

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE BILL

PART 6: EARLY LEARNING AND CHILDCARE

The Children and Young People Bill promises to transform childcare in Scotland. Part 6 of the Bill details the provision of 600 hours free early learning and childcare for all three and four year olds, and vulnerable 2 year olds. It's clear this proposal will have a massive impact on childcare providers, including childminders.

The main features of part 6 of the Bill are to:

- Rename 'pre-school education' to 'early learning and childcare'.
- Increase the amount of early learning and childcare from 475 – 600 hours per year.
- Increase the eligibility from all three and four year olds to now include two year olds who are "looked after" or subject to a kinship care order.
- Introduce a new eligibility for two year olds from workless households and, in 2015, to a further group of vulnerable twos.
- Bring flexibility into the delivery of early learning and childcare so the child can receive 2 ½ - 8 hours per day, over at least 38 weeks per year.
- Require local authorities to consult parents every two years about their preferences and use this information to plan the delivery of service.

The Bill is likely to become law by February 2014.

How this affects you...

Undoubtedly, the introduction of this Bill will have an impact on childminders. Whether that impact is good or bad is down to the local authority. Each local authority must decide how the 600 hours early learning and childcare will be delivered. Most of the 3 and 4 year olds will continue as normal and attend their local authority nursery. For others though who are looking for extended care, the local authority will need to appoint 'partner providers' to deliver the care and decide how the providers will be paid.

Unfortunately we have heard of some local authorities choosing to deliver the 600 hours solely via nurseries. We will be in consultation with these local authorities to highlight the flexibility and quality of care a childminder can offer – as required by the Bill.

To offer early learning and childcare places the childminder will be required to meet criteria set by the local authority. If the service is for a three or four year old the Curriculum for Excellence must be implemented in the service; if it is for a two year old, the Pre-Birth to Three guidance must be followed. For three and four year olds the childminder will also be inspected by Education Scotland to ensure they are meeting 'early learning' requirements. For the two year olds, Education Scotland will take a support role. We have been working with Education Scotland to ensure their involvement is as proportionate as possible.

In the past it would have been most unusual for a childminder to have been commissioned by the local authority to provide the 475 hours of what was 'pre-school education'. In most cases the childminder's role was to provide the wrap around service by taking the child to receive their pre-school education at the local authority nursery.

The local authority would normally only commission places from private nurseries or playgroups to supplement their own provision. These places would then be available to parents in work or training.

SCMA envisage that it will still be the case that the majority of childminders will provide wrap around care for three and four year olds. This will ensure that they socialise with the children they will be going to school with.

However, the care a two year old requires is vastly different from that of a three or four year old and we have evidence vulnerable children of this age flourish in the care of a childminder.*

We're involved...

Scottish Childminding Association (SCMA) has welcomed part 6 of the Bill and worked with the Scottish Government in the earlier consultations. More recently SCMA has assisted with the writing of the guidance for local authorities and in ensuring the quality of the provision.

We will continue to send information and lobby local authorities about the benefits of contracting with childminders especially for the service for vulnerable two year olds.

What you can do...

If, like us, you believe childminders can provide the best care for young children, particularly the vulnerable two year olds, and want to be considered as a 'partner provider' by your local authority, you can do the following:

- Find out what's happening in your area. Has the consultation with parents happened yet? How do they plan to deliver the 600 hours? What sort of criteria will childminders be required to meet?
- Write to your local councillor. Make it clear to them the impact this could have on your business. Contact details for each councillor can be found at www.writetothem.com.
- Let SCMA know exactly what's happening in your area. Write to us at information@childminding.org with '600 Hours' in the title of your email.
- Ask parents what they want. Do they want their child to be looked after in a nursery when you can provide consistent, high-quality care? Probably not. Ask them to make their feelings clear to the local authority, either as part of the consultation or by writing to the local councillor.

Get in touch...

Email us at information@childminding.org (be sure to write '600 Hours' in the title). We want to hear from you about what's happening in your area. All information we gather will be taken to the Scottish Government and will help us to build our case when representing childminders at meetings with local authorities.

*Community Childminding Research Briefing, SCMA, January 2014