

Early Learning and Childcare: Outdoor learning

Introduction

The Scottish government has now published its [guide](#) for creating outdoor play experiences in early learning and childcare. The government is committed to including increased opportunities for outdoor play in its early learning and childcare expansion programme. The guide is also aimed at schools and out of school care services. It is likely that the guide will mean that employers will move ahead with plans to expand outdoor learning. This may lead to ELC staff and other UNISON members being asked to spend increased time working outdoors. It is therefore likely that branches will be working with employers across education teams regarding changes to members work.

The guide

The guide was developed by Inspiring Scotland and the Care Inspectorate. The guide covers all types of outdoor learning settings:

Indoor settings: standard settings with a building and outdoor space

Indoor/outdoor settings: where Space to Grow has been implemented creating 20% extra capacity in the setting

Dispersed or satellite settings: a setting where local parks, woodlands etc are used for outdoor learning

Outdoor setting: provision is entirely outdoors with minimal infrastructure

As well as identifying appropriate spaces the guide covers a range of issues:

- travelling to sites,
- providing shelter,
- boundaries,
- hand washing and toileting,
- sleep and rest,
- clothing and kit,
- wildlife,
- food and water,
- fire

Briefing 102 highlighted potential bargaining issues around outdoor learning. This new guide gives more detail on what outdoor learning will look like and gives an idea of issues that members may have concerns about and that branches could potentially be negotiating. This guide will help branches identify issues so they can discuss them with education members and be prepared for changes that employers are planning.

KEY POINTS:

- **The Scottish government is doubling the free childcare allowance to 1140 hours a year from August 2020**
- **As part of this expansion there will be increased time spent on outdoor learning**
- **The changes outlined in the new guide have the potential to substantially change work in early years and other education settings**



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Key Issues

- How much time ELC workers will be expected to spend outside in non-outdoor settings?
- Will all staff be expected to work outside for long periods of time?
- Will all staff be expected to work for some time in entirely outdoor settings or will there be a specific “outdoor ELC worker” role for these setting?
- What shelter will be provided for outdoor learning activities? i.e. on wet, windy or very hot days
- What protective clothing and footwear will be provided for staff to enable them to work safely outdoors?
- What seating will be provided for staff?
- What will happen in extreme weather conditions, where will children be placed when the outdoor space cannot be used?
- How will paperwork etc be undertaken in outdoor settings with minimal infrastructure?
- Toilet and hand washing facilities: How will access and dignity for staff be maintained. The guide states that toilets do not have to be “plumbed in” this could be an issue for many members particularly regarding periods, particularly when unpredictable for example at menopause or those with disabilities and health issues such as IBS.
- What training will staff get in order to deliver outdoor learning? Outdoor learning is not just doing what you do inside outside. It is a specialised learning experience.
- What training will be provided round health and safety outdoors?
- Will training be provided regarding food hygiene in outdoor settings
- Will jobs be re-evaluated to recognise the new working environment and the new skills needed to deliver outdoor learning?
- There is some detail on getting children to understand the boundaries on their time in outdoor space but there is nothing about the risks from other users in these public spaces. How will this be risk assessed and children kept safe from both potential predators or for example a non custodial parent trying to gain access?

Action for Branches

This list is not exhaustive. Branches will be able to get more detail on the detailed plans in their authority. This will enable them to understand where the issues are locally. These changes may also offer recruitment opportunities as non-members concerned about these changes may now consider joining UNISON .

Branches are already meeting regularly with employers regarding the expansion of the early years service. In order to support this work branches are reminded that they are entitled to send delegates to the Education Issues Group (EIG) meetings. These can be members who work in schools or early years setting or stewards who support education members in the branch. They take place 4 times a year and lead our work in this area. This years meetings are on February 28th, May 22nd, September 11th and November 27th. Lorraine Thomson from the Scottish Local Government committee and Stirling Branch Secretary chairs the group and is happy to discuss the group if you have any questions.

The Group is also focusing on the challenges members face round supporting pupils with Additional Support Needs and violence in schools. So again branches are encouraged to send members with an interest in these areas.

If you cannot send a delegate please continue to send details of your employers’ plans for the early years expansion to k.sillars@unison.co.uk

Further info

The guidance

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/out-play-practical-guidance-creating-outdoor-play-experiences-children/>

Briefing 102 ELC delivery model

<https://unison-scotland.org/bargainin-g-briefing-102-early-learning-childcare-delivery-model-for-2020/>

UNISON response to the ELC Delivery Model

<http://www.unison-scotland.org/early-learning-and-childcare-service-model-for-2020/>

Response to the consultation on the Blueprint for ELC

<http://www.unison-scotland.org/library/Expansion-of-ELC-january-2017.pdf>



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