

Call for expert evidence on reform of childcare provision in Scotland

This response is from the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC). The SSSC is a Non Departmental Public Body (NDPB) and was established by the Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act 2001. We are responsible for registering people who work in social services, regulating their education and training and the collation and publication of data on the size and nature of the sector's workforce. We are also the Scottish partner in Skills for Care and Development, the Sector Skills Councils for the care sector in the UK.

Our work increases the protection of people who use services by ensuring that the workforce is properly trained, appropriately qualified and effectively regulated. We aim to protect people who use services, raise standards of practice, strengthen and support the professionalism of the workforce and improve the outcomes and experience of people who use social services. The social service workforce provides care and support for some of the most vulnerable people in Scottish society. These workers often deal with complex care needs and make a real difference to individuals' lives. The social service workforce employs more than 191,000 people in Scotland. **This figure includes more than 30,000 workers in day care of children or out of school care settings and more than 5,000 childminders (SSSC, 2013).**

Our vision is that our work means the people of Scotland can count on social services being provided by a trusted, skilled and confident workforce. Our purpose is to raise standards and protect the public through regulation, innovation and continuous improvement in workforce planning and development for the social service workforce.

The early years and childcare workforce is a significant part of our footprint, and currently forms around half of our registrants. Since qualifications-based registration was introduced we have seen a growing confidence in these workers, and this has had a positive impact on the quality of care that children and young people experience. Our sense is that this is a sector that is increasingly professional, committed and engaged in their development and that of children. This progress has been recognised internationally. We are currently working closely with colleagues in Canada to help them to introduce a similar model there.

- **What do you consider to be the most difficult challenges about how childcare provision in Scotland is currently organised, delivered and paid for? What particular aspects most need reformed? Why would you rate those aspects as having highest priority?**

One of the key challenges will be to continue promoting the critical role of childcare and the wider financial and economic benefits of this sector. Allied to that challenge is a need to ensure that the childcare workforce is valued and receives sufficient learning and development opportunities. The Scottish Government's economic strategies and the Early Years Framework highlight the financial and wider benefits associated with investment in childcare (Scottish Government, 2008; Scottish Government, 2011; Scottish Government, 2013). We welcome ongoing commitments to improve the flexibility of childcare and the emphasis on regulation and improvement. One of the key priorities is to ensure that there is ongoing investment in the childcare workforce.

There is a significant economic as well as social benefit to Scotland of high quality childcare. Firstly, it provides jobs. There are more than 30,000 people employed in early years and out of school care in the local authorities, the third sector and private businesses. In addition to that figure there are more than 5,000 self-employed childminders. Childcare also enables parents and carers to work. Thirdly, it is the foundation for children to grow up to be economically active. A paper by Women in Scotland's Economy (WiSE) neatly summarises the economic case for investing in high-quality childcare and early years education:

"Investments in childcare cannot be left entirely to parents and the private sector because of significant market failures, including externalities and information asymmetries. There are benefits to parents and to children and to businesses in such investments but the benefits are not confined to the parents and children and businesses that make the investments, but accrue to the wider society, and to business and government as a whole".

(Elson, Campbell, & McKay, 2013)

If children are safe, healthy and engaged in learning, they are far more likely to succeed in later life. This is much more likely to be the case if people working with them have the right skills, knowledge and values and are confident.

Childcare provision has been transformed in recent times and will continue to evolve over the next few years. The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 is leading to a substantial increase in the flexibility and increased number of hours of free early learning and childcare for many children in Scotland. We welcome these moves to provide greater flexibility and increased provision. One of the key challenges is to ensure that childcare providers can continue to recruit and develop the skilled workforce required to deliver these high-quality services. There is also a need to ensure that there are sufficient learning and development opportunities for the workforce.

The Scottish Government's consultation on the Children and Young People Bill identified a number of potential workforce challenges for employers. For example, employers may have to change their terms and conditions or develop

new approaches to working hours, holiday periods and staffing conditions. Some respondents suggested that these new arrangements may have implications for the time available for staff learning and development. One respondent noted that the childcare workforce is predominantly female and the implementation of the Act will also have an impact on their own childcare needs (Nicholson, 2012). Some providers have suggested that an expansion in the number of hours of free early learning and childcare – coupled with the increasing flexibility of services - will create logistical problems around finding suitable venues to deliver services. The Scottish Government have indicated that they will provide additional funding to help local authorities to develop the capital infrastructure required to increase the level of free early learning and childcare provision.

We believe that a number of providers are already altering the delivery of their services. For example, the National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA) Scotland published a survey¹ in February 2014 which suggests that a quarter of their members planned to extend their opening hours during the next six months. A quarter of NDNA Scotland's members also planned to extend their offer to include out of school care services to children aged five years or over during this period (NDNA, 2014). There is a need to consider the overall effects of these policies. For example, an increase in the number of hours of free early learning and childcare will have implications for nurseries but will also impact on other services including out of school care and childminding.

A further priority over the next few years is to continue developing an understanding of the impact of this policy on the childcare workforce and on children. There is also a need to sustain the development of this workforce. We return to this subject in our answer to the second question.

The extent to which services will have to recruit more workers to deliver enhanced or flexible services is unclear. There is some evidence which points to future growth in the number of workers employed by these services. For example, a recent survey by the SSSC suggests that many employers will increase the number of workers employed by their service during the next three years.

The Scottish Government's White Paper on an Independent Scotland sets out a number of proposals to further extend early learning and child care provision. The White Paper indicates that every three or four year old and vulnerable two year old will be entitled to 1,140 hours of child care per year by the end of the first independent Scottish Parliament (Scottish Government, 2013). These proposals would lead to an increase in the number of workers employed by the sector. The White Paper notes that these proposals will lead to an additional 35,000 jobs (Scottish Government, 2013). This will create demand for learning and development, particularly qualifications, for these people.

We have made great progress over the last few years in improving career progression. We continue to develop career pathways and resources to build on that so working in childcare is seen as a good long-term career prospect.

¹ The survey took place before the subsequent announcement around the extension of this policy to cover vulnerable two year olds (NDNA, 2014).

- **What do you consider to be the best 3-5 remedies that might be applied by governments or others to significantly improve things? In responding, can you specify what role employers, families themselves, or other agencies should play in providing, enabling or paying for high-quality formal childcare provision? Relative to that, what role should governments play in reforming childcare, whether at UK, national or local levels of government?**

Our response to this question focuses on the need for a skilled, competent and valued workforce which can deliver high-quality formal childcare provision. We welcome Professor Siraj's ongoing review of the early years and childcare workforce.

The need to increase the status of the early learning and childcare workforce has long been established. Substantial progress has been made in the past decade. The sector is now a degree-led profession. There is a suite of Childhood Practice awards including the degree, professional development award and the postgraduate diploma. The proportion of day care of children managers, practitioners and support workers with a relevant qualification has increased rapidly in recent years. Our evidence indicates that many of these workers are quick to register with the SSSC as they welcome the opportunity to identify their role and work towards attaining the relevant qualifications.

We have to dispel any misconceptions about the early years and childcare workforce. Studies by the SSSC, Education Scotland and others illustrate the vital role undertaken by these workers. These reports reinforce the point that an absence of a teacher does not necessarily lead to a compromise in service quality. In some cases the reverse may be the case (Education Scotland, 2012; SSSC, 2014).

Employers, workers and commissioners have a key part to play in ensuring that the workforce can access the skills and knowledge required to undertake their role.

- The Codes of Practice for Employers of Social Service Workers notes that employers must ensure that "only people who have the appropriate knowledge and skills and who are suitable to provide social services are allowed to enter your workforce". The Codes also highlight the need for employers to provide induction, learning and development opportunities for workers (SSSC, 2009)
- The Codes of Practice for Social Service Workers notes that workers must undertake relevant training to "maintain and improve your knowledge and skills and contributing the learning and development of others" (SSSC, 2009)
- Commissioners are required to take account of the need for staff to receive training. The guidance on the procurement of care and support services highlights the need for commissioners to consider staff development as part of their evaluation for costing services. Commissioners should also take staff training into account when setting selection criteria (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities; Joint Improvement Team; Scottish Government, 2010).

Registration is a major part of the drive for higher standards in social services and has been successful in enabling this workforce to experience the parity of esteem enjoyed by other professionals. For example, workers within day care of children services² are required to achieve registration within six months of taking up employment. Approximately 30,000 day care of children workers are registered with the SSSC. In addition, approximately 3,000 managers and practitioners in day care of children services are registered with another regulatory body. The numbers of workers with a qualification has risen steadily in recent years. Approximately 55% of the workforce held a relevant qualification in 2005/06. As of 2013/14 approximately 89% hold a relevant qualification while the remaining 11% are working towards achieving a relevant award (SSSC, 2014).

The SSSC has worked closely with a range of stakeholders to support registration by collaborating on the development of a range of qualifications and resources for the early years and childcare workforce. Many of these qualifications are starting to make a difference to the way in which early years and out of school care workers practice and view themselves alongside other professionals involved in the care, learning and development of children.

Largely, employers or the workers themselves are expected to fund the learning and development of people working in childcare. These employers range from large local authorities to small community projects and self-employed people, often with limited resources. This contrasts with other sectors such as education and the NHS, where government invests significant amounts alongside employers.

A wage commensurate with the knowledge and skills required is a vital part of promoting the status of this profession. There are a number of complex factors which play a role in determining wage levels in childcare. We note the discussion about commissioning and fee levels during the passage of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 (Education and Culture Committee, 2013). We have also noted a number of discussions about the appropriateness of zero hours contracts within this sector. A paper by Women in Scotland's Economy (WiSE) reinforces the need to re-consider the way that we view childcare workers' pay:

² Day care of children workers within the following categories are required to register with the SSSC: Managers and lead practitioners, practitioners and support workers. Further information about registration is available from the SSSC's website: <http://www.sssc.uk.com/Applying-for-registration/who-can-apply-to-register.html>

“Spending public money on supporting high quality childcare and early years education, including not only the construction of new nurseries, but also the staff costs incurred in operating them, is an investment. This is because today’s spending generates a stream of benefits for the future, both in the short run, the medium run and the long run. It is only an outmoded accounting convention that treats the pay of construction workers as investment and the pay of childcare workers as consumption. In economic terms the pay of childcare workers is just as much of an investment as the pay of construction workers, in that one creates physical capital, the other creates human capital.”

(Elson, Campbell, & McKay, 2013)

Our workforce data indicates that a substantial proportion of the childcare workforce is employed by the private and voluntary sector (SSSC, 2013). We welcome the Scottish Government’s commitment to promote the living wage and the forthcoming accreditation scheme for the private and voluntary sector. We also note the recent recommendations by the Low Pay Commission around the need to increase the level of the National Minimum Wage. We are working with COSLA, Scottish Government and other stakeholders on a project which aims to work towards a minimum level of the living wage for all adult care workers. We need to ensure that similar work is underway in the early years and out of school care sector. Ultimately we need to ensure that the professional early years and out of school care workforce is receiving a professional wage. The disparities in terms and conditions across the public, private and voluntary sectors also need to be considered.

The vast majority of the early years workforce is female. We need to continue the drive towards a diverse workforce which better reflects the Scottish population. There is a need for more positive male role models within this sector. There have been a number of initiatives which have sought to address this balance such ‘All about Men’³ and Kibble’s ‘Men Can Care’ projects (Smith et al, 2008). A need to promote wider diversity in relation to career options is also a key challenge for this sector (Commission for Developing Scotland’s Young Workforce, 2014). We have noted that there is a need to ensure that funding is available to allow older workers and ‘career changers’ to access training in this sector. We need to continue recruiting the people with the right skills and competencies to work in early years.

The workforce has a critical role to play in the development of high-quality childcare services. We have to continue investing in our current and future workers.

We are happy to provide further information on our response and our wider role.

Scottish Social Services Council
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³SSSC News, 7 July 2014: Redressing the balance in childcare:
<http://ssscnews.uk.com/2014/07/redressing-balance-childcare/>

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