



## **UNISON Scotland response**

### **Survey: The Development of Children and Young People NOS SCQF 6,7 and 9**

UNISON is Scotland's largest trade union. UNISON members deliver early years and childcare services across Scotland. We strongly support the principles of National Occupational Standards and hope their introduction to these qualifications would be a step towards recognising the highly specialist nature of this work. However, we emphasise that this specialism must come with commensurate pay and status. We are pleased to be able to respond to the Scottish Social Services Council's survey on making the standards mandatory in early learning and childcare qualifications at SCQF 6, 7 and 9.

**Do you agree that the Development of Children and young people NOS should be mandatory NOS for SVQ Social Services Children and Young People SCQF 6,7, and 9?**

Yes

**Please include feedback to support your response**

UNISON's members work in a variety of roles in education, including in early years education and childcare.

The skills and knowledge required to work in the early years and childcare sector have long been undervalued and underpaid – as is common with work primarily done by women. These proposals to make National Occupational Standards (NOS) relating to childhood development mandatory for early years qualifications could present a step forward in recognising and reflecting the specialism and the vital work of early years practitioners in Scotland but must go hand in hand with job evaluations and pay that is commensurate with this specialism.

The NOS reflect the vital importance of the work done by early years workers – much of what is set out in the standards is already what early years support workers, practitioners, and leads, do in their everyday working day.

At SVQ Level 6 required for early years support workers (that is, the lowest level of qualification required to work in an early years establishment), the NOS sets out that staff should “encourage and support the independence of children or young people to make choices and decisions for themselves and “contribute to positive and encouraging environments”.

At SVQ Level 7, required for early years practitioners, the NOS sets out that they are required to “work in partnership with children or young people and others to plan actions and create

personal learning and development plans” and “implement personal learning and development plans”. These are significant areas of educational work.

St SVQ Level 9, the level required for nursery leads and managers, the standard sets out that staff should “identify and source additional support needed for children or young people with others”, “lead the monitoring and recording of individual progress, ensuring this reflects the holistic development of children or young people”, and “co-ordinate systems, procedures, and practices that support the development of children or young people.”

These standards clearly show how vital the work of early years workers is to support children in the crucial early years, where the foundations of the next generation’s future are laid. This recognition is cautiously welcome. The standards set out what early years practitioners and leads are doing day to day at work. However, the adoption of the standards as mandatory within qualifications should not be used to increase early years workers’ already intense workloads (which have increased following the expansion of funded childcare to 1140 hours) or add complexity and further responsibility to roles with no job evaluation or additional pay.

Workers must also be adequately compensated for this essential work. The childcare workforce, particularly in the private sector, is poorly paid. Pay must reflect the advanced skills and knowledge required to do the job – skills and knowledge which are outlined within the National Occupational Standards at each level. If these standards become mandatory, the roles they pertain to should be evaluated so that their specialism and expertise is accurately and adequately recognised and compensated.

These standards outline the work early years workers must do to plan and evaluate learning and monitor and safeguard the young children attending their setting, completing detailed reports on each child, and delivering support to children with additional support needs. This work requires time ‘off the floor’ – away from the children. Too often, this time simply isn’t available to workers. If these standards are to be mandatory, time to complete the significant work that is involved in delivering child centred reflective practice, and evaluating children’s development and learning, and safeguarding tasks that go along with them, must be built into early years workers’ working days.

The addition of these standards to the SVQ qualification frameworks must not be seen as “job done” when it comes to training for the early years workforce. Many early years workers are ‘working towards’ these qualifications while working in early years settings. Many of the early years and childcare workforce have their own children, other caring responsibilities, or second and third jobs to supplement the low wages of the sector. Night classes or weekend study simply aren’t possible for many workers. Employers must ensure appropriate paid study leave is in place to allow staff to complete these qualifications. Working towards these qualifications is part of staff’s jobs – it must be possible to study for them as part of the working day. This is particularly important if the addition of the NOS requires more study time, evidence collation, or assessment.

Post-qualification, early years workers must have access to protected learning time, to continue to develop their knowledge and practice. This is particularly important given the

increased rates of additional support needs early years workers are reporting dealing with, and the specialist support and practice meeting those needs requires.

Deep cuts to the further education sector have reduced the availability of colleges which can deliver these qualifications. A well-funded and resourced childcare sector cannot exist in a vacuum. It must be supported by better maternity leave policies, flexible working rights, and a properly funded further education sector to deliver the training workers need.

There is also a question about how the addition of these mandatory standards to SVQs would impact workers with historical qualifications. If 'make up' study will be required, paid study time must be available for staff within their working day, and delivery of these extra modules must be accessible.

UNISON's members also work in a variety of educational roles in school settings. Our member working in school support roles have been calling for formal accreditation and training for years. Despite promises from the Scottish government, this training and accreditation has yet to materialise. The Scottish government should introduce a recognised training pathway and accreditation for school support workers to enable career progression and development.

For too long, the skills and knowledge involved in working in the early years and childcare sector have been underpaid and undervalued. The introduction of these standards would be a welcome step towards the recognition of the highly specialist and essential work carried out by the early years and childcare workforce, who are largely women. But recognition alone is not enough. Early years and childcare workers must be paid at a rate that properly compensates the complex, specialist, and essential nature of their work.

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