



Stepping Stones for Families

Sustaining Positive Change

Response to Scottish Government Consultation: “A Blueprint for 2020: Early Learning and Childcare Service Model for 2020”

BL Devine, SSfF Policy Officer, June 2018



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Stepping Stones for Families (SSfF) welcomes this opportunity to contribute our views and perspectives to the Scottish Government’s Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) Service Model for 2020 consultation.

[For 30 years](#), SSfF has worked alongside children, young people and families in their own communities, in both rural and urban settings across Scotland; to give them: support; opportunities; and a voice in tackling the effects of poverty, social isolation and disadvantage in their lives.

We are [committed to ensuring that all children have the very best start in life](#), and for some of the 2,000 families we work alongside every year, day to day life can be exceptionally challenging.

We believe that all children should have an enjoyable life, in a healthy and safe environment where they are respected and supported to achieve their full potential and realise their aspirations.

As an organisation we believe in and promote a children’s rights based approach in all that we do; not just within our services but also externally with our partners, funders and communities.

In compiling our response, SSfF has engaged with each of our [community based services](#) alongside participating and contributing to two of the Scottish Government’s regional face-to-face consultation events in Glasgow.

Following our participation in conversations with the Scottish Government and having reviewed the draft national standards and proposed “funding follows the child” model we have structured this response to address each section outlined in the consultation document, as they relate to our own priorities, concerns and services.

Over-Arching Statement

SSfF welcomes the Scottish Government’s commitment to investing in high quality, fully funded and sustainable ELC that aims to offer increased choice and flexibility to parents and/or carers.

At this time it is important to acknowledge the challenges faced by all sectors and stakeholders throughout this phase of the ELC expansion programme. We expect these challenges to continue throughout the implementation of Scotland’s ELC expansion policy. We are all under pressure respectively, however within this environment, SSfF believes there are opportunities.

As an experienced provider (30 years) of high quality ELC to children and families who are often experiencing/fighting multiple impacts of social isolation, destitution, poverty and exclusion, SSfF disagrees with the current “Funding Follows the Child” model in its present form.

SSfF would urge the Scottish Government to look at learning from the current infrastructure supporting funded entitlement. Current infrastructure does not guarantee full cost recovery to providers or equity of choice to children and families, particularly those experiencing poverty and limited choices through circumstance.

We also urge the Scottish Government to reflect upon alternative approaches. In particular the Public Social Partnership¹ (PSP) models, which foster from inception, a partnership approach to service development; delivery; and evaluation.

SSfF is under no illusions about the challenges ahead for all as this revolution in ELC proceeds.

As an organisation we are accustomed to acting flexibly and responsively, prioritising and meeting the needs of our beneficiaries.

We value and prioritise the voices of the children and families we work alongside, whilst exceeding our obligations externally across constant and ever-changing funding, regulatory, and policy environments.

We welcomed the by-proxy advocacy provided via Audit Scotland's report (²Audit Scotland, 2018) which defined numerous issues, risks and potential pitfalls associated with the current programme of ELC expansion, alongside clear recommendations to Scottish Government. SSfF would refer the Scottish Government again to the issues/recommendations raised in that document (Audit Scotland, 2018) in tandem with our response.

Response

What factors should be considered in developing a simple, standardised yet flexible process for becoming a funded provider?

SSfF would recommend the Service Model Working Group harnesses learning from the ³Public Social Partnership (PSP) approach and applies it to the standardised process for becoming a funded provider.

¹“Public Social Partnerships (PSPs) are voluntary partnerships involving one or more organisations from the public and third sectors, and potentially from the private sector. They are designed to involve the third sector earlier and more deeply in the design and commissioning of public services” (Scottish Government) <https://beta.gov.scot/policies/third-sector/public-social-partnerships/>

² Audit Scotland (2018) *Early Learning and Childcare* [Online] Available at URL: <http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/report/early-learning-and-childcare> (Accessed, February 2018)

³ Scottish Government (NDA) ‘Public Social Partnerships’, Scottish Government, Third Sector [Blog] Available at URL <https://beta.gov.scot/policies/third-sector/public-social-partnerships/> (Accessed June 2018)

What are the key shared principles which should underpin an effective and positive partnership between local authorities and funded providers?

SSfF would advocate for relationships (throughout the full life-cycle of the partnership/contract) to be based upon principles of positive partnering.

As stated previously in relation to a potential standard process, there is evidence to suggest that the Public Social Partnership model (⁴ Scottish Government, 2018) allows for a more collaborative approach to service design and delivery.

SSfF would advocate this approach rather than the current over reliance upon more traditional contractor/supplier relationships which are based solely upon fixed or static contractual obligations.

SSfF has promoted co-design/delivery of services for 30 years. This is based upon our: [experience](#); [expertise](#); commitment; and practice of equitable and collaborative approaches to: service/project planning design; delivery; and evaluation with the children, young people, families and communities who we work alongside.

We find that: collaboration; investing in relationships; seeking to trust and be trusted; to recognise and understand difference; the creation of environments and opportunities for all stakeholders to contribute to **their** service; ultimately supports sustainable and positive change in lives, as well as our operations.

As an organisation, we would welcome these principles into the national standards.

Our aspiration is to see outdoor learning and play becoming a defining feature of funded ELC in Scotland.

- **Does criteria 3 capture this ambition? If not, how could it be strengthened in a way that is sustainable for providers?**

SSfF welcomes the acknowledgement of outdoor learning in the national standards, however we would also request further clarity e.g. outdoor learning encompasses far more than decanting an indoor environment to an outdoor environment.

SSfF harnesses social pedagogy and the universal language of play across all of our settings, and within all of our services with children, parents, carers and families.

Whilst we welcome and fully support the recognition play within the national standard. As a voluntary sector organisation that relies upon independent grant funding, we would seek to advise the Scottish Government of a potential risk to the third sector.

Grant making trusts and foundations will not fund services and activities that are defined as statutory provision. We would urge the Scottish Government to consider the wider strategic and sustainability implications for the third sector when including/defining play within the national standards for statutory ELC provision.

⁴ Scottish Government (2018) Strategic Public Social Partnership Model: Research Findings [Online] Available via URL <https://beta.gov.scot/publications/report-date-strategic-public-social-partnership-ssp-model-scotland-research/> (Accessed May 2018)

- **What challenges, if any, exist for funded ELC providers to ensure children have access to outdoor play? How can these challenges be overcome?**

In the first instance staff levels and ratios combined with the constraints of funding are a challenge in providing outdoor learning.

In tandem with our views expressed (above) in relation to process and principles of partnership, and within the wider context of service delivery, the rate that commissioners pay for ELC provision in implementing the expansion will be critical.

Secondly, SSfF would call on the Scottish Government to ensure there are provisions made within the national standards for subsidised high quality Forest School Training for ELC staff who are working in settings providing the funded ELC entitlement.

Currently the cost of Forest School Training is a significant challenge for organisations who are not receiving full cost recovery for services delivered.

Thirdly, outdoor learning is a returning and growing concept across the ELC sector. Funders and commissioners must take into account that additional costs are being incurred for protective clothing, staff travel etc. These costs will have to be reflected in the rate/cost per child, to ensure high quality provision of outdoor learning.

Finally, for organisations who are providing ELC entitlement on extremely tight budgets (as a consequence of insubstantial funding rate for funded ELC entitlement) balancing staff levels and ratios within ELC settings across concurrent indoor and outdoor learning sessions is a significant challenge.

Question 5a: Will the criteria set out in the draft National Standard:

- **Ensure that high quality, accessible, flexible and affordable Early Learning Childcare is delivered in all funded provider settings?**

Question 5b: Is there any criteria not included in the National Standard that is required to ensure a high quality service is provided to all children?

Question 5c: Do the proposed criteria within the National Standard seem fair and proportionate for all?

SSfF would agree to a certain extent that the national standards will support the Scottish Government's aim of providing children and families with high quality, flexible and affordable ELC in funded provider settings.

It is our view that the national standards are unrealistic as they relate to the experiences of many of the families and children who we work alongside, every day.

This view is informed by 30 years of working alongside children, young people and families who are experiencing poverty, who are excluded from opportunities and who are socially isolated.

We welcomed the opportunity to voice our concerns and advocate on behalf of the families we work alongside through frank, challenging and positive discussions with the Scottish Government at their consultation [event hosted by GCVS Everyone's Children](#) in June 2018.

The national standards in their present form will only increase choices to families who will have/or do have, free and unburdened access to choices in their everyday life.

It is challenging to determine that the national standards (in their current form) fully appreciate the realities behind the broad term of “additional support”.

SSfF would urge the Scottish Government to acknowledge the nurture and support of parents within the national standards, whilst giving further consideration to accessibility and choices.

We ask the Scottish Government team to consider more fully how the national standards will, in reality increase opportunities for families to be aware, trust, access or sustain funded entitlement for their children.

SSfF would also encourage the Scottish Government (particularly those designing and setting the national standards) to meet and have conversations with families.

As an organisation, we would be willing and open to creating these opportunities, and we would extend an invitation to the Scottish Government for this shared learning and dialogue to take place.

Recognising Nurture and Support for Parents

SSfF calls for the Scottish Government to recognise the concepts of nurture and support for parents within the national standards.

Children live in families and may not access or be able to engage fully in their funded ELC entitlement as their parents are struggling, overwhelmed or facing multiple and complex factors including: poverty; welfare reform; hunger; violence; immigration; trauma and complex trauma; poor mental health; relationship breakdown; despair; emotional and physical exhaustion; destitution; low self-esteem and social isolation.

If parents find themselves in circumstances that are overwhelming, this has a direct impact upon children; and subsequently, a direct impact on choices and accessibility.

Providing support to families who need it is critical. SSfF works alongside children at the very start of their lives, **this** is early intervention and prevention.

SSfF currently funds and provides family wellbeing services across Glasgow to address the issue of accessibility through nurture. Our Family Wellbeing Service works in partnership with 8 local authority nurseries across Glasgow who have recognised that there is a need for strengthened and supportive relationships between the ELC setting and families who have been identified as requiring intensive family support.

The SSfF Family Wellbeing Service is currently undergoing evaluation by [Glasgow Centre for Population Health](#) (GCPH), and more information can be found in Appendix 1.

Question 6: What areas would you look to be addressed in the technical guidance note for supporting implementation of the ELC Living Wage commitment?

SSfF is a (real) Living Wage Employer.

Our concern would be in relation to funding of staff costs. The national standards and technical guidance must ensure that the annual rise in the Living Wage is supported by an equivalent increase in the funding paid to the provider, as the increase occurs.

Please also see our views in answer to Question 1.

Question 7: Should newly established ELC settings be able to deliver the funded hours on a probationary basis, pending the outcome of their first inspection, provided they meet all other aspects of the National Standard? Are there any particular challenges or issues that may arise from this approach?

If a provider has established a new nursery for the purpose of delivering the expanded hours, it would seem fair to offer them the opportunity to demonstrate that they will meet the national standard.

**Question 8: What support will service providers require to prepare for the introduction of the National Standard and meet the criteria and delivery of the new service model?
Training**

SSfF would argue that if the public sector has the resources to provide training to staff providing funded ELC entitlement, these resources should be shared across sectors to ensure equal opportunities for staff (regardless of sector or setting) who are providing the funded ELC entitlement.

As part of the national standard, SSfF would welcome a joint approach to resourcing, providing and accessing training across Scotland.

Our call is based upon the principle, that we are all working with Scotland's children, and their experiences of ELC, including play and outdoor learning, are the priority.

SSfF would welcome a national standard that ensures every member staff working within ELC has the resources, knowledge and ongoing training they need to demonstrate excellence in providing childcare. We owe our children this.

We would also refer to our views in response to the first question in this consultation.

Funding Packages

SSfF understands that the Scottish Government is not in a position to set rates (cost per child) which will cover the cost of providing funded ELC entitlement.

However we believe that the Scottish Government can set a national standard that all partners providing the funded ELC entitlement will receive full cost recovery.

SSfF would also call for equal opportunities to access capital funding and refurbishment funding. And, again, we would refer to our views in answer to the first questions that highlighted principles for partnering and the Public Social Partnership model.

SSfF is aware that local authorities have been awarded some development funding, and we would argue that collaborative approach, co-design opportunities are being missed due to lack of information combined with no visible or easily accessible pathways to influence local centralised decision making.

We would call for the Scottish Government to ensure there is accountability within the national standards.

Business Model – Sustainability

The national standard dictates that all funded ELC entitlement will be free at the point of delivery, to parents.

SSfF is concerned that the current model of retrospective payment (from commissioners to suppliers) in tandem with the proposed national standard will present providers with a significant and potentially catastrophic cash-flow challenge. We are also of the view that the funding model and infrastructure currently deployed in Scotland will not meet business needs.

SSfF would urge local authorities and Scottish Government to engage more closely with third sector providers on this issue.

End. BL Devine.

Appendix 1

Stepping Stones for Families – Family Wellbeing Service

Our Family Wellbeing Service works in partnership with 8 local authority nurseries in Glasgow.

In our experience we find that often we have to begin at the beginning with families and take things step by step, and for some parents the issue of becoming stigmatised through circumstances can also become a significant barrier in accessing additional support, entitlements; and contributes to social isolation.

SSfF Family Wellbeing Workers are embedded within the nursery settings to establish and build relationships with families who have been identified as requiring additional support; and/or struggling to sustain their child's attendance.

We work in partnership with local agencies, and adopt a social pedagogy approach with families who take an active role setting outcomes that have value to them and their children.

Families co-design with our workers, their own packages of support which will enable the family achieve the outcomes they want to achieve. In time, we find that this enables children to access and sustain their ELC entitlement, increasing their ability to participate in their own education.

This project has been funded for five years via the Big Lottery Fund and is undergoing evaluation by [Glasgow Centre for Population Health](#) (GCPH)

References

Audit Scotland (2018) *Early Learning and Childcare* [Online] Available at URL: <http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/report/early-learning-and-childcare> (Accessed, February 2018)

Scottish Government (NDA) 'Public Social Partnerships', Scottish Government, Third Sector [Blog] Available at URL <https://beta.gov.scot/policies/third-sector/public-social-partnerships/> (Accessed June 2018)

Scottish Government (2018) Strategic Public Social Partnership Model: Research Findings [Online] Available via URL <https://beta.gov.scot/publications/report-date-strategic-public-social-partnership-ssp-model-scotland-research/> (Accessed may 2018)