

Scottish Government launches quality childcare action plan ^[1]

The Scottish Government has moved to strengthen the quality of childcare years in advance of its target to double its funded offer.

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AVAILABILITY

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EXCERPTS

The quality action plan, published today, sets out 15 actions to further strengthen the quality of early learning and childcare in Scotland.

It comes ahead of the move to almost double the number of hours of free childcare for three and four-year-olds in Scotland from 600 to 1,140 by 2020.

The actions focus on strengthening continuous professional development for staff, ensuring fair pay and good working conditions, and promoting use of outdoor learning.

They include:

- The development of guidance to support local authorities and private childcare providers to implement the living wage commitment (Action 6);
- Refreshing and re-launching national guidance on pre-birth to three and building the ambition to bring this up-to-date with new evidence (Action 9);
- The promotion of greater use of outdoor learning and physical activity by producing a 'how to' guide on finding access to suitable outdoor areas (Action 10);
- Funding a facilitator to help the sector share learning and experience in improving children's learning and development (Action 15);
- The creation of a directory of CPD opportunities (Action 5).

The action plan has also been shaped by a new report by NHS Health Scotland, published today, which found the higher the quality of ELC, the greater its effect on children's development.

Other findings from the NHS Health Scotland report showed that compared to those with no experience of early learning, children who attended settings had improved language and cognitive skills, also that fair working conditions which aid staff retention affected child interactions and stability.

Minister for childcare and early years Mark McDonald said the Government has 'committed to double investment in the sector from £420 million to £840 million.'

He said 'We know that this alone isn't enough. If the early learning and childcare expansion is to support our ambition of making Scotland the best place in the world to grow up and close the poverty-related attainment gap, we need to guarantee that the funded entitlement is of the highest possible quality.

'We are already increasing access to our most qualified staff through our commitment to ensure that nurseries in Scotland's 20 per cent most deprived areas benefit from an additional graduate by August 2018. However, we know we can do more to further strengthen quality across the ELC sector. The plan published today contains a range of actions to help achieve this.'

Purnima Tanuku, chief executive of National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA) Scotland - which contributed to the Scottish Government action plan, said, 'It really shows that the Scottish Government has listened to and worked with the sector, including NDNA Scotland, in its proposal to improve quality in early years.

'This action plan recognises the link between high-quality early learning and giving all children the best start in life which is extremely encouraging.

'Investing in the early years workforce is the best way to do this, with enhanced training opportunities, relevant qualifications and continuous professional learning'.

The action plan was developed in consultation with a Quality Reference Group made up of early years organisations, universities and charities.

-reprinted from Nursery World

Region: Europe ^[3]

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