

## **Section 2 – Curriculum and Assessment**

### **2.3 Please share ideas you may have to improve learner progression across stages and sectors**

In the earliest years, Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) provides a strong and stable foundation for children to build the basis of their future learning. It is, however, important to note that Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) sits in a very unique position, in that CfE is not the only overarching document which informs the work undertaken within our sector. Our new national guidance Realising the Ambition: Being Me underpins CfE and encourages staff beyond early years to engage with its content to support transitions across the early level of our curricular framework, which is vital for children as they move to school from ELC. The committed, dedicated and highly skilled EY workforce, who work across the private, voluntary, independent (PVI) and local authority sectors, with varying terms and conditions and wage brackets, guide our youngest children through the most important years of their lives, under not only one but two extremely important documents.

It is felt within the Early Years (EY) sector that there is not enough recognition of the challenges of working with the new RtA Guidance alongside CfE. This is compounded by the requirement to track and monitor practice using two inspection frameworks, Education Scotland and Care Inspectorate. Therefore, both children transitioning to primary school and the teachers who take over their learning and education at what is still an early stage in their lives, would benefit greatly from a commitment to sharing good practice of pedagogy within ELC to the school environment.

While there are examples of good practice in this type of sharing, it is by no means the case across the country. something of a ‘postcode lottery’, which absolutely should not be the case for some of the most important transitions in a child’s life. There simply has to be a stronger message that it is critically important for Primary 1 teachers to be given support, space and time to facilitate constructive engagement with ELC prior to children starting their school journey. At present, there is little to no equity between school and ELC – the reality of working together and the value of sharing transition information are not realised.

The experience, knowledge and skills of the ELC workforce in preparing our youngest citizens for this important step cannot, and should not, be underestimated. Instead, it should be the basis for a collaborative approach to the transition from ELC – whether that be within a nursery, with a childminder or another part of our sector – to primary school. As the early level of CfE is shared between both ELC and School, there is an urgent need for more joined up approaches, shared collaborations, joint planning, and

sharing of assessment information to support the learner journey, and keep the child at the centre.

EYS would not only support, but would be happy to be involved in, the creation of a nationally agreed process to support effective sharing of assessment information from ELC with receiving primary schools. The fact that such an agreed approach/nationally agreed framework for sharing transition information does not exist, seems to be at odds with one of the key purposes of CfE, in ensuring that children have one continuous, seamless learning journey from their first to last engagement with CfE. There are opportunities within other documents that our sector utilise, such as the National Standard and the Health and Social Care Standards, to implement this, which would both simplify and streamline this vital transition process.

In our manifesto ahead of the 2021 Scottish Parliament elections, EYS has called for support for parents and children via an enhanced transition from ELC into Primary 1. Providing a phased, blended approach, whereby children spend time in both their ELC setting and school from August until the end of Term 1, would allow for staggered entry into this next phase in their lives. Both ELC staff and teachers would be involved in supporting enhanced and extended play-based learning pedagogies, which would be of great benefit to those children starting Primary 1. This would of course require to be resourced appropriately, however this shared engagement of expertise between ELC and School, we feel, would be of huge benefit to the child and the family, and the staff teams in the respective sectors.

## **7. Please share any additional comments you have on curriculum and assessment.**

It is fair to say that the recent OECD report, '*Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence: Into the Future*', is very much weighted towards primary and secondary education and the staff who provide this. There is little to no mention of ELC, and there is almost a presumption that anyone involved in a child's earliest involvement with CfE will be a teacher based in a school.

The omission of any recognition of the importance of ELC can devalue the vital role played by Scotland's early years workforce as well as the importance of supporting a clear learning continuum and skills progression from ages 3-18. As an organisation, EYS sees first-hand the importance of high-quality ELC that offers effective play-based pedagogies, positive interactions and nurturing approach and support in the earliest years of a child's life.

The Scottish Government has demonstrated a clear commitment, through the expansion to 1140 hours of funded ELC for all children aged 3-5 and eligible 2-year-olds, to ensuring that our youngest citizens are given the best start in life. The recent Programme for Government has also promised to extend this provision to younger children within this parliamentary term, as well as committing to the creation of a wraparound system of care for school-aged children. These policy objectives are, of course, to be commended, given the benefits they will provide for children, not only

while they are in ELC, but as a positive foundation for the rest of their lives. The value of a positive early years' experience is immeasurable.

It is, therefore, extremely disappointing that those with the skills, expertise and experience to deliver high quality ELC are not always fully recognised in the implementation of CfE at the earliest stages and we feel there is, therefore, a need to provide a better connected and smoother assessment system. Unfortunately, the workforce within our sector do not benefit from the same opportunities as teaching colleagues do and there was little in the OECD report to attempt to rectify this. Also, we cannot underestimate the value of effective transitions between babies and toddlers within the 0 – 3 stage, prior to the official implementation of CfE, so that there is not a perception that 'learning' begins at 3. We feel strongly that this important younger stage is also given due importance, to ensure that we transition effectively from 0-3 years into the early level, to ensure that their individual learning continues, uninterrupted, at the correct level and appropriate pace.

For example, the report notes the importance of 'cutting down' on teacher's class contact time, giving them the opportunity to carry out lesson plans and undertake professional learning. While they are not teaching, McCrone teachers are brought in to cover their classes. The benefits of this approach are two-fold – not only are children guaranteed continuity of learning, but teaching staff are able to have valuable time to away from the classroom, to further their development and plan meaningful, engaging lessons which will benefit their pupils. EYS does, of course, fully support this as a vital means of ensuring children receive the best possible quality of learning and teaching under CfE throughout their school journey.

It is, therefore, extremely disappointing that those supporting children's earliest stages in ELC, are very seldom offered the same opportunity to plan and develop. Planning, including the effective use of assessment, to meet children's learning needs is crucial. While there may be prospects for this to happen within Local Authority (LA) settings, there are no plans for this within the PVI sector that we are aware of. In order to ensure we support effective transitions between ELC and school, we should consider focusing on opportunities for ELC and school staff to work together to discuss children's achievements within the Cfe benchmarks in all curriculum areas to assess the progress of learners, and support a ***shared understanding*** of the standards to be achieved at early level during transition.

This is not an equitable approach on a number of levels. Early years professionals working under CfE at the age 3-5 stage are not afforded the opportunity to have meaningful time away to engage with curriculum planning and development within their settings, yet their colleagues within schools are. Both are adhering to the same curricular framework, however again, the importance of early years involvement within the CfE process is not recognised. There are also disparities between parts of the ELC sector, as there may be some McCrone time embedded into Local Authority settings (particularly those with teachers, which are often ELC settings attached to schools), yet there is none within PVI settings that we are aware of. This is despite the fact that the whole sector providing funded ELC entitlement has to work within the early level of CfE, as well as other key national documentation and guidance. This could,

arguably, create inequalities between children whose settings have time to jointly plan and develop with other school professionals, and those who do not.

It is important to note that these are not the only differences within the ELC sector as a whole – there is a significant gulf between LA and PVI settings, which has arguably been further compounded by the impact of COVID-19.

The expansion to 1140 hours has taken, and continues to take, a toll on the sector against the restrictions brought about by Covid-19. Private and Third sector ELC settings and childminders are also facing ongoing sustainability challenges, as indicated in the publication of the Scottish Government's Financial Sustainability Health Check of the Childcare Sector. The variability of the funded rate paid to members nationally in particular, is extremely concerning for the ongoing sustainability of the sector and until this is addressed, will continue to create a pervasive gulf and a potential level of resentment across the sector. It simply should not be the case that a workforce has to follow, to the letter, the same guidance, policies, practice and legislation, yet there can be such a significant difference in the wage scales provided.

The continued loss of highly qualified and experienced staff from the PVI sector settings to local authorities, which offer higher pay, and often improved terms and conditions, is a significant issue. In our 2021 Holyrood manifesto, EYS also called for the creation of a National Pay Scale to ensure that the (predominantly female) workforce delivering this are paid a fair and equitable wage, which is based on qualifications, skills and experience, and not the type of setting that they work in. The benefits of this financial recognition may also counter the established gender imbalance in the sector.

- 10.1 There is clarity on where high quality support for leadership and professional learning can be accessed to support practitioners (Agree etc).**
- 10.2 Please share any comments you may have on support for leadership and professional learning.**

There is a wide range of professional learning (PL) opportunities available to the early years sector in Scotland, however there is a need for clarity and equity of access. The provision of PL is one of the four key strands of work of Early Years Scotland, delivered via our highly successful Professional Learning Academy. The organisation has invested in establishing an expert dedicated professional learning team who design, develop and deliver affordable, accessible, and relevant high quality professional learning opportunities across the country.

Thanks to funding from the William Grant Foundation, we now have a new Online Learning Platform, which supports the Early Learning and Childcare sector with opportunities for professional learning and the development of Early Learning and Childcare National Collaborative Learning Communities. EYS is all too aware of the importance of continued professional development throughout the career of an early years professional offered at flexible times such as early morning and evenings, and at affordable rates.

That being said, there is currently a disjointed professional learning landscape, and the organisation is also aware of the challenges faced by the sector, and in particular PVI colleagues, in accessing the level of PL required. The lack of time available to those within PVI settings to undertake the courses which are on offer, further permeates the inequalities within the sector. One of the underpinning principles of the expansion to 1140 hours of funded ELC is that children will benefit from high-quality provision, delivered by highly skilled, trained professionals. There can be a lack of access to PL for PVI settings, often due to ongoing staff challenges, a lack of funding to pay for PL, or lack of access to this within their LA. The PVI providers regularly state that they often do not have the time or the resources to be in a position to release staff for external PL opportunities. Although the PVI sector continues to support their own staff team's professional learning in house, and train and develop students, there are ongoing challenges to supporting wider staff access to high-quality PL, more often than not through no fault of their own, and the ongoing loss of their qualified staff requires critical support. Evidence of the challenges in accessing PL have been gathered by SSSC and reflect the disparity between LAs and PVI providers.

EYS is aware of good practice examples across a range of LAs who fully involve their commissioned nurseries to access and participate in the professional learning that is on offer for the LA ELC staff teams. This is a very beneficial and inclusive approach that our members would welcome across all LAs.

EYS would also argue that there should be more access to shared opportunities for PL between ELC settings and Primary 1. As previously outlined, the move to school is an extremely important transition, and would benefit significantly from collaborative working and sharing of effective pedagogy and practice, in order to support effective transitions. EYS also supports a renewed focus on leadership within ELC and believes that we should continue to explore the need for more effective leadership professional learning and development, alongside a clear leadership path and journey for early years professionals. Key in this will be an agreed position in the language of leadership within ELC. Concepts of leadership and management continue to cause mixed levels of understanding for all stakeholders. Current work with the Scottish Government and partners sees commitment to address this to ensure a position of shared understanding.

Finally, members have reported feeling disconnected from the Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs) and many don't understand what RICs are, or what their role is. This is clearly an area that would benefit from a renewed focus for ELC.

- 12.1 Independent inspection has an important role to play in scrutiny and evaluation, enhancing improvement and building capacity.**
- 12.2 Please give examples of how you would like to see scrutiny and evaluation being carried out in future.**

At present, the ELC sector is subject a series of standards and frameworks which have significantly increased bureaucracy, and this has become very challenging for the sector overall. The aspiration to have one ‘shared inspection framework’ for ELC would have reduced the increased challenges around scrutiny and inspection, but this was unable to be created. The recent release of the new Care Inspectorate Quality Framework, alongside the requirement to also still use Education Scotland’s ‘How good is our ELC?’ is causing the sector increased challenges. Pressures also include staff recruitment and retention, professional learning and training of new and existing staff, responding to updated COVID guidance, managing the intention to resume full inspections, balancing the health and wellbeing of staff; the duty of care that employers have to their staff with the expectation that the sector will require to absorb yet another change to scrutiny, self-evaluation, recording and reporting. There is a clear request from members to streamline the process of inspection and improvement in ELC nationally.

We are also aware that with the SG manifesto commitment of the introduction of a 1-year-old offer of ELC provision, and increased wrap around school care, there could therefore be a greater volume of quality standards which childminders may have to follow. This has also led to childminders, as well as other ELC professionals leaving the profession, due to the burden of bureaucracy and workloads.

EYS is therefore, in agreement with members, calling for the creation of a ***single inspection body*** which encompasses the skillset and expertise ***of both education and care***. It would be much more beneficial overall to have a single, professional, streamlined service, encompassing the skills and expertise of both Care Inspectorate and Education Scotland, that ensures quality and consistency, rather than two very different systems which run and inspect on care and education separately.

In discussion with members, EYS has noted that if a single body is to be created, there must be cognisance of the language and tone used to describe the activities it carries out. Some of the inspections carried out at present are described as ‘scrutiny’, which has negative connotations. Settings would find it much more beneficial if there was more of a focus on support and continuous improvement. Inspections which concentrate on the negative aspects of a setting cause anxiety, stress and pressure. EYS members have confirmed that they would find it much more beneficial to be advised where they are doing well and how they can be supported to make any improvements needed, to ensure the approach supports a continuous learning journey for the setting.

The concept of ‘shared inspection’, with both organisations working together does, in theory, sound beneficial, however ultimately it would still be two different organisations working under their respective roles and remits. We have the opportunity in Scotland to be creative, and transform support for the ELC sector by devising a new Inspection body and process. The aspiration for this would be an organisation which has the skillset needed to inspect the holistic nature of early learning and childcare, can only be a beneficial change for the sector, and most importantly, will support improved positive outcomes for children and families overall.