

Response ID ANON-6XPF-X4BR-4

Submitted to **A Blueprint for 2020: The Expansion of Early Learning and Childcare in Scotland**

Submitted on 2017-01-09 13:41:42

Consultation Questions

1 How do we ensure children are fully supported at the transition stages throughout their early-learner journey? What support should be provided to ensure that the ELC workforce and teachers have the skills, knowledge and capacity to support transitions?

Comments:

The key support for children is their parents; there must be a secure attachment here before other attachments can be made and relationships established, for example, with ELC staff. ELC staff should be given training in attachment theory and the importance of the parental relationship, so that they can support parents to support their children through the initial and daily transitions to childcare settings.

A crucial part of supporting children through transitions should be increasing parental knowledge and awareness of the importance of transitions and information on how to best support their child through transitions. ELC staff need to be given training on how best to do this.

Until recent funding cuts, Parenting across Scotland produced a booklet, Starting Primary School,

(<http://www.parentingacrossscotland.org/publications/top-ten-tips/starting-primary-school/>) to help parents support their children through the transition to primary school. This was widely used by local authorities and individual schools and nurseries and very much appreciated by parents. Consideration should be given to reproducing this booklet or similar supportive material for parents.

2 What support is required to ensure that the ELC workforce have the skills, knowledge and capacity to deliver high quality provision for two year olds? How can the ELC sector best meet the specific learning, developmental and environmental needs of two year olds? What approach should be taken on the transition for these children when they turn three?

Comments:

This question presupposes that ELC provision is desirable for two year olds; while it may be so for some, for many, childcare at this age is not necessarily what is needed or wanted by families. When children are this age, many parents want to stay at home with their children. However, we recognise that there are parents who wish to return to work, and those for whom financial imperatives and government conditionality pressures mean that they have to work.

ELC provision throughout the system, but particularly for two year olds, must be child-led, child-centred and responsive to the needs of the whole family. The ELC sector needs to respond to the needs of individual children in a tailored way recognising that one size does not fit all, and that different models may be appropriate for different children, particularly in the case of two year olds where the evidence around the efficacy of ELC is inconclusive.

Many of the two year olds who are currently eligible under the looked after provisions have issues with attachment; where children are looked after this is often because they have experienced abuse or trauma. Accordingly, when they are placed with a new carer, they need time to form that crucial new attachment rather than being taken from their primary carer into another setting. For many looked after two year olds, ELC may not only be an inappropriate option but may actually be harmful. Nurturing care and forming an attachment with the new carer should be the primary objective, and can be fostered by support from skilled workers.

PAS urges the greater promotion and use of Part 6, section 49 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 to allow alternative arrangements to be made to free hours of ELC where this is more appropriate for children. Alternative arrangements may involve, for example (but not exclusively), home based family support, childminder provision, stay and play sessions. Many families may wish to take up the offer at some point, but are not ready at this stage, and may need other help before leaving their children in childcare or returning to work. For many of the vulnerable families which PAS partners work with the provision of free ELC would not automatically enable them to return to work, and more support and phasing would be required. Providing parenting or family support prior to children entering childcare may be more helpful for some families, and, indeed, may form part of the phased preparation that is needed for children to make a successful transition to ELC.

Given the comments above and our view on how ELC support should be constituted for the two year old population, the definition of the workforce would include not only those traditionally included in the ELC sector but family support workers and other professionals. Kinship carers in the PAS report, Kinship Care: Barriers to Employment <http://www.parentingacrossscotland.org/media/1361/pas-final-report-200416.pdf>, state that one of the reasons that they do not wish to place their child in childcare is that they feel that staff do not have sufficient knowledge of dealing with disordered attachment and trauma issues; as well as training in normal child development, this needs to be fully covered in both initial and ongoing training for childcare workers. Additionally there should be specialist expertise in this area that practitioners can access when they need to, either through the academic sector or through an agency such as the Care Inspectorate or SSSC.

Childminders are a particularly effective option for many two year olds offering individualised care and flexibility to meet the needs of child and family. Where home based support is required, community childminding is an option that can build family resilience.

3 How can the qualification routes and career paths that are open to early learning and childcare practitioners be developed to ensure that the ELC sector is seen as an attractive long-term career route?

Comments:

The importance of early learning and childcare needs to be given full recognition so that the workforce is valued accordingly. Workforce qualifications have been shown to be critically linked to children's outcomes which makes having well qualified staff essential to an expansion which has children's outcomes at its heart. A comprehensive long-term workforce strategy should be developed that addresses issues such as recruitment, training and qualifications, retention, diversity, and credit transfer systems. Social pedagogy is much used in throughout Europe; students undertake a set of core modules underpinned by a set of core principles and an ethos that is closely aligned to children's rights. Once qualified, workers can work with children and young people across the age ranges offering a degree of flexibility and alternative career paths.

Any expansion or workforce development must be achieved in a way that recognises the value of the profession and avoids exploitation. Trainees need to be paid a reasonable rate for the job. Remuneration for ELC workers should be commensurate with the importance of their role.

There needs to be parity across sectors so that terms and conditions are comparable across public and private sectors. This must mean that providers receive comparable funding for the free hours so that this becomes a possibility.

In order to attract a wider range of people, there need to be a number of routes into the profession, including intermediate labour market models, mentoring, and other positive action models.

4 How can we increase the diversity of the ELC workforce, in particular increasing the gender balance in the sector?

Comments:

The ELC profession is predominantly staffed by women; only 2% of those working in ELC in Scotland are men.

Redressing the gender imbalance needs to be tackled as a long-term project as an integral part of a comprehensive workforce strategy. In spite of years of action to address gender imbalance in the Nordic countries, the proportion of men working in early years is still very low (5 – 10%). Consideration needs to be paid to gender stereotyping from early education through to secondary education to redress this imbalance. Poor pay and career prospects must be improved for this group, as indeed they do more generally for the workforce to attract and retain the quality of staff need to provide positive outcomes for children.

Some positive steps which could be taken include the following:

- Advertising needs to be targeted at men as well as women and images need to reinforce this.
- Careers advice needs to proactively offer this as a choice to boys as well as girls.
- Case studies and role models need to be highlighted.
- Best practice that works need to be shared.
- New male recruits should be placed in training programmes with other men and should be mentored by male practitioners where possible.

Much attention has been paid to increasing the number of women in non traditional professions eg STEM, similar measures need to be taken in relation to the representation of men in non traditional roles.

As well as the male-female balance, attention needs to be paid to enabling people from BME communities and disabled people to enter the profession. In terms of BME communities, advertising needs to be targeted and placed in community settings and languages. In order to enable disabled people to enter the workforce, settings must be accessible and adaptations made as appropriate.

5 How can payment of the Living Wage and wider Fair Work practices be encouraged across the ELC sector?

Comments:

We welcome the expansion of ELC and the employment opportunities that this will offer.

It is crucial that providers work towards implementing the Living Wage so that ELC workers are properly recompensed. As well as individual providers working towards this, the government needs to take a strategic approach so that this is addressed routinely and comprehensively; barriers need to be identified and addressed. Unless this is done at a strategic level, individual providers trying to implement this are likely to face cost increases of approximately 15% which would then be passed on to parents with a retrograde affect on affordability. We believe that implementing the Living Wage needs to be carried out without a negative impact on parents' ability to afford childcare costs.

Given the critical role of early years as the foundation for children's later outcomes, and that the evidence shows that early years education plays a critical role in narrowing the attainment gap and improving the life chances of disadvantaged children, it is imperative that Government provides adequate funding to ensure its efficacy.

Any grants for delivering the free hours should be dependent on providers being compliant with the Living Wage. It is critical that the hourly rate paid to providers to deliver the 'free hours' recognises this.

The expansion and development of ELC should be linked at strategic level to the Fair Work agenda; there are opportunities to include commitments in the Scottish Business Pledge and the Fairer Work Action Plan. Scottish Government must work with ADES, COSLA, private providers and the unions to ensure fair work practices.

6 What actions should be taken to support increased access to outdoor learning, exercise and play?

Comments:

7 How could accountability arrangements for early learning and childcare be improved?

Comments:

Accountability should be clear, open and transparent. How it is structured will depend on funding and delivery models. While these might be positively delivered through local hub models with cross sector representation, it is vital that there is democratic accountability so that parents have clear routes of redress where they wish to take up issues or have queries to raise. Accountability needs to be well linked to local authorities so that links can be made across departments so that, for example, families can receive additional support as well as childcare where appropriate, and that links can be made to economic development so that ELC is looked at in the round.

8 What factors must be considered in delivering flexible ELC provision, while continuing to ensure a high quality service? To what extent could funded ELC support parents and carers with non-standard working hours, such as working shifts and weekends?

Comments:

Flexibility is crucial for many working parents but is tricky to deliver, and should not be at the expense of quality nor of children's outcomes. There needs to be an ELC framework which delivers the core ELC offer with some flexibility, but also includes a core plus offer. In order to deliver flexibility there needs to be 'slack' in the system to allow for a flexible offer. Funding needs to recognise and allow for flexibility with additional funding.

As well as directly providing more flexible ELC provision, the provision and working practices which enable flexibility for the employer while exploiting employees need to be tackled. The synergies between childcare provision and fair work practices need to be better understood, explored and integrated.

The increasing casualisation of the labour market presents particular issues for childcare provision. Practices such as zero or variable hour contracts need to be tackled from a fair work perspective; bad working practices should not be enabled by subsidised flexible childcare provision.

Local employers should be included in local delivery hubs so that their knowledge of local labour markets and employers' needs can be utilised to inform strategic planning of ELC provision in their area. To sit alongside consultation with parents, those planning ELC provision should work with employers to draw up assessments of local employment patterns and working patterns of parents in their area and adjoining travel to work areas.

Family Friendly Working Scotland has pioneered the use of the 'Happy to Talk Flexible Working' strapline

(<http://www.workingfamilies.org.uk/campaigns/happy-to-talk-flexible-working>) in Scotland; this strapline enables employers to advertise jobs on a flexible basis and to potentially attract a wider and more diverse poll of applicants. Working Families has piloted this on a local basis in Wales with SMEs with promising results; local employers have been able to recruit suitable local employees, such as women returners, who may not have returned to the workforce if they had not been able to work flexibly. Enabling people to work both more locally and flexibly has an important impact on their childcare needs, for example, by potentially cutting

back on travel to and from work travel times.

It is important to work with employers to raise their awareness of the business case for family friendly working (staff satisfaction, retention, recruitment and work-life balance are all evidenced to be positively affected by family friendly working policies). Family Friendly Working Scotland is already making headway in this area. Additionally employers' role and responsibilities in relation to childcare need to be clearly highlighted (<http://www.scotsman.com/news/opinion/crucial-issue-is-far-from-childs-play-1-4125619>).

Parents should be able to choose a provider to meet their needs within certain parameters which dovetail with children's needs. Where flexibility is needed outside of core hours in early evenings or early mornings, this is likely to be best achieved through individualised care in the child's home. There needs to be a recognition that this will be more expensive and will need to be subsidised. The duplication or extension of flexible models such as those developed by the Childcare and Learning Alliance (CALA) and One Parent Families Scotland should be considered.

While this consultation does not look at Out of School Care or childcare during holidays, it needs to be recognised that childcare needs do not stop once a child starts school, and that in a number of recent surveys parents have stated that this is a considerable difficulty for them; this is an issue which needs to be addressed alongside ELC expansion.

9 How can we ensure fair and sustainable funding for all providers offering the ELC entitlement?

Comments:

It is essential that a fair funding mechanism is developed that allows for long term planning and development. Funding must recognise and allow for fixed costs. There needs to be equity across sectors; providers should receive the same hourly rate regardless of which sector they work in. This would improve quality of provision, stabilise the quality, retention and career paths across sectors.

Duration of funding must be addressed. Some providers are being asked to provide childcare on a per place per term basis or on a results basis. This is a problematic way to deliver ELC as it does not allow for long term strategic planning, sustainability or staff retention (in some cases, staff are working under permanent threat of redundancy). Long term funding means that ELC can be properly planned and developed, that staff have security and the prospect of a career rather than a short-term job, and are more likely to stay around and develop their career. Given that the quality of the workforce is critical to quality in ELC, maintaining and developing staff must be part of the funding consideration.

Thought needs to be given as to how to dovetail inspection and funding awards in a more logical way. Funding must be dependent on quality. However, there are some discrepancies between the inspection regime and the procurement process which affect how funding is offered. For example, one local authority only funded partnership nurseries who had received a high grading from the Care Inspectorate in the previous year, but given that where nurseries receive a high grading they often do not receive a further inspection or grading for four years, nurseries of a high grade were disqualified by the discrepancies between the inspection and procurement processes.

10 What more can we do to promote and support the involvement of childminders in the entitlement to ELC? What are the barriers, if any, to becoming a childminder? How can we ensure quality while preserving the unique value of home-based care?

Comments:

Childminders should be part of every local authorities' offer to parents as they offer a highly skilled, professional workforce with the ability to respond to individualised need; overall, they are highly graded by the Care Inspectorate and have the skills to deliver high quality early intervention. The low ratios and home environment can provide a consistently high service for children. Unfortunately currently too few parents are able to take up the free hours through childminders as partner providers or are aware of this option. They can offer a highly specialised service, such as community childminding, which supports the child while developing the parenting relationship. Childminders are often able to provide the flexibility that is needed by families, and their contribution must also be considered in this light. They can also bring continuity between ELC and Out of School provision, something which is especially important to children with additional support needs.

Currently a very small percentage (2%) of childminders are being commissioned to provide ELC for two year olds, and the figures for three and four year olds are not much higher. Scottish Government must work with other interested parties to raise local authority awareness of childminders, their particular role and skills, how they are regulated and what they can bring to the ELC offer. Often commissioning arrangements are heavily weighted towards larger providers and involve disproportionately onerous tendering arrangements which disadvantage smaller providers, particularly childminders. Again, this needs to be addressed. There are already a number of areas where the expansion of ELC through nursery settings has adversely affected the sustainability of childminders.

Additionally Scottish Government needs to highlight to parents that they can use childminders as part of the ELC offer. Given that parents have been steered towards nursery settings for the ELC offer for many years, to ensure increased use of childminders as part of the ELC entitlement there needs to be a promotional campaign to inform parents about what childminding can offer.

One of the keys to promoting childminding is to ensure the sustainability of the Scottish Childminding Association so that their expertise in service design is utilised and their unique link to childminders is used to both inform providers and develop the skills and capacity of the profession.

11 How do we ensure that the voice of children and their families is heard as we plan this expansion?

Comments:

The voices of children and families need to be at the heart of the expansion and Scottish Government needs to listen to these voices to ensure that the needs of families are met. In particular, Scottish Government and local authorities need to ensure that the voices of all families are heard, not just those who shout loudest or who are used to and comfortable making their voice heard. Many marginalised families have very specific needs around childcare, but need a more proactive approach in order to ensure their voices are included. Specifically, families affected by disability find it much more difficult to access ELC and to return to work, and are disproportionately likely to be in poverty; there needs to be a much more proactive approach to ensuring that the voices of families affected by disability are heard so that the ELC offer can more adequately meet their needs.

One opportunity which is currently not being utilised as effectively as it might be is the consultation with parents (Part 6, section 50, Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014). Currently consultation practice is inconsistent and patchy (<http://www.parentingacrossscotland.org/media/1147/pas-local-authority-consultations-final-report-020915.pdf>) and half of local authorities have not published their consultation reports though there is a legal duty to do so. Further, our report on local authority consultation reports cited above, found that no local authority had specifically consulted families affected by disability or BME families although the statutory guidance specifies that there is a legal duty to do so.

We would suggest a number of ways to remedy this:

- Drawing up national guidance on best practice on consultations which learns from previous consultation experience
- Ensuring that local authorities follow their legal duties around consulting with families affected by disability and BME families
- Requiring local authorities to work together on a cross boundary basis on their consultations and reports to ensure that travel to work and cross boundary issues are addressed
- Requiring reports to be published and laid before Parliament on a biennial basis
- Requiring a Parliamentary debate on the consultations to inform future provision and ELC development
- Requiring the local reports to be analysed to form a national picture of need which can be responded to at a strategic level.

Parental engagement is recognised by the OECD (<http://www.oecd.org/education/school/49322478.pdf>) as being important in driving children's outcomes. As part of the expansion, guidance is planned for any new buildings which are commissioned. We would urge that any new buildings should include family rooms. These rooms can then be used for meeting with families, work on supporting families and parental engagement activities.

In order to ensure that the voices of children are heard, both at this stage and throughout the process, it is essential that a Child Right Impact Assessment is carried out in line with Part 1, section 1 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014.

12 How can we ensure equality of access for all children? What barriers do children with disabilities and additional support needs currently face in accessing early learning and childcare? What further action is required to address these barriers?

Comments:

To maximise entitlement where families would use entitlement where they knew about it, there are a number of additional things that Scottish Government could be doing. These include:

- Publicising the offer through universal services, such as GPs and health visitors
- Working with the third sector to ensure that the parents they work with are aware of and supported to take up the offer
- Ensuring that the Scottish Family Information Service is a reliable and comprehensive source of information on ELC in all local authorities throughout Scotland
- Ensuring that parents know that there is a range of options (i.e. nurseries, childminders etc)
- Making access to ELC easier by simplifying forms and offering parents assistance to fill them in where needed
- Highlighting that parents do not have to take up the full entitlement and can use fewer hours if they wish.

In terms of families affected by disability, childcare is often more difficult to access because of either a child's or parent's disability. In Working Families' research, looking at childcare for children with disabilities (http://workingfamilies.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/WF_OffBalance_FINAL1.pdf) seven out of ten parents in the survey said it was 'very difficult' or 'impossible' to find childcare, and 1 in 3 parents were paying more for their childcare. Less parents of disabled worked, though many wished to do so.

The UK Parliamentary Inquiry on childcare and disability has useful information and recommendations

(<http://www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/sites/default/files/files/Parliamentary%20Inquiry%20into%20childcare%20for%20disabled%20children%20report.pdf>).

However, there is no equivalent research or report for Scotland, and no comprehensive Scottish information; we would recommend that as part of the work of the Strategic Evidence Group, Scottish-specific work on this subject should be commissioned to assess the difficulties parents of disabled children face in accessing childcare.

We would also recommend that:

- Training about disability and additional support needs is included in both initial training and CPD for ELC staff and management
- Individualised responses and offers are made
- There are funding sources for adaptations and local lending libraries for specialist equipment
- Fund for adaptations/lending library for equipment
- There are disability/ASN specialists in each local authority area, and a national network that practitioners can draw on for expertise, signposting, and accessing appropriate training.

13 How can we support higher take-up rates amongst eligible two year olds, and other groups less likely to access entitlement?

Comments:

This question presumes that this is a desirable outcome. However, it may not be the best or the most appropriate option for many two year olds or what some parents want (see also Q2). In Family Friendly Working's forthcoming report, Family friendly working needs of low income households, a significant number of parents of two year olds told us that they had made an active choice to look after their children at this age.

There should not be the expectation that the two year old offer has the same level of take up as the three and four year old offer, partly because it will be inappropriate for some children and partly because of parental choice. Also given that this is a relatively new offer, it is only to be expected that initial take up will be slower.

As stated in our answer to question 2, for looked after children who are likely to have been subject to traumatic experiences it is likely to be more important to form secure attachments with their new carer than to enter an ELC setting. However, support could be given through the use of Part 6, section 49 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, allowing alternative arrangements to be made to free hours of ELC where this is more appropriate for children. Alternative arrangements may involve, for example (but not exclusively), home based family support, childminder provision, stay and play sessions. Many families may wish to take up the offer at some point, but are not ready at this stage, and may need other help. For some families, alternative arrangements may be more appropriate, and indeed, may form part of a managed transition to an ELC setting at a later stage. We feel that it would also be desirable if this part of the Act were to be extended to other two year olds as well as eligible twos so that individualised and tailored support can be made available to children and their families.

In terms of maximising take up, one group that may be particularly likely to need the expansion offer is single parents because of the conditionality regime. Working with the DWP, to publicise the offer to this particular group as well as others returning to work would be a useful way forward.

Our answer at Q2 is also pertinent here.

14 How can more social enterprises, and third sector providers, be encouraged to enter the early learning and childcare sector?

Comments:

Equity and transparency in funding is essential to ensure sustainability of social enterprises and third sector providers. Given that much of the function of third sector providers is to support low income families, subsidy is essential and provision will not be sustainable without it. Currently, a number of local authorities offer a rate to third sector partners which is well below the rate for their own provision and is often below the actual cost of providing the service. If social enterprises and third sector providers are to be encouraged to enter the sector, and just as importantly to be able to be sustainable, then this needs to change.

15 How can the governance arrangements support more community-led ELC provision particularly in remote and rural areas?

Comments:

Not answered

16 How can the broader system for promoting, accessing, and registering for a place in an ELC setting be improved? Please give examples of any innovative and accessible systems currently in place?

Comments:

For parents who may find the services difficult to access, face-to-face support works best to provide information, discuss the options and support with any form-filling. This can be via family support workers, financial inclusion staff, employability staff or peer mentors. For many young parents and young people who have been looked after, a key worker who helps them both to access and to integrate services is likely to be the best way forward.

ELC brokerage officers may be one way of ensuring the needs of families who find services hard to reach can be met i.e. a staff member based in a locality with very close links to the planning and governance structures for ELC whose role is to work with families and support them to put together the ELC package that best meets their needs

17 Do parents and carers face any barriers in accessing support with the costs of ELC provision (beyond the funded entitlement)? What more can we do to ensure additional hours are affordable?

Comments:

For many parents, finding the cost of the deposit and advance payments can be an issue; for some parents, this can stop their access to ELC provision before it has even begun. A lone parent contacted Family Friendly Working Scotland recently. She had been offered a job and had managed to find an ELC place for her child but wasn't able to take it up because she could not afford the deposit. A deposit guarantee scheme or similar could be initiated to help low income parents in this situation.

A capping mechanism (similar to those used in the Nordic countries) which caps childcare fees as a proportion of household income would be a way of ensuring that fees are appropriate. We would suggest that this should be a cap on income after housing costs, and would ensure affordability, particularly for those on low incomes.

There are often associated costs with nursery – dressing up days, outings etc – which can disadvantage families on low incomes and deter them from participating in ELC activities. CPAG's work on cost of the school day (<http://www.cpag.org.uk/content/cost-school-day-report-and-executive-summary>) should be replicated to assess what additional costs in ELC are a deterrent to affordability and parental engagement, and what strategies can be used to tackle these.

18 How can ELC providers, particularly private and third sector providers, be encouraged to extend capacity?

Comments:

Equity and/or fairness of funding is essential to ensure that partners are on a level playing field in delivering the 1140 hours, especially for third sector partners. Funding must be guaranteed for a reasonable amount of time to allow for strategic planning, sustainability of services, and expansion.

Good practice should be shared via partnership arrangements and peer mentoring.

Integration with other services to allow for sharing and offsetting of costs while providing the seamless services needed to support parents should also be considered.

19 What funding model would best support our vision for high quality and flexible ELC provision, which is accessible and affordable for all?

Comments:

Whatever funding model is decided on, sufficient funding needs to be provided to ensure that ELC provision is of the highest quality to ensure beneficial outcomes for all children. The system also needs to be clear and transparent and enable families to access ELC without barriers.

Research shows that supply side models where funding is directed to providers are more efficient in delivering ELC. We would advocate that an approach based on the multi agency hub model of local decision making and resource allocation put forward by the Childcare Commission (Reference) should be set up. Funding should then be allocated to providers in the local area through a clear and transparent model. Funding should be distributed to providers on an equitable basis, whether they are public or private, as long as they meet quality standards. There may be a case for varying costs based on any additional needs.

A parent accessing ELC for their child should be able to make their choice of provision with the expectation that they will receive the same hours and level of provision whoever the provider is.

All families should have the same opportunity to access ELC; this does not necessarily mean that the offer or financing needs to be the same for all. Funding for families needs to be proportionate to and meet their needs. A system capping ELC costs as a proportion of household costs would be the best means of achieving this with fairness and parity for families

20 If it were possible for aspects of the entitlement to be phased in ahead the full roll out by 2020, how should this be implemented?

Comments:

Given the Scottish Government's commitment to tackling child poverty and to mitigating the worst effects of welfare reform, phasing in the entitlement for parents on low income would be both beneficial for the health and wellbeing of low income families and consistent with the direction and joining up of Scottish Government policy areas.

Currently the impact of childcare fees on household costs acts as a deterrent for many parents on low incomes to use childcare and to enter the workforce. The main group for whom the entitlement should be phased in early is single parents. There is ample evidence to show that single parents want to work and that the barriers which prevent them from doing so are structural, one of the key barriers being the cost and availability of childcare.

While we do not agree that parents should be forced into work and believe that parents should be free to choose whether to look after their children in the early years or have the option of ELC should they wish, unfortunately, this is not a choice for single parents. Under Universal Credit and other employment benefits, single parents are increasingly being required to work when their children are at pre school age, and can be sanctioned for not doing so, leading to unfair and deeply punitive poverty for both parent and children. While being unable to find suitable childcare is an exemption from these rules under JSA, this is often disregarded and parents are sanctioned regardless. Research from Gingerbread shows that single parents are more likely to be sanctioned. Equivalent protection is not afforded to parents under the new guidance for Universal Credit which will mean that if single parents refuse a job offer, they could be sanctioned regardless of whether childcare is available.

<http://www.welfareconditionality.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/WelCond-findings-lone-parents-May16.pdf>

Conditionality for lone parents of children under five: April 2017

- Parents of three- and four-year-olds will be expected to be available for and actively seeking work.
- Parents of two-year-olds will be required to attend work-focused interviews and will be subject to a work preparation requirement.
- Parents of one-year-olds will continue to be required to attend work-focused interviews.

This comes into effect in April 2017.

Under Regulation 88(2)(a) of the Universal Credit Regulations 2013, the Secretary of State can reduce the expected number of hours for which a responsible carer must search for work to a number that is compatible with her/his caring responsibilities.

(<http://www.cpag.org.uk/content/changes-welfare-reform-and-work-act-2016>)

Phasing in early entitlement of ELC for single parents would help to mitigate the effects of welfare reform, help to lift single parents and their children out of poverty, and remove one of the structural barriers preventing single parents from being able to work. An additional benefit would be that design of an ELC offer which works for single parents, given their needs around affordability and flexibility, would be likely to also work for the wider community of parents.

Another group who should be considered for early phasing in of the entitlement are families affected by disability. This group are, like single parents, more likely to be affected by poverty. Again, evidence shows that many parents would like to work but are deterred from doing so by structural barriers, a key one of these, being suitable childcare provision. Again, getting it right for these families would have similar benefits to those for single parents – enabling parents to work, moving families out of poverty and improving outcomes for children. Similarly to the case for single parents, getting it right for this group would likely result in an improved offer for the wider population.

More generally, early phasing in of the entitlement would be beneficial for low income parents both in terms of children's outcomes and helping to move families out of poverty.

About You

What is your name?

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Are you responding as an individual or an organisation?

Organisation

What is your organisation?

Organisation:

Parenting across Scotland

The Scottish Government would like your permission to publish your consultation response. Please indicate your publishing preference:

Publish response with name

We will share your response internally with other Scottish Government policy teams who may be addressing the issues you discuss. They may wish to contact you again in the future, but we require your permission to do so. Are you content for Scottish Government to contact you again in relation to this consultation exercise?

Yes

Evaluation

Please help us improve our consultations by answering the questions below. (Responses to the evaluation will not be published.)

Matrix 1 - How satisfied were you with this consultation?:

Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied

Please enter comments here.:

Having the response date so soon after Xmas was challenging in terms of getting our response ratified by partners.

Matrix 1 - How would you rate your satisfaction with using this platform (Citizen Space) to respond to this consultation?:

Very satisfied

Please enter comments here.: