

THE EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTE OF SCOTLAND

EIS Response to the Scottish Government Discussion Paper on Early Learning and Childcare 1140 Hours Expansion

The Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS), as Scotland's largest education union and with membership across all sectors, including Nursery, welcomes the opportunity to comment on the forthcoming programme of trials focused on increased ELC delivery.

1. What should be the key features of Scotland's ELC model?

The EIS believes that ELC should be delivered by a workforce which is valued for the diversity of skills that it deploys in addressing the education and care needs of Scotland's pre-school children, in the context of early years being crucial to their future educational and life chances.

To this end, all members of the ELC workforce should be highly trained and qualified, and fairly paid, as appropriate to their role within the team. Research consistently demonstrates that such an approach- proper investment in the workforce- is the means by which to deliver the highest quality of provision overall, in addition to that which has the greatest positive impact on improving outcomes for children who face socio-economic disadvantage.

The EIS is of the view that central to the delivery of early years education must be GTCS qualified teachers who remain the most highly qualified members of the early years workforce tasked with this key responsibility. GTCS registered teachers play a unique role as pedagogical leaders; as 'bridging professionals' across the Early Level of Curriculum for Excellence; in identifying and providing for children with additional support needs, including those who have English as an additional language; and in working with families and the wider community.

In spite of the essential nature of the role of qualified nursery teachers, within the current model of ELC provision, children are guaranteed only 'access to a teacher' with interpretations of this widely variable and ill-defined across the country.

Research commissioned recently by the EIS provided evidence from the Teacher Census that the numbers of qualified teachers employed in local authority settings has reduced dramatically in the past 10 years, amounting to a 29% drop in numbers, while the reduction in pupil numbers has been only 4%.

At the point at which research data was gathered in 2014, the teacher to child ratio stood at 1:84; that ratio has now reduced further to 1:94. Government statistics show that 25.7% of pre-school children currently have no access to a teacher; 50% of local authorities state that pre-school children in their authority do not have access to a teacher; and 50% of local authorities state that there is no minimum time stipulation for pupil contact with a teacher.

The EIS is of the clear view that in designing new models of ELC delivery to take account of the increased 1140 hours of free childcare entitlement, and to deliver the dual aims of equity and excellence in education, the Scottish Government and delivery partners must seek to remedy the current deficit in the number of qualified nursery teachers and the inequality of provision across and within local authorities.

The EIS urgently calls upon the Scottish Government to legislate to ensure that the contribution of GTCS registered nursery teachers to early years education and childcare is safeguarded in statute and that Scotland's pre-school children, in receiving high quality early years education, are guaranteed minimum access to a teacher.

Besides staff qualification levels and training, staff salaries, and healthy staff-child ratios and group size, the EIS would concur with the other remaining OECD findings with regards to indicators of other indicators of quality- the effectiveness of the curriculum, the physical environment and staff gender and diversity. The EIS view is that Curriculum for Excellence provides a framework within which, with adequate resources, high quality learning experiences can be designed and delivered for Scotland's early learners. The physical environment is, of course, key to providing the space and surroundings to enable those high quality learning experiences to occur, and to supporting the wellbeing of the children and adults who learn and teach within it. Finally, diversity within the workforce is of huge importance in fostering a sense of belonging among learners, all of whom should see the diversity of their communities reflected in the composition of the staff who work with them.

2. Which specific principles of ELC models should be prioritised within our programme of trials?

The EIS believes, as reflected in the response to the previous question, that quality and fairness and equity, should be prioritised as principles within the programme of trials.

Furthermore, 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. 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.

The Scottish Government prioritises flexibility

3. What do you see as the key barriers to a successful implementation of the 1140 hours commitment?

The EIS would regard 'successful implementation' to mean the delivery of early education and childcare provision that is of high quality and equitable.

A barrier to this at present is the absence of legislation safeguarding children's equal and minimum access to a qualified teacher.

If this were to be rectified, a further challenge would lie in teacher recruitment, as is already the case. Large numbers of teachers would require to be recruited and trained, and those who have been removed from the nursery setting to teach in primary, redeployed.

Another dimension of successful implementation is from the perspective of the workforce, including registered teachers. The EIS is of the view that there requires to be improvements in the conditions of all members of the early years workforce. 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 if it is to be considered 'successful'.

4. How might these trials be designed to overcome such barriers?

Efforts could be made to fund the recruitment and/ or redeployment of qualified nursery teachers by local authorities for the purposes of the trials, with a view to continued retention beyond the life of the trial.

The specific detail of improving the conditions of service for early years workers who are not teachers is a matter for the trade unions of which they are members.

5. Are there existing examples of best practice?

There is 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 years education.

6. Are there existing examples of innovative delivery within ELC provision that you can share with us?

Examples of good practice are likely to be found in Finland where pre-school provision is characterised by healthy child to adult ratios; staff are among the most highly trained and qualified in Europe; there is close regulation of modes of delivery; and the provision of curriculum guidelines by government for use in the early years context.

7. What outcomes should we be measuring through this programme of trials?

The success of the trials should be judged, in the view of the EIS, according to the following:

- The cognitive and wider developmental progress of the children involved in the trials (though without early learners being exposed to formal testing);
 - The wellbeing of the children involved;
 - The extent to which teachers, as experts in child development, early level pedagogy with the emphasis firmly on play, additional support needs provision, transitions and supporting families, judge the approaches adopted within the trials to have been a success;
 - The extent to which families, and women in particular, report positive impact on their employability and overall income;
 - The extent to which families report positive impact on the overall wellbeing of the family;
 - The extent to which trade unions as representatives of workers in Early Years report positively on resources, delivery and the impact on their members.
8. Are there other services for children and young people that the trials should be integrated with?

In the interests of effective transition into and from early years education, integration with Health and Education (Primary sector) respectively would be advisable for all children. For children with additional support needs, Health and Social Work services should be involved in the trials. Time for staff to liaise with professionals from other agencies would be a requirement.

9. Are there local/ regional characteristics that should be explicitly built into trials?

Consideration should be given to assigning additional resources to models of provision being trialled in areas of high and multiple deprivation, or generally in instances where it is known that children have additional needs.

Consideration should also be given to how children and families in rural areas will be able to access their entitlements.

In areas where teacher recruitment has been a difficulty, careful planning and resources are needed to incorporate adequate qualified teacher access for children into the trials.

10. How can we design trials in such a way as to ensure scalability?

The answer to this question is very much dependent on the integrity of the Scottish Government's commitment to ensure that 'Scotland is the best place in the world to grow up' and that the education system will embody the twin aims of equity and excellence. The realisation of such a vision for early

childcare and education requires significant investment. Trials should be designed with this in mind.

11. Would you be interested in being involved in the programme of trials? If so, in what capacity?

The EIS would be willing to seek feedback from any members who are involved in trials and to feed this back to the relevant personnel. Beyond that, we would be willing to work with partners in the design, delivery and evaluation of trials, and thereafter in the process of scaling up and implementation.