

Early Learning and Childcare Service Model: SSSC response (April 2018)

The Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) is the regulator for the social service workforce in Scotland. Our work means the people of Scotland can count on social services being provided by a trusted, skilled and confident workforce.

We protect the public by registering social service workers, setting standards for their practice, conduct, training and education and by supporting their professional development. Where people fall below the standards of practice and conduct we can investigate and take action.

We also have a responsibility for workforce data and intelligence. We produce workforce data, information and intelligence for employers and other customers to support the development of the sector. We develop and publish Official Statistics and National Statistics on the social service workforce.

Question 1: What factors should be considered in developing a simple, standardised yet flexible process for becoming a funded provider?

Stakeholders should be involved in the identification of these factors. These stakeholders include regulators, local authorities, providers and people who use services.

The consultation paper sets out the meaning of 'provider neutral'. We think the second bullet point on page 13 should also refer to registration and ongoing development.

Question 2: What are the key shared principles which should underpin an effective and positive partnership between local authorities and funded providers?

No comment.

Question 3a: We are proposing that the National Standard includes a qualification requirement for childminders delivering the funded entitlement to be qualified to or working towards the same qualification level as is required for an ELC practitioner (SCQF level 7). What are the advantages of including this criteria?

We welcome this proposal. The evidence suggests that very few childminders currently deliver the funding entitlement. We appreciate that work is underway to address this.

The most important driver of quality in ELC is a dedicated, highly skilled and well-qualified workforce. The Scottish Government's 2017-18 Action Plan notes that childminders are more likely than most other childcare services to achieve Care Inspectorate grades of very good and excellent.

The introduction of this agreement will have a number of advantages for everyone who uses or delivers funded services. The criteria will help to:

- support the delivery of consistently high-quality services
- provide reassurance for parents
- ensure that childminders' skills base is recognised and understood by parents, carers and other professionals in this sector
- promote flexible career pathways for all early learning and childcare professionals in this sector.

We would like to see the criteria revised to indicate that SCQF level seven will be the minimum level and based on the Scottish Social Services Council benchmark qualification. This would be consistent with the equivalent criteria for ELC practitioners and support practitioners across the ELC sector.

The SSSC supports the use of Recognised Prior Learning (RPL) by childminders. The RPL process helps workers to gain credit for previous work and learning and can contribute to achievement of qualifications. The SSSC and the Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework have a national agreed process for RPL.

There is a need to consider the implications of this proposal for the wider childminder workforce.

Question 3b: Are childminders able to access adequate funding to pay for training to SCQF level 7? Are childminders able to access training to SCQF level 7 in a way that is flexible enough to allow them to continue to run their businesses?

The evidence suggests that many childminders can access or undertake training now. For example, the Scottish Childminding Association's recent Membership Survey reports that half of approximately 500 respondents either have or are working towards a recognised childcare qualification.

The SVQ Social Services (Children and Young People) at SCQF Level seven has a 'skill set' for childminders. The skill set identifies the relevant optional units and is available from our Learning Zone website.

Question 4: Our aspiration is to see outdoor learning and play becoming a defining feature of funded ELC in Scotland.

- **Does criteria 3 capture this ambition? If not, how could it be strengthened in a way that is sustainable for providers?**
- **What challenges, if any, exist for funded ELC providers to ensure children have access to outdoor play? How can these challenges be overcome?**

No comment.

Question 5a: Will the criteria set out in the draft National Standard:

- **ensure that high quality, accessible, flexible and affordable Early Learning Childcare is delivered in all funded provider settings?**
- **Support increased choice for parents and carers?**

We believe that the criteria will support the delivery of this aspiration. We think there is a need to invite further feedback on the draft standard including the views of parents and practitioners.

Further work will be required in future to evaluate and learn the lessons following the introduction of the criteria.

There is a need to make sure the criteria and the National Health and Social Care Standards are consistent.

Question 5b: Is there any criteria not included in the National Standard that is required to ensure a high quality service is provided to all children?

No comment.

Question 5c: Do the proposed criteria within the National Standard seem fair and proportionate for all? Do the proposed variations for some criteria seem fair and proportionate for childminders?

The criteria and variations seem fair and proportionate for all.

Question 6: What areas would you look to be addressed in the technical guidance note for supporting implementation of the ELC Living Wage commitment?

We welcome the intention to pay a real living wage to all ELC workers delivering the funded commitment. The commitment appears to create the possibility that some non-funded ELC workers may not receive a living wage. These workers care for many of the youngest children in ELC services.

Whether any employers will operate a two-tier rate for funded and non-funded ELC is unclear. This scenario would risk devaluing the contribution made by some childcare workers.

The technical guidance could reinforce the vital role of all partners in delivering the wage. This includes:

- the need for commissioners to acknowledge this issue as part of the ongoing work around developing a sustainable rate for delivery of the funded ELC hours
- the need for providers to explore how they use existing resources to meet the commitment for all staff and to limit the extent to which they pass on the cost to people who use services
- links to relevant resources including the Living Wage Foundation website.

Question 7: Should newly established ELC settings be able to deliver the funded hours on a probationary basis, pending the outcome of their first inspection, provided they meet all other aspects of the National Standard? Are there any particular challenges or issues that may arise from this approach?

We welcome this proposal.

Question 8: What support will service providers require to prepare for the introduction of the National Standard and meet the criteria and delivery of the new service model

Service providers may require support to make the connections between the National Standard and other key priorities. These include:

- The Health and Social Care Standards
- The SSSC Codes of Practice for Social Service Workers and Employers.