

Early Years Scotland

Response to the Consultation on a National Care Service for Scotland

October 2021

Early Years Scotland (EYS) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Scottish Government's consultation on a National Care Service (NCS) for Scotland.

Early Years Scotland is committed to providing the very best start in life for every child in Scotland. We are the leading national third sector organisation for children pre-birth to 5. Early Years Scotland's remit is broad, but with a strong focus on the professionals and families who care for the youngest members of our community.

EYS wishes to outline some key points around children's services and the organisation's reservations and ideas around the proposals contained within this consultation document.

Recognising that the consultation is very lengthy, including many questions which would not be relevant to early learning and childcare (ELC), we have instead produced a more focussed response on the issues raised by the consultation as they relate to ELC.

- **Inclusion of children's services within the system**

EYS would support the creation of a system which allows for meaningful, positive transitions between children's and adults services. At present, the significant leap from children's social care into adult social care is disjointed, confusing and ultimately can result in poor outcomes.

Working directly with families, EYS has seen first-hand how this has an impact on care-leavers who become parents and, ultimately, how this affects their child's start in life. A more joined-up, coordinated system which works for, rather than against, those moving from children to adult services is essential. Positive experiences for these individuals, many of whom go on to become parents, would empower them to have confidence in many aspects of their life, most pertinently with regards to their parenting skills and abilities. This, in turn, provides our youngest children with the positive start in life that EYS believes that every child in Scotland should experience. We welcome discussions around how inter-agency working would support this aspiration, however we feel that the ELC sector should not be fully integrated in a new NCS.

- **The role of Early Years**

Positive experiences in the earliest years are absolutely vital, leading to improved outcomes for individuals as they progress through their lives. This is especially true for both children aged 0-5 who access care services, as well as for adult care-leavers who have gone on to become parents. EYS is in a privileged position to represent both

the ELC sector, as well as children and families and as such, is well-placed to advise on how early years should be considered separately in its own right and avoid the risk of education and care being separated.

At present, Early Years is aligned with education, and the learning should be emphasised, hence the change to the term, early learning and childcare. It is, however, important to note that Early Years is also very much care-centred – the two are intrinsically linked and cannot, and should not, be placed specifically in one ‘silo’. There are real and genuine concerns within the ELC sector that the creation of the National Care Service will place Early Years solely in the area of care only, which, to the mind of EYS, would be extremely detrimental to both the workforce and children and families, and we believe that ELC needs to be viewed in a more holistic way. It could also create divisions within the workforce – for example, the likes of childminders, who are a vital part of our sector, may end up working under different frameworks and guidance than nurseries. A fragmented ELC sector would not be beneficial, and this has to be carefully considered in the creation of a National Care Service.

- **Regulation and Inspection**

Uncertainty as to how ELC will ‘fit’ into the new Care Service is compounded when considering the bodies currently involved in regulation and inspection for the ELC sector. At present, regulated settings are inspected by either the Care Inspectorate or Education Scotland, or both, for shared inspections. EYS is concerned how this will be potentially affect the sector, depending on where it is placed as a result of the creation of a new NCS. 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 absorb yet another change to scrutiny, self-evaluation, recording and reporting. Therefore, EYS would like to request that this is all taken into account prior to making any decisions on possible changes to ELC and the NCS.

As part of the Education Reform consultation, 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 that ensures quality and consistency, rather than two very different systems which run and inspect on care and education separately. There is therefore a concern that the early years will be seen as ‘care’ only, and this needs to be a combined approach.

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. A creative, new entity, however, which has the skillset needed to inspect the holistic nature of early learning and childcare, can only be a beneficial for the sector, and most importantly, for positive outcomes for children and families overall.

EYS believes it is vital that there is cognisance of this as the new Care Service is built. Inspection and scrutiny are such important aspects of a well-functioning ELC sector and the sector, the children, families, and staff need to be given value in their own right.