stressful and as a lone parent I have no time for myself. I am exhausted, underpaid and under supported."

"It's so hard for me single mom with two young children 8 and 5yrs old get pressure job from universal credit. Now I am studying with Edinburgh college(I get a little bit help for me with cost after school club when I am studying."

"I also feel that my child is missing out on beneficial development opportunities that my older children benefitted from when we did have access to a local after school club. By this I mean the opportunity to make friends and have social interaction with others children and adults."

"Having to cut working hours has meant that, with cost of living, things are very hard. It would financially be better to not work than to work reduced hours due to out of school child care issues."

"We have no family support, I had also been caring for my parents who have passed away. Even if changes are made it the economic damage will still be done"

"I have to make up my work hours after the children go to bed which means I am constantly tired"

There are also a range of written answers under "other reasons", while a number of respondents offered additional comments, which bring to life the pressures they are facing due to lack or limited access to school age childcare.

This includes stress about doing their jobs properly, using up leave to cover holidays, working when the children are asleep, worried about children's development in no longer having social interaction with other children and them sitting in front of tv or Xbox, while the parent tries to get work done.

Parents and carers of children with disabilities report even more difficulties in accessing suitable care for their children, while transport issues also have an effect on the rush to get children to and from school whilst still trying to hold down a job.

Respondents including many essential public service staff, such as NHS consultants and staff juggling limited access to after school care, or using lower quality "babysitters" in between, or a teacher who cannot work full time because of no access to a breakfast club in her school. As one parent said "our economy is in decline, and it should be a primary priority of government that sufficient school age childcare is available and accessible to those contributing to the economy".

Although those who said they currently had enough school age childcare, were not asked to complete the remaining questions, some did provide further comments which are also enlightening.

Without school age childcare "Children and I would be pushed into poverty." As overall results show many parents and carers are losing family income, employment and educational opportunities, all of which helps keep families out of poverty.

However lack of childcare cuts right across the demographic of parents and carers:

"if our OOSC and holiday club couldn't run I would have to significantly cut my working hours or even leave my job as an NHS Consultant." Again, we cannot afford to lose essential staff from the NHS.

4. *What type of childcare could work best to serve the needs of parents in employment or seeking employment?*

Please see answers to Qs 1.2. and 3 above.

5. *What improvements to public transport could support parents?*

We recommend, especially in rural areas, examining the school bus system so, for example, a "double run" could be provided for children using the breakfast club and after school care, this would help parents from having to start work later and finish up earlier for picking up children from childcare.

6. *What can the Scottish Government do to increase the supply of well-paid, secure employment that works for parents?*

We would reiterate that investment in overall childcare infrastructure supply of well paid secure employment would support parents and carers in their careers.

7. *Are population changes in your area affecting local employment opportunities? If so, how?*

n/a

8. *What steps would be helpful at ensuring those not currently employed, and are looking for work, are supported?*

They and their child or children should be able to access free childcare in advance of gaining employment, this would be good for the children in getting used to using childcare, and free up time for the parents to prepare for going back into the workforce. Support organisations for

employability programme should be based on dignity, respect and human rights, and we believe that the use of sanctions on already low family income on universal credit might force parents into unsuitable work, cause undue distress and further poverty.

9. *Do you feel that parents who want to improve their employment options have sufficient access to education and training in your area? If not, what could be improved?*

Although students can get help with childcare costs, many may not know about this, and again, if there is no actual childcare available, this prevents them from taking up education and training opportunities.

10. *What can employers do to offer more family friendly and flexible working conditions?*

This should be standard good practice.

11. *What do employers need from the Scottish Government to offer family friendly and flexible working conditions?*

Support to ensure they have sufficient knowledge, resources and levels of staffing to cover delivery of such policies.

12. *What could the Scottish Government prioritise to help parents into work and better paid jobs? And What about parents who want to increase their hours- 'underemployed'.*

This is both a feature that parents in our survey mentioned and a fact of life for school age childcare staff. Childcare hours are mainly on the "floor" for such staff and they often have to do training, qualifications, administration, planning, mentoring others etc. in very little paid for or in their own time, so increasing hours paid to include all of this other work is needed.

Ensure there is a strong childcare infrastructure in place, including school age childcare and specific support for children with additional support needs. Invest in high quality training and apprenticeships for all ages for the skilled jobs of the future and this should include childcare.

13. *If the Scottish Government wants to help parents into work and better paid jobs, which changes should be its priority?*

See Q 12 answer.

14. *Is there anything else you would like to tell us?*

We request that we submit the full parental survey quoted above, after the completion date of 31 March 2023 to be included in our final response. Thank you.

Notes:

1. School age childcare in Scotland

In Scotland, school age childcare, also known as out of school care, is the largest sector providing play, care, and informal learning opportunities for school-aged children outside formal education. Services all provide child-centred care after school, and some additionally provide breakfast clubs and all-day holiday care. Currently there are around a thousand services catering for over 50,000 children.

School age childcare services operating for more than 2 hours each day are required to register with the Care Inspectorate, and staff are regulated by the Scottish Social Services Council. Staff in registered settings are required to meet the same regulation and qualification requirements as those in early years settings.

Parents using school age childcare services registered with the Care Inspectorate may be able to access government support to pay for childcare costs through tax credits or the Tax-free childcare system.

2. About SOSCN

The Scottish Out of School Care Network (SOSCN) has been operating since 1991, and we are the national intermediary charitable organisation supporting the out of school care sector in Scotland. All our work is underpinned by a commitment to ensuring that children's rights are met by enabling access to play, care and informal learning opportunities outside school hours.

Our membership is free and open to services and individuals, which includes staff members, committee members, students, development and support staff, academics, regulators... anyone with an active interest in school age childcare. Join SOSCN today and you will receive regular information updates, news bulletins and access to our free and low-cost training and events.

Submitted by

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Company No. SC200662

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