



PAS briefing to the Education and Culture Committee's Inquiry into Scotland's Educational and Cultural Future

1. The benefits to children, families and the wider economy of investing in childcare

Parenting across Scotland believes that high quality affordable childcare is crucial to Scotland's children and families and to Scotland's economy. As well as the many well evidenced benefits for children and families, childcare is an essential element in any strategy which seeks to ensure a sustainable economy.

Benefits to children

Early learning and childcare is beneficial to children in:

- Improving children's development and socialisation
- improving educational outcomes overall
- reducing the educational attainment gap between children.

We would thoroughly endorse Save the Children's and Children in Scotland's well researched and well referenced evidence on this.

Benefits to families

High quality affordable childcare is beneficial to families in a number of ways, enabling:

- parents, particularly mothers to re-enter the labour market
- parents to study
- parents to move out of poverty
- parents to receive support should they need it.

In countries where high quality universal childcare is on offer, there tend to be higher rates of maternal employment and corresponding lower rates of poverty. In the UK as a whole, childcare costs are the highest for any OECD country with the exception of Switzerland (OECD 2010), and in Scotland, in particular, childcare costs are higher than in other parts of the UK (FACT report 2014). Additionally, in Scotland, probably because of the high costs of childcare there is a greater use of informal childcare, particularly grandparents, by families, especially by more disadvantaged families, meaning that children miss out on the well evidenced benefits of formal childcare.

Additionally, childcare has a part to play in early identification of health and behavioural difficulties, preventing later problems. Where parents are more vulnerable and have

difficulties in raising their children, often support may be given directly through, for instance, community child minding or family support, or indirectly through signposting to appropriate services.

Benefit to Scotland's economy

Childcare has been marginalised for too long as a woman's issue; it is an issue for whole families, and indeed for the wider economy.

Childcare enables parents to re-enter the labour market and to sustain employment. It ensures that employers retain staff and are able to recruit from the widest talent pool. The 2011 IPPR report, Making The Case for Universal Childcare states:

“universal childcare pays a return to the government of £20,050 (over four years) in terms of tax revenue minus the cost of childcare for every woman who returns to full-time employment after one year of maternity leave. Universal provision can also enable families to better balance work and caring responsibilities and, in so doing, help to promote higher employment rates and reduce gender inequalities.”

Through its benefits to children in reducing educational inequalities and improving outcomes for children, it also has a preventative spend impact by reducing spending downstream.

Overall benefits

As Professor Ailsa McKay stated:

“In the long run, there is a return via the positive impact on children, on their education, health, behaviour and future earnings. This, in turn, means, other things being equal, a positive impact on participation in the labour market, economic growth and productivity, reductions in poverty and income inequality, greater cohesion and increase in healthy life expectancy.”

WiSE 2012

2. The planning, training and investment that would be required to bring about a transformation in childcare provision

Long term vision

There needs to be a clear long term vision which recognises the importance of childcare and works across departmental portfolios to achieve this; it should encompass both children's policy and employability agendas and should seek the engagement of all sectors of society to ensure commitment to a shared vision and a long term plan.

We support the development of a universal system of high quality affordable childcare that meets the needs of children and families. This should be affordable at the point of delivery; capping by proportion of income is one system we would wish to see considered.

We believe that it is essential that childcare is of high quality to ensure that it achieves its objectives, especially those of improving children's outcomes.

The vision for childcare must go beyond the early years must go beyond the early years. Parents continue to need childcare when their children reach school age; it is important that any childcare vision ensures that out of school care is included.

Switch to supply side funding

In order to deliver transformational change that ensures choice and flexibility for parents and economic benefits to employers, a switch from demand to supply side funding should be considered. Paying childcare providers directly rather than parents would ensure that more flexible, high-quality childcare is available in all areas, including those where there is currently no provision. Following need rather than market conditions would deliver better value for money for taxpayers and for parents, better availability, greater flexibility, and more consistency of quality. OECD countries that provide universal affordable childcare use this model of delivery.

Quality

High quality childcare is essential in achieving improved outcomes for children and so we welcome the Scottish Government's recent announcement of a review of the early years workforce. This should seek to ensure that the workforce is of the highest calibre to deliver quality childcare. It is important that the review talks to the dedicated staff at all levels about how childcare is currently being delivered and about their needs and views on improving quality. Consideration needs to be given to ensuring that quality is across all sectors.

Providing high quality childcare means an investment in staff and that childcare staff are paid the living wage. At a recent PAS Parliamentary event, ironically parents in the childcare sector reported having to leave their jobs because they could not pay for their own childcare needs from their wages. Affordable childcare for some parents should not be subsidised by other parents' low wages.

Flexibility for parents

The Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill promises flexibility in delivery to parents and consultation with parents. We welcome this as something that is much need – parents' working patterns fit a standard nine to five working pattern less and less. At the outset in August 2014, we accept that flexibility will be limited due to the constraints of rapid implementation. However, the policy intention of the Bill must be retained and developed in future years. This will need to be delivered by a variety of providers if it is to be truly flexible and meet the needs of families.

Consultation with parents on their childcare needs is enshrined in legislation and will be outlined in more detail in forthcoming guidance. It is imperative that this consultation is meaningful, consults a wide variety of parents and informs future planning. We welcome the fact that although out of school care is not currently included within legislation, parents will be consulted on their needs for out of school care. This will enable a picture to be built up of the need for out of school care to inform future provision.

We would ask on the consultation that:

- information on how local authorities consult with parents is collated and shared
- good practice on consultation is shared
- consultation results are amalgamated and reported on across Scotland, so that Scottish wide needs and variations can be assessed
- a Scottish-wide report is drawn up on parents' out of school care needs is drawn up to inform future provision.

Out of school care

Currently, legislation does not include out of school care. Parents' need for childcare does not stop when their children start school, nor do the benefits of childcare. Future plans need to consider the provision of out of school care. Out of school care allows parents to participate in the workforce, as well as having a positive impact on children's outcomes and addressing inequalities.

The link with work

While childcare has the capacity to deliver better outcomes for children and routes back into employment for parents, particularly mothers, it is important to bear in mind that the link with the labour market is also crucial on a number of counts.

Firstly, employers need childcare in order for their businesses to operate successfully. The case for childcare is not only to the benefit of children and families, but has a massive business impact. This should be recognised in employers' organisations' development of strategy and involvement with economic regeneration. It should also be considered whether or how employers should shoulder some part of the costs of childcare through taxation or other means.

Secondly, patterns of employment are changing as employers require more flexibility; requiring a concomitant flexibility of childcare provision. Providing childcare outside of the traditional nine to five hours is challenging, expensive and needs innovative solutions, but is nonetheless necessary if it is to respond to the needs of families in the labour market.

Finally, employers themselves have a role to play in childcare by how they organise their patterns of work, their provision of family friendly working and by providing information about childcare. Parenting across Scotland is working with Working Families and Fathers Network Scotland under the banner of Family Friendly Working Scotland to promote a programme of family friendly working in Scotland. This will include Scottish Awards for Top employers for Working Families, one of which is the PAS award for childcare which will be for an employer promoting and enabling childcare for their workforce.

Conclusion

Parenting across Scotland welcomes the current focus on childcare and the opportunity to work with Scottish Government, the Scottish Parliament and other interested parties to deliver transformational change in childcare for Scotland's parents.