

School Age Childcare Workforce Discussion Paper

November 2022

1. About this paper

This discussion paper which focuses on the current issues facing the childcare workforce in Scotland has been produced by the Scottish Out of School Care Network (SOSCN), with input from the Care and Learning Alliance (CALA).

2. Current Workforce Situation

Recruitment and retention of staff in all school age childcare (SAC) services has been an issue for a number of years. Services in voluntary, private and public sectors are now reporting that recruitment and retention of qualified and experienced staff are amongst the greatest issues they face.

We believe we are now facing a workforce crisis in school age childcare- the inability to either retain and/or recruit suitable individuals is affecting the ability to deliver quality childcare services, and furthermore, it is being reported to us that financially sustainable, much-needed and used services are either unable to expand (to meet demand) or beginning to close due to a Scotland-wide lack of suitable individuals to work in SAC.

As the national school age childcare representative organisation, we believe the Scottish government's commitment to a future expansion of school age childcare provision, whilst very welcome, will create additional pressure on an already stretched workforce. We have concerns that without additional resources and regulatory change to support the development of the workforce, the school age childcare sector in Scotland will remain vulnerable to closure in the short and medium terms prior to the full implementation of the planned expansion.

Since school age childcare supports not only individual families but also the ambitions of wider society and the economy, we believe it must be considered as an infrastructure service, meaning it is financed and resourced accordingly with a particular focus on supporting the workforce.

3. What are the workforce issues the school age childcare sector is experiencing?

- **Ongoing impact of 1140 hours ELC expansion**

The ELC expansion created many more jobs within local authorities offering better pay and conditions, more hours, and career prospects than could be provided in non-public sector or non-ELC services. Unable to compete with these terms, SAC services have reported significant losses in experienced and qualified staff. Replacing staff with similarly experienced and/or qualified individuals is proving extremely difficult- 'the pool to draw on is empty'.

- **Low pay and poor conditions**

Pay and conditions are both push and pull factors and are probably the main reason for the loss or churn of staff within childcare. Most SAC jobs are part-time term-time and when combined with low salaries many workers now find it does not provide a living wage. In addition to staff moving to ELC services, a significant number are leaving the

childcare sector completely for other sectors such as retail or leisure where they will receive better pay and more hours.

An additional 'push factor' facing SAC workers is a requirement for individuals receiving Universal Credit to work full-time hours, and since more hours are not available they are required to look elsewhere for employment.

Although there is a commitment that ELC staff across sectors receive the Real Living Wage this does not apply to SAC staff. As a national organisation, whilst we are committed to staff receiving the Real Living Wage we recognise that it can be difficult for private and voluntary sector services to keep raising salaries in scale, meaning that the pay difference between workers at the lowest level and those with more responsibility and experience diminishes. Unsurprisingly this then can also become a 'push factor' in seeking employment elsewhere.

In short, working in childcare is not financially attractive. Although childcare costs in the UK are high, it should cost even more as it is built on the back of a generally poorly-paid workforce. However, we do not think that parents should pay more through fees but that SAC should be better resourced directly from government in order to increase salaries.

- **Paperwork, bureaucracy and changing regulatory requirements**

In SAC services, increased paperwork, bureaucracy and changing regulatory requirements have been highlighted as major difficulties in terms of completing everything within paid working hours. To achieve all the administration and regulatory compliance effectively requires full-time hours, yet 86% of SAC staff are part-time workers.

Non-public sector services tend not to have finance, HR departments etc therefore much of the paperwork must be completed by managers or volunteer management committees. Even although some managers are supernumerary, increasingly they are having to work on the floor to cover staffing shortages meaning paperwork needs to be completed outwith normal work hours and usually with no additional financial compensation.

Many managers talk of the negative impact that additional unpaid hours have on their own family/non-work life leading to a poor work-life balance. Since most of the paperwork is a legal, regulatory or funding requirement someone has to complete it-effectively the sector is built upon staff partially working for free to ensure regulatory compliance. There is a full-time expectation but on part-time hours. Whilst some staff would welcome being paid these additional hours others would prefer to have the time. We believe that paperwork needs to be less onerous and more streamlined.

- **Impact on quality**

Following on from the previous point, with managers and other staff members having to cover staff absences or a simple lack of staff, many services are finding it impossible to set aside time to develop the service or implement quality improvement which in turn affects the quality of service. When being inspected, SAC services are increasingly being downgraded due to staffing issues which further compounds the stresses and tensions of the workforce.

- **Lack of professional recognition**

SAC services cite a lack of professional recognition from the wider children's services sector as being a disincentive; this is despite having to meet the same legislative and regulatory requirements on both service and individual levels as other 'daycare of children services'.

- **Qualification and training requirements**

The requirement for Managers to have a degree-level qualification in Childhood Practice can be problematic, especially for SAC services. Services are reporting it is difficult to recruit individuals with this qualification- most want full-time employment and therefore may be more inclined to work in ELC. The SAC sector is also losing long-term experienced but older staff who do not wish to complete the degree. Others are reluctant to undertake the qualification because they do not see it as being relevant to SAC; they cannot afford it, or simply do not have the time to complete it.

Access to, and funding of, qualifications and training can also be problematic, especially in the past two years. Staff are usually expected to undertake training and qualifications outwith work hours with no extra pay. The location and timing of training may also cause difficulties for individuals, especially within rural areas.

- **Ongoing impact of COVID pandemic**

The COVID Pandemic has had a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of the workforce. Managers in particular have reported high levels of stress and exhaustion due to the levels of responsibility to ensure the ongoing health, safety and wellbeing of the children and staff in their care. In short much of the workforce is exhausted mentally and physically by their experience of delivering services during the Pandemic, and although the pandemic is over, the demands on staff remain.

- **Transport**

Of course, this is not solely an issue for childcare workers, however, many will not live near their employment so have to commute either by public or private transport which is both time-consuming and costly. Transport costs can be a significant outlay on already low wages.

- **Issues of rurality**

Rural services are affected more acutely by all the above due to a smaller and more geographically scattered population; there are probably fewer public transport options yet often greater distances must be travelled; access to locally delivered training and qualification opportunities is limited; staff are still on low wages but often general living costs can be higher in rural areas than more urban ones, and in general there is a much smaller pool of expertise to draw upon.

5. Recommendations

Childcare as infrastructure

- Investigate how childcare could be funded as a national infrastructure service by looking at other statutory funding models and considering how they could be adapted, e.g.

something like NHS dentistry which has come from, and retains, its mixed-economy model.

Improved pay and conditions

- More direct funding from national government to improve salaries
 - Real Living Wage for all childcare workers not just ELC staff
 - Support increased pay for managers and qualified/senior staff to ensure meaningful pay differentials between different job levels.
- Subsidised (free public transport) for childcare workers
- Discounted shopping/purchasing for childcare workers as are sometimes offered to NHS, fire fighters etc.

Qualifications and training

- Ring-fenced workforce development money to pay for qualifications and training
- Allow additional qualifications to be registerable with SSSC e.g. outdoor education, forest schools qualifications for outdoor childcare services; specialist ASN qualifications for specialist childcare services; youthwork qualifications, sports, arts qualifications for SAC services. (*We believe that childcare qualifications should still be required within a childcare service but not necessarily for all staff and that a mixture of skills and qualifications would enhance children's experiences, particularly in SAC services.)

Need to pull from a wider pool of expertise

- We believe that a widening of registerable qualifications would help with this.

A change to regulatory and legislative requirements

- Currently SAC services are registered as 'daycare of children' services meaning they have to meet the same legal and regulatory requirements as full-time additionally funded and subsidised ELC services. Effectively, SAC services are treated like ELC services but for older children. We believe that a different legal definition, with more proportionate regulation should be applied to SAC which better recognises the ages and developmental stages of the children attending, and the fact it is not a formal education service but one which operates during children's leisure time. In short, we believe that a 'lighter touch' approach to regulatory requirements and associated qualifications would benefit the workforce but not to the detriment of the quality of experience for the children attending.

6. Case studies highlighting the negative impact on services, families, and the wider community of the SAC workforce crisis

Below are two case studies showing the impact the workforce crisis is having on services across Scotland. The first features Longstone After School and Breakfast Club in Edinburgh which, despite being needed, well-used and financially viable closed in October 2022 due to a lack of staff.

The second focuses on CALA's difficulty in recruiting staff which means that a long-planned for and long-needed SAC service in Ullapool remains unopened; the potential knock-on effects to the local community and economy if the situation continues are also highlighted.

6.1 Case Study One- Longstone After School Care and Breakfast Club

Longstone After School Care and Breakfast Club is a long-established service run by a voluntary management committee in Edinburgh. It has a registered capacity of 20 places after school and 18 at breakfast club, and ordinarily employs one full-time degree-level qualified manager along with two part-time members of staff.

Following a year of focussed business redevelopment and longer-term sustainability plans and strategies implemented by the skilled and dedicated voluntary management committee, the service was operating at near-full capacity with a waiting list of 16 children across Monday to Friday for the breakfast club and 26 across Monday to Friday for the After School Club in August 2022. Yet, despite the renewed success of the service it had to close at the end of September 2022 due to a loss of staff and an inability to recruit new ones.

The long-standing manager, although loving the job, moved to an ELC position within Edinburgh Council which provided better pay and conditions, and greater career prospects. The senior worker who had agreed to step into the manager role temporarily then similarly accepted an ELC council position. As an unqualified trainee, the third member of staff was not able to step into the managerial position.

Despite advertising widely, locally and nationally, and using both free and paid-for platforms there was a limited response to the adverts; many were poor applications, and most applicants had no relevant experience or qualifications. Three individuals were invited to interview but only two attended and neither were suitable choices. After the staff worked their notice the service's only option was to close.

The impact on families has been immediate: some parents have had to cut work hours, or shift work patterns; some parents are now sharing informal childcare responsibilities and single parents in particular are struggling with the juggle of work and childcare. The management committee is currently conducting an impact assessment survey with families.

As the committee is still hopeful that a service can be reinstated in the school, it has kept the let for the remainder of its 12 months. Through the council, the school is being funded to deliver a breakfast club 4 days a week but this is guaranteed until Christmas and only opens at 8am, whereas the previous club opened at 7.30.

However, these are only stop-gap measures and not a long-term solution- it is the ongoing difficulties retaining and recruiting staff which have forced the closure of a much-needed and used school age childcare service in Edinburgh.

6.2 Case Study Two – Proposed new SAC in Ullapool delivered by CALA

Care and Learning Alliance (CALA) is a childcare, children and families charity based in Highland which has been providing remote and rural services for over 40 years. It currently runs 24 childcare settings including daycare, early learning and childcare, and school aged childcare as well as a range of other services including a staffbank of relief practitioners, support for families and play in communities, advocacy and membership support for ELC and SAC sector.

Proposed Ullapool OSC service:

Responding to a community request and consultation indicating strong demand and need for childcare in Ullapool and the surrounding area to support working parents, CALA agreed to explore options, starting in September 2021, for a School Aged Childcare (SAC) provision. Since then CALA has been working closely with Highland Council and the Scottish Childminding Association (SCMA) who have been supporting the potential development of 2-year old and rural childminding provision.

Highland and Island Enterprise, Highland Council, local councillors, local MSPs, the local community council and parent council as well as the school and other agencies have been supportive of the development of the service, recognising the huge need in the area to support economic sustainability and local services.

CALA's research and business plan led them to develop a new SAC provision for children aged 3-12 years from the end of the school day until 6pm Monday to Friday (term time), operating from a Highland Council room in portacabins used by the primary school.

Current situation regards the proposed service (as of October 2022):

Care Inspectorate were only willing to grant initial registration for children aged 5-12 years due to concerns about the suitability of the on-site toilets, although there is the understanding this will be revisited once the service is up and running, and the shared use of the room has been negotiated with the new head teacher of the school.

The application, although pending, requires the appointment of a named manager before completion and final sign off. A recruitment campaign has been ongoing for a number of months, but unfortunately, despite a range of advertising and promotional actions, the service is still without enough staffing to run.

The service cannot move forward until a staff team are appointed which is adding to the frustration of parents who have been awaiting this vital provision's opening.

Reasons why service cannot open in terms of workforce issues:

Despite numerous recruitment strategies including face-to-face open events, press release / advertising, social media, support of local businesses and Community Council, CALA have been unsuccessful in attracting any interest or application for the manager post (which can be stand-alone part-time or peripatetic) or Assistant Childcare Practitioner post leaving them without the required workforce to proceed with opening the provision.

A low rate of pay and timing of working hours are thought to be amongst the reasons for the lack of interest (any parent looking for part-time work would offset any earning against the cost of their own childcare making this unattractive to most). CALA are also competing against employers in the area such as Tesco and the local authority offering higher wages, and better conditions and hours.

The direct impact on parents of no OSC service (current & ongoing):

There is a negative impact on the ability of parents to remain in full time employment, with some parents indicating if a solution is not found they will need to resign from their employment; this includes local secondary school teachers and GPs.

The wider community impact of no OSC service (current & ongoing):

There are huge and far-reaching economic implications and a potential impact on current and future employers who will struggle to recruit staff in the local area. There is a risk of children being left in unsafe situations or with responsibility of younger siblings where parents must work to survive, having possible detrimental effects on children's development. The impact of, for example, teachers leaving the area will be huge - it could be detrimental to the continued delivery of a subject at the high School, meaning parents may chose to leave the village completely to allow their children to access a wider range of subjects elsewhere. This means even more people leaving their jobs which could undermine services such as local health, social care or hospitality.

There is also a reputational impact on CALA as a charity of being unable to deliver on a proposed service for parents and the community.

7. Further reading

SOSCN Membership Survey Summer 2022

<https://soscn.org/downloads/research/soscn-membership-survey-summer-2022.pdf>

Workforce Survey Results 2021. Out of School Care Workforce Statistics (SOSCN, 2022)

<https://soscn.org/downloads/research/osc-workforce-survey-results-2021.pdf>

Recruitment & Retention Survey 2019 Results (SOSCN, 2019)

<https://soscn.org/downloads/research/recruitment-and-retention-survey-results-2019.pdf>

With thanks to the management committee of Longstone After School Care and Breakfast Club, for contributing the case study. Further thanks to Care and Learning Alliance (CALA) for contributing the case study and additional expert knowledge.

