

**Education and Culture Committee**  
**Scotland's Educational and Cultural Future**  
**Scottish out of School Care Network**

**Call for Written Evidence: Theme 2: Early Years, Childcare and Employability**

**The Committee is interested to hear your views** on some or all of the following issues—

- ☐ The benefits to children, families and the wider economy of investing in childcare;
- ☐ The planning, training and investment that would be required to bring about a transformation in childcare provision;

**Introduction:**

The Scottish Out of School Care Network (SOSCN) is a Scottish registered charity (SC020520), established in 1991 and is the national infrastructure umbrella organisation providing support, mentoring, training, information and resources to the nearly 1,000 school-aged childcare and holiday care services in Scotland. Such services provide childcare, play and learning, before and after school, and during school holidays, to around 50,000 children of school age. We are committed to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). In particular we support Article 31 on the right to culture, play, leisure and recreation. Go to <http://www.soscn.org/> For information on SOSCN and school age childcare in general.

We are confining our comments to the above extract from Theme 2 of the written call for evidence, as that is where our expertise is relevant.

**About School Age Childcare:**

Can be termed out of school care, after school clubs, breakfast clubs, holiday care or clubs, the defining feature is that the service is registered with the Care Inspectorate as a daycare for children service and their staff are registered with the Social Services Council or recognised equivalent body.

**Scottish Statistics: 2012** (Source: Care Inspectorate Childcare Statistics 2013)

School Age Childcare Services	School Age Childcare Services	Holiday Services	Breakfast Clubs
Stand-alone – first main service	685	53	0
As Additional service	285	532	536
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>970</b>	<b>585</b>	<b>536</b>

At least 52,540 school age children are registered to access these care, play and learning opportunities and this figure does not include the potentially high numbers of 4-5 year olds already at school and attending nursery or other services providing school age childcare (total 4-5 year olds registered around 63,000 excluding childminders). This makes school age childcare the second largest sector providing childcare in Scotland

The number of services, however, is steadily declining, from a peak of over 1,200 in 2003, to for the first time being less than a thousand in 2011, with 997 services, and down to 970 now. Numbers of places are not declining so much, suggesting that there may be mergers and consolidation of some services for sustainability reasons.

School age childcare services are fairly evenly spread across all areas of deprivation from the least to the most, demonstrating the need and benefit to all communities. However there was a reduction from 8.2% in the most deprived areas in 2011 to 6.7% in 2012 and from 9.3% to 7%, in intermediate areas, reflecting sustainability issues.

Area of deprivation	No. of services per 10,000 head of population
Most deprived	6.7%
Intermediate	7%
Least deprived	8.9%

Most services receive no core funding support therefore rely on parents accessing childcare tax credits or childcare vouchers to pay for the service.” Sustainability issues” can happen when fees are no longer affordable or numbers of families using the service drop in number, therefore the service cannot cover costs.

**General points:**

First, we cannot stress enough the point that for there truly to be “transformational change” in childcare, the **exclusion of school age childcare** from the possible first ten years of the proposals in the White Paper: Scotland’s Future, is a major and highly concerning omission.

We appreciate that the Minister for Children and Young People has asked the Early Years Task Force to look into school age childcare, and we will be contributing to that process. We are also pleased that the early years collaborative now covers children up to age 8.

It is, however, of fundamental importance that proposals for childcare in Scotland’s Future, whatever the outcome of the referendum or elections, **include school age childcare** from the outset. One way or another, over the past 22 years, at different times, SOSCN has worked with every major political administration, in the UK and in Scotland, to deliver policies and strategic interventions to boost the supply, quality, and sustainability of school age childcare.

From whatever political foundation, we can surely argue that, given this experience, that there must be at least cross party support for the need for school age childcare.

Every single economic argument, feminist argument and social welfare argument to justify investment in expanding childcare for 1-5 year olds, are all arguments we understand and agree with, and all also equally apply to school age childcare.

Anyone with an understanding of children's development in the school years knows and understands the importance of children's social life, relationships with peers and supportive engaged adults. They especially need opportunities for play and activities, which support their acquisition of a wide range of skills and contribute towards their emotional and social resilience. Therefore, we also see school age childcare as essential for children themselves, not just as an economic lever to support their families into work. This sector is also the largest employer of play workers and indeed is crucial to the aspirations of the National Play Strategy (Scottish Government, 2013a). We would also add that this is a source of support for children's cultural, sports, leisure and recreational rights under Article 31 of the UNCRC.

The best practice, in terms of provision of childcare, includes school age childcare in other European countries (e.g. Denmark, Sweden, Finland and Norway). We also recently hosted a visit from a group of school age childcare workers from Iceland. In all cases, the state directly funds such services. This fact has received too little attention in commissioned reports and evidence for the white paper policy proposals (see, for example, Scottish Government, 2013b)

This sector is currently the second biggest provider of childcare places in Scotland (Care Inspectorate, 2013), reflecting the undoubted need for such childcare. Without any national or local policy support and investment set out for at least the next 12 years it will surely be harder for this sector to maintain levels of provision, and importantly, quality standards. By the time families are used to access free or heavily subsidised provision for their under-fives, when they need school age childcare, there may be very little supply left to meet the demand, or the costs may be as prohibitive as now; on average £50 a week term time or £100 a week holiday care (SOSCN, 2014a).

### **Workforce Issues**

We have real concerns that the large increase in terms of the need for a qualified workforce, engendered by the expansion of earlier years services, (with proper direct investment in quality and staff pay and conditions), will also reduce the levels of staff, especially well qualified staff, in the school age childcare sector.

Our worry is that an exodus of suitably qualified staff, understandably taking their qualifications and experience to the new and better-resourced jobs; opened up in the early learning and childcare for under-fives, will then lead to huge difficulties in recruiting replacements.

This could mean that services would then fail to meet their registration requirements with the Care Inspectorate and close down, thus reducing the availability of school age childcare.

Even if it does not go that far, we do not want to see within school age childcare for the next 12 years or so, a situation where services experience a constant “churn” of their workforce, through recruiting and training staff who then move on to more secure posts once they are qualified, as this will affect quality.

**The unintended (we are sure) consequences of a highly laudable policy aim to vastly increase the levels of childcare for 1-5 year olds could be that it reduces the viability, quality and indeed provision of school age childcare places.**

It may not be widely known that staff in school age childcare services are required to meet the same standards of qualifications required for staff in the earlier years sector and to register with the Social Services Council (other than childminders in early years, who are not registered with the SSSC). Services also meet Care Inspectorate regulatory standards and many also take part in our own quality assurance processes.

SOSCN has worked hard with our sector, the SSSC, and providers of degree level qualifications to ensure staff in school age childcare know about their registration and qualification requirements and are encouraged to meet such standards. We do not support any diminution of such standards, in our view, this is not a solution to this issue.

We have received positive feedback from service managers, who have undertaken the BA in Childhood Practice; they report increased confidence, especially in working with fellow professionals across health, education and social work. Indeed we are currently rolling out Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) training to services in recognition of their professional role in supporting this policy framework.

(We are also appalled at de-regulation proposals by the current UK government for school age childcare services in England; where there will be no qualifications required of staff and potentially ratios of 1 member of staff to 30 children (SOSCN, 2014b).

**The benefits to children, families and the wider economy of investing in childcare;**

All of our comments here apply to all childcare for all ages of children not just those under school age. As a general introduction: our Benefits of Out of School Care Video (SOSCN, 2011) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jlDMi4u5k3Q> includes parent’s views on both the economic and social support they receive; as well as, of course, children’s voices, while service managers discuss the benefits overall.

In terms of the benefits to children, the investment has to be in *high quality* childcare. This means that staff must be suitably trained, qualified, as well as committed and caring about their work and the children they look after. They must know, understand and deliver current theory and good practice in supporting children’s development and learning and be able to

engage positively with children, their parents and carers and fellow professionals in delivering their service.

We are currently supporting the rolling out of GIRFEC training and awareness and this is undoubtedly, alongside the UNCRC, which it is based on, the foundation of good practice and we would expect to see contents of qualifications, care standards, regulations and regulatory conditions to embrace and promote this approach in in early learning, CfE and childcare. We would like to see much more about how children develop throughout the school years embedded in the relevant qualifications for our sector.

We agree with the evidence used in the white paper, Scotland's Future, to bring out the benefits to children themselves of high quality care in the early years. We would agree with Professor Susan Deacon in that we have plenty of evidence to support good quality care and learning provision in the early years, now we have to act, and the white paper proposals go some way to beginning this process.

In terms of the benefits for children of school age of good quality childcare, in out of school and holiday services, there is not a large body of similar academic evidence, and we are currently trying to encourage more interest in this topic from academic specialists in the childcare field.

There is however, transferable evidence, for example, the report on *Indicators of Social and Emotional Healthy Living, Children Ages 5-12 Years* (Schonert-Reichl, Stewart Lawlor, Oberle, & Thomson, 2009,) for the Canadian Public Health Agency of Canada, sets out a richly detailed comparison of a wide range of international measures of social and emotional wellbeing for children of this age group. In doing so, they argue the case for seeing middle childhood as an equally important period in children's development, as it is then, they argue, that their future trajectory of adolescent to adult life is even more determined than in the early years.

This report is useful as it strongly reflects what we have developed in Scotland, in terms of the GIRFEC approach to child wellbeing, it also brings in material from respected child theorists, reports on child poverty and the consequential detrimental effects on children's development, as well as work which includes children's own views and opinions. Crucial to middle childhood are opportunities to be with and play, socialise and form close relationships with peers.

The NCB report on *Young Children's Wellbeing* (Fauth and Thompson,2009) reviews a wide range of literature covering the 0-8 age range in terms of various indicators of wellbeing, including play, space to play, neighbourhood, family income and resources and activities provided in both the home and other (early years) care environments. Like many others it points out the paucity of research into the benefits, or otherwise, of out of school services.

The evidence underpinning the National Play Strategy and associated Action Plan (Scottish Government, 2013) is all transferable to school age childcare in that it is both one of the biggest providers of play opportunities for children and where most staff undertake playwork qualifications in Scotland.

### **Economic Case**

We agree with the view put forward in the white paper, and associated evidence, that investment in childcare, by enabling parents to work, can eventually at least pay for itself through the increased tax and national insurance revenue and reduction of some types of benefits. We made a very similar argument ourselves, for investment in school age childcare, in *The Next Step in Scotland* (SOSCN, 1997) a long time ago. More recently, the IPPR has produced reports such as *Making the Case for Universal Childcare (2011)* which go into the finer detail of how such modelling of investment and return would work.

European wide research emphasises the value of school age childcare in addressing poverty and deprivation (Reid and White 2007) where the provision of such care can facilitate women in entering and remaining in the workforce and make a substantial contribution to children's welfare. In disadvantaged areas, out-of-school care can contribute to tackling poverty and problem behaviour.

Various evaluations of the Out of School Childcare Initiative, especially the Final Evaluation Report, Annex 1, <http://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/global-content/research/uk-wide/out-of-school-hours-childcare-year-three-evaluation-report> by the then New Opportunities Fund, now BIG Lottery, showed that there were significant and positive labour market impacts of investing in school age childcare for families and communities.

### **Forward planning and workforce issues:**

We have already explained the unintended consequences of creating a much wider job market for similarly regulated and qualified staff where we see a potential problem in that there may be a huge displacement of staff moving from school age childcare to the early years services, which will have better conditions, public investment and greater security.

This is why planning to expand childcare should apply to ALL childcare in Scotland and to ensure we retain services and not allow them to go into decline in one area as it expands in another.

There is also a case where, if independence is not on the cards, from 2015, for example, the whole childcare voucher system *will no longer be open to parents of school age children for their childcare costs*, indeed it will take another five years before, once again, such services are belatedly included. We firmly believe that childcare should be subsidised at source and not through myriad tax credits or voucher schemes. A significant proportion of this

“spending” on childcare is actually spending on administration by government or private voucher companies.

We have experience at SOSCN of various previous initiatives, which created a large expansion in childcare. Lessons from such experiences include:

- There needs to be a strong infrastructure of support in terms of development, land and premises, workforce and information resources. All of this requires costing and investment. However, over investment in one area, as determined by policy, should not lead to cuts in other areas; it is not a good plan to have a shiny new nursery while the school is falling apart around it.
- There needs to be measures to prevent inadvertent displacement of existing good quality provision, therefore development should build on what already exists and we should not be in a rush to create a lot of new services from scratch.
- There needs to be protected investment resources for staff training, qualifications, professional development and recruitment support.
- The third and private sector providers should be involved and treated as equal partners in these processes.
- The regulatory bodies and Education Scotland will have increased workloads and also require extra resources
- Organisations like SOSCN, providing valuable infrastructure, support to development, expertise and models of delivery will also need to be supported
- It all takes time... to build up capacity and use, we have experience of many “one year” initiatives foundering, as parents, children and communities need to get to know and trust that local provision is going to be around before they commit to using it.
- For the workforce, we need to look again at the contents of qualifications and ensure that the FE sector is suitably staffed and resourced itself to provide training and qualifications.
- There should be imaginative use of the school estate and community premises. Again, if school age childcare is not included, will they be pushed out of using school premises as school nurseries are expanded?
- Monitoring and evaluation should be built in and expected from the start, therefore, there will need to be sufficient resources and staff to cover such roles.
- We believe the UNCRC, GIRFEC and the SHANNARI framework should be the foundation for planning, monitoring, evaluation, quality and qualifications development.

We hope these comments and linked evidence are useful.

Irene Audain MBE

Chief Executive, Scottish Out of School Care Network, 4th March 2014

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