

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE RESPONSE TO THE REPORT OF THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE ON THE EARLY YEARS INQUIRY

INTRODUCTION

1. This paper sets out the Scottish Ministers' formal response to the Education Committee's report on its Early Years Inquiry, which was published on 14th June 2006.
2. The Executive welcomes the Committee's report and the debate the Inquiry has generated. Early years services are a vital resource for children and families, support the economy and economic growth and it is important that we provide the type of services that families need.
3. This response is being issued at the same time as the publication of the Executive Response to the National Review of the Early Years and Childcare Workforce. That document marks a significant shift in our policy on early years and looks forward to a future where families will find it easier to access high quality flexible early years services that meet their needs. Members of the Committee may find it helpful to read the workforce publications alongside this response, although we have summarised key points where they relate to the recommendations made by the Committee.
4. At the heart of our vision for the future is an early years sector that delivers both quality and flexibility to provide the services that parents want and children deserve. We therefore share many of the objectives the Committee has expressed in its report, although there are areas where we see the route to achieving those objectives slightly differently.

RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATIONS

The following sections provide our detailed responses to the Committee's recommendations. We have taken the recommendations in an order that we think best highlights the logic of our approach and this means in some cases changing the order they were set out in the Committee's report. In each case, the text of the Committee's recommendation is provided in bold type.

STRATEGIC APPROACH

Overall, our aspirations are quite simple and straightforward. We want every child to have high quality care, either provided by its parents, or, where the parents so choose, by trusted carers, by a childminder, or by a high quality provider either in the local authority, private or voluntary sector. We want parents to be confident that, wherever their child is cared for, it will be looked after in a safe, comfortable and creative environment. We want care to be flexible enough to articulate with other entitlements, like the free pre-school education for three and four year olds, so that parents will be able to work if they wish to do so. We want parents who need support, advice and information on parenting to have access to what they need in their local community. We want to ensure that families who are experiencing problems which might make children vulnerable are identified as early as possible so that they can be properly supported. We want to ensure that children who have Additional Support Needs can be identified and supported as early in their lives as possible. And finally, we want all this to be delivered by a highly skilled, professional and respected workforce (paragraph 40).

As noted in the introduction, the Executive shares the Committee's aspirations in terms of the outcomes it wants to see for children and families.

The way forward we have outlined in this paper and the Response to the Workforce Review strongly reinforces the Committee's view that we need a combination of quality and flexibility to move the sector forward and we have made a number of proposals for how to do that which will be discussed later in this response.

We also agree with the message in this recommendation that we need to maintain a mixed economy of providers and to deliver a combination of universal and targeted services to meet the individual needs of children and families.

The Committee specifically refers to the need to have support, advice and information for parents available locally. The Executive is already supporting a number of parenting programmes including accessible services such as single-gateway telephone helplines and non-stigmatising 'marketplace' approaches to parental information, and the Sure Start Scotland programme is one of the main sources of support for parenting services at the local level. The Executive is committed to supporting parents and will continue to develop its policy on parenting and how best to support families.

We also strongly endorse the view that a highly skilled, professional and respected workforce will be the key component in delivering the kind of services that will fulfil the ambitions that have been outlined. The Executive Response to the Workforce Review sets a clear path for developing the necessary skills and raising the status of the sector.

The Scottish Executive has not produced an overarching strategy since 1998. It is appropriate that the Scottish Executive reflects on the strategy and updates it to provide a document that sets out its strategic objectives for the sector for the next 10 years, and explains how they are to be achieved. (Executive Summary)

The Executive Response to the Workforce Review represents an important step forward in the Executive's strategic approach to early years and childcare service. Nevertheless, we recognise that it is not an overarching strategy of the type the Committee describes. As Ministers made clear in evidence to the Committee, there is a recognition of the need to refresh the strategic direction either by publishing a strategy or making the direction of travel ever clearer. Any overarching strategy is likely to come after the May 2007 election and the very significant progress in the delivery of services since the last strategy was published should be recognised.

THE EARLY YEARS WORKFORCE

There are a number of fundamental issues which will need to be addressed before it will be possible for the vision [for the early years sector] to be realised. Most importantly perhaps, raising skill levels across the early years workforce must be accelerated. Questions about what the appropriate mix of staff skills and qualifications should be for different settings, what role should teachers play and how the value of work in the early years sector can be properly recognised and rewarded, need to be answered urgently. (paragraph 15)

The Committee's report raises a number of issues concerning the workforce, and points out that **the area requiring the most urgent investment is improving the skills levels of the early years workforce**. That is why the Executive set up a National Review of the Early Years and Childcare Workforce in summer 2004. The Review reported to Ministers in autumn 2005 and the Scottish Executive Response to the National Review of the Early Years and Childcare Workforce, which was published today, sets out how Ministers intend to develop the workforce and to ensure that we have quality and flexible early years and childcare services, and includes a timetable for the early action. The following section covers the following Committee recommendations:

We call for a strategy to ensure that training, delivered flexibly by innovative methods, is available across the country. (Executive Summary)

However, we think there may be a case for some accreditation of prior experiential learning which would help to value the experience of some workers and which might mean that some of these workers would be able to carry on working in the sector with some additional training. We would ask the Scottish Executive to explore this possibility further with the Scottish Social Services Council. (paragraph 106)

Ideally, we probably need to move towards a system which could meet the needs of people who aspired to be primary specialists or early years specialists. (paragraph 115)

Ministers' long-term vision is of services that combine **quality** and **flexibility** to meet the needs of children and hard-working families. We want to see all providers aspiring to the quality of the best, and investing in their services to deliver the standards that children deserve and parents expect. We also want to see the public sector in particular delivering more flexible services, and working more closely with voluntary and private sector providers to provide a seamless experience for children.

There is a strong evidence base demonstrating the relationship between a well qualified workforce, particularly well qualified leaders, and the quality of services for children. We have already made significant progress in developing the skills and qualification levels of the early years and childcare workforce through preparation for registration with the Scottish Social Services Council which commences in October and Workforce Development Funding (WDF) which can be used for a range of workforce development activity but has been focused on ensuring that the workforce holds qualifications to allow registration. There is therefore already a structure that allows training to be delivered flexibly across the country.

The Review's report set out a number of attributes that a future qualifications framework should have including the need for it to support flexibility and movement of the workforce, to have a variety of routes including university, college and work-based learning and to allow recognition and accreditation of prior learning. Development of a new qualifications and professional development framework will take account of this. This framework is intended build on existing qualifications, so workers wanting to reach the new professional status and who already hold qualifications allowing registration will not have to undertake a whole new qualification, but will use continuous professional development to do so.

However, as the Committee points out in relation to some concerns from the private sector regarding qualifications for registration of experienced staff, up-skilling the workforce is vital, and training is one of the most important elements, and it does not recommend any exceptions. We support this position. Experienced staff can use appropriate vocational qualifications to have their competence and prior learning assessed. Vocational qualifications in the sector do not usually require formal examinations but involve workers producing evidence in a variety of ways such as reflective accounts or direct observation of their practice.

The Review of the Early Years and Childcare Workforce and the Executive's Response concentrated on the non-teaching workforce. Teachers are part of the early years and childcare workforce and are the leaders in many centres. They have, and will continue to have, a distinctive and important role to play in pre-school provision alongside other professionals. Not every early years setting currently has a teacher and this is not going to change. Indeed, the balance is likely to shift towards more non-teaching staff managing centres in the future and our response to the Review sets out how we intend to develop an early years professional. The following section addresses the Committee's specific points about teachers.

We also recommend that, in the short term, the Scottish Executive considers whether any changes are required in initial teacher education to ensure that the early years sector is enhanced as a destination for teachers in training, and that there continues to be adequate availability of early years training placements. We urge the minister to ensure that the supply of teachers for posts in the early years sector is secured and to

consider whether any other incentives may be required in order to secure the supply. (paragraph 98)

All primary teachers are equipped during their initial teacher education to teach in the early years sector, and we do not necessarily see that changes to current ITE provision are likely to enhance the early years sector's appeal to teachers. However, we recognise the importance of teachers being suitably equipped and, accordingly, initial teacher education courses, all of which are approved by the Scottish Ministers on the basis of advice from the General Teaching Council for Scotland, are kept under review to ensure that they reflect Ministerial initiatives and changes in national priorities so that they best prepare new teachers for the challenges of teaching in Scotland in the 21st century. This long standing arrangement, which has led to courses evolving over time to meet employers requirements is shortly to be brought into sharper focus. As a consequence of Ministers' response (May 2005) to the 2nd stage review of initial teacher education, local authorities are charged with providing rigorous, evidence-based feedback to the GTCS and the universities, on an annual basis, about the effectiveness of ITE courses in preparing teachers to teach in their schools. Formal arrangements will be in place for teachers graduating in 2007.

The current high level of recruitment of student teachers has severely tested the capacity of our teacher education system on a number of fronts, not least in relation to placement experience in the early years sector. Universities, in consultation with the GTCS, have adopted a range of pragmatic solutions to the problem to ensure that every student teacher has at least an acceptable minimum of experience in an early years setting.

The Executive's annual teacher workforce planning exercise, the results of which enable us to offer advice to the Scottish Funding Council on the number of student teachers that need to be enrolled, takes fully into account the number of teachers required in all sectors, including the pre-school sector.

Ministers should also look at whether there is scope for joint professional development involving teachers and other early years staff. (paragraph 112)

We also recommend that the Scottish Executive... looks (in the longer term) at the possibilities of joint initial training for teachers and early years staff, with flexible entry and exit points. (Executive Summary)

The Executive agrees that there are potential benefits from joint training of teachers and other professionals. The potential for such benefits to accrue is present in relation to both initial (pre-service) training and continuing professional development (in-service). This is already being taken forward, although not exclusively in relation to the early years sector. In the response to the 2nd stage review of initial teacher education, Ministers challenged the universities and local authorities to explore options in this respect.

We would urge the Scottish Executive to consider whether a degree of flexibility can be incorporated within the system, so that, for example, some elements of training may be undertaken by distance learning, on-line, part-time or by some other flexible mode. (paragraph 110)

We also think...it is important that, where possible, common elements of training are delivered to groups of learners who seek to play different and complementary roles with

in the early years sector, so that barriers between different sectors are broken down and an interdisciplinary approach is established. (paragraph 111)

Delivering integrated services for children is dependent on having a workforce which is able to work across professional boundaries in the early years and, just as importantly, across all children's services. The Review of the Early Years and Childcare Workforce emphasised the value of identifying a shared skills and knowledge base across children's services. Likewise, Getting it Right for Every Child highlights the importance of developing the children's services workforce. We are considering how we might take this forward, including looking at a common core of skills, knowledge and competencies, and examining entry level qualifications, training and continuous professional training across professional groups.

Local authorities are likely to have a key role, along with childcare partnerships, in determining the local need and securing the supply of training, particularly for existing staff. We suggest that it would be helpful for councils to interpret this role more widely than they might traditionally do, by co-ordinating the supply of training not only for their own staff, but also for the staff of the voluntary and private sectors. (paragraph 109)

This already happens through the Executive's £6m pa Workforce Development Fund (WDF) which supports training and development of the early years and childcare workforce. WDF is managed by local authorities in conjunction with childcare partnerships which have the flexibility to determine how the resources are used to meet local needs. Local authorities and childcare partnerships have to take account of the need for investment in all areas of the early years and childcare workforce, including those employed in the private and voluntary sectors, and childminders.

We call on the Scottish Executive to consider what steps can be taken by local authorities and others to increase the opportunities for support available to childminders. (paragraph 127)

Training and development of childminders is currently supported through WDF. We ask local authorities to report how they use WDF to support workforce development in 3 main categories:

- qualifications which would allow registration with the SSSC (although childminders are not required to register with the SSSC, they can and we would encourage them to undertake qualifications and local authorities to provide support);
- access courses e.g. support for recruitment; and
- continuous professional development.

In 2004-05, childminders received 5% of total local authority spending on qualifications for registration, 11% of spending on access courses and 16% of spending on CPD.

In our response to the Workforce Review, we indicate that we do not plan to introduce a qualification requirement for childminders. However, we are also clear that childminders are an essential and integral part of the early years and childcare workforce. In developing a new qualifications and professional development framework, it will be important to ensure that the content and delivery are appropriate for childminders. Indeed, as part of the consultation exercise on implementation of the action set out in our Response to the Review, we ask

childminders some specific questions about their training and development requirements which will be fed into the design process. We will be looking at how childminders can be encouraged and supported to undertake training and professional development and what, if any, entry-level training might be appropriate.

The Scottish Executive continues to support childminders by working closely with the Scottish Childminding Association (SCMA). The Executive provides financial support to the SCMA who provide advice to current and prospective childminders on a range of issues from pre-registration training to guidance on keeping children safe and healthy. Additionally, the Scottish Executive expects local Childcare Partnerships to work with childminders and support them.

We agree with and support much of what the Committee says about childminders often operating as one-person businesses, who can face the risk of isolation from other child-carers and experience difficulties in seeking support. Whilst continuing to provide financial support for the core services delivered by SCMA, the Scottish Executive recently funded the Support Childminding Project undertaken by the SCMA that specifically addressed the issue of support for childminders as highlighted in the Committee's report.

Through regular dialogue with SCMA, we would aim to ensure that additional ideas for supporting childminders can be discussed and developed as appropriate.

The Informal Workforce

We call on the Scottish Executive to consider how grandparents and other informal carers can best be supported in the ways set out above [in paragraphs 128 & 129]. (paragraph 130)

Grandparents and others undertaking informal childcare can currently access many of the support services that are available. This could range from attending parent/toddler play groups to more formal forms of support. There is also the option of formalising the childcare by becoming a registered childminder or a sitter under the Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act 2001.

We remain open to ideas regarding how informal carers can better be supported, perhaps through helping establish informal support networks. Many parents find these helpful in having friends to share concerns and questions with. However, as many such networks are established through attendance at antenatal classes etc there may be less opportunity for informal carers to access such mutual support and this is an area that merits further consideration.

PLANNING & FUNDING EARLY YEARS SERVICES

Instead of replicating the family centre model throughout the country, we would like to see a strategy, which would need to be carried through from the Scottish Executive to development planning within local authorities, to ensure that every community in Scotland has access to the level of services for children most appropriate to its needs. We would like to see this lead, in time, to the creation of more family centres in some communities delivering a range of services including care and pre-school education to

those who need or want them, but we fully accept that these high costs centres are likely only to be justifiable in communities where there are the most significant challenges (paragraph 52).

We would also like the Scottish Executive to implement legislation to local authorities on ICSPs so that, in the next and subsequent rounds of planning, each local authority is required, using the framework contained in the Scottish Executive's strategic plan, to document its current services and to set out its proposals for the strategic development of pre-fives services over the next three year period, with an indicative longer term 'forward look' at outline proposals for the following two plans, giving an overall planning horizon for the council of 9 years. This would provide a clear national overview of service provision and would also highlight local authority areas where there were significant gaps and where additional investment might be required. We also call on the Scottish Executive to ensure that any future legislative framework for planning for children's services takes specific account of the early years sector (paragraph 56).

The Committee notes that there is already legislation which requires local authorities to prepare plans for children's services in consultation with local partners. Our guidance on integrated children's services plans already refers to the need for local partnerships to set out their plans for targeted and universal early years services and childcare. The first round of plans (2005-08) has already been reviewed by the Executive and we have provided comprehensive feedback to partnerships on their strategic objectives, management and delivery structures and on specific policy areas, including early years provision. We will be in touch with local partners shortly to discuss plan updates.

Creating new legislation and associated burdens on local government is not something we do lightly. We believe that we can deliver the aims of this recommendation without new legislation by building on the work already underway. It is worth pointing out, however, that in addition to covering early years provision, integrated children's services plans also include school education, child health, children's social work, youth justice, child protection and other policy areas, such as substance misuse. We would need to consider carefully the overall size and balance of plans if we were to encourage the level of detail on early years suggested by the Committee. Plans tend to be pitched at strategic level and we would not normally expect to see a lot of information on individual services operating in a partnership area. It is important to note here that, within the ICSP framework, each local authority already operates a Childcare Partnership which provides a more detailed focus on early years and childcare services, but only the most strategic elements of that will appear in the top level ICSP. The plans are primarily for local use and it is for local partners to assess need, gaps in service etc and then to set objectives and allocate resources to meet local needs and priorities.

We note the Committee's suggestions that plans should include a "forward look" over a 9 year horizon. While the need for forward planning is certainly accepted, it is arguable that a 9 year horizon, which spans more than 2 Parliamentary/Local Authority terms and 3 Spending Reviews, is too long for meaningful forecasting of need and resource requirements. On balance, we believe that the current 3 year planning horizon is about right and that building on the current arrangements provides scope to meet the Committee's desire for local planners and providers to deliver high quality services for all children and young people according to local needs and circumstances.

In line with the approach set out above, the Executive sees the need for further family centres as a matter for consideration at the local level in light of local circumstances and needs. We would also stress the need to focus on services rather than buildings when it comes to an integrated approach to delivery although, as the Committee notes, family centres can play an important role in this where there are concentrations of need.

The Scottish Executive and local authorities should urgently consider whether greater coherence can be achieved between their various funds which support early years provision with a view to rationalising application, monitoring and reporting requirements. Examples of relevant funds include the pre-school education funding, SureStart, Childcare Strategy, Workforce Development Fund and Working for Families Fund (recognising that some of the funding streams affect school age children too). (paragraph 134)

Reducing the number of funding streams to local government to support children's services is already a priority for the Executive and this is something which we are taking forward within the Executive and with local partners. Several of the funding streams referred to in paragraph 134 of the Committee Report already sit within the core local government settlement so local authorities have considerable flexibility to allocate resources to meet local needs and priorities within the broad strategic frameworks set out by the Executive. We are also moving towards greater integration within the core settlement of the Changing Children's Services Fund to reflect its increased use at local level to sustain frontline services.

While this degree of local flexibility has been mostly welcomed, some local children's services providers have expressed concern that greater mainstreaming of funding within the main local government settlement could result in diversion of resources away from supporting children's services to other local priorities. We share the Committee's desire to ensure that there are high quality services delivering improved outcomes for all children and young people and we are, therefore, looking at ways to link the consolidation of funding streams to other work on outcome agreements with local government.

An important contribution to funding childcare has been made through the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit. Although this is a reserved matter, it is essential that the Scottish Executive works with colleagues in Whitehall to ensure that the childcare/pre-school education system is considered as a whole, and that any changes made within the devolved competence are considered in the wider context of the tax and benefits system. (paragraph 139)

The Executive liaises with Whitehall on reserved matters that have a bearing on policy in Scotland and uses its influence as appropriate to promote changes which would benefit Scottish families. Equally, we are careful to design devolved services in ways which take account of reserved policy and ensure maximum benefit is derived from investments we make.

CURRICULUM ISSUES

We call on the Minister, in his response to our report, to provide a more detailed plan setting out the ways in which curricular changes in the first year of primary education

and in 3-5 are to be achieved and how children with additional support needs are to be better supported during pre-school education. (paragraph 73)

Curricular Changes

As the Committee is aware, the Executive is currently taking forward the revision of the 3-18 curriculum through *A Curriculum for Excellence*. The Executive published the advice of the Curriculum Review Programme Board in a paper, *Progress and Proposals*, in March 2006, reporting on the work undertaken to date. As *A Curriculum for Excellence* is part-way through an on-going process, it is not possible at present to define the eventual shape of the curriculum. However, the advice of the Programme Board is that the development of a new curriculum should build on the real strengths of the 3-5 guidance, and build better continuity between preschool and P1 experiences, especially in learning and teaching approaches. This will likely mean extending elements of the child-centred, active learning approaches which are used in pre-school into the early years of primary, emphasising the importance of opportunities for children to learn through planned, purposeful play. This methodology will create improved opportunities for continuity and progression in learning and development as children move between settings, which would be underpinned by a new achievement framework within which the early experiences and outcomes for children are described at a level incorporating both pre-school and P1. Within this early level, staff will have more opportunities to plan around individual children's needs and interests. This more relevant approach should enhance children's motivation and disposition towards learning. The Programme Board has also recommended that this should be a curriculum for *all* our children and young people. In this environment, there will be enhanced opportunities for all children including those who require additional support with their learning to have their needs met within relevant contexts.

The Executive recognises that the changes that will be needed in P1 in particular are one of the more significant changes that will flow from *A Curriculum for Excellence*. As such, we recognise the need for detailed planning to ensure staff are supported in making the required changes and that school facilities reflect the move to more active learning in early primary. Work to develop the curriculum in more detail is now being commissioned, and will take account of the needs of all young people, and the need for improved progression from preschool to primary 1.

We intend that revised curriculum guidance will start becoming available from summer 2007.

Support for Children with Additional Support Needs in Pre-school Education

The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 aims to ensure that all children and young people receive the additional support required to meet their individual needs and to help them make the most of their education.

The Act also applies generally to pre-school provision, which is under the management of the education authority, made for prescribed pre-school children. This provision also can include provision where an education authority have an arrangement with another provider; for example, where the authority have arranged for children to attend a private nursery under a

partnership agreement. The Act also places duties on Education Authorities to plan well in advance for the transition of children with Additional Support Needs to primary education.

As the Committee implies, the quality of the workforce is crucial in ensuring additional support needs are identified at the earliest opportunity and acted upon in an appropriate manner. The proposals for raising the quality of the workforce set out above will be an important element in improving support for children requiring additional support.

We ...believe that the cognitive element, which clearly exists within the 3-5 sector, also needs to be placed, in an age-appropriate manner, at the centre of care for the 0-3 year olds. We are therefore also pleased to note the Minister for Education and Young People's comments that 'child care should begin to focus not only on care but on the stimulation of young people and how their early experiences help their education. (paragraph 69)

As the Committee heard in evidence, there is some resistance amongst professionals to any suggestion of a "curriculum for babies". The Birth to Three policy document and accompanying training materials therefore focus on creating a broad framework of care, and on developing practice through exemplification rather than specifying particular aspects of learning and development.

There is an opportunity to build on this existing framework through the pilots of pre-school services for 2 year olds. We are discussing with Learning Teaching Scotland the possibility of undertaking work to learn from the pilots and in particular develop practice around learning and development for 2 year olds and transitions into pre-school. This work would be beneficial in any further roll-out of pre-school services for 2 year olds and the elements around transitions into pre-school services will also have wider relevance.

We will reflect on the need to go further in terms of developing practice for 0-3s in light of this work.

REGULATION AND ITS ROLE IN RAISING QUALITY STANDARDS

There were calls from some of our witnesses for some of the Care Commission inspections to be unannounced. The Care Commission itself reported to us in written evidence that a substantial proportion of parents want unannounced inspections. We think this is a matter for the Care Commission to consider, but there does appear to be a case for some inspections to take place on an unannounced basis. (paragraph 80)

We appreciate that adult contact with small groups of children will remain important, but we recommend that the Minister considers, and consults those in the field, on whether current staffing ratios for children aged 3 and over are still appropriate (paragraph 87).

As the Committee notes, the Care Commission already carries out unannounced inspections. In 2005-06 the Commission inspected play schemes, out of school schemes and some private and voluntary nurseries and playgroups on an unannounced basis. In 2006-07 most early years services will be inspected on an unannounced basis. A small proportion of early years services may have short notice (same day) announced inspections to ensure, for example that

Care Commission officers don't travel great distances for an unannounced inspection to find that the nursery or playgroup are away from the building on a day trip. Around 400 services (from a total of over 4000) will have joint inspections under the Care Commission's arrangements with HMIE in 2006-07. These joint inspections will be announced but in subsequent years unannounced inspections can be done. The Commission is also inspecting childminders on either unannounced or short notice arrangements this year.

While we note with interest the Committee's comments about different ratios of adults to children that operate in childcare and education settings in different countries, we have no current plans to change the ratios that apply in Scotland.

Much of the evidence we heard during the inquiry told us that the most important element in supporting vulnerable children and their families is early identification of children who may be vulnerable, at risk or in need of extra support. This includes those with additional support needs (ASN). We therefore believe that, initially, most resources should be targeted at the under 3 age group, and within that, particularly at those most in need. (paragraph 14)

We agree with the point that providing services at an early stage for vulnerable families who need additional support is vital. Indeed, this rationale lies behind our support for the Sure Start Scotland programme.

Starting Well, the National Health Demonstration Project for early years is also an important initiative in this regard. As a result of Starting Well, its successor in Glasgow, Parents and Children Together (PACT), teams are being rolled out across Glasgow. These multi-disciplinary teams provide intensive time-limited support to the most vulnerable children and families. The learning from both Starting Well and PACT is being shared across Scotland through NHS Health Scotland.

In July 2006 the Executive launched a £2m pilot project for the targeted provision of pre-school services for two year olds. The pilots are taking place in Glasgow, North Ayrshire and Dundee over a 2 year period. The Executive is planning an evaluation of the pilots to explore their impact and this will be used to inform further development of services for this age group.

More generally, there is a balance to be struck between building on the substantial investments we have made in provision for 3-5 year olds and increasing the level of investment for 0-3s. Therefore, while we agree there is a strong case for new investment to be focused on the latter, there are also recommendations in the Committee's report which would imply further investment in the 3-5 age group as well.

OTHER ISSUES

Pre-school Education and Integration with Other Childcare Services

We think this area requires further development, and we call on the Scottish Executive to examine, in the development of its future childcare strategy, how the quality and availability of 'wraparound' care to supplement the pre-school education entitlement

can be raised, and how better integration between childcare services and pre-school education can be achieved. (paragraph 66)

We share the Committee's ambition to see more flexible services that dovetail with each other. In the Executive Response to the Workforce Review, we challenge local authorities to provide more flexible services and, where appropriate, work with partners in the voluntary and private sectors to provide services that work coherently together for the benefit of parents and children.

The demand for all day services and the most appropriate solutions will vary across Scotland and we are therefore looking to local childcare partnerships to develop solutions that meet local needs. We believe strongly that local partners have the delivery mechanisms – Integrated Children's Services Planning and Childcare Partnerships – and the means - Childcare Strategy funding - to make progress in this area.

The Executive has committed to amending our Statutory Guidance on Pre School Education to reflect the response to the Workforce Review. In doing so, we will consider whether there are further steps that can be taken to move this agenda forward.

We recommend that the Scottish Executive provides clear guidance to local authorities on the circumstances where it is considered that qualified teaching staff are employed. We suggest that a teaching presence should be a requirement in pre-five nursery education settings in disadvantaged areas, with local authority funding adjusted to reflect this requirement. (paragraph 97)

The Executive recognises the important contribution that teachers make in early years settings and this is reflected in the existing advice, *Guidance on Involvement of Teachers in Pre-school Education*. As explained in this guidance, we consider local authorities are best placed to make decisions on the staffing of their pre-school education service and we do not intend to place a requirement on local authorities to have teachers in any particular type of pre-school provision.

The Executive supports the argument that children from disadvantaged backgrounds can derive particular benefit from high quality provision. However, we believe the approach to targeting resources is a much wider question than just the deployment of teachers, though does not exclude the deployment of teachers. Issues such as the level of financial support and input from quality improvement teams provided to partners operating in deprived areas and the level of targeted services that are provided on top of the universal provision are also important factors. We do believe there is a case for looking again at our statutory guidance to ensure that local authorities are targeting resources to ensure children in disadvantaged areas are deriving maximum benefit, but would wish this to look at the wider picture and to retain flexibility for local authorities to match approaches to local needs.

The workforce section of this response sets out the Executive's intentions to develop a new early years professional to lead pre-school and other care settings. The important point here is that it provides a route by which we can raise standards of leadership more universally, irrespective of management arrangement or location. The aim is to create a levelling up of standards and to ensure children who are vulnerable who do not live in an area that is classed as disadvantaged can also derive the benefits that flow from good quality provision. This, of

course, is not intended to prevent local authorities from targeting additional resources where there are particular concentrations of need.

Mixed Economy

HMIe and the Care Commission have recorded quality differences between local authority, voluntary and private sectors. We believe it is essential that the gap between the private and voluntary sectors and local authorities is narrowed and eventually eliminated. (Executive Summary)

However, we urge Ministers to ensure that changes, for example a general uplift in salary costs for the early years sector, are carefully managed so that the mixed economy of public, private and voluntary sectors is sustained and not unduly distorted. The need to manage change while at the same time ensure continuing stability is one of the reasons why we have placed long timescales on our vision for the early years. (paragraph 132)

We share the Committee's view that it is important to ensure that the mixed economy of early years provision is sustained and to introduce changes at a pace that all sectors can cope with. The mixed economy is an important element in delivering choice and flexibility for parents.

We are supporting the private and voluntary sectors in the drive to raise the quality of provision. Much of the funding made available for workforce training, through the Workforce Development Fund, has been used to provide training for staff in the private and voluntary sectors.

In addition, the Executive Response to the Workforce Review makes a commitment to directing additional resources at pre-school education partner providers in order to improve leadership and management capacity in these settings. Ministers are investing an additional £5m pa in pre-school education to fund an increase in the advisory floor used to inform local authority decisions about the cost of providing pre-school places.

The steps to increase qualification levels, as set out in the section on the Workforce, are being phased in to reflect the different starting points of the various parts of the early years and childcare sector. However, we are clear that children should be able to access high quality services in all parts of the sector and have therefore not differentiated between types of provider.

In considering possible changes in the early years sector more generally, we try to consider the capacity of the various parts of the sector to meet new requirements and any additional support that each type of provider will need.

EVALUATION - THE RESEARCH EVIDENCE

Sure Start Scotland

We therefore welcome the Scottish Executive's commitment to evaluate Surestart and would ask the Minister to ensure that the evaluation uses clearly stated outcome measures (paragraph 46).

We note the Committee's comments about the evaluation of Sure Start Scotland. The nature, diversity and multiple joint-funding status of Sure Start Scotland projects, as well as our understanding of the complex 'National Evaluation of Sure Start' in England, suggest that national evaluation of Sure Start Scotland will inevitably be a complex undertaking, and take significant time to complete.

While no date has yet been established for any formal evaluation of Sure Start Scotland, the Executive is currently working with DfES policy and analytical colleagues to ascertain transferable lessons from the evaluation work undertaken on Sure Start in England. We are also talking to local authorities about local practice and outcomes for measures funded directly by Sure Start and the many projects combining Sure Start resources with a range of additional funding streams.

We have also undertaken two robust, rigorous mapping exercises (in 2001 and 2004) to determine the scale, nature and impact of Sure Start Scotland services, and many local authorities are already assessing the success of Sure Start Scotland in their local areas. These assessments will be very valuable in developing the context and detail of any national evaluation. Local authorities will also evaluate and report on how they ensure the quality of provision for the most vulnerable children and families as part of the inspection of children's services.

Finally, we would like to note that although we have found all the research evidence referred to in this section helpful, there is only limited research evidence which has taken place in the Scottish context. We recognise that the Executive has made a commitment to longitudinal research in this area through the Growing Up in Scotland survey. This will provide a useful baseline. However, we recommend that it is supplemented by a more in-depth and long term evaluation of the impact of the proposals recommended in this report (paragraph 38).

The Committee recognises the importance of continuing to work towards the improvement of the early years evidence base; this is an ongoing aim of the Executive. However, it is important to reiterate that the impact of any early years support on society will not be immediate and will not be realised until any provision is well established. The value of long term research is recognised.

The Committee notes the longitudinal research that is ongoing, the Growing Up in Scotland (GUS) study contributes towards our knowledge of parents experiences and views on service provision within Scotland, early education and parenting, to name a few.

Further, the Committee referred to the importance of early education for children under the age of 3 years, with reference to the pre-school pilots for vulnerable 2 year old children. All aspects of the pilots will be evaluated (over a two year period), with an undertaking to explore the impact of the early intervention on the children, their parents and also the views of the care providers.

The Executive are in the process of awarding the contract for the Parents Access to and Demand for Childcare Survey 2006, which is to be a partial repeat of the surveys completed in 2000 and 2004. This repeat survey will contribute towards our continued understanding of the childcare situation in Scotland, building on previous findings.

The key in all aspects of research is to understand the factors that influence positive outcomes for children and to build on these in developing services.

THE CHALLENGE

In ten years time, we want Scotland to have an early years sector that gives all children the best possible start in life, that values and develops them and is aspired to by the rest of the world. We challenge the Scottish Executive to show us how it will do that. (Executive Summary)

Ministers share the Committee's aspiration to have an early years sector that gives every child in Scotland the best possible start in life. Early years services are crucial in supporting families and giving children first-class opportunities to learn and develop. As this report has demonstrated, we are taking forward a range of policies to improve services in the early years sector. But we recognise that there is still more to be done and the development of excellent early years provision that meet the needs of our youngest children and their families will need to continue to be a focus of policy development for many years to come.