

Education and Culture Committee: Scotland's Educational and Cultural Future (March 2014)

This response is from the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC). The SSSC is a Non Departmental Public Body (NDPB) and was established in 2001 by the Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act. We are responsible for registering people who work in social services, regulating their education and training and the collation and publication of data on the size and nature of the sector's workforce.

Our work increases the protection of people who use services by ensuring that the workforce is properly trained, appropriately qualified and effectively regulated. We aim to protect people who use services, raise standards of practice, strengthen and support the professionalism of the workforce and improve the outcomes and experience of people who use social services. The social service workforce provides care and support for some of the most vulnerable people in Scottish society. These workers often deal with complex care needs and make a real difference to individuals' lives.

Our vision is that our work means the people of Scotland can count on social services being provided by a trusted, skilled and confident workforce. Our purpose is to raise standards and protect the public through regulation, innovation and continuous improvement in workforce planning and development for the social service workforce.

This response focuses on the early years, childcare and employability theme in the Committee's call for evidence paper. The four evidence themes are used as the basis for this response.

1. THE BENEFITS TO CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND THE WIDER ECONOMY OF INVESTING IN CHILDCARE

The Early Years Collaborative sums up the overriding ambition in one sentence:

"To make Scotland the best place in the world to grow up for all babies, children, mothers, fathers and families."¹

The benefits of investing in childcare are outlined in a number of key reports. For example, The Scottish Government's Economic Strategy notes the

"significant returns from preventative investments in maternal health, parenting and early learning in the form of lifetime improvements to health, socialisation and educational attainment".

¹ Early Years Collaborative website (accessed February 2014):
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/Young-People/early-years/early-years-collaborative>

These benefits are extended into greater participation in the labour market when these children become adults (Scottish Government, 2011).

The Early Years Framework outlines a number of benefits which include the economic case for investing in early years and childcare. The progress report highlights a potential short-term saving from investing in early years and support from pre-birth to age five of up to £37,400 a year per child in the most severe cases. The medium-term savings associated with interventions from pre-birth to age eight could be up to £131 million a year (Scottish Government, 2011)

Curriculum for Excellence provides an opportunity for effective and seamless transitions between pre-five year olds and primary education. Curriculum for Excellence also allows children to benefit from meaningful opportunities for differentiated learning through play and developmental support. This process will strengthen the engagement between early years practitioners, parents, children and feeder primary schools.

2. THE PLANNING, TRAINING AND INVESTMENT THAT WOULD BE REQUIRED TO BRING ABOUT A TRANSFORMATION IN CHILDCARE PROVISION

Context

The Care Inspectorate publishes annual statistics on childcare provision in Scotland while the SSSC publishes equivalent workforce data. Developing a total for the number of workers involved in this agenda is a complex process as there are a number of individuals who play a vital role in childcare.

Table: Childcare workforce (headcount, March 2012)

Category	Number of workers (headcount)
child care agencies	400
childminding	5,810
day care of children	30,560
residential child care	7,030
school care accommodation	1,200
Total	45,000

(SSSC, 2013)

The sector's composition has changed substantially in recent years. For example, approximately 62% of the day care of children workforce are employed by the private and voluntary sectors (SSSC, 2013). Workforce planning plays a key role in shaping the planning, training and investment required to bring about a transformation in childcare provision. The SSSC has developed an interactive website which allows commissioners, employers and other interested stakeholders to examine the data at local level and in greater detail.²

² Data website: <http://data.sssc.uk.com/>

Impact of investment in the childcare workforce

The benefit of investing in childcare workers has been long-established. For example, the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project is a major European longitudinal study of a national sample of young children's development between the age of 3 and 7 years. The study collected information on over 3,000 children and reached a number of key conclusions such as:

"Settings that have staff with higher qualifications have higher quality scores and their children make more progress"

(Sylva et al, 2004)

The Early Years Framework focused extensively on the importance of workforce training and investment. For example, the Framework highlights the need for the workforce to have an extensive understanding of child development to ensure that they can detect risks and problems and can assess these either directly or with the help of other services. The importance of ensuring that workers are familiar with the principles of Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC) is also highlighted. The Framework identifies a number of other key areas including a need to undertake effective cross-working across sectors and to ensure appropriate access to Continuous Professional Development opportunities (Scottish Government, 2008).

We note that there have been a number of discussions about the workforce implications during the passage of the Children and Young People Bill (Education and Culture Committee, 2013) The white paper on Scotland's Future contains proposals to extend the number of hours of free early years and childcare. The paper also refers to the implications for regulation, inspection and quality:

"This extension in the provision of early learning and childcare will be achieved in a way that is affordable and sustainable. It will include investment in training and require a substantial increase in the workforce. We estimate that it will create around 35,000 new jobs. The additional investment will also cover regulation, inspection and quality through Education Scotland, the Care Inspectorate and the Scottish Social Services Council"

(Scottish Government, 2013)

Role of the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC)

The SSSC plays a number of key roles in the development of the childcare workforce which include:

The development of National Occupational Standards and qualifications

The SSSC works with partners within the UK Sector Skills Councils to develop and revise the National Occupational Standards (NOS). The NOS are the benchmark statements of competence that an individual can be expected to demonstrate at a given level and for a specific activity. They form the basis for key qualifications and are used for other purposes such as developing job descriptions. Over 80% of qualifications accessed by the social service workforce

are based on the relevant NOS. These awards include Higher National Certificates (HNCs), Professional Development Awards (PDAs) and Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs). The Modern Apprenticeship Frameworks in Scotland are based upon the NOS as SVQs. The NOS were reviewed in 2011/12 and form the basis for new SVQ structures launched in February 2014.

The recent introduction of SVQs in Social Services and Healthcare and Social Services (Children and Young People) allow individuals to move within and across practice areas without the need to replicate learning. These qualifications support the development of a flexible workforce. Merging the SVQ qualifications at level 3 and 4 will afford employers and the workforce greater transferability and flexibility across the children and young people sector. An integrated framework will provide greater opportunities and choices for the workforce on how to progress in their career thus providing greater mobility and employability. The SSSC works with the sector to make sure that the qualifications developed are of the highest quality and adequately prepare the sector for the complex roles and responsibilities around working with children.

The SSSC is undertaking a review of the social work degree in Scotland. The degree aims to provide graduates with a graduate level theoretical knowledge, skills and understanding alongside well supervised practice experience. The degree programme combines the generic benchmark skills necessary for the social work role with the specific specialist knowledge of GIRFEC and the Key Capabilities in Child Care and Protection. The programme supports the development of social workers' competence and understanding of ways to ensure that children are Safe, Healthy, Achieving Nurtured, Active, Respected, Responsible and Included as identified in GIRFEC. The programme provides social workers with the necessary skills for working with the complexity of children and families who are vulnerable or otherwise disadvantaged.

We are aware of the early successes of the degree in Childhood Practice in enabling well-qualified, well led early education and child care provision. There are over 1,200 graduates from these programmes in Scotland and this is signalling a significant paradigm shift in expectations from this group of workers. Graduates from the Childhood Practice award are more evaluative, better prepared for working with other key professionals and use evidence to inform improvement in their practice. In light of the success of these awards, work is on-going around the development of a degree level qualification for workers in residential childcare services. Such a development will help to ensure that some of the most vulnerable children and young people in Scotland have access to services led by highly qualified staff.

Registration and regulation

To register a worker must satisfy the criteria for registration. This includes holding the appropriate qualifications for the job they do and being able to evidence good character. For example, day care of children support workers must be registered with the SSSC by June 2014. Workers in residential child care and school care accommodation are also required to register with the SSSC

while childminders register their service with the Care Inspectorate. The timetable for registration is available from the SSSC's website.³

The majority of non-managers in early years services are working at practitioner level. These workers are responsible for caring for and meeting the developmental needs of children as young as 6 weeks old. The role of the early years worker is becoming increasingly complex. The planned extension to the delivery and free early learning and childcare (particularly for children who are 2 years old, or have been subject to a kinship order) will add to the complexity around this role. It is our view that it is likely that the SVQ level 2 is no longer sufficient for support workers but we await the outcome of the Early Years Workforce Review recently announced by the Scottish Government. The need for further training and development to ensure that these workers are qualified to the appropriate level should be anticipated and funding should be made available to support this.

Rolling out Childhood Practice

All managers of early years and childcare services in Scotland have been required to obtain a degree level qualification in Childhood Practice in order to lead and manage their service since December 2011. This qualification also allows managers to register with the SSSC.

Recent BA Childhood Practice award graduates spoke at an SSSC event about the impact that the qualification has on their practice and outcomes for children and families. The graduates noted that the award gives them the confidence to do their job and supports them to be skilled and knowledgeable advocates for children's rights. A number of graduates believe that their enhanced understanding of evidence based practice ensures that their opinions are well informed, listened to and respected. They believe that this award helps to provide the personal and professional autonomy which they require to meet the needs of children and young people in Scotland. A recent Education Scotland study noted the following:

"Our evidence would suggest that in almost all centres surveyed, staff, who either have the BA Childhood Practice award or are undertaking the qualification, believe that it is having a significant and positive impact on children's learning. Theoretical studies build very well on staff's practical experience. Staff have a clearer understanding of child development and feel more confident and motivated in delivering the curriculum. We know that staff are using their new knowledge and skills to improve learning for children, for example outdoor learning. They are delivering more child-led learning which promotes deeper and challenging learning experiences"

(Education Scotland, 2012)

The University of Edinburgh is undertaking research into the impact that Childhood Practice has on the workforce and service delivery. The findings will be published in Spring / Summer 2014.

³ SSSC, Compulsory Registration timetable: <http://www.sssc.uk.com/Compulsory-Registration/compulsory-registration.html>

Assessing learning

The SSSC works in a number of ways to ensure the quality of assessed learning. This process includes working with awarding bodies through the establishment of the Scottish Awarding Body Forum. This forum provides partner organisations with opportunities to develop and maintain processes for the quality and integrity of qualifications. One example is the recently introduced requirement for assessors of vocational qualifications to hold a relevant practice qualification.

Dispelling the childcare workforce myths

The Early Years Framework highlighted the need to dispel the myth that childcare is low skilled, low paid and women's work. We have touched upon these themes in our responses to recent parliamentary inquiries around underemployment and the role of women at work. Childhood Practice has a key role to play in promoting the professionalism of the workforce.

There are a number of complex factors which play a role in determining wage levels in childcare. We note the discussion about the role of commissioning and fee levels during the passage of the Children and Young Bill (Education and Culture Committee, 2013). We noted earlier that a substantial proportion of the childcare workforce is employed by the private and voluntary sector. A number of these workers may be paid below living wage. We welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to promote the living wage and the forthcoming accreditation scheme. We also note the recent recommendations by the Low Pay Commission around the level of the National Minimum Wage.

3. WHETHER THE INTERACTION BETWEEN CURRENT UK AND SCOTTISH YOUTH EMPLOYABILITY INITIATIVES COULD BE IMPROVED

We have nothing to add on this issue.

4. THE EXTENT TO WHICH YOUTH EMPLOYMENT COULD BE BOOSTED BY: (A) A CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHT TO THE OPPORTUNITY OF EDUCATION, TRAINING OR EMPLOYMENT; AND (B) THE BRINGING TOGETHER OF JOB MATCHING, EMPLOYABILITY TRAINING AND CAREER GUIDANCE.

Career progression is important to maintain a motivated and skilled workforce. The SSSC is working within the sector to establish a clear route for individuals to develop and progress skills to meet the needs of children and young people. The SSSC sees the potential of the recently introduced Certificate of Work Readiness (CWR) for supporting young people to gain the necessary skills and confidence to work within a care setting. Pilot projects have been successful in using the CWR as an introduction into working within childcare and early years settings. The SSSC is exploring how the CWR may support care leavers to gain the necessary employability skills in a supportive environment. Clear and informed career guidance are also central to career progression.

We work closely with our colleagues in Skills for Care and Development⁴ to develop a Career Ambassador scheme in Scotland. Our Ambassadors give their time, supported by their employers, to go out to promote and encourage people of all ages to think about social service careers. A reception for Careers Ambassadors and their employers was held in the Parliament in February 2014.

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**Scottish Social Services Council
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⁴ The Sector Skills Council for the social service sector