



EARLY YEARS SCOTLAND STRATEGIC PLAN 2022 – 2025



INTRODUCTION

A strategic plan, by its very nature, is about planning effectively, and this Early Years Scotland (EYS) Strategic Plan for 2022 - 2025 sets out our shared aims, commitments and priorities for the next three years.

The COVID-19 pandemic understandably brought many challenges and continues to have an impact on our EYS members and children and families we support, and emerging data shows that the pandemic adversely affected black, ethnic and minority communities in particular. Whilst COVID-19 also brought many challenges for the organisation, it also presented some opportunities. In the creation of this plan, we reflected on the positive changes and new ways of working that have emerged as a result of the pandemic.

By embracing these changes, and combining them with our understanding of effective early years pedagogy and practice, we are in a good position to move forward with our vision. As a learning organisation, we are committed to thinking holistically, and adapting to the needs of all stakeholders accordingly.

The last EYS Strategic Plan covering the period 2021 – 2022 detailed a range of outcomes across our four key strands of activity, and for the purpose of this next three-year plan, we will continue to demonstrate our strategic objectives under the same four areas described within the plan. We made positive progress regarding the majority of our outcomes within our previous plan. We aim to continue to build upon these, as well as considering new and additional areas of support for members, the early learning and childcare (ELC) workforce, and all those who work for, and on behalf of, our babies and youngest children, from pre-birth to five years in Scotland.

OUR WORK

EYS is committed to providing the very best start in life for each and every child in Scotland.

The rights of babies and children must be recognised and upheld in all aspects of their lives. EYS is fully committed to embedding this in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and will do so across all strands of our work.

We are Scotland's principal national organisation that is dedicated to, and has a strong specialism in, the early years of babies and young children's lives, from pre-birth to five. We have high expectations of, and aspirations for, each and every child, believing them to be naturally curious and creative, as well as extremely competent, capable thinkers and learners.

Our services aim to strengthen and improve confidence, attachment, transitions, interactions, shared learning, the home learning environment, and attainment.

All staff are committed to career-long professional learning, or are fully qualified early years professionals with a strong track record in ELC policy and practice.

Our key responsibility is to listen to and take account of the views, preferences and needs of children and their families. We work closely with children, parents, carers and the workforce, to support them to remove the barriers of inequality due to, for example, gender, ethnicity or faith, so that children are loved, nurtured, ambitious, have a fair start and grow to realise both their potential and their aspirations.

We are committed as an organisation to continue to collaborate on and develop robust and meaningful partnership working opportunities across statutory, private and third sector services. We aim to extend our engagement with our statutory colleagues to further enhance our reach, scope and representation as a leading national third sector organisation.

Throughout the next three years of this strategic plan, we will also be focusing on family engagement and support, so vital in the context of high-quality ELC. In particular, engaging with families from diverse, ethnic, cultural and linguistic backgrounds will ensure to that our practice is more culturally responsive. This valuable strand of engagement will be incorporated in all of our services for children and families. EYS is acutely aware of the challenges Scottish families are currently facing regarding cost-of-living increases and we are committed to supporting the Scottish Government's Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan, 2022 – 2026.

EYS is also committed to raising awareness of, and embedding a practical understanding of, climate change and sustainability. We will do this within our organisation and as an external membership representative to the ELC sector. We will look at ways to encourage, share, and learn from good practice to support the sector and our own organisation to support this growing policy area.

EARLY YEARS SCOTLAND: 4 STRANDS OF ACTIVITY

1. Working Directly with Young Children and their Families

Our range of Stay Play and Learn services offer family-focused learning experiences to encourage and develop family relationships through a play-based approach.

Our qualified early years practitioners engage with young children and their parents/carers to reduce the poverty-related attainment gap by strengthening and improving confidence, attachments, interactions, the home learning environment, transitions, shared learning and attainment. We work in a range of prisons across Scotland facilitating programmes to support children affected by parental imprisonment. The EYS Family Visitor Centre focuses on providing a welcome and safe environment for children and families, with a strong focus on providing vital family support.

2. Membership and Support for ELC Settings, Groups, Professionals and Students

We offer a number of services and membership benefits for professionals who work for, and on behalf of, Scotland's youngest children. We also support parents to establish, run and improve unregulated groups in local communities. EYS will advocate on behalf of the sector to ensure children and families have access to the services they need.

Our membership benefits include curriculum, inspection and business support, professional learning opportunities, regular magazines and bulletins, a members' area on our website, specialist insurance and legal advice, policy templates, access to our helpline and much more. We also offer membership to parents/carers, students, practitioners, childminders, local authorities, voluntary sector and national organisations, companies and businesses, ELC settings, parent and toddler groups, primary schools, colleges and universities.

Commitment to consultation with members is a priority and will inform positive changes.

3. Professional Learning Academy

The pandemic has had a profound effect on all aspects of our lives and there is no doubt that it has changed our approach to offering and delivering career-long professional learning. Quality remains at the heart of provision for our youngest children and we maintain our commitment to offer diverse opportunities for all those dedicated to ELC, including professionals, local authorities, colleges, universities and partners, and parents.

Our offer of online professional learning was accelerated by the pandemic. The Online Learning Platform, made possible through funding from the William Grant Foundation, has proved to be a vital tool for those working with our youngest children. Geographical barriers will continue to be removed as we adapt to the changing learning needs of stakeholders. Increased engagement with virtual delivery will allow the Professional Learning Team to develop multi-mode learning opportunities. As the sector adapts to this array of learning options, we are committed to the design, development, and delivery of affordable, accessible and relevant high-quality learning.

Facilitating the creation of collaborative learning communities across the country remains a priority and an adaptive approach embraced during the pandemic puts the Academy in an optimal position to achieve success and positive outcomes for all stakeholders.

The EYS Professional Learning Academy will become a creative and diverse 'Centre of Excellence'. It will become a hub to support multiple partners and EYS activity.

4. Policy, Practice and Legislation: Advice and Advocacy

We are committed to ensuring that we remain connected and fully engaged with developments, initiatives and debates on matters relating to young children across the country.

As EYS is a membership and service-delivery organisation, we have a responsibility to ensure that our children and members' voices are represented at local and national level. A significant strand of our work therefore lies in informing, influencing, supporting and challenging early years legislation, policy and practice, to ensure Scotland's children have the best start in life.

COVID-19 and the challenges it has presented has highlighted the pivotal role EYS plays in representing the voice of the sector, families, and, most importantly, babies and our youngest children.

Ahead of the 2021 Scottish Parliament elections, EYS produced our latest manifesto, which was developed and created on behalf of, and in collaboration with, children under the age of five, their families, and the ELC sector. This document set out five key themes for early years. These were:

- sector sustainability
- value our workforce
- children and families
- health and wellbeing and
- supporting effective transitions.

Each theme focuses on specific 'asks' which will support the ELC sector. These include recovery following COVID-19 and implementation of the 1,140 hours expansion; the creation of a National Pay Scale for the sector; and the introduction of an ELC equivalent to the Pupil Equity Fund (PEF), targeting specific funding to those in low-income areas. Our manifesto is ambitious, but each 'ask' would considerably improve the lives of the children and families we work with, as well as the sector overall.

ELC CONTEXT IN SCOTLAND

Scotland continues to realise a policy commitment that truly appreciates the importance of the early years - focussing on prevention and early intervention. Like so many third sector organisations, EYS has been flexible and diverse in approaches to supporting children and families across the country. As we look ahead to the next three years, we remain committed to ensuring policy is implemented for the good of all young children and their families.

High quality ELC is a strong predictor of positive outcomes and improved life chances for children.

The pandemic highlighted our position as a voice for a sector committed to providing excellent learning environments. As a national membership organisation we guided the sector through interpretation and implementation of guidance whilst securing our position as a conduit for our members to have their thoughts heard by key partners, including the Scottish Government. This is a position we will continue to uphold.

The Scottish Government's commitment to increase funded ELC provision from 600 hours to 1,140 hours by August 2021 was impacted by the pandemic. EYS maintained a strong connection with the sector as, together, we navigated the impact of COVID-19. We will learn from these challenges and they will inform our organisational direction.

The expansion of funded ELC provision will see entitlement for all children aged under three. Extensive research acknowledges the benefits of high-quality provision and recognises that outcomes are improved when this goes hand-in-hand with a rich home learning environment. We will ensure our organisational objectives address the changing needs of children, families and the sector as a result of this change in policy. Our offer of professional learning for the sector will align with and encompass this policy area.

Extended funded entitlement must ensure connections with families remain a priority. Families must be supported to offer a nurturing home environment, regardless of socio economic backgrounds. Opportunities to encourage and guide parents most in need of support remain a priority for our own organisation and across the sector. This support can be diverse and may be in relation to parenting approaches or supporting parents in educational or employment pathways. Fundamentally, we will strive to support the sector and children and families, cohesively and meaningfully, to experience the best care and learning experiences.

EYS believes it is well placed to support the Scottish Government's expansion of ELC whilst playing a pivotal role in championing current priorities and agendas across the sector. Babies and our youngest children deserve the commitment and compassion of the adults in their world to ensure that high-quality provision is a priority. Families experiencing difficulties or disadvantage must be supported positively.

ASPIRATION AND VISION

Aspiration

We aspire to see a Scotland where every baby and young child's life chances are enriched by high-quality experiences and an equal and excellent start in life. We are committed to being diverse, responsive and creative in an ever-changing landscape within the ELC sector.

Vision

Through listening and being responsive to the needs of children, families and all those who work for, and on behalf of, our youngest children, we seek to improve the lives of Scotland's children, both now and in the future.

VALUES

It is our organisational responsibility to support everyone who is engaged, directly or indirectly, in the provision of ELC for Scotland's youngest children. Our specialist early years expertise places us in a strong position to ensure that all children can have the very best start in life, leading to a better future. Everything that we do must be of the highest quality, in collaboration with our partners. In so doing, we endeavour to be open, transparent and always deliver in accordance with all commitments we make.

Our determination to achieve our objectives and continue to improve, means that we always strive for the highest standards to ensure that our contributions impact positively on the life chances of young children and their families.

We focus our collective organisational efforts solely on benefitting Scotland's youngest children and their families. As we develop and flourish together, we will become increasingly an organisation that staff feel ownership of, are proud to be part of, and where people want to work and participate and contribute to the early years landscape.





STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

Strategic Objective 1: Working Directly with Young Children and their Families

1a – Communities

To support children to experience high-quality ELC provision at the earliest stage in their lives, we will work directly with children and families through our Stay Play and Learn programme, delivered virtually and in-person in a range of settings. EYS provides individualised support to children and families, passing on our early years knowledge and experience through our peer support model.

EYS's monitoring and evaluation frameworks will track and support the measurement of the performance indicators listed below, including providing evidence of progress through three case studies each quarter for each strategic objective.

Performance Indicators:

- 75% of children demonstrate increased emotional and physical wellbeing.
- 75% of children demonstrate improved wellbeing and engagement.
- 60% of parents demonstrate increased confidence in their parenting skills, an improved understanding of the importance of attachment, as well as communication with and responsiveness to their child's needs.

1b – Prisons

To support children and families affected by parental imprisonment to experience high-quality provision at a significant time in their lives, we will support children and families through delivery of our Prison Programmes and Family Visitor Centre.

Performance Indicators:

- 75% of children demonstrate increased emotional and physical wellbeing through regular contact with their parent/carer in prison.
- 75% of children demonstrate improved wellbeing and engagement.

Strategic Objective 2: Membership and Support for ELC Settings, Groups, Professionals and Students

2a – Membership

To support more members to deliver high quality services, for children and families, both face to face and virtually.

2b – Development and Support Service

To support and guide more members to deliver high-quality services for children, EYS Development and Support Officers (DSO) will increase their dedicated support for the ELC sector, both face-to-face and virtually.

Performance Indicators:

- An annual 10% increase in membership numbers.
- Increase Development and Support Officer contracts with local authorities by one new local authority per annum.
- 80% more members report increased satisfaction with the EYS membership and support services.

Strategic Objective 3: Professional Learning Academy

3a – Professional Learning Sessions for Professionals, ELC Settings, Parents and Students

To improve and enhance the quality of ELC experiences for children, we will increase the delivery of high-quality professional learning through the EYS Professional Learning Academy. Multiple modes of delivery will be offered through online courses, virtual sessions, in-person and hybrid sessions.

3b – Conferences and Events

To improve and enhance the workforce capacity to deliver high-quality ELC provision for children we will deliver key events and contribute to partner events nationally either in person, virtually, or via a hybrid model.

Performance Indicators:

- A 15% increase in the number of professionals attending learning events annually.
- 80% more professionals report that they are highly satisfied with our professional learning support.

Strategic Objective 4: Policy, Practice and Legislation: Advice and Advocacy

4. The organisation will use this EYS Strategic Plan and its key priorities to advocate on behalf of our members to the Scottish Government, but also to encourage cross-party support for the changes we wish to implement.

Performance Indicators:

- Policy and decision makers demonstrate and report making use of our evidence in policies, strategies, or legislation.
- EYS will conduct a Board and organisational climate change audit and subsequent carbon-reduction targets which will also support members to take action accordingly.
- ELC services clearly reflect what children and families say matter to them.
- EYS will have active participation in a minimum of five national and strategic working groups annually to ensure that our members' voices are strategically shared.
- EYS will publish 20 policy blogs and update annually to raise awareness of relevant ELC themes.
- EYS will commit to engaging in a minimum of four ELC consultations annually to ensure we share the voices of members, children and families nationally.

IN SUMMARY

In order for EYS to sustain and deliver the diverse range of services that improve outcomes for Scotland's youngest children, and achieve our strategic objectives, we will continue to secure core funding from the Scottish Government, and other key sources, both locally and nationally.

Our commitment to collaborative and creative partnerships remains a priority and we will build upon learning experiences to ensure that forward thinking and progressive approaches underpin our organisational objectives.





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