

An equal start: A plan for equality in early learning and care in Scotland (2016) ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

Full report PDF ^[2]

Introduction

The Scottish Government has voiced a clear commitment to making childcare affordable, accessible and to a world class standard. First Minister Nicola Sturgeon has proposed to double the expenditure on childcare in order to achieve this.

The key change proposed is to increase the amount of free hours of childcare available to all 3-4 year olds and 'vulnerable' 2 year olds from 15 to 30 per week (1,140 per year). This doubling of free hours brings with it challenges, most notably that the childcare sector in Scotland is not currently prepared for such a significant increase in the statutory right of 145,000 young children to 30 hours per week of high-quality childcare by 2020.

The purpose of this report is not to further analyse the childcare sector in Scotland, but to offer solutions to the big challenge the Scottish Government has set itself. This report is about how the Scottish Government can deliver on its commitment to transform the childcare sector in Scotland.

In Part 1, we lay out the scale of the challenge, providing a detailed account of what is required in terms of increased staff, centres and places to cope with moving to 30 hours. We argue that the current infrastructure of the childcare sector, which is fragmented and privatised, will almost certainly be unable to cope with this challenge without a radical restructuring of the sector.

Part 2 outlines our plan for restructuring the childcare sector: a menu of options to manage the infrastructure and skills investment needed to transition to 30 hours, and a National Childcare Service, which will be responsible for ensuring the effective delivery of childcare through public provision. We argue strongly that not only is this approach the only way of ensuring increased quality of provision in the childcare sector, but that it is also the most efficient and cost effective, fitting into the Scottish Government's planned budget for childcare from 2020.

In Part 3, we look at how this new structure could help deliver an inspiring vision for early years education, with a national early years curriculum delivered by well-paid and qualified childhood practitioners.

Part 4 looks further ahead. Beyond delivering 30 hours, what could be done in the future to optimise Scotland's childcare sector? We earmark improvements in flexibility, affordability and quality that could make early learning and care in Scotland among the best in the world.

Early learning and care in Scotland has made consistent progress over the past decade on staff qualifications, availability of childcare and quality of provision. A single qualification framework and registration system has been established, and promoted a creative pedagogy based around play. The move to 30 free hours per week is now an opportunity to take early learning and care to a new level, where equality is embedded in every part of the system, for young children, parents and professionals. This report is a plan for an equal start.

Region: Europe ^[3]

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inequality ^[5]

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Links

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