

Section 1: Funding follows the child

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

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

Scottish Childminding Association (SCMA) hopes that the factors considered for any commissioning arrangement is clear, transparent, fair and proportionate both for the childminder and the local authority. Currently there seems a wide variation in the commissioning arrangements across Scotland. Some of the procurement arrangements are both complex and inaccessible for childminders with applications in some cases over 70 pages. This is very time consuming both for the childminder to complete and for the local authority to administer which seems to not fit with the idea of best value.

Childminding services are still being asked about their finances even though this is unlikely to be linked to their viability. Most childminders do not have a business bank account as they are not required to have one. As such they would need to submit a personal bank statement which may even be a joint account with their partner. That will tell the local authority nothing of any relevance about their childminding service.

The recommendation in this consultation document is for childminders to submit contingency plans which will be relevant to explain how continuity of service will be maintained. In practice childminders already have policies in place to demonstrate how their service meets the requirements outlined by the Care Inspectorate, which include Emergency Procedures.

SCMA recommend that these documents are referenced or enhanced rather than developing new contingency plans.

A number of new services are registered each year. It would seem sensible if newly registered services are able to enter into a temporary partnership arrangement with local authorities to give accessibility to their service, with this being confirmed following their first inspection.

Most childminding services are still not being considered or allowed to enter into a ELC partnership with their local authority to offer funded hours, therefore to ensure best value and flexibility for families, it would be reasonable to outline a proportionate system that will work for both settings. This should include an application process that is open and adaptable, and not one that was originally designed for group services.

It is important that over the next two years that parents are made aware of the variety of options available to them. Currently there are often slips where reference to Early Learning and Childcare services is abbreviated to 'nursery'. Parents rely on public information and it will be increasingly important that this is correct. By 2020, parents will be able to decide the service that best suits their child but they need to be properly informed of their options to be able to make that decision. They can't do that based on the limited information currently available to them.

SCMA recommends that care is taken over publicly available information to raise awareness of the full range of quality Early Learning and Childcare services including childminding.

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

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

In successful partnership arrangements where SCMA has been involved there have been some common key shared principles. These include:

Effective communication: Communication has been instrumental in building effective and positive partnerships across all services delivering funded hours. This has also applied where possible to quality assurance systems. It has led to a better understanding and respect between types of services and the local authority and most importantly consistent messages to parents.

Joint training: Where possible joint training is arranged or at least occasional networking meetings. These can be difficult to plan and arrange as a priority for childminding is that these events are held in the evening or at the weekend. Increasingly local authorities are contracting with SCMA to provide training, learning and support services or to call on SCMA to share feedback on what has worked in other areas.

Sharing best practice: This is key to underpinning effective and positive partnerships and has worked well at the regional collaboratives and networking events.

Quality: Quality must be a key shared principle to underpin effective and positive partnerships. SCMA is seeing that initially quality assurance visits are more frequent. Increasingly though over time, local authorities are having more confidence and understanding of the local childminding services and can reduce or refine quality assurance systems more proportionately.

Mutual trust: Childminding services are constantly assessing the service they provide and making the information available for the Care Inspectorate. SCMA trusts that the information provided for these assessments can also be used as part of the quality assurance for local authorities. This will be more effective once the shared inspection model between Education Scotland and Care Inspectorate is operational.

Clear roles: Establishing clear roles and responsibilities are key to underpinning effective and positive partnerships. There is often little understanding of how different services operate. SCMA has tried to improve this in a few areas with childminders spending time in nursery. However, this must also work the other way around. SCMA recommends that lead practitioners spend time working with the childminders in the childminding setting. This will also help where there are genuine blended services to improve information sharing and joint planning.

The proposed service model could also be improved if other services that support children and families are more closely integrated and planned with funded ELC. Community Childminding concentrates on children and families at times of difficulty.

We know from research of the services we provide in Glasgow that 50% of the children placed with a Community Childminder are also found to be eligible two-year olds. This allows for a smooth transition, so the child can stay with the same childminder who then provides funded ELC. Even when the child is three or four they can still stay with the childminder if this is seen to be the most appropriate service for the child.

There is some limited allowance for this in the Children and Young People Act where family support is also promoted but only for very specific children like looked after children or those with a kinship carer.

SCMA recommends that this part of the Act is reviewed as a matter of priority in order that services like Community Childminding can be more widely developed to cover other eligible two-year olds.

This work in supporting families as well as vulnerable children could be acknowledged as necessary to help give children the best start in life, contribute to closing the poverty-related attainment gap and help improve overall outcomes to children and families.

Section 2: National standard for funded early learning and childcare provision

3a We are proposing that the National Standard includes a qualification requirement for childminders delivering the funded entitlement to be qualified to or working towards the same qualification level as is required for an ELC practitioner (SCQF level 7). What are the advantages of including this criteria?

Yes

What are the advantages of including this criteria?:

At a previous SCMA AGM, childminders voted in favour of a requirement for them to hold or be working towards a qualification at SCQF Level 7 to bring them in line with requirements of other ELC practitioners registered with SSSC.

There was never any doubt that childminders should not be required to register with the SSSC since they are individually registered with the Care Inspectorate. The disadvantage for them was they then did not get the same opportunities, funding or support to work towards a qualification.

More recently discussions with childminders as part of the review of ELC workforce and discussion with SCMA board repeated this desire to improve the infrastructure to assist them to work towards a qualification and as important to give them the time to achieve this.

Many childminders are highly graded, experienced services, wanting a system to give them accreditation for their prior learning, skills and knowledge.

As a result, SCMA has worked with SQA on the launch of a new qualification: The Complete Childminding Learning Pathway – a Work Based Award, which is an SQA qualification at SCQF Level 7. SQA has mapped this qualification to the appropriate HNC and SVQ3 which are the qualifications required for registration with the SSSC for other ELC practitioners.

SCMA is an Approved SQA Centre, enabling us to deliver this qualification to anyone in childminding and it is expected that other centres will follow in the future. Critically those childminders who have recently completed SCMA Continuing Professional Learning (CPL) workshops and courses will be able to use this prior learning to complete the Work Based Award more quickly and with the qualification mapped they will also be able at a later date to progress to complete the relevant HNC or SVQ3.

SCMA highly recommend that The Complete Childminding Learning Pathway – a Work Based Award from SQA is acknowledged by Scottish Government as one of the appropriate qualifications for a childminder wanting to deliver the funded hours of ELC.

The main advantages are:

Improved status of childminding - There appears to be a feeling that the quality of childminding services is not as high as other ELC practitioners who are required to hold or work towards a qualification at level 7. There needs to be respect across services and those working in them and that will be helped if they hold similar qualifications.

The opportunity for ELC practitioners to move between different services - SCMA has noticed more staff moving from nursery into childminding setting. This transition also requires additional training especially in running a business, and working closely with parents and families. Equally childminders wanting to work in group settings will need to hold or be working towards a qualification so if more of them do so then they will be able to move if wanted.

Perception of parents - SCMA recognises that some parents equate quality with holding a qualification. It will help parents feel confident in choosing a childminding service if the terms and conditions have parity with other ELC lead practitioners.

Improving the knowledge of childminding services - Evidence from Care Inspectorate has long shown that the quality of practice of childminding services is as good or better than group services. Despite this, there has been less evidence of the underpinning knowledge of these services. Holding or working towards an appropriate qualification at Level 7 should bridge this gap and help childminding services to be more confident and help them improve outcomes for children.

Increase confidence of Commissioners - 2020 will see Funding Follows the Child give parents more control over the services they choose for their children. The service provider will still have to meet the quality standard. Currently some local authorities have additional quality assurance systems to monitor the delivery of services. This is made worse if they are not familiar with the outcome focussed self-assessment and inspection process that the childminder has had to go through. If the qualifications held by services is at the same level as other ELC practitioners it should make this monitoring process more transparent and straight forward.

3b Are childminders able to access adequate funding to pay for training to SCQF level 7?

No

Yes

Please add reasons for your answer.:

Funding and access have been the two main barriers to childminders completing qualifications at SCQF Level 7.

Not surprisingly funding and the access to qualifications has been targeted at those practitioners who are required to hold a qualification. As childminding services are not required to complete a qualification, they have largely been left out. This also applies to the inhouse CPL opportunities for providers of funded ELC run by local authorities which is mostly held during the day and is not accessible for childminders.

Some childminders in a few local authority areas are lucky enough to have qualifications funded by their local authority. However, for the most part training of any sort must be funded in some way by the childminder. Most childminders were able to fund their learning using an Individual Learning Account (ILA) but SCMA found that only around 50% of childminders used an ILA.

What is accessible for childminders is CPL opportunities run by SCMA. SCMA has always run our CPL workshops and courses in the evening and at weekends but found that was not sufficiently accessible in all areas. Access has been improved as SCMA have developed our courses to be available by e-Learning. Now around 75% of childminders access their CPL by e-learning. SCMA have linked this with SSSC accredited open badges so the learner can be assessed as to how they have put their learning into practice.

The significant development recently that has improved access was the launch of the SQA Complete Childminding Learning Pathway – a Work Based Award; a qualification credit rated at SCQF Level 7. SCMA is approved by SQA to deliver this award and it can be funded using an Individual Training Account (ITA).

There are limits to this though as the Work Based Award consists of six units and therefore cannot quickly be fully funded by their ITA. It does though have the advantage of allowing the accreditation of prior learning and an easy pathway mapped by SQA to other relevant qualifications.

SCMA would recommend that additional funding is made available from Scottish Government for experienced childminders looking to deliver funded ELC to complete the Complete Childminding Learning Pathway – a Work Based Award as an initial route to SVQ3 or HNC.

Most childminders wanting to complete an SVQ3 or HNC may be able to receive SAAS funding though this is not available for the Work Based Award. SCMA is advised by SQA that we can work towards delivering a full SVQ3 and would prioritise those childminders who have completed their Work Based Award with SCMA.

Using the Work Based Award as a transition to other qualifications is important for SCMA and childminders. SCMA has already had discussions with one college who acknowledge that the SQA mapping is significant. They are hopeful that they may be able to offer a one-year HNC for those childminders who have completed the Work Based Award.

Childminders tell us that basic college courses are often inaccessible and part time courses rare. The majority prefer to access their training by e-learning and preferably courses that are designed more for them rather than adapting to group based courses.

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

No

If not, how could it be strengthened in a way that is sustainable for providers?:

Quality childminding services rarely see themselves as split into outdoors and indoors. They deliver a community-based service that integrates all aspects of their local community into their service. As such the aspiration in criteria 3 will become problematic if being outdoors for learning, play or anything else is seen as a separate aspect of what is provided for the children and their families.

Childminding benefits from the advantage of having a very low adult-to-child ratio with one childminder to three pre-school children. Being responsive and flexible is a normal part of the service. Even the car trip or the walk to collect older children from school becomes part of the experience. A chance for storytelling or singing.

Much has been made of the outdoor kindergarten but SCMA is aware of childminding groups who operate solely outdoors and for others the opportunities of trips during holidays expands what is even available on the doorstep.

What this criteria does not do is to aspire to different types of services collaborating to enhance the experience for the child. A truly blended model as opposed to a split placement will see a group service collaborate with their local childminding services to make the most of the outdoors.

How can these challenges be overcome?:

Childminders advise SCMA that there are few challenges for them in ensuring children have access to outdoor play. They are skilled at adapting activities for difference ages of children and that includes from babies to school age. Examples can be seen in Care Inspectorate - My World Outdoors.

Childminding services are not restricted by their registered premises. While most will have access to their own garden, they also have access to their local community services or to travel further when times permits.

For new childminders who may be unclear of the opportunities then this can be overcome by attending SCMA Outdoor Play workshop which is also available by e-learning. This helps childminders review, develop and enhance their outdoor provision they currently offer. This is also included in Unit 4 of the SQA Complete

Childminding Learning Pathway.

Group services could link with their local childminding services that are delivering funded hours to enhance their opportunities for outdoor play.

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?

Don't know

Please explain your answer.:

SCMA feels that the criteria does not prevent the aspirations being met. There are aspects though of the statutory guidance that need to be reviewed.

Accessibility and Flexibility: Flexibility and choice must include choice of provider and there needs to be a much clearer understanding of the difference between a blended model as opposed to a split placement. In a blended model services are combined as a matter of choice to best meet the needs of the child. This allows for example for part of the day to be with a group service and part with a childminder to allow for the pace of the day to change and the experiences of the child to be maximised. Joint planning and the effective exchange of information will ensure that the day is seen as a whole and not split into different parts.

Unfortunately, at the moment many parents have to patch together services rather than choose a blended model especially if they are working. Childminders find it difficult to work around the varying session times of existing local authority nurseries. A blended model does not mean childminders only providing a service at the start and end of the day which is difficult for nursery but being respected as an equally important part of the child's day.

Funding Follows the Child should improve choice. However, parents need to go through their local authority for information and to register for a place and if childminding is not promoted then it won't be understood as a choice. This will leave parents with little or no information about childminding which is actually reducing accessibility and flexibility as we expect a lot of parents will have no experience of using a childminding service.

Quality: The criteria are set out in sections like outdoor environment, food, development of skills but in practice a childminding service will integrate all of these aspects based on the needs and wishes of the children ensuring the delivery of a high-quality service. The Health and Social Care Standards are deliberately outcome focused, as are the Care Inspectorate's Wellbeing Indicators (Safe, Healthy, Achieving, Nurtured, Active, Respected, Responsible, Included) and SCMA would hope that the criteria also becomes focused around the needs of the child. The danger otherwise is that this then becomes an exercise in recording on these different criteria, in addition to a range of others from partnership organisations, without thinking why the records are kept or if indeed they improve outcomes for children and their families.

Don't know

Please explain your answer.:

There is a long way to go before there is increased choice for parents and carers. While there are examples of innovation, there is still a real threat of 'more of the same' for parents, and no real improvements on flexibility and choice.

Despite an overwhelming majority of childminders indicated their willingness to deliver funded ELC, still only a handful of childminders are in partnership with the local authority so this will need to rapidly increase if families are to be given the choice of a childminding service from 2020.

Parents and carers need to be actively encouraged to consider a childminder when thinking about ELC for their child and local authorities have a role to play in delivering this to ensure improved outcomes for all children and business sustainability for childminding services.

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?

Not Answered

Please explain your answer.:

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

Don't know

Please explain your answer.:

Yes

Please explain your answer.:

SCMA trusts that the variations for childminding services are not seen as a lower threshold for them but a recognition that they are approaching the delivery of ELC as a different type of service. As such the criteria may not be the issue that prevents some childminding services from offering funded hours but rather the way they may be implemented or interpreted by the local authority in which they operate.

Record keeping for all services should be kept to a minimum and be kept for a specific purpose. Maximise use of existing records kept for regulatory purposes. This is the opportunity to rationalise and review and that would include records on children kept by group service.

SCMA is concerned that some local authorities do not appear to appreciate the quality of the childminding services in their area or what this will add to help improve outcomes for children. There seems confusion as to the records they already keep or the role of the Care Inspectorate in inspecting and assisting with improvements. Our discussions with many areas have led us to believe that the understanding of childminding is very out of date. It is no wonder then that there is a slowness in including these services as an option to deliver funded ELC.

SCMA recommend that further work is done by Scottish Government to help improve local authority's understanding of childminding.

Section 3: Implementing the early learning and childcare living wage commitment

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

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

The big gap in the living wage commitment and everything alongside it, is how it will apply to childminding services who are self-employed. While it is noted that this criteria only applies to childminders who employ staff, SCMA would like to see an expectation that includes improving conditions for sole providers. It is unclear what is included in the rate that is paid by the local authority. Does this also cover the services that may be on offer by the local authority or will this be charged to the service. For example any additional training that is available or quality assurance visits.

Childminders will also be affected by having more than one child from the same family. They will be able to deliver a funded service for eligible children and charge for any additional hours needed. The family though may have other children attending the same setting who are not eligible for funded hours and the childminder will have to negotiate an agreement for these hours.

Some clarity on this for parents would be welcomed.

Additional expectations are also coming in for those childminders in receipt of universal credit. DWP will assess the childminding service's entitlement against a 'minimum income floor' based on what an employed person would earn for similar work. If childminding services are then compared with the salary of a lead practitioner, then this will lead to gaps in universal credit payments.

SCMA recommend that Scottish Government follow up discussion with DWP to clarify how they will assess the potential income of self-employed childminding services.

Section 4: Next steps and the transition period to 2020

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?

Yes

Are there any particular challenges or issues that may arise from this approach?:

It would seem sensible to allow some new services to deliver funded hours.

For childminding this will depend on the level of experience of the childminder. Some are coming into childminding having worked in teaching or nursery. They should be able to demonstrate their competence as part of the registration process and supports the ethos of fairer working practices.

For a childminding service this is a comprehensive process that includes an assessment of the individual. This can be seen to be more detailed than that of a group service where staff may not even be fully in place.

The difficulty is that children and their families will become attached and accustomed to using their chosen service including their childminder, and this is true for both older or younger children. In theory the family will still be able to use the service but it may not be possible for the service to continue without the income from funded hours.

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?

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?:

SCMA is already providing some local authorities with a number of support services for childminders delivering funded hours of ELC. This includes: assisting with recruitment, learning and support, administration, payment processes and sharing of best practice. This is allowing SCMA to build up a picture of the range of support necessary to secure business sustainability and fairer working practices for childminding services in Scotland.

From a learning and development perspective, local authorities can access everything from SCMA – from recruitment and selection through to our Childminding Induction Support Programme and then onto the SQA Work Based Award.

Regarding the commissioning of services by local authorities, local childminding services have welcomed additional support from SCMA with the application process to ongoing support to maintain standards.

Most challenging has been supporting services in advertising their services and helping parents understand the benefits of childminding for their children. This is not so much a support role for the childminder as information support for the parents. Some models have been very successful as for example in Midlothian, Glasgow, Aberdeen and Stirling where the local authority have been proactive in working with SCMA and a variety of agencies to promote childminding alongside of their own services.

About you

What is your name?

Name:

Maggie Simpson

What is your email address?

Email:

maggie.simpson@childminding.org

Are you responding as an individual or an organisation?

Organisation

What is your organisation?

Organisation:

Scottish Childminding Association

The Scottish Government would like your permission to publish your consultation response. Please indicate your publishing preference:

Publish response only (without name)

We will share your response internally with other Scottish Government policy teams who may be addressing the issues you discuss. They may wish to contact you again in the future, but we require your permission to do so. Are you content for Scottish Government to contact you again in relation to this consultation exercise?

Yes

Evaluation

Please help us improve our consultations by answering the questions below. (Responses to the evaluation will not be published.)

Matrix 1 - How satisfied were you with this consultation?:

Please enter comments here.:

Matrix 1 - How would you rate your satisfaction with using this platform (Citizen Space) to respond to this consultation?:

Very satisfied

Please enter comments here.: