



# **A Blueprint for 2020: The expansion of early learning and childcare in Scotland**

**The UNISON Scotland Submission to the Scottish Government January 2017**

## **Introduction**

UNISON is the largest trade union in Scottish public services. We have a long history of campaigning for comprehensive free-at-the-point-of-use childcare. Members are often working parents struggling to find and to pay for childcare and are the key workers in this sector delivering childcare and early years education mainly but not exclusively in the public sector. Members therefore have a unique perspective on this service meaning they can make a valuable contribution to the policymaking process UNISON Scotland welcomes the opportunity to respond to the consultation on A Blueprint for 2020: the expansion of early learning and childcare in Scotland

## **Response**

UNISON welcomes the Scottish government's proposals to expand early learning and childcare. It is an important step in both tackling poverty and the attainment gap that harms children who live in poverty and our society as a whole. We need to make sure that we learn the lessons of the adult care sector where we now have a fragmented service, which is costly and hard for users to navigate, with varying quality of service and a race to the bottom for staff terms and conditions.

The private sector is already struggling to deliver childcare. There is little scope for them to pay the living wage and pension contributions, far less the pay required to retain qualified staff over a long-term and make a profit. The recent Nesta report Innovation in Childcare (Jill Ritter July 2016) states that "profit margins are tight for many providers". So tight are they that the "innovation" they offer as a route forward is to use unpaid volunteers and parents to presumably to maintain profit margins.

Childcare should be provided free at the point of use by the public sector. The current system is patchy, complex and expensive. Parents in Scotland pay 27% of their household income on childcare, compared to the OECD average of 12%. We need a radical overhaul of childcare provision to ensure that it provides what families actually want: a safe nurturing environment for their children doesn't cost the earth.

Workers in Scotland are currently facing a cost of living crisis. Where wages are stagnant or falling and while some costs are now falling years of price increases for essentials like electricity and food mean that money is still very tight. For many with young children the high cost of childcare is either a barrier to work or leaves many women working to only to keep a foot in the workplace. The UK has a relatively low participation of women in the workforce by EU standards. A Mumsnet survey showed that 67 per cent of mothers in work and 64 per cent of those not working say the high cost of childcare is a barrier to taking on more employment.

It's not just the high cost of childcare which creates a barrier for women trying to return to work. The system is patchy and hard to navigate. Places are hard find. Until you know what specific childcare is available then it's impossible to say what hours you will be able to work and vice versa. This is hard for those hoping to negotiate changing working patterns returning to their job and almost impossible for those trying to find new work.

There is no one place to go to find out what's available: local authorities don't even have to keep a list of what childcare is available, what it costs or monitor what demand for care is in their areas. There is no statutory obligation to provide/organise childcare for under-threes except for those whose parents are in receipt of certain benefits or are "looked after". Many working parents are forced to use private sector nurseries because they cannot buy extra hours on top of their free hours in local authority nurseries. Others are reliant on family and friends.

Public delivery is the most cost effective way forward: money won't be lost to profit, and is where we will be best able to ensure a coordinated and comprehensive service. Public delivery also makes it easier to ensure that the workforce is properly paid and well qualified. Public delivery also gives better protection to childcare workers who need all the same rights and opportunities, for example flexible working, as other workers. Good terms and conditions are how you attract and keep skilled workers. The recent JRF programme paper: *Creating an Anti-poverty Childcare System*<sup>1</sup> states that a shift to supply side funding for pre-school childcare services is the most effective route forward:

"International evidence and the best examples of high quality provision in the UK suggest that the most effective approach to funding pre-school childcare is supply side funding, where investment is made directly in service. This approach provides the means to offer universal access to services and effectively shape the quality, affordability and flexibility" (Executive Summary page 3)

"the case for supply funded childcare is simple: it is the most effective means of delivering reliable access to affordable, flexible and high quality childcare regardless of ability to pay" (Executive Summary page 3)

UNISON is particularly concerned that the government is considering voucher type schemes or extra funding for the private sector. Not only does this have a high risk of creating a service based on low paid and unqualified staff it risks creating a two tier system where those who can afford to pay more on top of the vouchers will have access to better nurseries than those on low incomes. Vouchers also add extra complexity and administrative costs to the system. Vouchers will do the opposite of closing the attainment gap.

One of the many advantages of public sector provision is the ability to better co-ordinate childcare with other services, for example where an extended day nursery is co-located with a primary school on the same campus. This type of delivery means that parents only have to leave and collect their children (aged up to 12 years) from one place. This also improves the transition to formal education at 5 as they are already familiar with the school. Examples include

Lime Tree Day Nursery – Merrylee Primary School

Shaw Mor Family Learning Centre – Tinto Primary School

Kelvinpark Family Learning Centre – Hillhead Primary School

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<sup>1</sup> JRF programme paper: *Creating an Anti-poverty Childcare System*  
<https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/creating-anti-poverty-childcare-system>

Govan Family Learning Centre – Pirie Park Primary School

Knightswood Early Years Centre – St Ninian’s Primary School

Garthamlock Family Learning – St Rose of Lima Primary School

While childcare should enable parents to work its focus must be on what’s best for children and their development. Childcare cannot and is not separate from learning. You cannot care for children properly without educating them nor can you educate without caring for them. Expanding childcare cannot be at the expense of quality otherwise the Scottish government’s aim of closing the attainment gap will not only not be met it will get worse.

Currently staff only have to be “working towards” qualifications to deliver the service. UNISON believes that this should have only been a transitional standard when first introduced and that staff should have to hold the set qualifications rather than working towards them. That does not mean we do not support in-work training but that those who are in training should be “supernumerary”. UNISON is calling on the Scottish government to set a reasonable end date for this practice. There also needs to be much closer monitoring of the training staff working towards qualifications are receiving for example attendance at college for modern apprentices. The Scottish government’s own report<sup>2</sup> shows the only reason that third and private sectors services are cheaper is because of lower wages which to some extent reflect the lower levels of qualifications across their staff. It is by ensuring a quality service not just “free hours” that will ensure that the expanded service meets the needs of families.

All the evidence indicates that that having well qualified staff, including staff with a degree level qualification working in a nursery is key to good outcomes for the children. The government’s research<sup>3</sup> shows that the public sector has fully qualified staff whereas the private sector is much more reliant on those “working towards” their qualifications. Many staff move to the public sector when the opportunity arises, attracted to by the better pay. This means the public sector also has more experienced staff and less turnover all of which mean children in the public sector have access to a better quality service.

The childcare workforce, particularly in the private sector, is not well paid. The knowledge and skills required, as with much work traditionally done by women, are not widely recognised or rewarded in the market. This needs to be challenged. Pay must reflect the skills, knowledge and reflective practice required to do the job. There is a substantial pay gap between the sectors. A brief survey of vacancies showed that the public sector is offering jobs at approx £11 per hour while the range in the private and voluntary sector was £7 to a high of £8.50. Where jobs were offered with an annual salary the public sector range was £19 to £23,000 a rate more in line with that being offered for managers in the private sector where some posts offered a £16,000 to manage a nursery. Since our survey of job adverts the Scottish government’s research<sup>4</sup> shows that the public sector spends 80% more than the private sector and two thirds more than the

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<sup>2</sup> Scottish Government Financial Review of early learning and childcare: the current landscape sept 2016

<sup>3</sup> Financial Review of early learning and childcare in Scotland Scottish Government Sept 2016

<sup>4</sup> Financial Review of early learning and childcare in Scotland Scottish Government Sept 2016

voluntary sector. Out with the public sector 80% of practitioners and 50% of supervisors are paid less than the living wage. This is because many are under 25 and therefore have lower legal minimum wage rates. The table indicates just how low wages are for many childcare workers.

<b>Category of staff</b>	<b>Current rates</b>
<b>Aged 25 and over</b>	£7.20
<b>Aged 21 - 24</b>	£6.95
<b>Aged 18 - 20</b>	£5.55
<b>Aged 16 - 17</b>	£4.00
<b>Apprentices</b>	£3.40

While UNISON supports the living wage campaign this is a minimum standards for wages and is too low to reflect the skills of a qualified workforce. The welcome expansion of childcare must not be on the backs of a low paid workforce. Only public delivery paid for via taxation can support appropriate wages for the skills required to deliver high quality childcare.

Delivering high quality childcare needs a well qualified workforce. This requires decent pay and terms and conditions. This largely female workforce faces all the same challenges as other working women including balancing their own caring responsibilities with work and the high costs of childcare. Childcare workers need access to flexible part-time working. Currently 52% of the childcare workforce works part-time. We see no reason why this will/should change. Many choose this work because it fits in with their own caring responsibilities. There needs to be a substantial increase in staff numbers to cope with both the extra hours the current children will now attend for but also the extra children who take up the service. As many staff will want to work part-time the number of actual employees will be higher than the FTE figure.

Qualifications and career progression are essential to attract and keep experienced staff in the sector. This will require training and ongoing professional development. Cuts and centralisation in FE will impact on colleges' ability to delivery this training. Meeting the longer term aspiration requires planning and investment in training now.

The degree level early years qualification and the recent clarification that it qualifies holders for leadership roles are welcome. Gender segregation in the workforce and its impact on the gender pay gap is a key issue in Scotland and just as there needs to be support for girls in schools to consider a wider set of job options but boys should also be encouraged to consider childcare as a career. Improving wages will go a long way to attracting more men into the sector.

Delivery of the new extra hours will require adequate funding. Working with children isn't just about the time spent with the child. Workers also have to plan, evaluate, and monitor learning and keep detailed records of each child's progress. There needs to be wider recognition of what these jobs actually involve and adequate funding for the staffing levels and hours of work required to do the job.

Extending free childcare should not be used to force women into paid work. Families need time to look after their own children and a fair work/life balance. Developing the right childcare cannot be separated from improved maternity leave and flexible working rights. The workplace penalty for motherhood is substantial. The answer is to change workplaces: a year's paid maternity leave, flexible working, part-time work and paternity leave will reduce the impact of motherhood on women workers and reduce the gender pay gap. Those who look after their own children full-time should also have that work and the skills required recognised when they attempt to return to work.

**Question 1: How do we ensure children are fully supported at the transition stages throughout their early-learner journey? What support should be provided to ensure that the ELC workforce and teachers have the skills, knowledge and capacity to support transitions?**

The way to ensure that childcare staff can support children is through investment in training and appropriate wages to reflect the qualifications needed to do the job. Child development in the new range of qualifications doesn't appear to be a core element but an optional one. Given child development is a key part of the job this should be a compulsory part of any qualifications and should cover pre birth to 7 years.

There will need to be substantial investment not just in nurseries but also in further education colleges to ensure there is capacity to both train new staff and for continued professional development for all staff throughout their careers.

Currently staff only have to be "working towards" qualifications to deliver the service. UNISON believes that this should have only been a transitional standard when first introduced and that staff should have to hold the set qualifications rather than working towards them. That does not mean we do not support in-work training but that those who are in training should be "supernumerary". UNISON is calling on the Scottish government to set a reasonable end date for this practice. There also needs to be much closer monitoring of the training staff working towards qualifications are receiving for example attendance at college for modern apprentices. It is by ensuring a quality service not just "free hours" that will ensure that the expanded service meets the needs of children and their families.

**Question 2: What support is required to ensure that the ELC workforce have the skills, knowledge and capacity to deliver high quality provision for two year olds? How can the ELC sector best meet the specific learning, developmental and environmental needs of two year olds? What approach should be taken on the transition for these children when they turn three?**

In the past qualifications covered child development from birth to 7 so our members are already trained to work across the age range and those in extended provision still do.

Those who work with 3 to 5 years olds may need to refresh their skills and knowledge if they are to work with two year olds (or younger children). Again this will require investment in appropriate training and time to study.

Transitions are of course important times for children that is why it is important that delivery is in the public sector to ensure a seamless transition both through their nursery journey but on into primary school. There are many examples where existing nurseries have been adapted to accommodate two year olds: Elmcroft Nursery, Kincardine Nursery, Bonnybroom Nursery, Pikeman Nursery , Dennistoun Early Years, Westercraigs Nursery, Rockfield Nursery. They offer an excellent model both supporting the needs of two year olds but also the transitions.

**Question 3: How can the qualification routes and career paths that are open to early learning and childcare practitioners be developed to ensure that the ELC sector is seen as an attractive long-term career route?**

As stated above the best way to move forward is to ensure that the workforce is fully qualified and rewarded appropriately for those qualifications. There also needs to be a clear career path and support from employers for continued development and advanced qualifications. This must include paying course fees and time to study for those who wish to gain further qualifications whether that is a degree in childhood practice (or other suitable degree) or shorter courses on child development or specific learning difficulties or behaviour challenges.

**Question 4: How can we increase the diversity of the ELC workforce, in particular increasing the gender balance in the sector?**

Improving wages will be the most effective route to improving gender balance within the sector. Much more also needs to be done in schools and across wider society to break down gender stereotypes round job roles and subject choices within schools. Expanding delivery in the public sector will also mean that the Equality Duties apply. Job and college adverts need to be targeted for example to attract more male applicants and more applicants from minority ethnic communities.

**Question 5: How can payment of the Living Wage and wider Fair Work practices be encouraged across the ELC sector?**

The government can legislate to ensure that these practices are mandatory across the sector. UNISON believes that all staff working in the sector should be fully qualified this means that the living wage is well below an appropriate level of pay for qualified staff and shows limited ambition. Higher wages restrict the ability of the private sector to make a profit. The Nesta report confirms that the private sector is struggling to make a profit their suggestion that introducing unpaid workers into the service shows that the market cannot provide a quality service with decent wages. Only a publically provided service can achieve the standards required to ensure a high quality service that will achieve the government's aim of closing the attainment gap.

**Question 6: What actions should be taken to support increased access to outdoor learning, exercise and play?**

UNISON believes outdoor play is an essential part of child development. Increasing access requires investment in the nurseries that children attend so that as many as possible have access to outdoors. We also have a range of parks and public spaces that could offer excellent outdoor activities but poor public transport and lack of toilet facilities restricts the opportunities for their use. Improving access to public toilets and transport including disabled toilets would be a very cost effective way of expanding opportunities. Given our climate ensuring nurseries have appropriate clothing available for outdoor play all year round will ensure that all children can access the opportunities not just those whose parents can afford the clothes.

**Question 7: How could accountability arrangements for early learning and childcare be improved?**

Ensuring that the service is delivered via local government will ensure local democratic accountability. The current parent council/forum system could then be extended into the early years services.

**Question 8: What factors must be considered in delivering flexible ELC provision, while continuing to ensure a high quality service? To what extent could funded ELC support parents and carers with non-standard working hours, such as working shifts and weekends?**

UNISON members are very often the parents working the non standards hours. Many health services are open 24/7 365 days of the year and many local government services are increasingly delivered out with standard hours. We need to ensure that parents have more and better access to family friendly working when they have small children and look at imaginative solutions for those who work non-standard hours which centre round children.

Flexible childcare still needs to ensure that children have access to high quality staff and have consistent contact with their key worker. Public sector nurseries need to be open from 8 til 6 and parents should be able to pay for extra hours in their child's nursery rather than having to use alternatives out with current 18 hours or school hours going forward. Sadly the Scottish government hasn't yet achieved 100% access to the current "free hours" therefore it is essential that we don't let the search for the right service out with eight until six delay us from getting the service right for those with standard hours.

**Question 9: How can we ensure fair and sustainable funding for all providers offering the ELC entitlement?**

The recent JRF programme paper: Creating and Anti-poverty Childcare System<sup>5</sup> states that a shift to supply side funding for pre-school childcare services is the most effective route forward:

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Public delivery is the most cost effective way forward: money won't be lost to profit, and is where we will be best able to ensure a coordinated and comprehensive service. Public delivery also makes it easier to ensure that the workforce is properly paid and well qualified. Public delivery also gives better protection to childcare workers who need all the same rights and opportunities, for example flexible working, as other workers. Appropriate pay and good terms and conditions are how you attract and keep skilled workers. There is therefore no need for a strategy to fund other providers.

Vouchers systems add complexity and administrative costs to childcare systems. They lead to fragmented services where it is hard to set and maintain standards. Vouchers increase inequality with the wealthiest able to purchase higher quality services. This will widen the attainment gap at the point where it is the most crucial point to start closing it.

**Question 10: What more can we do to promote and support the involvement of childminders in the entitlement to ELC? What are the barriers, if any, to becoming a childminder? How can we ensure quality while preserving the unique value of home-based care?**

No comment

**Question 11: How do we ensure that the voice of children and their families is heard as we plan this expansion?**

The Scottish government should ensure that services users and children are consulted. They must though ensure that it is not just the well-off and well-connected who participate in the process. There is often discussion of hard to reach groups but these people are in fact seldom listened too. The Scottish government needs to work in partnership with a range of organisations for example anti poverty groups and minority ethnic communities and disabled people's organisations to ensure that as wide a range of voices are heard.

**Question 12: How can we ensure equality of access for all children? What barriers do children with disabilities and additional support needs currently face in accessing early learning and childcare? What further action is required to address these barriers?**

UNISON believes that there needs to be appropriate funding and increased training for staff to support the mainstreaming of children with disabilities into both nurseries and schools. Staff are also expected to take on personal and medical support needs of disabled children across schools and nurseries with very little training and support. Too little attention has been given to the additional staffing and support required for children with disabilities to fully participate in mainstream education. Staff need specific training

for example on autism to ensure they can support those children and support other children to understand and interact with children with disabilities.

**Question 13: How can we support higher take-up rates amongst eligible two year olds, and other groups less likely to access entitlement?**

This will require better support for the *named person* and improved co-ordination across all those supporting families of eligible two year olds. This is another reason why UNISON believed that expansion of childcare is best delivered in the public sector where the rest of the staff involved already work.

**Question 14: How can more social enterprises, and third sector providers, be encouraged to enter the early learning and childcare sector?**

UNISON does not believe that this is an appropriate route forward to expand the childcare service

**Question 15: How can the governance arrangements support more community-led ELC provision particularly in remote and rural areas?**

UNISON does not believe that this is an appropriate route forward to expand the childcare service. It also seems odd to just copy a question from the education governance consultation. This does not seem the best way to co-ordinate the two consultations

**Question 16: How can the broader system for promoting, accessing, and registering for a place in an ELC setting be improved? Please give examples of any innovative and accessible systems currently in place?**

UNISON believes that by bringing the service wholly into local government the current system for accessing/registering for schools can be extended into nurseries.

**Question 17: Do parents and carers face any barriers in accessing support with the costs of ELC provision (beyond the funded entitlement)? What more can we do to ensure additional hours are affordable?**

The answer is to fight poverty and low pay through decent wages and to change workplaces to create a fair work life balance for families: a year's paid maternity leave, flexible working, part-time work and paternity leave will reduce the impact of motherhood on women workers and reduce the gender pay gap.

The Scottish government could also use its new powers to increase child benefit and to introduce an anti poverty strategy. Poverty Alliance manifesto would be an excellent place to start. [http://www.povertyalliance.org/userfiles/files/TPA\\_Manifesto.pdf](http://www.povertyalliance.org/userfiles/files/TPA_Manifesto.pdf)

**Question 18: How can ELC providers, particularly private and third sector providers, be encouraged to extend capacity?**

UNISON does not believe that this is an appropriate route forward to expand the childcare service.

**Question 19: What funding model would best support our vision for high quality and flexible ELC provision, which is accessible and affordable for all?**

UNISON is particularly concerned that the government is considering voucher type schemes or extra funding for the private sector. Not only does this have a high risk of creating a service based on low paid and unqualified staff it risks creating a two tier system where those who can afford to pay more on top of the vouchers will have access to better nurseries than those on low incomes. Vouchers also add extra administrative costs to the system and increase the risk of fraud. Vouchers will do the opposite of closing the attainment gap.

The government's own research shows that "cheaper" nurseries are only cheaper because they pay the staff less. And the latest report from Nesta is clear that "profit margins are tight for many providers". They are suggesting volunteers as a route forward to presumably to maintain profit margins. High quality provision requires fully qualified paid staff. If high standards for staff qualifications and pay are not set then we will end up with the same issues that are now causing problems in the care sector. Investing in a high quality childcare service will be expensive but worthwhile. Money cannot be wasted on profit or administering vouchers. The research is clear the only reason other sectors are cheaper than local government delivery is paying staff less. The only way to make decent pay affordable is through public delivery paid for via taxation.

The recent JRF programme paper: *Creating and Anti-poverty Childcare System*<sup>6</sup> states that a shift to supply side funding for pre-school childcare services is the most effective route forward:

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Public delivery is the most cost effective way forward and is where we will be best able to ensure a coordinated and comprehensive service. Public delivery also makes it easier to ensure that the workforce is properly paid and well qualified. Public delivery also gives better protection to childcare workers who need all the same rights and opportunities, for example flexible working, as other workers. Appropriate pay and good terms and conditions are how you attract and keep skilled workers

**Question 20: If it were possible for aspects of the entitlement to be phased in ahead of the full roll out by 2020, how should this be implemented?**

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<sup>6</sup> JRF programme paper: *Creating and Anti-poverty Childcare System*  
<https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/creating-anti-poverty-childcare-system>

Ensuring all parents can access the current entitlement of 18 hours in public sector nurseries should be the government's starting point. As the government moves forward the focus should be on supporting those on low incomes though we see no reason why the government cannot move quickly. The UK government is promising that 30 free-at-the-point-of-use hours will be available for families in England by the end of 2017. 2020 is four years away meanwhile families are struggling to make ends meet.

## **Conclusion**

UNISON is the largest trade union in Scottish public services. We have a long history of campaigning for free at the point of use comprehensive childcare. Members are often working parents struggling to find and to pay for childcare and are the key workers in this sector delivering childcare and early years education mainly but not exclusively in the public sector. UNISON supports the Scottish government's aims of expanding "free" childcare and closing the attainments gap. Done properly these aims offer a route to tackle inequality and poverty and improve the lives of people in Scotland and substantial long term savings to the public purse. Done wrongly they will create a low quality services with a poorly paid workforce and a fragmented and chaotic system and poor child protection adding long term costs to the public sector and making life worse for Scottish families. UNISON Scotland welcomes the opportunity to respond to the consultation on A Blueprint for 2020: the expansion of early learning and childcare in Scotland

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