

Education and Early Years Policy Consultations

Introduction

The Scottish Government has now published 2 consultations on its plans for education and childcare. The first ***Empowering teachers, parents and communities excellence and equity in education*** is seeking views on their plans to change how schools and nurseries are organised/governed and ***A blue print for 2020: the expansion of early learning and childcare in Scotland*** focuses specifically on the proposed expansion of “free” early years education and childcare services. These services are vital for our members: both as the staff who deliver them and as service users. The proposals outlined will also have a significant impact on wider local government structures and funding and so will require significant input from UNISON to the policy process.

Empowering teachers, parents and communities excellence and equity in education: A Governance Review

As highlighted in [policy briefing 80](#) the Scottish Government is proposing to “empower teachers, practitioners, parents, schools and communities” as part of their plan to achieve of their laudable aim of closing the attainment gap between Scotland’s less well-off children and their better-off peers. They are therefore consulting on proposals to shift responsibilities from local government both onto head-teachers and to new regional education bodies. It is clear from the consultation document that this includes both school and early years’ education services. Moves to devolve funding/responsibilities to head teachers could impact on members working in a range of roles in local authorities. Changes could include giving heads greater responsibilities for staffing hours and roles and responsibilities, staff mix within schools and wider roles regarding procurement of services i.e. educational psychologists/speech therapy, cleaning and HR.

The consultation isn’t just about moving responsibilities to schools there are also proposals to move functions and services currently delivered by local authorities and national bodies to new regional bodies so reducing the role of local government in education delivery. UNISON members in England have a great deal of experience of issues following schools moving out of local authority control.

Questions include

What services and support should be delivered by schools? What responsibilities should be devolved to head teachers and head teachers to enable this?

How can governance arrangements support more community-led early learning and childcare provision particularly in remote and rural areas?

What services and support functions should be delivered at a national level?



POLICY BRIEFING

KEY POINTS:

The Scottish Government is proposing

- moving powers from local authorities to both head teachers and regions education boards
- expanding “free” early years and childcare hours to match current primary school hours
- a greater role for the private and third sectors in early years



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A blue print for 2020: the expansion of early learning and childcare in Scotland

Expanding childcare and early education (ELC) is a significant part of the government's plan to close the attainment gap and also to reduce poverty by expanding opportunities for work through making childcare more affordable and creating new jobs in the service. The Scottish government is proposing to increase the number of free (at the point of use) hours of childcare hours to match current school hours and to increase flexibility of provision. The consultation indicates that the Scottish government is looking for "innovative delivery approaches" and for "community led ELC provision". The first minister has also stated that funding will "follow the child" rather than the current system where it is included in the local government budget.

Questions include

How do we ensure that children are fully supported at the transition stages throughout their early learner journey?

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

How can more social enterprises and third sector providers be encouraged to enter the early learning and childcare sector?

UNISON view

UNISON supports the wider aims of closing the attainment gap and reducing poverty and has long campaigned for investment in early years and schools to support those aims. Local authorities provide both economies of scale and specialist support to schools freeing up head teachers to focus on education rather than HR and purchasing/business management. There is a real opportunity to make progress in closing the gap but our experience of changes in England where the role of local authorities in education have been reduced shows that there are also substantial risks from some of these proposals.

Recent research by the Scottish government confirmed our own research that staff outwith the public sector earn substantially less than their public sector counterparts in ELC. Levels of qualification are also lower as many are often "working towards" qualifications rather than fully qualified. The higher salaries in the public sector also mean that staff are more experienced as it is able to recruit and retain staff more effectively than lower paid sectors.

Creating an ELC service by expanding the low paid sectors will not reduce poverty and inequality. Giving children the best start in life requires a highly skilled workforce, this requires appropriate wages not just to retain and reward skilled staff but also to ensure that the staff themselves do not live in poverty while enabling others to earn high salaries elsewhere. The aspiration of delivering the living wage is a low benchmark. We should be aspiring to wages that reflect the skills and qualifications required to deliver high quality ELC.

What is needed is a comprehensive service delivered by a fully qualified workforce, led by practitioners with an appropriate degree qualification. This will require substantial investment in both the services and in colleges and universities to train the extra staff required. The market will not be able to support the level of investment and planning required for expansion particularly in rural areas and in less well off communities. Only the public sector can deliver.

Action for Branches

The Scottish Government's proposals will have a significant impact on local government in general and education staff in particular. Please review the consultations discuss with your members and feedback to the Bargaining and Campaigns team **Please contact Kay Sillars 0141 342 2819**

Further info

A blue print for 2020: the expansion of early learning and childcare in Scotland

<https://consult.scotland.gov.uk/creating-positive-futures/expansion-of-early-learning-and-childcare>

Empowering teachers, parents and communities excellence and equity in education: A Governance Review

<https://consult.scotland.gov.uk/empowering-schools/a-governance-review>

UNISON Scotland Childcare Charter

http://www.unison-scotland.org.uk/educationissues/UNISONScotlandChildcareCharter_Mar2015.pdf



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