



## Scottish Government

### Early Learning and Childcare – 1140 Hours Expansion Programme of Trials - Discussion Paper

April 2016

#### ***Introduction***

The Scottish Women's Convention (SWC) is funded to engage with women throughout Scotland in order that their views might influence public policy.

The SWC uses the views of women to respond to Scottish and UK Government consultation papers.

#### **SWC Evidence Source**

The Scottish Women's Convention engages with women using numerous communication channels including Roadshow events, Thematic Conferences and regional contact groups. This submission paper provides the views of women and reflects their opinions and experiences in a number of key areas relevant to childcare provision in Scotland.

#### **Purpose of the Consultation**

The Scottish Government's aim is to develop high quality, flexible early learning and childcare (ELC) which is affordable and accessible for all. This means the whole system, including out of school care, and not just the Government funded hours.

Currently, free provision of ELC is offered to all 3 and 4 year olds, as well as eligible 2 year olds. From August 2014, that increased to 600 hours per year, equivalent to around 16 hours per week if delivered during school term time. However, the Scottish Government is committed to increasing the entitlement to 1140 hours per year by 2020. This will continue to cover all 3 and 4 year old children, and eligible 2 year olds.

In preparation for this expansion, the Scottish Government will establish a programme of trials testing a variety of delivery models. The aim of these trials will be to test how best to deliver ELC to all eligible children across a spectrum of differing requirements.

## **WHAT SHOULD BE THE KEY FEATURES OF SCOTLAND'S ELC MODEL?**

*We know that providing ELC to families has a positive impact on many areas of their lives: these include child development, narrowing the attainment gap, allowing parents to work, train or study, as well as fighting poverty and inequality in our communities.*

***What are the features that we fundamentally cannot compromise on within our ELC delivery model? Are there additional outcomes not referenced here that our ELC policy should aim to achieve?***

**The model must be flexible, free, accessible and appropriate. It must be provided by well paid, highly skilled staff, who are afforded equal access to training, development and wages, regardless of the sector in which they work.**

The SWC welcomed the provisions in the Children and Young People's Act, which raised the number of early years funding hours for 3-4 year olds and vulnerable two year olds from 475 hours per year to 600 hours per year. It must be recognised, however, that while this attempt to improve things for families was a step in the right direction, it was not enough to remove any of the barriers to women's labour market participation. The introduction of 1140 hours per year has the potential to be extremely beneficial for women. This will, however, depend upon the way in which it is delivered.

It is also important to note that many parents seek childcare in order to accommodate going back to work, which tends to happen long before the child is 3 years old. Depending on their circumstances and their employer, this can mean paying for expensive private childcare (which costs more for babies and younger children) from when their child is very young. There is a real reliance on childminders and nurseries for those whose children are under 3. Many parents – in the main mothers, with whom the majority of childcare responsibility still lies – are forced to make the choice not to return to work because if they did the childcare costs would be outwith their reach.

*“If I was to go back to work when my child turns one, even on a part-time basis, I would basically be working for nothing because the cost of childcare would take up most of my wages. I want to go back to work, I want to further my skills and earn my own money, but the prohibitive costs of childcare are taking that choice away from me.”*

The expansion of funded hours of childcare and early years provision is positive for the children it will benefit. It must, however, be borne in mind that the need for good quality, accessible, appropriate childcare does not always start when a child is 3, nor does it end when that child goes to school.

### **Availability**

One of the main difficulties faced by parents is the availability of childcare, either in the area where they live or close by to where they work. For families with children aged between 3 and 5 years old, it is extremely difficult to access places within Local Authority nurseries, which guarantee funded hours. They are forced to rely on expensive private provision as a result.

There is no publicly funded childcare available to cover the shift patterns in which many women are employed, which often involves working in the evenings and at weekends. One of the ways in which these women can access provision is through childminders. This type of care, outwith standard hours, must be paid for and does not come under the remit of the 1140 hours expansion.

*“They are few and far between and even then women are still having to rely on one person – what happens if they take ill? Employers don’t take too kindly to mums needing time off to look after their kids in these circumstances.”*

The Scottish Government must take this into account when designing trials for new services, recognising the differing and diverse working patterns of women. This is especially the case for those who are at risk of benefit sanctions if they do not accept employment, regardless of the terms and conditions. The Scottish Government has demonstrated a clear and strong commitment to mitigating against the impacts of welfare reform which are outwith the powers of the Scottish Parliament. Ensuring that there is adequate childcare for those who are forced into work would be another positive way of doing this.

There is also no guarantee that private nurseries will be able to provide the free childcare and early years education which is laid down in statute. Partner nurseries, which are private providers who offer funded hours, often have to tender for the contract to be able to do this. Established childcare providers can be forced to close if their application for tender is unsuccessful, which leads to stress and anxiety amongst parents, who then have to source alternative provision. It also means job losses for, in the main, women. Any trials which are implemented must be carried out in both in public and private childcare facilities, in order to be able to identify any issues with the provision of more hours in a private setting.

## Rurality

The Scottish Government must take into account the geography of rural Scotland. In a number of remote, rural and super sparse areas, it is extremely difficult for women to access formal childcare. Where there is a nursery or a childminder available, they often do not offer flexibility. Wraparound childcare - which often means before 8.30am and after 3.30pm - is limited. Similarly, provision is not always near to a place of work or study. As a result, women can be forced to undertake long journeys by public transport in order to get drop their children off, then to get to work or college, before doing the same again in the evening. Many of the women who have to juggle these responsibilities are in low paid employment.

*“By the time you pay for the bus and pay for the childcare, what’s the point in working when wages are so low?”*

Many women in rural areas rely on childminders to provide their childcare. They are likely to be able to offer more flexible hours than, for example, nurseries. As a result they are in high demand due to the lack of formal provision across the geographical area.

The lack of childcare in rural areas can put pressure on women to apply for jobs with an increased salary. This can result in more responsibility and longer working hours just so they can pay for childcare. Otherwise they can be forced to choose not return to work at all.

*“It’s a catch 22. You either have to go back into work and try and balance that with a family life, or you don’t go back to work but feel as if you’ve wasted your education or are not fulfilling all of your potential. It’s so hard.”*

As a result of difficulty in accessing services, there is a significant reliance on informal provision from friends and family. In some circumstances older women in local communities have offered to look after other people’s children as they have recognised the need for the assistance.

*“Unless you have family in the area, it’s really difficult to get any kind of childcare. Not everyone is lucky enough to have support networks around, which makes it even more difficult for them to find someone to look after their children.”*

It is vital that early years expansion trials take place in both urban and rural areas, in order to be able to identify either positive or negative aspects of delivery. Not taking rural issues into consideration would be extremely detrimental to children and their families in these areas.

### **Affordability and Flexibility**

The cost of childcare is a huge barrier for women seeking to access education, employment or increasing working hours. This is particularly the case for families with more than one child, a disabled child and lone parents.

*“We’re paying roughly the same every month for childcare as we do for our mortgage. That’s frightening.”*

While there are families who use solely funded hours within Local Authority nurseries as their childcare provision, it must be recognised that many use their entitlement through private provision. This means having to make a financial contribution for their children to be looked after, often because the hours they require are not available from public providers.

Flexibility in childcare, at present, comes at a price. Private nurseries tend to provide longer opening hours, often taking children in from 7.30am and closing at 6.00pm. Local Authority nurseries, on the other hand, provide childcare in sessions, offering places either in the morning or the afternoon. Working patterns have changed, but the way in which children are looked after have not.

Local Authority provision still works on the notion that a woman will work on a part-time basis, a few mornings or afternoons a week in their local area, and the 16 hours and 20 minutes per week of funded provision will cover their childcare needs. The reality for many women is that they are in low paid, low skilled employment, on zero hours contracts or in uncertain shift patterns.

*“If you have to be in work for 8.30am and the nursery doesn’t take kids until 9.00am, what are you supposed to do? Anything before 9.00am is seen as wrap around care and you have to pay more for it.”*

It is, therefore, extremely important that this is acknowledged when the key features of Scotland's ELC model are being considered. Many parents would not have to pay such high costs for private childcare if the funded hours available to them were provided in a much more flexible way.

The lack of wrap-around, flexible provision can lead to a reliance on assistance from friends and family. The lack of flexibility, coupled with their working patterns, means that children are often missing out on the funded places they are entitled to.

Informal caring is becoming increasingly relied upon, with many women in the *“middle layer of caring, looking after both young grandchildren and elderly parents.”* This can have a detrimental effect on the physical and mental health of these women, many of whom continue to hold down part-time jobs. However women often do not have support networks round about them, such as friends and family, so have no choice but to rely on expensive private childcare. Ensuring that the extra hours of funded provision suit women and their families would be welcomed in the design of a new national childcare service.

*“The lack of accessible, affordable childcare is holding so many women back. It's a complicated jigsaw which can lead to real stress and anxiety. Access to more free childcare, provided with the needs of families in mind, would open up so many opportunities and more choices.”*

Middle income families do not qualify for assistance with childcare costs. Sending a child to nursery takes *“a huge chunk”* out of household budgets, particularly if they have more than one child. Women often delay returning to work until their children are at school as it is the only financially viable option.

### **Childcare Workers**

A well trained, highly skilled, well paid childcare workforce must be one of the most important aspects of the ELC system. It is vital that the workers who provide this type of care, the majority of whom are women, are given recognition for the work they do, both in monetary and societal terms. This is beneficial for the children, who would be guaranteed to receive a positive, valuable early years experience. It is good for parents, who would be safe in the knowledge that the women who are looking after their children are as well equipped as possible to do so. It is also extremely beneficial for the workers, who would not only be paid well for the important job that they do, but would also be valued for their work.

This is not the case at present. Modern Apprenticeships (MAs) and further education courses in ELC do not attract the same levels of funding as those traditionally undertaken by young men, such as construction and plumbing. This perpetuates a cycle of low paid, low skilled work, much of which is seen to be 'women's work' and as such is not valued by society.

*“Plumbers are paid more than early years practitioners. Why is fixing pipes worth more than looking after our children?”*

The childcare workforce is too often forgotten about. These women are vastly underpaid and grossly undervalued by society. It is also important to recognise that there are often significant disparities in the way those employed in the private sector and those employed in the public sector are treated.

Workers in private nurseries are open to more exploitation than their Local Authority counterparts. They are often only paid the minimum wage, and the younger workers who are in training through a Modern Apprenticeship or college placement are paid less than that. These workplaces are, more often than not, non-unionised. Once the young women are fully qualified, they tend to be let go in favour of a younger, cheaper trainee. They will often either become supply staff, which offers no guarantees of permanent employment or income, or will have to take a job in another industry, meaning that their training and qualifications are not being used in the way they should.

*“This is exploitation in its most obvious form, which causes competition between recently qualified early years practitioners.”*

Conversely Local Authority childcare workers are in nurseries and pre-five centres which receive better funding, where they are able to join a trade union, and where the payment of the Living Wage is a real possibility. Regardless of the type of childcare provider they use, parents should be assured that the women who are looking after their children are subject to the same working conditions, are well paid, and tend to be given the recognition they deserve for the vital work that they do.

It is, therefore, vital that all of these aspects of an ELC system are taken into consideration in design and implementation of services.

**The SWC believes that availability, accessibility and affordability of childcare (with a recognition that these issues are more acute in rural areas), as well as a well paid, highly skilled valued workforce, are the key features which cannot be compromised on within the delivery model.**

### **WHICH SPECIFIC PRINCIPLES OF ELC MODELS SHOULD BE PRIORITIES WITHIN OUR PROGRAMME OF TRIALS?**

*Different models of ELC provision might be better at delivering different outcomes. The principles we would like to see provision based on might include (but are not limited to): providing quality, flexibility, fairness, promoting parental choice, accessibility, integration with other services, value for money (for whom – the user, the provider or both?), integration with home life, preparing children for school life, enabling work, addressing the differing needs of 2,3 and 4 year olds and sustainability.*

### ***What principles should take priority? Which would you like to see trialed?***

It is important to recognise that a 'one size fits all' approach to childcare provision is not the most effective method of delivery. The unique geography of Scotland, as well as varied and differing working patterns of women, contribute to the need for a system that is delivered flexibly, with the best interests of the families that use childcare at its heart. This is particularly the case when taking value for money into account. Women throughout the country frequently tell the SWC that the cost of childcare is a significant barrier for them. In designing expansion trials, it is extremely important that value for money and flexibility are considered together. This will ensure that families are able to save money because the funded childcare is provided in a way that suits them, as opposed to only in morning or afternoon sessions.

*"Hearing that free childcare will be expanded to almost double what it is at the moment sounds great. But it will only be really beneficial for me – and others like me – if it's available in hours throughout the day rather than sessions. It's not going to do any good if I'm expected to put my kids in for a morning, go back and get them for an hour at lunchtime and then put them back in for the afternoon."*

The differences between public and private childcare provision cause a number of issues. Women have commented that some private providers seem to be more focused on profit rather than providing the best early years experience for children and their families. If the Scottish Government, therefore, wants to ensure value for money for the provider (which will consequently have an impact on value for money for the user), regulations or guidelines must be considered. These should aim to ensure parity in fees, as well as terms and conditions for staff, between public and private providers.

### **ARE THERE EXISTING EXAMPLES OF INNOVATIVE DELIVERY WITHIN ELC PROVISION THAT YOU CAN SHARE WITH US?**

***Do you know of any innovative approaches to providing high quality, flexible ELC anywhere in the world from which we should be learning? Are there existing innovative delivery models in Scotland whose impact you would be interested to see evaluated?***

There are a number of impressive models of ELC provision throughout the world, such as highly praised models in the Scandinavian countries. These allow real flexibility for parents through affordable childcare provision. There is no doubt that aspects of delivery in countries such as Norway, Sweden and Denmark are to be admired. However it must be borne in mind that the overall economic landscape is very different in these places. Taxes are much higher than in Scotland, which means there is more money in the public purse which enables the state to subsidise childcare. That level of funding is not available here, which means that the Scottish Government will have to look at delivery in a way which suits the resources of the country.

There is real potential to design and deliver a model of ELC provision which is uniquely Scottish, benefitting children, parents, childcare workers and providers. The most effective way of ensuring this happens is through meaningful, direct consultation with those who use services and those who provide them. The lack of accessible, affordable, appropriate, flexible childcare throughout the country continues to be a significant barrier to women who wish to enter or sustain employment or education. All-round better provision, designed to suit the needs of all parties concerned, is one of the most important ways to ensure women's full and active participation in the labour market. This cannot be created without their full and effective input.

*“If the Scottish Government are serious about making childcare work, then they need to ask parents first and foremost what’s going to be best for us. We’re the ones who have to juggle work and childcare on a daily basis. It becomes part of your routine but that doesn’t mean it’s not stressful – I’m always worried in case I don’t get back to the nursery before it closes, or if there’s going to be a fee increase, or if my little one isn’t happy or enjoying their time where they are. It’s not an easy puzzle to piece together.”*

### **ARE THERE LOCAL/REGIONAL CHARACTERISTICS THAT SHOULD BE EXPLICITLY BUILT INTO THE TRIALS?**

*Scotland is a country with great regional and local diversity, and in order to be successful, the models of ELC provision will need to be cognisant of and reflect these local needs.*

***Which local/regional characteristics most preclude a one-size-fits-all’ approach? What responses to specific local challenges might ELC trials need to address to be of real value?***

It is vital that local/regional characteristics should be explicitly built into the trials. As has already been outlined, there are additional barriers to accessing formal childcare provision in remote, rural and super-sparse parts of Scotland. If these are not fully taken into consideration in the programme of trials, children and families in these areas could be significantly disadvantaged.

It is also important to take into account that not all areas which are considered rural are the same. There are significant disparities between local issues and needs in Dumfries and Galloway, than there are in Angus, for example. Similarly, childcare provision can be difficult to access in areas which may not be considered rural by many, for example smaller towns and villages outwith bigger locations. While it will not be possible to carry out trials in each and every rural part in Scotland, the barriers and challenges in these areas will not be adequately addressed simply by choosing one location outwith a main town or city. The Scottish Government must still consider the views of service users and providers in places where trials are not being undertaken.

**WOULD YOU BE INTERESTED IN BEING INVOLVED IN THE PROGRAMME OF TRIALS?  
IF SO, IN WHAT CAPACITY?**

The Scottish Women's Convention (SWC) is funded by the Scottish Government to communicate and consult with women in Scotland in order to influence public policy. Through a number of diverse consultation events, the SWC strives to have contact with women and relevant organisations in Scotland.

Every year the organisation undertakes a series of 'roadshows', visiting women in their local area in order to discuss issues which are important to them, their families and communities as a whole. The SWC visits several rural locations and a Scottish island, as well as more urban areas as part of this. The organisation has a strong network of women across the country, who can be relied upon to inform a number of documents and publications, such as Scottish Government and Scottish Parliament consultations, as well as other national and international reports.

The SWC would, therefore, be willing to assist in the programme of trials by bringing together groups of women, where we have networks, in order to discuss priorities for delivery of the expansion of early learning and childcare. Please do not hesitate to get in touch if this would be beneficial to this consultation process.

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