

Scotland's Educational and Cultural Future

Submission from the Equality and Human Rights Commission to the Education and Culture Committee

4 March 2014

Introduction

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (the Commission) was established by the Equality Act 2006 and came into being on 1 October 2007. The Commission promotes and protects equality and human rights, working to eliminate discrimination, reduce inequality and make sure that everyone has a fair chance to participate in society. We welcome the opportunity to submit evidence to the Committee, our submission focuses entirely on Theme 2: Early Years, childcare and employability.

Benefits of introducing a universal childcare system

The Commission welcomes the plans set out in 'Scotland's Future' to 'develop a universal system of high quality early learning and childcare for children from the age of one to when they enter school.' The Commission views this as an essential goal no matter what the outcome of the referendum.

Universally accessible and affordable childcare driven by a skilled and valued workforce will have significant benefits for Scotland. We hope that the Committee will look to learn from countries like Denmark where parents are guaranteed a day care place for children from the age of six months until they start school at six years. Participation rates are very high, 97% of children between the ages of 3 and 5, and 91% of those aged between 1 and 2 attend day care. The cost is capped at 25% of the unit price of provision, it is free for parents on the lowest incomes, and the average family spends only around 7–10 % of their disposable income on childcare.¹

Universal childcare has been shown to reduce inequality and maximise the wellbeing of children and their parents. It has the potential to contribute to the Governments preventative spending agenda as increasing women's participation the labour market mitigates against poverty and promotes social mobility, which in turn prevents expensive social problems developing in later life. There are also

¹ Double Dutch; the case against deregulation and demand led funding in childcare, IPPR, 2012
http://www.ippr.org/images/media/files/publication/2012/10/double-dutch-childcare_Oct2012_9763.pdf

positive economic outcomes to be gained from investing in childcare; a cost benefit analysis by IPPR suggested that £20,050 over 4 years could be collected in tax revenue for every woman who returns to full time employment 1 year after maternity leave.²

The Commission expect that any future universal childcare system will provide excellent early learning and childcare for disabled children. It is a common experience for parents of disabled children to find childcare to be nonexistent or prohibitively expensive. The Family and Childcare Trust reported in their recent Childcare Costs Survey that 75% of local authorities across England, Scotland and Wales do not have enough provision for disabled children.³ In our Working Better Research we found that 49% of Family Information Services in both England and Wales reported that there was not enough childcare provision in their area for disabled children. For these families, a parent is likely to stay at home to look after their children and so face more social isolation and risk of poverty.⁴

Transforming workforce of the childcare sector

We welcome the provision within the Children and Young People's Bill which will deliver more funded, flexible childcare of 600 hours a year for 3 and 4 year olds and vulnerable two year olds from August. The Scottish Government have recently announced a review of the early years workforce led by Professor Iram Siraj. We expect that the Committee will look closely at the reviews recommendations for the planning, training and investment that would be required to bring about a transformation in this sector.

In addition we would ask that the Committee examine two issues, which we consider to be central to the transformation of the childcare sector:

How to shift the gendered language and focus of debates about childcare

There is a need to move the debate about caring away from being regarded as a 'woman's issue' recognising that this is an issue for families, and recognising the very critical role that it has in Scotland's future. Assumptions about gender

² Making the case for universal childcare, briefing paper, IPPR, 2011
http://ippr.org/images/media/files/publication/2011/12/making-the-case-for-universal-childcare_Dec2011_8382.pdf

³ Childcare Costs Survey 2014, Family and Childcare Trust, <http://www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/News/part-time-childcare-costs-are-now-higher-than-average-uk-mortgage>

⁴ Working Better, Childcare Matters, EHRC, 2010
http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/uploaded_files/research/working_better_childcare_matters.pdf

“traditional” employment roles, still restrict school leavers’ options for training and employment: last year we looked at the Scottish Government’s modern apprenticeship scheme and found that less than 2% of engineering or construction placements go to women. The persistence of occupational segregation in childcare is also a problem; childcare jobs are seen as ‘women’s work’ and are generally undervalued and underpaid. Low pay and low status offers little encouragement to improve the quality of the service provided.

2. How to introduce a childcare system that is valued recognising that investment will bring benefits for everyone

Caring carries a high degree of social value; it also involves a high level of responsibility, and a sophisticated skill set and experience which should be highly valued. The childcare workforce of the future will require higher levels of training, opportunities for progression and lower carer to child ratios. This will be more expensive, but there will be significant benefits.

A recent report by the New Economics Foundation highlights that ‘in childcare - as in many public services - workers are not simply an input whose efficiency in producing and output can be enhanced through technological developments or better time management systems.’ It is important to accept that caring is unique and that quality care will require investment.

Finally, the Committee may wish to consider research by the New Economics Foundation (NEF) called *The Value of Childcare: quality, cost and time*.⁵ The report presents a childcare model that calculates the cost of childcare per hour for different wage levels for childcare workers and suggests the total associated costs which would raise the quality of staffing and provision.⁵

⁵ The Value of childcare: quality, cost and time, NEF, 2013 <http://www.neweconomics.org/publications/entry/the-value-of-childcare>