

Education and Culture Committee

Scotland's Educational and Cultural Future

Children in Scotland

Thank you for the opportunity to provide evidence to the Committee's Inquiry on Scotland's Educational and Cultural Future. We would make clear from the outset that this contribution sets out our view in terms of policy. As an umbrella body representing a very wide range of interests within the children's sector, including local, Scottish and UK-wide bodies, we do not intend to offer a view in relation to the referendum itself, except to say that the future sustainability of services and outcomes for children and families will always be our primary concern whatever political choice is faced and which we hope all voters will take into consideration when casting their vote. We also appreciate that social policy is primarily determined and subject to change by governments of the day as well as the pool of available resources and prevailing economic circumstances, and that a strong and stable economy is a prerequisite if we are to fulfil ambitions in this regard. We look forward to a constructive process of debate to help build and deliver a shared set of goals for what we want a future Scotland to offer all of its children, young people and families - whether independent or as part of the UK.

Children in Scotland has for many years campaigned for increasing and improving childcare and learning for all, from the early through to teenage years. Quality and affordable childcare is an investment in children's future, which supports educational achievement. Curriculum for Excellence has been the main vehicle for educational transformation between ages 3 to 18 enjoying cross-party support but we also know that the opportunity of early learning is an essential step in the route towards improving outcomes for all children, as well as tackling poverty and deprivation experienced by too many of our children.

We know that the provision of good quality, affordable childcare and learning opportunities underpins employment, economic regeneration and gender equality strategies. As such we supported the Scottish Government's proposal in the context of the Children & Young People (Scotland) Bill to extend the entitlement to statutory free early learning and childcare from 475 to 600 hours per annum for three and four year olds and some two-year-olds, as well as the principle of the ambition stated in "Scotland's Future" of "transformational childcare" in the sense of extending free hours to mirror the school day and potentially to children as young as one, albeit we have sought clarification on costings and other details. We would however add some further caveats.

Firstly, the economic arguments set out around pre-school provision also apply to school-aged children, particularly those in primary school.

Subsidising out of school care provision can also help parents access or keep employment by ensuring they are not limited to the school day. Much of the out of school care in Scotland is provided by independent and third sector bodies, including many services in schools and providers have a particularly important role to play in communities which may not be able to sustain larger, less flexible services provided by local authorities for example. Particularly given pressure on local government budgets combined with planned tax and benefit changes that will see support for parents of over fives being withdrawn but replaced incrementally in the coming years, we believe there is a need to place provision for school-aged children beyond the school day on a statutory footing in Scotland, preferably for children up to 14 years as is currently the case in England under the Childcare Act 2006.¹ We also note the Scottish Parliament's Equal Opportunities Committee similarly recommended that childcare for school aged children should be available, on a statutory basis for children up to the age of 15.² We also supported amendments to the Children & Young People Bill for a statutory right to childcare and to provide Ministers with an enabling power to specify a minimum amount of out of school care when resources allow similar to the Bill's current for pre-school. Although these amendments were unsuccessful the Bill was amended to ensure out of school care has to be taken account of with respect to children's services planning.

Secondly our particular focus on extending the number of two-year-olds eligible for early learning and childcare in the Children & Young People Bill reflected the fact that every month of pre-school provision after age two is linked to better cognitive development, independence, concentration and sociability in later life and can help identify children requiring extra support. Evidence suggests that early learning and childcare can improve outcomes for children and reduce significant socio-economic inequalities but only when services are of a high quality. To ensure high quality experiences it is important that services recognise the different needs between two-year-olds and three and four-year-olds. The priority for very young children is services that develop their social and emotional skills and lead to better attachment. This was the original rationale behind the then Scottish Executive's pilots of nursery for vulnerable two-year-olds in certain local authority areas from 2006-08.³ We therefore welcomed the Scottish Government's pledge in January that eligibility for early learning and childcare for two-year-olds is to be expanded beyond those who have Looked After status or are under a Kinship Care Order as originally proposed, albeit the proposed extension to 15 per cent of two-year-olds from this year and to 27 per cent from next year still

¹ Childcare Act 2006 (England & Wales): <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/21/contents>

² Scottish Parliament Equal Opportunities Committee Women and Work Inquiry, June 2013: www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/64971.aspx#a34

³ Evaluation of Extended pre-school provision for vulnerable two-year-olds pilot, 2008: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/12/16111725/2>

remains some way short of the 40 per cent of two-year-olds who will be eligible for pre-school care in England from this September. As we stated in our written evidence to the Committee on the Children & Young People Bill, we would ideally like to see a universal entitlement for all two-year-olds when resources allow, however in all cases we would seek assurances that quality and the child's development remain the primary purpose. Recruiting and retaining a skilled workforce and integrating services are key considerations in this regard. We would be concerned to ensure that the current debate does not focus on the needs of the labour market, as important though these considerations are, to the detriment of these developmental considerations.

Moreover, it is important that "transformational childcare" is viewed more than simply an extension of the current system with extra hours bolted on. There is a wider debate to be had regarding the preferred model of early learning and childcare. The introduction of universal pre-school education for three and four year olds since the 1990s and subsequent extension of hours by successive UK and devolved administrations have been important steps forward. This has been mainly delivered through subsidising existing or expanded mixed economy of demand-led services as well as parents through tax credits. However, even with the proposed extension to 600 hours free hours per year, full time childcare remains prohibitively expensive for many families in Scotland. Indeed the childcare costs report produced jointly by Children in Scotland and the Family and Childcare Trust has shown Scotland has some of the highest childcare costs outside of London and the South East with parents in Scotland more reliant on grandparents for childcare than other parts of the UK.⁴

The Institute for Public Policy Research cites research that supply-funded systems that offer direct childcare provision or direct payments to childcare providers tend to be more effective than demand-led systems in achieving lower net childcare costs compared to their total expenditure, and at ensuring high quality provision (Cooke and Henahan 2012).⁵ Most of these systems provide some of the entitlement free with caps on costs for any additional expenditure to ensure fairness. The same research has indicated that there is a tipping point of about 10 per cent of family disposable income that balances work incentives for mothers with childcare affordability.

The IPPR also observes that the free entitlement element needs to be flexible. In the Scottish context, despite a clause in the Children & Young People Bill requiring local authorities to "have regard to the desirability of ensuring that the method by which it makes early learning and childcare available of the Part is flexible enough to allow parents an appropriate degree of choice when deciding how to access the service," the new legislation also limits of the free element of

⁴ 2013 Scottish Childcare Report, Children in Scotland/ Family & Childcare Trust:
www.familyandparenting.org/Resources/FPI/Documents/FCT_Scottish_Childcare_Costs_13.pdf

⁵ "Childminding the Gap", IPPR/Nuffield Foundation, Feb 2014
www.nuffieldfoundation.org/sites/default/files/files/childmind-the-gap_Feb2014.pdf

childcare to sessions “which are more than 2.5 hours but less than 8 hours in duration.”⁶ The precise availability within these times is a matter for local authorities to determine within their available resources. More therefore more is requires to be done to enable mothers particularly to use their entitlement more flexibly so that it can cover longer days rather than short daily sessions, particularly for mothers at the margins of employment. Clearly the issues of family friendly hours and flexibility are a challenge for employers as well as government. In this context we also welcomed recent changes to employment law at a UK level allowing mothers and fathers to share parental leave.⁷

Finally, we would also make the point that in countries with systems of high quality universal provision, especially “wrap-around care” these are generally supported by higher levels of taxation. Though it can provide huge dividends both socially and financially in the long term, quality provision of both early learning and childcare cannot be provided on the cheap and this needs to be a dimension to any realistic debate.

I hope this is helpful. Please do not hesitate to contact us if there are any queries arising or if we are able to provide any further information which may be useful to the Committee.

Best wishes.

Yours faithfully

Ross Gilligan

Policy Officer

⁶Children & Young People (Scotland) Bill (as passed), Feb 2014:
[www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4_Bills/Children%20and%20Young%20People%20\(Scotland\)%20Bill/b27bs4-aspassed.pdf](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4_Bills/Children%20and%20Young%20People%20(Scotland)%20Bill/b27bs4-aspassed.pdf)

⁷ Children in Scotland media release, Nov 2013:
[www.fahhttp://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/docs/SharedParentalLeaveCommentFINAL.pdf](http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/docs/SharedParentalLeaveCommentFINAL.pdf)

Children in Scotland is the national umbrella agency for organisations and professionals working with and for children, young people and their families. It exists to identify and promote the interests of children and their families and to ensure that policies and services and other provisions are of the highest possible quality and are able to meet the needs of a diverse society. Children in Scotland represents more than 400 members, including most of Scottish local authorities, all major voluntary, statutory and private children's agencies, professional organisations, as well as many other smaller community groups and children's services. It is linked with similar agencies in other parts of the UK and Europe.

The work of Children in Scotland encompasses extensive information, policy, research and practice development programmes. The agency works closely with MSPs, the Scottish Government, local authorities and practitioners. It also services groups such as the Cross Party Parliamentary Group on Children and Young People (with YouthLink Scotland). In addition, Children in Scotland hosts Enquire - the national advice service for additional support for learning, and Resolve: ASL, Scotland's largest independent education mediation service.