

Scottish Childminding Association (SCMA) welcomes the government's ambitious plans to transform early learning and childcare in Scotland. We have supported the Children and Young People Bill as it has made its way through Parliament.

The case is already widely well known that our youngest children will benefit from the availability of quality early learning and childcare. This universal provision ensures that all children will benefit and make good transitions into school.

Research also tells us that having access to flexible, affordable childcare will allow parents to access work. Parents being in work will ensure children are less likely to be living in poverty. Childcare needs to be available not just for pre-school children but also for school age children. Out of school care is just as important as pre-school childcare. It is essential to help parents back into work as well as bring the benefits that quality out of school care provides for children.

The modern workforce is being expected to be more flexible as shift work and weekend work becomes more common. The childcare sector must reflect that and a community based childminding service is more likely to be able to meet these needs without disadvantaging the children.

We would recommend a system that benefits from supply side funding with fees being capped. This will allow all families to have equal access to quality services.

Our economy will benefit both from an increase in employment in the provision of childcare as well as parents being able to access other forms of employment.

SCMA would argue that the best package of early learning and childcare is the one that has a variety of types of provision. Unlike other countries, Scotland is starting from a good position as the quality of the existing early learning and childcare services is high. By far the majority of childminding services for example are graded as good to excellent\*. This has led to the reduction in frequency of inspections without any reduction of quality. It will be essential as we move forward that these community based services are invested in. They have the real advantage of very low adult-to-child ratios that are particularly suited for the 0-3 age group as well as extending to school age children.

Future planning will need to have a more strategic overview to ensure there is a more even availability and choice of services. Currently it is left to individuals to come forward for registration and as a result this leaves some areas with little provision and some areas where services quickly go out of business. Good planning of the need for services will allow future services to be more sustainable which is important for continuity for children.

Ongoing professional development and support is needed as well as a move to a more qualified workforce. This will enhance the existing clear registration and inspection process as inspections focus more clearly on improving outcomes for children.

The early learning and childcare sector would benefit from more continuity between the current education system and the care service system. Currently these run in parallel leaving a lack of overall planning of the different types of services.

The needs of children and families are very different and so there will always be a need for a broad range of services from local authority services to the range in the private sector. It is the planning of these services that needs to be carried out by community planning partnerships in line with a clear government vision.

SCMA has examples of case studies from parents and childminders with their views of the importance of local services to support them into work. We are happy to share these with the education and culture committee.

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\*Childcare Statistics 2012, Care Inspectorate, October 2013