

**Scottish Women's Convention response to:
The Scottish Government Consultation
"Out of School Care in Scotland – A Draft Framework for Consultation"
November 2019**

The Consultation

The Scottish Government's draft framework on Out of School Care sets out what is known about the out of school care sector in Scotland and asks questions about what the Scottish Government can do to support families in accessing high quality, flexible and affordable services which benefit children and parents and carers.

Future policies on Out of School Care should be shaped by the people who would benefit from them. The Scottish Government want to understand what children, parents and carers, professionals and experts think about the ways in which Out of School Care can give children opportunities to play and access life-enhancing experiences and support parents to work, train or study.

The Scottish Women's Convention (SWC)

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 a variety of Parliamentary, Governmental and organisational consultation papers at both a Scottish and UK level.

The Scottish Women's Convention engages with women using numerous communication channels including Roadshow events, Thematic Conferences and regional contact groups. This submission provides the views of women and reflects their opinions and experiences in a number of key areas relevant to accessing flexible and high quality out of school care throughout Scotland.

What range of services are needed: regulated out of school care, childminders, activity-based clubs and programmes such as sports clubs, creative arts clubs, outdoor activities, other types of activities? Can you tell us why these services are important?

All services listed above are important and should be adapted to include a wide range of activities in order to allow children to develop to their full potential. A particular focus should be given to those from more disadvantaged backgrounds who do not currently benefit from these services due to unaffordability.

This is in keeping with the Scottish Government's astute commitment to challenging the educational attainment gap that continues to remain pervasive amongst young people. As well as education, a range of activities including sports and creative hobbies allow children to socialise, interact and develop.

What can we do to support community based approaches to delivering out of school care?

Community based approaches are some of the most successful case studies for highlighting just how out of school care can provide a framework for ensuring children reach their full potential. Sustainable funding and educational support should be the utmost priority for these approaches, including high quality infrastructure and equipment in order for children to fully benefit from all services.

Many community organisations can often struggle for funding given that they are community based and may not meet specific requirements of particular funding streams. These groups often provide assistance on a voluntary basis, offering free meals and childcare as well as running services where parents can get school uniforms and other supplies. It is vital that these valuable community led organisations are well supported to continue with the work that they do.

What name should we use for the range of out of school services and activities? Is there a better term than "Out of School Care"?

Yes. The term "Out of School Care" whilst not particularly controversial, does tend to imply that care is only given after the school day has ended, rather than showcasing the wide variety that these places offer such as during holiday periods.

To enable us to realise our vision, we have identified three key aims that we will need to achieve. Do you agree with our 3 key aims for a future out of school care framework? Yes/No. Please explain your response.

Yes. However, given the significant economic pressure on families, a further aim that should be highlighted would be one that encompasses a clear commitment to ensure all inequalities are tackled to ensure all children gain the advantage of out of school care provision, regardless of background.

High quality services which provide children with life-enhancing experiences:

In order to ensure children reach their full potential and development, this aim should clearly state the commitment to ensuring high quality services for all children. This is particularly astute in cases for children from more deprived socio-economic communities who may miss out on the benefits of these services due to unaffordability. With the ongoing rise of child poverty in Scotland, this has potentially negative implications for closing the educational attainment gap. Giving an explicit guarantee to ensure all children receive the same life-enhancing experiences is crucial to safeguard against the problems of ongoing austerity and poverty for many families across Scotland.

Out of school care is accessible and affordable and meets the needs of children and young people, parents, and carers and communities:

Unaffordability is the key component for families wherein children may stand to lose out on access to out of school care due to the high cost of some such services. Not only is this an issue for those parents who are already in work, but also for those attempting to return to the labour market. Women – particularly those working part time – can often find themselves segregated in low paid roles which require shift work or unsociable hours. It is therefore imperative that the needs of these women are met when planning how to cover the cost and flexibility of services. Out of school care should be responsive to women in these particular situations.

The rise in precarious and zero hours contracts mean many women may find themselves in employment for which they are given very little notice before having to work. All childcare should be adaptable and take into account the employment needs of this cohort. Publishing best practice approaches between Local Authorities and current out of school care providers, including qualitative case studies from those across the spectrum, may be a way of ensuring aims not only reflect responding to family's needs but also encourage uptake of out of school care for those that need it most.

Out of school care services are embedded in communities and enable children and young people to access a range of spaces including the outdoors:

Women are in agreement that this should be a main focus due to the range of advantages this has for children's health. The benefits children develop in connection with the outdoor environment are vast. This should be considered as an educational aspect wherein children can learn through practical skills about the outdoors, health and climate change. Ensuring collaborative working is key to producing longer achievements in terms of closing educational attainment gaps and health inequalities.

Problems may arise, however, for some families who may not be able to afford suitable provision in terms of adequate outdoor clothing and footwear. Affordability matters such as this must be taken into account to ensure no children are stigmatised and an inclusive approach encompasses all children.

How can we help to ensure that all families have access to an out of school care place for their children if they want it?

The quickest and most robust response to ensuring access for children is to maximise uptake for those from more deprived backgrounds as a first priority. These families will most likely have parents on precarious and insecure employment contracts who would not be able to afford out of school care as a matter of choice. This may have particular implications for the benefits that services have for children's development and educational attainment.

Out of school care should be effectively funded to provide high quality care for children of all ages and best support their needs. Targeting uptake through a range of services such as employability services, healthcare providers and schools could be a beneficial way of ensuring families who need help the most know where to access it.

How can we make sure out of school care is an affordable option for more families?

Women are in agreement that childcare, including out of school care, should be free, accessible and meet all children's needs. Many women face barriers due to the upfront deposits and administrative fees that are charged at present for use of such services. Allowing some children to participate but not others not only heightens stigmatisation and singles particular children out for their background but also exacerbates women's inequality by preventing participation in the labour market.

The fact that some organisations, particularly those in areas where out of school care is limited, can stigmatise certain families by charging high prices is extremely detrimental to many children. Strategies should take account of area such as this to ensure services are provided with a high quality of care for those from deprived backgrounds and additional support needs. Given the continuous rise of in work poverty for many families across Scotland, it is crucial that the needs of parents, carers and children are met in a way that incorporates a responsibility to relieve some of the burdens placed on families experiencing the worst of this.

How can services be more effectively delivered in rural/remote areas to meet the needs of families?

Flexibility and community based services are often key in areas which are not highly urbanised within Scotland. A range of different approaches should bear in mind availability within specific areas. Inflexibility in location means that some women and their families may not be able to access services put in place for their benefit, giving little advantage to those that need it most. In areas where restrictions on transport are found and more sparsely populated communities are common, it may be best to consider different options and work collaboratively with services such as local childminders to ensure effective delivery of out of school care.

In developing options for how to remove barriers, it is adept to note that there is not a one size fits all option for the whole of Scotland. Given the unique geographical structure of particular areas across the country, problems with accessibility should be looked upon at a local level to work out how to best to target delivery.

How can we ensure that children with disabilities and additional support needs can access out of school care services?

In order to ensure equal access for all children and provide for all support needs, a range of options must be looked at including:

- Commitments to ensure staff are sufficiently trained to a high level to deal with all children's needs.
- High quality infrastructure that meets the needs of children with disabilities.
- Extra economic support for families where children have disabilities or additional support needs.
- Suitable play and educational equipment in both indoor and outdoor settings of after school care to ensure children's health needs are met.
- Implementing continuous improvement checks wherein all aspects of the service are routinely subject to equality impact assessments and health and safety checks.

What is important for parents and carers in terms of location of out of school care services

Schooling environments are often raised as a particular choice in terms of location for out of school care services. This is due to their proximity to an environment in which children feel comfortable and safe, representing less upheaval. This also has the added benefit of not having to transport children after school from education to another service.

Do parents/carers need food provision as part of after-school and holiday clubs?

Yes. As mentioned previously, this should be a key component of out of school care. For many families, the ongoing welfare reform and Universal Credit roll out has seen a significant rise in the number of families accessing food banks. For some, food provision in out of school care relieves a significant economic burden that they may face.

This also has the added benefit of loosening stigma that is often still attached when families cannot afford food. Allowing children to access healthy and nutritious meals for free means that both parents and children can enjoy the full benefit of this.

What qualifications, skills and experience should the out of school workforce have? What is most important and why?

The utmost importance for parents when entrusting their children to services is ensuring that staff are sufficiently trained. Qualification requirements for the out of school workforce illustrates a high level of quality care. Support and funding should be given where necessary to allow those wishing to work as part of the out of school workforce to gain any educational qualifications that are required.

Thinking about the full range of provision – regulated out of school care, childminders, holiday programmes and other activities – should qualification requirements for staff working across these provisions be the same or different? Why?

Publicly funded provision of free childcare which is managed and operated by well trained and qualified staff is crucial to ensure a framework that is of a high quality. It is imperative that all children are afforded access to the same standard.

Wherein provision is not publicly funded but qualification requirements are a minimum standard, however, this may have the unintended consequence of causing certain services costs to rise meaning additional expenses for parents. Where approaches do require specific qualifications, guidelines around applying for funding should be readily accessible. Local Authorities should work in partnership with services to ensure families needs are met and establish suitable frameworks within their own communities.

How can we promote working in the out of school sector as a more attractive career choice?

Incorporating an effective, streamlined process and recruitment drive for prospective candidates is essential to promote the sector as an attractive career choice. Promotion of the real Living Wage to prospective candidates is important to illustrate the quality of care delivered by staff within these settings.

Showing value to staff including high quality benefits, recognition of trade union representation and collective bargaining is key to ensuring staff see their own careers as valuable first and foremost. Emphasis should be placed on the quality of these careers with the opening up of opportunities for development and advancement within the sector.

At present, many women note that public or third sector careers in the out of school sector tend to be of a higher standard than private ones. This is for a number of reasons including better development opportunities and remuneration of staff which in turn leads to increased morale and reduced turnover, ensuring staff and children build trusting and quality relationships. There is also the idea that this type of provision is not run for profit meaning services would not be cut just to ensure moneymaking.

How can we increase diversity across the out of school care workforce?

Training should always stress the need for high quality provision within out of school care services. A commitment to equality and diversity of workforce that reflects the community should underpin the workforce. This should include training around diversity issues and an inclusive approach to intersectional traits when advancing high quality care for children. Such measures do not only highlight equality representation within Scotland but also present an inclusive approach to children within their care.

Conclusion

The SWC welcomes the opportunity to comment on and have women's voices heard in relation to out of school care in Scotland. Women have noted that the educational attainment of all children, equal access and flexibility should be at the forefront in order to promote children's full potential. The issues raised highlight that children from less advantaged socio-economic backgrounds continue to lose out the most when it comes to accessing quality care. It is therefore imperative that the needs of all children within Scotland are met with free quality care that underscores a distinct aim to tackle poverty and inequality.

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