





Introduction

Regulation of early years and child care services and the people who work in these services means a fully qualified workforce with all the benefits that brings for our children. As well as improving outcomes for our children, better child care has an impact on our communities and, importantly, on our economy as it improves outcomes for women, helping them to continue to work. Increased scrutiny has meant a significant positive change in the expectations parents and the general public have of the skill and competence of early years' workers and services.

"Child care" means so much more than keeping an eye on a child while the parent or carer goes to work. It isn't a job just anyone can do. Around 30,000 early years and child care workers in Scotland provide care, learning and development support to our children, working directly with parents, children and other professionals.

A lot has happened since the 2007 National Review of the Early Years and Childcare Workforce where Scottish Government set out its vision for the workforce it wanted to be able to deliver high quality services. As a critical partner the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) has made real progress in delivering that vision through our role in workforce development.

We welcome the current review and the opportunities this brings for us to tell the story of the achievements of the early years and child care workforce since 2007. The qualifications and resources we have developed and the difference qualifications are starting to make already to people who have chosen to specialise in the care, learning and development of our children and young people.

Main Messages

Since we opened the SSSC Register, qualification levels for early years professionals have gone from 55% to 89% with the remaining 11% working towards their qualification.

Qualifications are starting to have an impact on the professionalism of the early years and child care workforce.

The Childhood Practice awards have opened up career progression for early years workers.

Latest research shows that people who have completed the Childhood Practice award feel they are working on a par with other professionals involved in the care, learning and development of children.

Scotland is viewed as an international leader in the field of early years workforce development and education due to the Childhood Practice award.



A growing profession

Central to giving all of our children the best possible start in life is the quality and professionalism of the people working in our nurseries and early years services. Skills and qualifications are at the heart of most professions. The Effective Provision of Pre School Education (EPPE) Project in 2004 identified that the single factor in determining the quality of early years' services is the level of qualification of the manager and the wider workforce.

In 2005-06 before we opened the SSSC Register for people working in early years, around 55% of the workforce had a relevant qualification. Now in 2013-14 as a result of the registration requirements around 89% are now qualified with the remaining 11% working towards a qualification.

We have developed a range of qualifications and resources for the early years and child care workforce which are starting to make a difference to the way in which early years' workers practice and view themselves alongside other professionals in the care, learning and development of children.

The most significant development is Childhood Practice awards.

Childhood Practice

Back in 2006, after the first Scottish Government led review of early years, we were asked to develop a degree level qualification for leaders and managers of early years' services.

As a result of the 2006 review, for the first time, early years leaders and managers were required to gain a Scottish degree level qualification, putting them on a par with other professionals such as teachers and recognising the impact they have on the development of a child.

We worked with others to develop the Scottish subject benchmark statement – The Standard for Childhood Practice in 2007 and the new awards in Childhood Practice. There is now a suite of awards: degree, professional development award and the postgraduate diploma, delivered by 12 providers across Scotland. All are work based, building on non traditional learning to make access to higher education much more achievable and opening up a new world of opportunity.

Before the review there was little opportunity for career progression. Since launch in 2008, 1200 people have graduated with Childhood Practice awards and the highest percentage of these graduates are practitioners seeking promotion and career enhancement.



To hear from professionals talking about Childhood Practice and the impact it is having on their practice, watch our short film here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cVBqSbW56vI>

Real life learning in a virtual world

We have developed a range of online resources to support the learning and development of this workforce, recognising that people learn in different ways and often don't have lots of time or money for learning. Digital developments mean that we are able to use the same technology that we all use every day, like tablets and mobile phones, to learn as well as for our leisure. And we can get access to learning no matter where we are in the country so there is a real benefit for rural learners. We have invested in developing resources that meet these challenges and provide real-world scenarios and problem solving opportunities using digital technologies. Many of the tools and resources support people doing the Childhood Practice awards as well as supporting workforce development across the board.

Staff can make decisions and sometimes mistakes and learn from these in a safe and controlled environment. We are working with

the University of the West of Scotland to develop more resources using gaming technologies and we are developing a virtual learning environment. We are also developing a career pathways resource for people interested in or returning to work.

These tools are an essential element of developing a skilled and professional workforce, with feedback from employers telling us that they are using the resources to support staff development at all levels.

Find out more about these and other resources at:

workforcesolutions.sssc.uk.com

Setting the standards

Making sure that the suite of qualifications for the early years and child care sector remain fit for purpose is essential as they form the basis of the qualifications required by the SSSC for registration and contribute to the development of a high quality, professional and valued workforce.

In 2012/13 we reviewed the National Occupational Standards (NOS), involving employers, representative bodies, training providers and others. As a result we now have new Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) in Social Services (Children and Young People) for support workers and practitioners working in day care of children services in Scotland. Developing these SVQs has allowed the development of a new range of Modern Apprentice qualifications. This means we have been able to support employers to actively encourage a new generation of workers into the child care sector. On average there are around 1000 new early years apprentices each year.

A world class reputation

Our work has gained European and international recognition, promoting Scotland as a world class provider of solutions for skills development in the early years field. The SSSC has spoken at conferences in Strasbourg and Stavanger on the development of the Childhood Practice degrees and most recently were invited to Canada to speak to the Ontario College of Early Educators who are interested in developing a similar programme for their early educator staff. The

Ontario College were particularly interested in the impact Childhood Practice is making to the confidence, pedagogical understanding and performance of the individuals who have undertaken the award. We have been able to showcase Childhood Practice internationally and, importantly, highlight the process that the SSSC went through in developing the award. It is this process as well as the premise of the award as a work based degree, building on initial qualifications and widening access to higher education that has generated considerable interest outside Scotland.

What's next?

We anticipated that Childhood Practice and other developments in qualifications and skills would make a significant difference to the professionalism and quality of the early years workforce but needed time and evidence. The first report to highlight this was the Education Scotland report **Making the Difference: the impact of staff qualifications on children's learning in early years**. It showed that changes to qualifications were making a difference to services on the ground. So we asked the University of Edinburgh to research a follow up report on the impact the new degree was having on the individuals who were doing it.

Our report, **Taking the first steps – is Childhood Practice working**, shows us how it has positively and significantly affected individual workers' knowledge, confidence and leadership skills and their relationships with the other professionals in children's lives. This provides us with a good baseline to measure future change. The report is available at www.sssc.uk.com

This is a good news story of a sector that deserves praise for its efforts and for making a difference to children's lives.

Our next step will be to carry out more research into the impact that employers are seeing as a result of Childhood Practice and other qualifications and skills developments.

We will continue to work with children, parents, employers and providers to make sure Childhood Practice remains a relevant degree that is fit for the future.

Professor Iram Siraj is reviewing early learning and child care. As the workforce regulator and the organisation with responsibility for

workforce development and planning the SSSC is looking forward to sharing our expertise to inform this important review.

Registration with the SSSC isn't a one off. Our belief is that continuing registration needs to be based on the ability to keep practice, knowledge and skills and competence up to date and we will be introducing a new career long development framework for the whole of the social services sector in 2015.



Scottish Social
Services Council

Scottish Social Services Council
Compass House
11 Riverside Drive
Dundee
DD1 4NY

Telephone 01382 207101
Fax 01382 207215

Email enquiries@sssc.uk.com
www.sssc.uk.com

If you would like to request this document
in another format or language, please
contact the SSSC on 01382 207101.