

A Blueprint for 2020: The Expansion of Early Learning and Childcare in Scotland – Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) response

The 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:

- publish the national codes of practice for people working in social services and their employers
- register people working in social services and make sure they adhere to our Codes of Practice
- promote and regulate the learning and development of the social service workforce
- are the national lead for workforce development and planning for social services in Scotland.

Our purpose is to raise standards and protect the public through regulation, innovation and continuous improvement in workforce development and planning for the social service workforce. The social service sector employs more than 200,000 people in Scotland, including 36,000 day care of children staff and 5,500 childminders¹ (SSSC, 2016). The expansion of Early Learning and Childcare will involve a considerable increase in the size of the workforce.

All staff working in day care of children services must register with SSSC or another appropriate regulatory body² and work towards relevant qualifications. The Scottish Government has indicated that nurseries in the most deprived areas will benefit from an additional qualified teacher or childcare graduate. We are pleased to see the Childhood Practice qualification which we developed being recognised in this way. The additional childcare staff, who are expected to be in post by 2018, will need to meet our regulatory requirements.

Our response focuses on questions 1-5 and 7.

Question 1: How do we ensure children are fully supported at the transition stages throughout their early-learner journey? What support

¹ There are a number of groups of workers not captured by this data. These include childminding assistants and personal assistants employed by individuals in receipt of a direct payment.

² such as the General Teaching Council (GTC)

should be provided to ensure that the ELC workforce and teachers have the skills, knowledge and capacity to support transitions?

A number of studies have identified the importance for ELC practitioners to have appropriate qualifications, experience and knowledge to understand the importance of developing a secure attachment between the practitioner and the child, so that the child can move easily between services. Understanding the needs of children at transition stages requires a trusted, skilled and confident workforce which can deliver high-quality formal childcare provision.

The SSSC works with stakeholders to develop a range of work-based qualifications and awards used for continuous professional development (CPD) for the early years workforce. We are working to enhance understanding of attachment and transitions in the workforce and have been working with the Scottish Government to develop further resources which focus on these important areas of practice.

To meet the Scottish Government's commitment to increased childcare capacity, there needs to be a significant expansion of the workforce. Training and development capacity will also need to expand. We are therefore developing mobile learning resources on mentoring and leadership to help staff support new workers coming onto the ELC sector. These activities will help to enhance learning provision, ensuring that we have people with the right skills, knowledge and values working in childcare who can support children at transition stages.

Elements of the SSSC's work already support this agenda. We:

- manage the Social Services (Children and Young People) Modern Apprenticeship framework
- approve and quality assure the Childhood Practice award
- are working with the Care Inspectorate to develop a new childminding learning pathway to support childminders' professional learning
- are developing and delivering a range of activity to enhance leadership capacity across the sector
- work with the Scottish College of Education Leadership on leadership development for people working in childcare
- have produced a wide range of traditional and digital learning and development resources to support the ELC workforce.

Question 2: What support is required to ensure that the ELC workforce have the skills, knowledge and capacity to deliver high quality provision for two year olds? How can the ELC sector best meet the specific learning, developmental and environmental needs of two year olds? What approach should be taken on the transition for these children when they turn three?

The expansion of the workforce will require a substantial increase in training provision. Maintaining a focus on developing current staff is critical. It will also

be important to develop a better understanding of the additional workforce development needs for all staff working with two year olds.

Research has identified that, for very young babies and toddlers, specialised and practical training for ELC practitioners is vital for the quality and improved social and cognitive outcomes of children. As the first three years of life are often cited as the best and most cost effective time to reduce inequalities, and where developing cognitive and behavioural patterns profoundly affect children's ability to learn later, this seems particularly relevant as we look at expanding provision for our youngest children.³

There are initiatives, developed by organisations such as the Scottish Childminding Association (SCMA) and the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), which support ELC learners to work with childminders to gain practice experience. These initiatives could offer opportunities for learners to gain the necessary skills to support children in this age range. The learning resources we referred to in our answer to Q2 will also will support established workers refresh their knowledge and skills with two year olds.

The Childhood Practice qualifications (including the degree, professional development award and the postgraduate diploma) help to address the skills, knowledge and capacity of the ELC workforce. Managers or lead practitioners in a day care of children service must gain a BA Childhood Practice or equivalent qualification. By 2014 there were over 1,200 Childhood Practice graduates in Scotland. A University of Edinburgh study shows that Childhood Practice has a positive impact on workers' knowledge, confidence and leadership skills (SSSC, 2014).

There must also be an emphasis on the continuous professional development for existing ELC practitioners, including post-registration training and learning. Registration with the SSSC must support these requirements.

Question 3: How can the qualification routes and career paths that are open to early learning and childcare practitioners be developed to ensure that the ELC sector is seen as an attractive long-term career route?

Qualifications-based registration gives a clear route for those aspiring to work in Early Learning and Childcare and there are a variety of ways to gain the required qualifications. The fact that they are work-based makes them more accessible to people who are put off by traditional pre-entry routes and ensures they offer practice skills development as well as under-pinning knowledge.

The range of apprenticeships now being created, from foundation level which begins at school through to graduate level, also offers great opportunities for new entrants and existing workers. There is also a role for digital technology to

³ <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2015/06/5902/5>

support workforce development. There are important benefits to digital learning: it is flexible, portable and easily accessible. It can be quickly and easily updated and can be adapted easily to meet different needs. These are essential qualities for learning resources to suit this workforce.

However, in terms of career pathways, a number of barriers remain around reward, supply of qualified staff, formal career structures, movement between the private, public and voluntary sectors, job design and responsibilities. It is encouraging that ELC workers are increasingly valued and recognised as professionals, and that the contribution of good quality childcare to children's futures is now central to government policy. To improve the quality of service provision, a career in ELC must be attractive to new recruits and retain experienced workers, and challenge the perception that it is low skilled, low paid and 'women's work'. The Scottish Funding Council's Gender Action Plan (GAP) identifies the need to encourage men to consider an ELC career and it is important that Skills Development Scotland has recognised the importance of the sector in its skills investment planning.

The SSSC has recruited a number of career ambassadors. Career ambassadors have experience in different aspects of care and are able to promote both a realistic and positive view of a career in care. Their role is to describe what working in social services is like at events like careers fairs, talks at schools or colleges and to provide information on what the job really involves to people considering whether a career in care is for them. Recruiting ambassadors with ELC experience forms part of an overall recruitment strategy and helps to ensure that the ELC is seen as an attractive long-term career route.

Question 4: How can we increase the diversity of the ELC workforce, in particular increasing the gender balance in the sector?

The need to address the gender imbalance of the workforce has been identified in a number of reports, such as the Scottish Funding Council's Gender Action Plan (GAP).⁴ The GAP has set actions to address gender imbalances at the subject level within college regions. For example, the GAP notes work with colleges to tackle gender stereotypes through training of early learning and childcare practitioners. The GAP also aims to increase the numbers of men studying care.

There are a number of initiatives which will encourage young people from diverse backgrounds consider ELC as a career route, including apprenticeships and improved career education. Foundation Apprenticeships help young people to gain valuable, real-world work experience and access work-based learning while still at school. SSSC staff and career ambassadors have been attending careers events to highlight this. Furthermore, Education Scotland has developed

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http://www.sfc.ac.uk/web/FILES/Corporate_publications_SFCCP022016_GenderActionPlanInterimreport/SFCCP022016_Gender_Action_Plan_Interim_report.pdf

new careers guidance which helps young people to think about subjects, pathways and career choices (Education Scotland, 2015).

There is also a role for the Certificate of Work Readiness (CWR). The CWR gives young people a recognisable qualification. The qualification can be used to show employers that they have relevant experience for the workplace. It supports the Scottish Government's Opportunities for All agenda, helping young people find work, and employers find the right people. Since 2012 almost 2,500 people have completed the Certificate. One recent evaluation of the CWR suggests that it leads to positive outcomes for people undertaking the child care award. There may be scope to investigate other ways the CWR could be used to further increase the diversity of the sector, in particular increasing the gender balance.

Question 5: How can payment of the Living Wage and wider Fair Work practices be encouraged across the ELC sector?

In the wider care sector procurement guidance is playing a key role in encouraging the living wage. In 2016 the Scottish Government published best practice guidance on the procurement of care and support.⁵ The guidance sets out selection and award criteria which could be used for procuring services. This includes evidence of a skilled and competent workforce which meets registration requirements. The best practice guidance also highlights the need to make sure that:

- staff involved in procurement promote the interests and independence of people who use services and their carers
- employers provide learning and development opportunities which enable staff to strengthen and develop their skills and knowledge.

We welcome the Scottish Government's decision to allocate £25m of funding from the apprenticeship levy to support early years recruitment and training. The Scottish Government's recent response identifies care and early years as priority sectors in the economy.⁶ Suitable funding will be important to ensure that payment of the Living Wage and Fair Work practices are encouraged across the sector.

Question 7: How could accountability arrangements for early learning and childcare be improved?

Standards are important to make sure that those involved in providing services are held accountable for the quality of provision. All key stakeholders – including practitioners – must be involved in influencing and establishing the relevant standards of conduct and practice.

⁵ <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0049/00498297.pdf>

⁶ <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0051/00512714.pdf>

In November 2016 the SSSC published the revised Codes of Practice for Social Service Workers and Employers. Our Codes set out the national standards of conduct and practice that apply to all social service workers and employers.

Workers, employers, learning providers and a range of others were involved in revising the Codes. The new Codes for Workers are written in the first person to empathise professionals' accountability for their own practice (SSSC, 2016).

Social service workers, including those in the ELC sector, must be accountable for the quality of their work and take responsibility for maintaining and improving their knowledge and skills. When workers do not comply with the Codes, we can investigate and take action. We have found that early years workers are less likely to be subject to fitness to practise investigations than other registered workers which we think may be related to their relatively high level of engagement with their own learning and development.

To improve the provision of early learning and childcare, workers must be able to develop their knowledge and skills. Employers must be accountable for providing the conditions in which workers can practise, develop and learn to a high standard. The Care Inspectorate's recent commitment to enforcing the Code for Employers will mean the accountability arrangements for employers.

Scottish Social Services Council
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