

THE EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTE OF SCOTLAND

EIS Response to Scottish Government Consultation A Blueprint for 2020: The Expansion of Early Learning and Childcare in Scotland

1. How do we ensure children are fully supported at the transition stages throughout their early-learner journey? What support should be provided to ensure that the ELC workforce and teachers have the skills, knowledge and capacity to support transitions?

As reiterated within the findings of independent research by The Child's Curriculum Group, led by Professor Aline-Wendy Dunlop of the University of Strathclyde, 'Sustaining the Ambition: The Contribution of GTCS-Registered Teachers in Early Years', qualified teachers are central to supporting transitions for early learners.

Indeed, the research identified supporting transitions as one of the key contributions that nursery teachers make to the early-learner journey, as a consequence of the pedagogical expertise that they possess, and of their knowledge and understanding of additional support needs.

The nursery teacher's knowledge of early learning and child development, and of the Early and First Levels of CfE, facilitates a seamless transition from home to nursery, and from nursery to primary school for all children, in line with Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) ambitions for a seamless 3-18 learner journey. In addition, understanding of transitions is particularly key to supporting vulnerable children who tend to experience a greater number of transitions, therefore the particular skill that qualified teachers have in this regard, is particularly required in managing these in the interests of short and long term positive outcomes.

To ensure that all children benefit from the expertise of qualified teachers at key points of transition, the EIS would urge the Scottish Government to act to address the decline in the numbers of such teachers in nursery, and by legislating to ensure equal and meaningful access to a teacher for all nursery children across and within local authorities. Scotland has seen a 39% decrease in the number of nursery teachers over a ten-year period, offset against only a 4% drop in the nursery intake. The research also highlights the following:

- Nationally 25.7% of nursery children aged 3-5 have no access to a teacher;
- The current average nursery teacher to child ratio is 1:94;
- 50% of local authorities state that children do not have equal access to a teacher;
- Only 12 of 32 local authorities continue to employ full-time teachers in each of their Early Years establishments.

Related to the urgent need for the reinstatement of qualified teachers firmly within the Early Years workforce, is the difficulty of ensuring that initial teacher education (ITE) students are equipped with high quality learning experiences when they

undertake nursery placements. At present, many are unable to access the benefits of mentorship by qualified teachers because they are simply not there in the numbers required to provide this element of ITE as relevant to Early Years. In effect, the skills and knowledge to support transitions are not being shared on the scale required at present because of the decline in nursery teacher numbers.

For the current workforce including teachers, time for collaboration- planning and discussion with colleagues who form the Early Years team, and access to ongoing high quality professional learning, are key to ensuring that all have the necessary skills, knowledge and capacity to support transitions.

A strongly collegiate approach, with time made available within teachers' Working Time Agreements to support this, is crucial to the success of Early Years in achieving positive outcomes for Scotland's early learners. In contexts where transitions are across establishments and/ or sectors, particular consideration requires to be given to how meaningful communication and information-sharing between schools and the Early Years teams, be they local authority, private or third sector, will be resourced.

Furthermore, the EIS would raise concerns about dwindling numbers of support assistants and specialist professionals such as Educational Psychologists whose input and expertise are crucial in supporting children with additional needs at key points of transition.

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?

For teachers whose expertise is with children belonging to the 3-18 age group and with the 3-18 curriculum, access to relevant professional learning may be required to support transitions.

The EIS would also reiterate the point made in the final paragraph in response to Question 1 with regards to supporting transitions for the youngest CfE learners.

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?

The EIS is of the view that there requires to be improvements in the conditions of all members of the Early Years workforce. High quality pre-school provision is characterised by healthy child to adult ratios; staff who are highly trained and qualified, who have access to career-long professional learning, and who are appropriately remunerated; and close regulation of modes of delivery. Adequate investment to ensure that ELC delivery in Scotland, is characterised by these

elements, as in other high-performing European education systems, is fundamental to enhancing the status and value in public perception of this sector.

Recognition should be given to the leadership role that is informally undertaken by nursery teachers. The 'Sustaining the Ambition' research found that nursery teachers provide leadership and mentoring for other staff in their setting, as indicated by teachers themselves and by local authorities. Demonstrating best practice, supporting staff planning, advising staff regarding the specific needs of children, modelling new approaches to adult-child interaction; ensuring consistency in the assessment of children's progress; ensuring the relevance and robustness of evidence used to underpin assessments; and supporting staff to respond effectively to children with additional needs.

Much of the work currently being undertaken by unpromoted nursery teachers is closely comparable to that which is itemised within the remits of promoted post-holders in the primary and secondary sectors. The reduction in the number of promoted posts within the primary sector generally; the tendency for promoted posts to be located in the primary rather than the nursery; and the disappearance of the legal requirement in 2003 for nursery heads to be qualified teachers, have meant that teachers whose interests may lie in Early Years would be discouraged from such a career pathway because of the absence of a clear promoted post structure.

Additionally, the EIS would be interested in proposals designed to enhance the quality of the ITE experience as related to Early Years placements.

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

Scottish education has much to do to address gender imbalance within the teacher workforce generally. Primary teachers are overwhelmingly- more than 90%- female while two thirds of the secondary teacher workforce is now female.

Erosion of the pay, conditions, and status of the profession over time are contributing factors to this gender demographic and to the issue of teacher shortage more generally.

In responding to this, the Scottish Government requires to develop a strategy with accompanying resources that will address all factors that are combining to create teacher shortage and gender imbalance. This strategy should tackle issues of pay, conditions, status and gender-stereotyping in the various contexts where it presents itself- in the home, at school, college and university, and in the employment market. Significant attitudinal change is required within society as a whole to counteract the myth that caring, nurturing roles, including those with children, are the domain of women, and to counteract the culture that undervalues such work in terms of pay and status.

Equally, the strategy should address the issue of chronic under-representation of black and minority ethnic people within the teaching profession as a whole, and worse still within senior promoted posts, specifically.

Children and families should see the diversity of their communities in terms of gender, and race and ethnicity in particular, fully reflected in the whole education workforce, in the interests of enhanced educational and social justice outcomes.

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

It is the view of the EIS that the payment of poverty wages by any employer is wholly unacceptable and more so where employers are seeking access to public funds to support their businesses. The EIS holds such a position both as a trade union which objects to the exploitation of fellow trade unionists in any sector, and as a professional association whose members witness the impact of poverty, largely as a consequence of low income from employment, on children's education on a daily basis in the classroom.

As a minimum, therefore, while EU law prevents mandatory payment of the Living Wage as a public procurement requirement, the EIS would expect stringent adherence by the Scottish Government and local authorities to the principles of the Statutory Guidance on the Selection of Tenderers and Award of Contracts - Addressing Fair Work Practices, including the Living Wage, as a key means of realising the aims of the Working Together recommendations.

The trade union movement in Scotland will maintain its key role in advocating for the Living Wage as a minimum for all employees in all sectors, including ELC, and for work practices that are underpinned by the principles of effective voice, security, opportunity, respect and fulfilment.

6. What actions should be taken to support increased access to outdoor learning, exercise and play?

Research conducted by the EIS in 2010 found that across Scotland, public nursery provision offers a higher proportion of provision which has access to an outdoor play area (90.2% as opposed to 76.5% in the private sector and 70.6% in the voluntary sector).

As Children in Scotland pointed out in a media release of 24/08/10, research published in *Children in Europe* magazine demonstrated that private sector provision does not require to meet the outdoor space standards required of public provision:

outdoor space standards in services for young children vary widely across Europe, with some countries, including the Republic of Ireland, France and Germany, having no national requirements specified. Although Scotland does have a requirement for local authority nursery schools and classes for 3-4-year-olds to provide an area of 9.3m² per child – less than the size of the average bedroom – other services need only provide 'adequate and appropriate space' for the activities being undertaken.

This clearly highlights that in this regard, also, local authority provision offers a higher quality learning experience to nursery children.

In addition to availability of physical space within the grounds of a nursery establishment, adequate resourcing in terms of outdoor equipment and toys is essential, as is quality training for Early Years staff, including teachers, in delivering outdoor learning, exercise and play. If nurseries are to be encouraged to take outdoor learning beyond their own immediate play areas, additional funding of transport costs may be required, depending on the locations selected.

Healthy adult to staff ratios to ensure that outdoor learning experiences are of the highest quality, including for children with additional support needs, are, of course, essential.

Consideration should also be given to how families on low incomes can be supported financially to ensure that their children have the necessary shoes and clothing for any outdoor activity.

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

Nurseries and teachers are held to account by a number of bodies – local authorities as the employers; parents and pupils as consumers; HMIe and Care Inspectorate inspections; quality assurance regimes; line management; the GTCS and Professional Update; self-evaluation, politicians and the media.

The EIS would stress the distinction between the scrutiny functions of the Care Inspectorate and Education Scotland. Inspections of Early Years establishments by the Care Inspectorate should focus discretely on the health, wellbeing and safety of young learners; inspection of the provision of learning should solely be the function of Education Scotland whose core inspection staff are qualified teachers. Efforts made more recently by the two bodies to coordinate inspections has reduced what had been a previous blurring of the understanding of some Care Inspectorate staff of the organisation's functions.

Perhaps one of way of further "improving" the accountability arrangements already in place would be to streamline them and place more trust in the professionalism of teachers, schools and nurseries.

Any measures introduced to increase accountability approaches would need to be risk assessed as such measures could increase bureaucracy, complexity and potential for litigation.

8. What factors must be considered in delivering flexible ELC provision, while continuing to ensure a high-quality service? To what extent could funded ELC support parents and carers with non-standard working hours, such as working shifts and weekends?

The primary concerns of the EIS in the discussions around early education and childcare expansion are quality of provision and protection of the conditions of teachers who are employed within the sector.

While the EIS understands the government's employability agenda with regards to childcare provision, the EIS prioritises quality over quantity and flexibility of hours of entitlement, quality being of particular importance to children whose families face socio-economic disadvantage.

In seeking to deliver the additional hours of free nursery entitlement there certainly must not be any erosion of the terms and conditions of those employed within the sector, including those of qualified teachers, in the interests of offering greater flexibility of access to parents. Delivery cannot be at the expense of the conditions of Early Years workers and practitioners but must be family-friendly to them as workers, also. Teachers' terms and conditions, of course, are a matter for the Scottish Negotiation Committee for Teachers (SNCT) in any case. However, practice in some local authority nurseries has demonstrated that it would be possible to offer a service that includes wrap-around childcare serving employability interests, and meaningful access to a teacher serving educational interests, without compromising the terms and conditions of teachers as agreed by the SNCT.

9. How can we ensure fair and sustainable funding for all providers offering the ELC entitlement?

The EIS is of the view that education, including Early Years, should be a universal public service, free to all at the point of access, the funding of which should be ring-fenced to local authorities.

It is our belief that local authorities are best placed to deliver the education service, including that for pre-school children, both in terms of ensuring quality and equity of experience for learners, and in terms, from the perspective of teachers, of adherence to national conditions of service agreements.

This view is substantiated by evidence from Education Scotland inspections to suggest that best practice occurs within local authority run nursery establishments in which children have regular and meaningful interactions with qualified teachers who are expert in early education.

We believe that to ensure equity in provision, a national minimum staffing standard should be developed, to include nursery settings. Within that standard, issues of additionality should be considered, e.g. deprivation, additional support needs, English as an Additional Language, rurality, guaranteed time for promoted members of staff.

10. What more can we do to promote and support the involvement of childminders in the entitlement to ELC? What are the barriers, if any, to becoming a childminder? How can we ensure quality while preserving the unique value of home-based care?

The EIS view of how ELC should be delivered is outlined in answer to Question 9 above.

Within such a framework, there may be scope to explore the possibility of childminders being employed by local authorities as in other countries, with their terms and conditions negotiated collectively on a national basis.

11. How do we ensure that the voice of children and their families is heard as we plan this expansion?

Through direct engagement with a widely representative group of parents and their children, perhaps in local nursery settings where both parents and children feel comfortable. The expertise of nursery staff would be useful in informing the design of such engagement sessions but care should be taken by Scottish Government not to offload responsibility for such consultation to the Early Years workforce.

12. How can we ensure equality of access for all children? What barriers do children with disabilities and additional support needs currently face in accessing early learning and childcare? What further action is required to address these barriers?

Consideration should be given to potential barriers that families might face in accessing their childcare entitlements.

Families living in poverty may experience difficulty in meeting costs associated with travel potentially on a greater number of occasions to the child's nursery establishment, in affording to dress children appropriately for activities over an increased number of days, and in covering the costs of food and snacks for a greater number of hours.

Families living in rural communities face challenges in accessing nursery entitlements through a combination of geography and cost of travel. The expansion of nursery education in rural schools should therefore be seen as a priority, maximising access for all children in such communities and reducing the demand for private provision and community-led ELC. The inclusion of nursery provision within primary schools is a particularly effective strategy in remote and rural areas as it not only provides a much-needed service but may also support the viability of some remote and rural schools.

Parents with literacy difficulties may be less likely to understand and access their entitlements. Frontline public service workers in Health, Social Work and Education will require time to engage with such parents, which should be accounted for fully within their respective contractual arrangements.

Where families are newly arrived in Scotland, or where English is an additional language, entitlements may be under-utilised. Again, frontline public service workers will require time as above and additional specialist bi-lingual support in many cases, to help families overcome such barriers.

Children with disabilities and additional support needs face a range of barriers from lack of suitable transport, to unsuitability of nursery premises, to inadequate provision of additional specialist support from suitably trained staff. In the same way as the school sector suffers from insufficient numbers of specialist teachers, support assistants and other specialist professionals who contribute to the education of children with additional needs, so too does the nursery sector.

The EIS would again raise the particular issue of declining numbers of specialist ASN teachers within the context of discussions around teacher shortage and the need for a fully comprehensive recruitment strategy; and the issue of cuts to support staff numbers and increasing difficulty of access to speech and language therapists and educational psychologists, for example, within the context of the impact of cuts to local authority budgets on the delivery of all elements of the education service.

With this in mind, the EIS would again reiterate the call for a national minimum national staffing standard, to include nursery settings. Within that standard, issues of additionality should be considered, e.g. deprivation, additional support needs, English as an Additional Language, rurality, guaranteed time for promoted members of staff.

13. How can we support higher take-up rates amongst eligible two year olds, and other groups less likely to access entitlement?

Please see the response to question 12.

14. How can more social enterprises, and third sector providers, be encouraged to enter the early learning and childcare sector?

As stated in response to Question 9, the EIS believes that education, including Early Years, should be a universal public service, free to all at the point of access, the funding of which should be ring-fenced to local authorities.

It is our belief that local authorities, properly funded, are best placed to deliver the education service, including that for all pre-school children, both in terms of ensuring quality and equity of experience for learners, and in terms, from the perspective of teachers, of adherence to national conditions of service agreements.

This view is substantiated by evidence from Education Scotland inspections to suggest that best practice occurs within local authority run nursery establishments in which children have regular and meaningful interactions with qualified teachers who are expert in early education.

15. How can the governance arrangements support more community-led ELC provision particularly in remote and rural areas?

To reiterate the response provided to the same question in the EIS submission on the Governance Review of Scottish Education, what is needed is appropriate levels of funding to ensure that the commitment to childcare provision and early learning is met.

Local authorities, if properly funded, are best placed to provide early learning and childcare in all communities. The expansion of nursery education in rural schools should be seen as a priority and would reduce the demand for private provision and community-led ELC. The inclusion of nursery provision within primary schools is a particularly effective strategy in remote and rural areas as it not only provides a much-needed service but may also support the viability of some remote and rural schools.

Again, the EIS would stress the important difference between early learning and childcare, whilst being supportive of both. In terms of governance it seems odd to us that the first two years of the CfE 3-18 framework sit outside the remit of the learning directorate, risking the marginalisation of the nursery education sector.

16. How can the broader system for promoting, accessing, and registering for a place in an ELC setting be improved? Please give examples of any innovative and accessible systems currently in place?

The EIS has nothing further to add to the suggestions made in response to Question 12 for supporting access to entitlements other than that the views of a diverse range of parents should be sought, perhaps as part of the discussion as suggested in response to Question 11.

17. Do parents and carers face any barriers in accessing support with the costs of ELC provision (beyond the funded entitlement)? What more can we do to ensure additional hours are affordable?

The EIS has nothing further to add to that suggested in the final paragraph of the response to Question 6 and paragraphs 2 and 3 of the response to Question 12.

18. How can ELC providers, particularly private and third sector providers, be encouraged to extend capacity?

The EIS would wish to see local authorities adequately funded to extend capacity in the ways and for the reasons outlined elsewhere in this response.

19. What funding model would best support our vision for high quality and flexible ELC provision, which is accessible and affordable for all?

To echo previous responses within this submission, the EIS believes that nursery education should be universally free for all at the point of use, delivered by local authorities with ring-fenced education funding.

We believe that to ensure equity in provision, a national minimum staffing standard should be developed. Within that standard, issues of additionality should be considered, e.g. deprivation, additional support needs, rurality, guaranteed time for promoted members of staff.

The EIS also believes that certain services, such as EAL and ASN, need to be calculated on the basis of need and budget lines protected to ensure service delivery. A disproportionate level of austerity-driven cut backs has occurred in these areas subsequent to the removal of previous ring fencing.

It should be recognised that any funding formula must also be supplemented by a mechanism which provides for needs that arise which have not been foreseen.

20. If it were possible for aspects of the entitlement to be phased in ahead of the full roll out by 2020, how should this be implemented?

It is the view of the EIS that significant work remains to be done by the Scottish Government to strike the correct balance of quality and quantity of provision within the current 600 hours entitlement, and that efforts should be made to consolidate progress in this regard rather than towards early roll out of the extended entitlement. The EIS would recommend that evaluation of the first phase of expansion should be carefully evaluated and the pilots of the second phase of expansion conducted and analysed, to inform future progress.