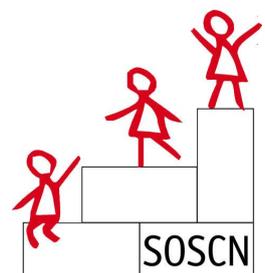


Rural Out of School Care Survey 2005



Scottish Out of School Care Network



Rural Out of School Care

Background

Scotland is a country of 30,414 square miles (78,772 square kilometres) with a population of just over five million, of which, one million live in rural areas. Approximately four million live in the central belt between Glasgow and Edinburgh, or in other words, four fifths of the population live on a fifth of the land.

A greater part of the Scottish countryside: hills, mountains, moor lands, lochs and islands, dictates that settlements and villages are small and dispersed with poor or irregular communication links. Industry and commerce is often very limited with many jobs being poorly paid, part-time or seasonal; due to the sparseness and wide-distribution of the population it is expensive to provide and maintain essential services. Public transport, healthcare, culture and leisure facilities, and of course childcare, all require greater subsidies and economic support than those in urban areas or cities.

Of course, that is not to say that all services in cities/urban areas are not in need of financial support, or that all rural services are not successful in their own right, far from it. However, it is true to say that in general, rural communities have additional requirements and face issues, over and above those experienced by services within more densely populated areas.

In May 2000 the Scottish Executive published "Rural Scotland- a New Approach" in which the Executive outlined its vision for rural Scotland. Below are extracts from the document (bold type SOSCN's own):

Extract One taken from "Chapter One- Our Visions for Rural Childcare"

"We want to work together to create a rural Scotland:

- Integral to Scotland's success, dynamic in harnessing its traditional strengths, and with an appetite for change
- Providing opportunity for our young people- so they don't have to leave to get on
- Offering a high quality of life to all its citizens, with access to services
- Sustaining and making the most of its natural and cultural heritage

The steps we take towards this vision in rural Scotland will often differ greatly from what is needed in urban Scotland...we have identified a number of practical overarching aims which will guide the development and implementation of our policies and programmes. These aims reflect the elements of the vision statement, and are as follows:

- Our future prosperity depends on combining traditional strengths with an appetite for change. We will support employers and communities to stimulate local and national economic success.

- **We will invest in our young people by bringing childcare, education, training and employment opportunities to where they live and work. Getting on need not mean going away.**
- We will improve access to services essential to our life and work, and ensure that quality of life will depend on what you need, not where you are." (p5)

"By 2020 we want a Scotland where child poverty has been eliminated; with full employment across all of Scotland...In rural areas just as much as in our towns and cities, we want everyone to enjoy the benefits of prosperity." (p6)

Extract Two taken from "Chapter 3- Providing Opportunity for Young People"

"The development of pre-school education and childcare in some rural communities can pose a particular challenge. The cost of pre-school provision in rural areas is generally higher than average, as the number of children is low, meaning that overhead costs are spread across few children. Ensuring access also needs careful planning. Transporting very young children is not straightforward: their attendance may only be for a part-time session and they require supervision and often special seats. It can be difficult to obtain adequate staff resource for pre-school education in some rural areas." (p19)

Extract Three taken from "Appendix 1- A Profile of Rural Scotland"

"Service Provision... research also showed that services with the lowest levels of satisfaction (satisfaction rates of less than 60%) and **the highest priority of rural residents for improvement, include activities for teenagers and young children; out-of-school care;** clothes shops; sports and leisure facilities..." (p65)

So, five years on and have there been changes? Has there been an investment in young people by bringing childcare to where they live? Is there access to services? Probably yes in that there is greater coverage of services, but how will they be maintained? The New Opportunities Fund's Out of School Hours Childcare Programme successfully enabled a large number of services, especially within rural areas to be set-up. As we are all well aware, this financial support is time limited, so what happens when the money runs out? Is the government truly committed to financially subsidising essential services in rural areas?

In spring this year the Scottish Out of School Care Network undertook a survey of rural areas to investigate the state of rural out of school care, the following section is a report of the results.

According to latest Scottish Executive statistics, there are currently 1,079 out of school care services in Scotland, 183 of which are based in rural areas.

In the spring of 2005 the Scottish Out of School Care Network (SOSCN) sent questionnaires to a cross-section of out of school care services located in local authorities identified as having a high percentage of rural services: Aberdeenshire, Angus, Argyll & Bute, Dumfries & Galloway, Highlands, Moray, Orkney, Western Isles, Perth & Kinross, Scottish Borders, Shetland, Stirling and Western Isles. Two types of questionnaires were distributed: one to be completed by the out of school care service and others to be completed by parents. Completed questionnaires were received from a total of seven of the twelve targeted local authorities with an approximate return rate of 10% for both sets of questionnaires.

Whilst the number of returns is perhaps not enough to draw "statistically robust" conclusions, the collected information can be used to support and illustrate anecdotal evidence and knowledge that SOSCN has gathered about out of school care in rural areas during the course of our work. SOSCN provides direct support to rural out of school care services and development/support workers across Scotland through its core work and that of the Funding Facilitators Programme.

It is SOSCN's expert opinion that rural out of school care services are economically fragile and vulnerable to closure.

1. The majority of out of school care services in rural areas are unsustainable on fee income alone due to two prime factors:

- Low numbers of children in catchment area.
- Low wages affecting fee levels and ability to pay full-cost recovery.

2. Parents without extended families, or friends able to provide childcare, are reliant on out of school care in order to access employment and study. (Although also true of urban areas it is more acute in rural areas as there is little or no alternative childcare.)

3. Out of school care provides employment, training and therefore greater opportunities to numerous people in small locations who would perhaps not otherwise be able to access employment, training or personal development opportunities.

4. Reliable and quality childcare is a key factor in stabilising an area's local economic strength and development.

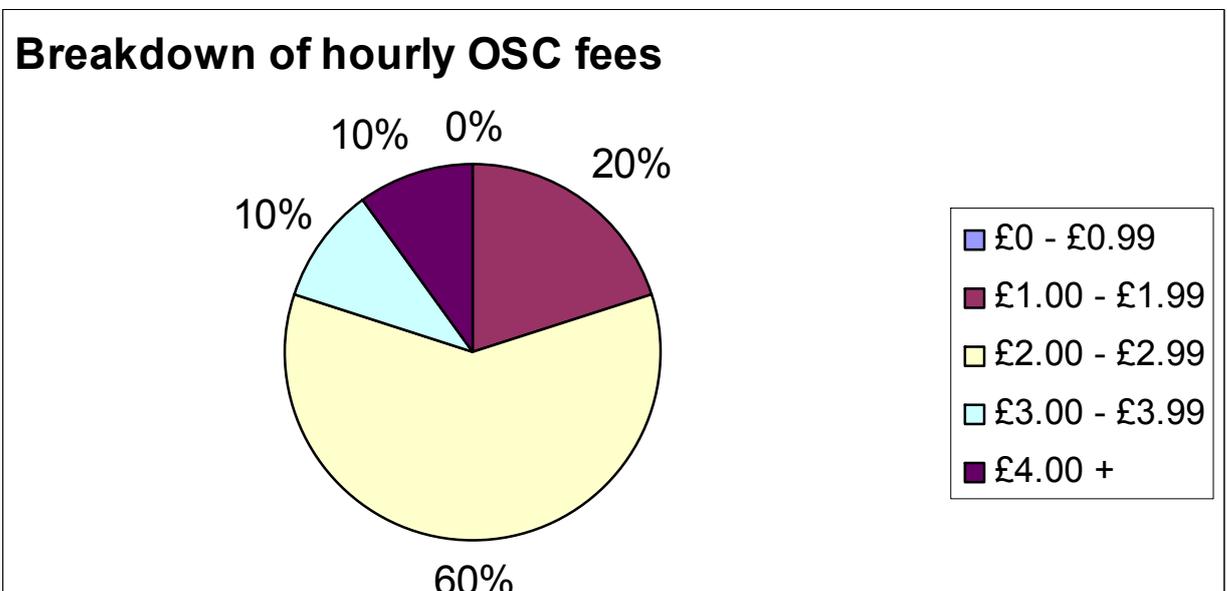
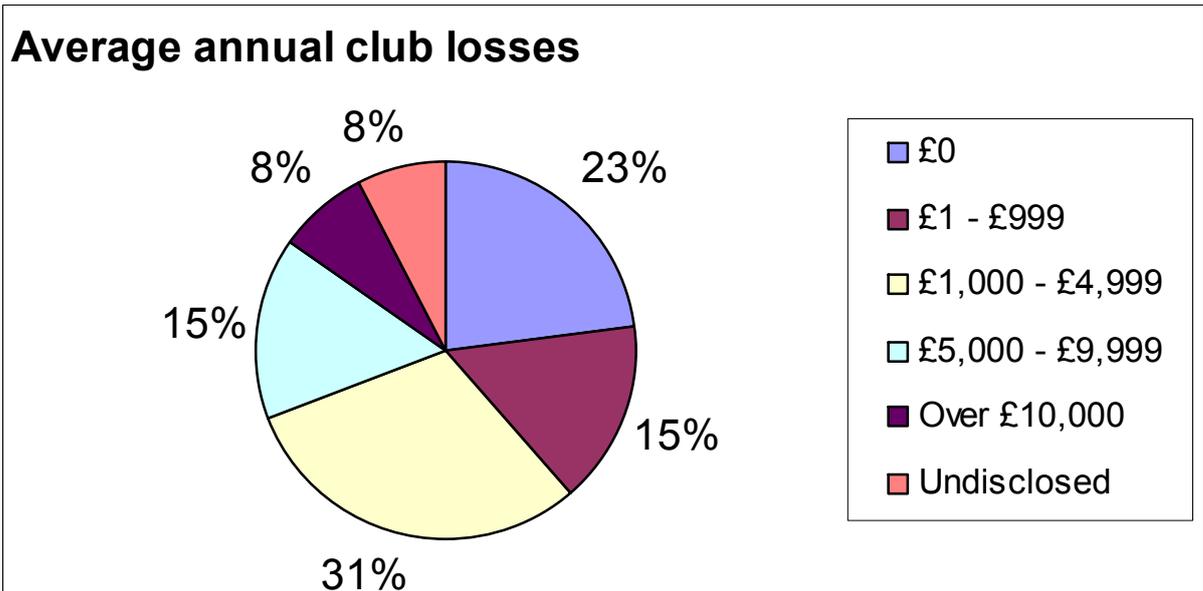
5. National government needs to recognise that out of school care and childcare in general, play key roles in maintaining an area's economic and social stability, and as a mostly economically unsustainable service requires continued and guaranteed financial subsidies in order to survive.

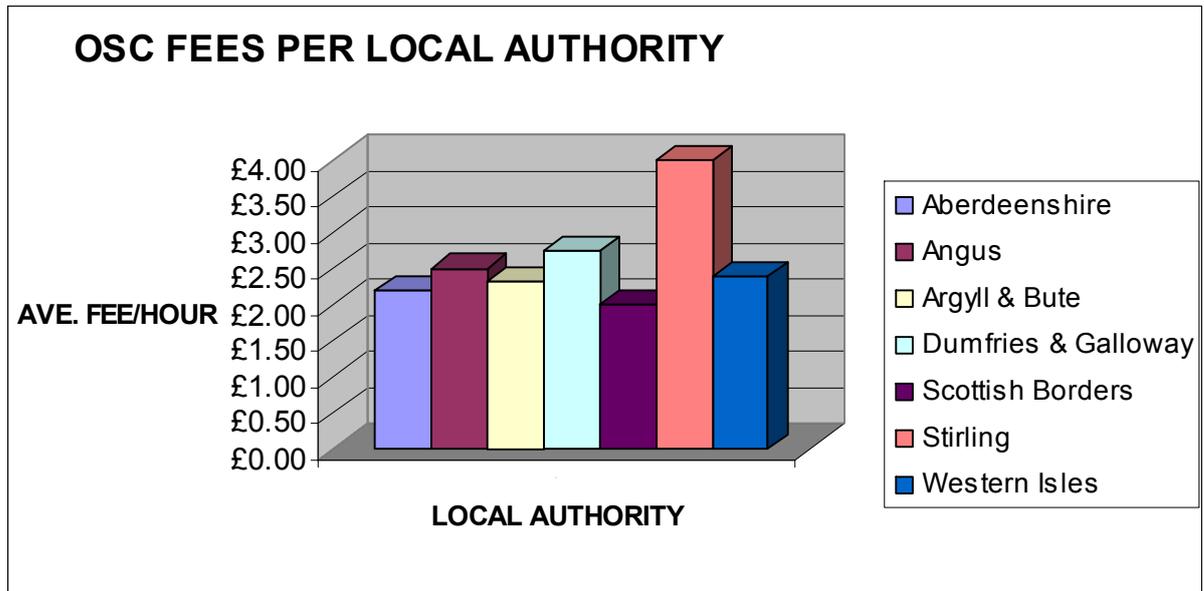
6. Out of school care often provides children in rural areas with the only opportunity to play and socialise with other children outwith the formal school environment.

The following results are the findings from the club questionnaires:

Fees		
Range of hourly fees		£1.50 - £4.00
Average hourly fee		£2.47
Factors influencing pricing policy: -		
Parents' ability to pay		76.9%
Other free childcare available		15.4%
Other (see "Comments" for specific factors)		38.5%
Does fee income cover expenditure?		
Yes		15.4%
No		84.6%
Will fee income alone ever cover expenditure?		
Yes		0.0%
No		84.6%
What are your annual losses?		
	£0	23.1%
	£1 - £999	15.4%
	£1,000 - £4,999	30.8%
	£5,000 - £9,999	15.4%
	Over £10,000	7.7%
	Undisclosed	7.6%
LOCAL INFORMATION		
Other Childcare Providers		
Is there unregistered childcare locally?		
	Yes	30.8%
	No	46.1%
	Don't know	23.1%
Do neighbours/extended family provide childcare?		
	Yes	92.3%
	No	7.7%
Are there opportunities for children to socialise outwith school other than the OSC group?		
	Yes	84.6%
	No	15.4%
Activities for Children & Young People		
Are there other activities for children and young people in the area?		
	Sports activities	84.6%
	Art activities	23.1%

Music activities	46.2%
Drama activities	46.2%
Dance activities	46.2%
Brownies/Guides	76.9%
Cubs/Scouts	69.2%
EMPLOYMENT STUDY	
Average % of parents who work full-time?	61.9%
Average % of parents who work part-time?	28.8%
Average % of parents who work locally?	42.5%
Average % of parents who commute to work?	65.0%





The following are results from parent questionnaires:

BACKGROUND INFORMATION			
Parents who work/study full-time	57%		
Parents who work/study part-time	43%		
Parents who work/study close to home	49%		
Parents who commute over 30 mins to work	33%		
Annual household income:			
Under £10,000	4%		
£10,000 - £20,000	22%		
£20,000 - £30,000	22%		
£30,000 - £40,000	14%		
£40,000 +	29%		
Undisclosed	10%		
Access to Childcare Tax Credits:			
Yes	57%		
No	39%		
Age category of children:			
under 3 years old	3%		
3 - 5 years old	13%		
5 - 8 years old	39%		
8 - 12 years old	35%		
12 +	9%		
ABOUT THE OUT OF SCHOOL CARE			
Length of time using the OSC service?			
Less than 6 months	6%		
6 months-1 year	31%		
1-2 years	16%		
2-3 years	20%		
3-4 years	8%		
over 4 years	18%		
Agreement with the following statements			
	Agree	Disagree	Unsure
My child(ren) enjoy(s) attending the OSC service.	100%	0%	0%
The OSC provides a variety of fun activities.	98%	2%	0%
The OSC provides a quality childcare.	96%	0%	4%
There are few other activities available for children/young people locally.	73%	18%	10%
The OSC benefits parents and the community.	94%	4%	2%
I am dependent on the OSC for my childcare needs.	77%	22%	2%
Without the OSC I would have to change my work/study pattern.	71%	22%	6%
Without the OSC I would have to give up work/study.	29%	43%	12%
The OSC fees are reasonable.	90%	6%	4%
The OSC is too expensive.	14%	75%	4%
If the OSC became too/more expensive I could ask relatives/friends locally to provide childcare.	29%	61%	8%

Comments from Groups

"Local families report that they would be "lost" without us. The fees rose recently but parents still feel it is value for money. My personal experience of personal development has been very positive. I did an 18 month distance learning course with Aberdeen University to achieve the Out of School Care certificate to be a co-ordinator. This was a total life change. If we were to close this would be a massive blow to myself, staff and of course children and parents."

"The club enables parents to work or go to college. The children meet and make new friends. We employ 10 people including past children of the club who have reached 16, as helpers. Most of the staff have gained valuable professional qualifications while working at the club and used these to gain employment in the school. If the club was to close these would be a lot of parents unable to go to work. We have children whose fees are paid by social work to give families and foster families a break. We also have special needs children who attend."

"It means that parents and carers are able to work full-time without having to worry about childcare as they know their children are being looked after in a safe and comfortable environment. If the club were to close then parents would need to rely on family and friends to look after their children, or otherwise, leave their jobs or have to work part-time to suit school hours."

"OSC in a rural community is crucial to enable parents to work in the nearest town and keep regular work hours. Children are met from school and given opportunities to make new friends from the neighbourhood while trying out a wide range of fun activities. OSC also provides employment and training opportunities for local people in play, work and childcare careers."

"The OSC provides a smooth transition of care from the school to the club. If the service were to close, it would be a sad loss to the community and cause inconvenience to parents who might have to alter work patterns."

"OSC provides a quality environment to leave children while working. If it closed, there is nowhere else in the village for the children other than the school. It would also take away the opportunity for parents to seek work. Staff have the opportunity to attend various training courses available. One member of staff is currently applying to take an SVQ."

"If the facility was to close, 15 staff would be made unemployed and many parents would struggle for childcare, maybe even having to give up work. Training to staff has been beneficial as it gives personal confidence and knowledge-gained benefits in other aspects of their lives."

Comments from Parents:

"I am a working single mum. The loss of the OSC would have major implications on both my and my children's lives. They provide an excellent service not only throughout term time but also during local school holidays."

"OSC provides a caring, safe environment for my children. They enjoy going to the OSC due to the varied range of activities on offer and being with their friends from school to play and relax."

"I rely on the OSC service to provide childcare whilst I am at work. I have no family locally to help with childcare. A reliable service is essential for working parents."

"I feel that the service provides quality care at more reasonable cost. Children and parents' views are always requested and considered regarding provision. Activities are fun and educational and opportunities to discuss a variety of topics are always provided. It is a chance for children of a variety of ages to meet others from local schools."

"I have found the out of school club invaluable. If the clubs wasn't there I would not have managed teacher training and would not now be contemplating full-time employment."

"One thing I would note- the club covers 8am to school time. This is a brilliant idea though the club has struggled to make it viable. Subsidy for opening at this time would be good."

"Good flexible, local quality childcare. Would be great if they could operate a breakfast club before school."

"Excellent care and facilities at OSC- wish it has been available sooner. Wish they could pick up from other primary schools nearby which have no other school care."

"Although, for myself, the OSC is not a necessity, it provides a useful, inexpensive service and takes the pressure off family and friends."

"Large rise of 50p per hour this year. This is a big increase, especially if you have two children."

"It is an essential service within my village as there is only access to one or two childminders, who are generally quite full. In my area there is no access to nannies, very few nurseries and next to nothing for children age 9 -1 0 and upwards. Establishments are needed that will look after children at least until 6pm, for those who have to commute to the cities."