

<i>item:</i>	8
<i>report:</i>	CYP21/08

## **EARLY YEARS PROVISION**

### **By Sam Brogan**

#### **Summary**

This report sets out issues in relation to inputs and outcomes for early education in the local authority and independent sectors, and includes the findings that confirm it is best practice to place 3 and 4 yr old provision in the same setting.

#### **1 Background**

- 1.1 A request was made at the Joint Committee on Children and Young People held on 14<sup>th</sup> March 2008 that information be brought back to the next meeting identifying the issues in relation to providing pre school education through the Local Authority and in Partnership with the Private and Voluntary sectors.
- 1.2 Highland Council has a duty to provide pre-school education as defined by the Standards in Scotland's Schools Act 2000, which amended Section 1 (1A) of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980. The Local authority has to provide 475 hours of funded pre school education each year, usually taken in five sessions of 2.5 hours or 12.5 per week over 38 weeks of the academic year. The number of hours is likely to increase from 2010 to 570 hours taken usually as five sessions of 3 hours or 15 hours per week.

#### **2 Local Authority Provision**

- 2.1 There are currently 161 pre school education provisions run by the Local Authority. As of August 2008 all nurseries with a few exceptions because of capacity or other identified issues will be able to offer combined sessions to both three and four year olds.
- 2.2 Each nursery holds registration with the Care Commission, under the category of 'Day Care of Children 0-16'. The Care Commission require that each provision has a named Manager and in all Local Authority nurseries this is the Head Teacher.
- 2.3 As Local Authority nurseries tend only to provide sessional care (i.e. sessions not exceeding 2.5 hours) the required staffing ratio of 1:10 for the three to five age group applies. With only one or two exceptions which have been risk assessed, a minimum of two staff members need to be employed, regardless of number of children in attendance.

- 2.4 Although there are differences across the Council area, Head Teachers are allocated management time according to the number of children in the whole school, including the nursery. If three hours of this time is allocated by the Head Teacher to nursery management the minimum cost of management of a small school would be £4,829 (hourly rates for Head Teachers vary according to the size of their school).
- 2.5 Nurseries are staffed with a Nursery Assistant and a Nursery Auxiliary, who are currently paid on different pay scales. A full time qualified Nursery Assistant at the top of the AP2 scale with five years service costs £20,171.24 including on costs; an unqualified Assistant on the AP1 scale costs £18,183; and a Nursery Auxiliary on the GS pay scale costs £13,106.84. These various grades will be subject to the imminent outcome of job evaluation.
- 2.6 There are currently approximately 336 members of staff on these grades.
- 2.7 Nursery Auxiliaries are regarded by the Scottish Social Services Council as fulfilling the function of Practitioner, and therefore need to be qualified to HNC /SVQIII or equivalent, albeit they do not get paid at a qualified rate. They also work in part time provision for 15 hours, which constrains their capacity to be involved in planning and associated processes with the Nursery Assistant during contracted hours. The contracted limit of 15 hours also prevents staff, particularly lone parents, drawing down tax credits to which they may be entitled, as these are only accessible to people working 16 hours or more. It may be that the Local Authority could draw from a larger pool of people if more hours were offered.
- 2.8 It is proposed that, following the outcome of job evaluation, work commences to identify how some of the challenges and anomalies identified above might be addressed in the planning for a 15 hours nursery week from 2010.

### **3 Partner Centres**

- 3.1 There are currently 89 partner centres commissioned by the Local Authority to deliver pre school education: 21 in the private sector and 67 in the voluntary sector. From August 2008, all partner providers with a few exceptions will be able to provide combined sessions for three and four year olds.
- 3.2 Private centres generally provide childcare to children from birth as well as pre school education to those children within the eligibility range. As private centres offer full day care, the required ratio for children in the three to five age ranges is 1:8.
- 3.3 The Manager tends to be the person in overall charge of the nursery. The salary scales for these posts vary greatly. Members of staff in private centres, like their managers, are paid on different pay scales depending on the employer and these costs are not shared with the

Local Authority. Most staff work longer hours than in the Local Authority and Voluntary sector as they provide full day care.

- 3.4 In voluntary sector provisions, there is a mix of Care & Learning Alliance (CALA) managed centres and stand alone parent led committee groups.
- 3.5 CALA presently fully manage 24 centres, and provide staff management in 14 centres. The remaining 29 are managed by either committees of parents or by a board of Directors in the case of community enterprises.
- 3.6 CALA manage centres on a peripatetic basis, at a cost of £3,200 per centre. Whereas in committee led groups, the manager is either the Senior Play Leader, or in a few cases, the Chairperson which adds no extra cost.
- 3.7 A full time equivalent Senior Play Worker in the voluntary sector would cost £13,524 including on costs. A Play Worker on a full time equivalent basis will cost £10,413 including on costs.
- 3.8 Each year the Scottish Government set the "advisory floor" - the minimum per capita the Local Authority is required to pay partner providers. Highland Council allocates this funding via block grant or per capita, as per appendix 1.
- 3.9 Accommodation costs are included in the block grant or per capita allocations above. Currently this equates to £3101 per annum or £16.32 per session. This covers rental costs in most centres. However, it is insufficient to cover the costs in some CLL facilities. For example, Culloden Library is paid £1805 over and above the allocation given to the Playgroup. These arrangements are presently subject to review by the ECS Service, as part of a process to establish consistent pricing for the use of all school and community facilities.
- 3.10 From August 2007, minimum pay scales were recommended to providers of pre school education staff, so that Play Workers could be guaranteed £7.00 per hour, and Senior Play Workers £8.00 or £9.00 if they hold an appropriate management qualification. This was broadly welcomed across the sector, but has raised issues for full day care providers who cannot match this salary out with funded pre school education, and cannot pass it on to staff who work with other age groups if children.

#### **4 Combined Three and Four Year Old Provision**

- 4.1 From August 2008 all providers will be expected to offer places to three and four year olds. In a few communities there has been resistance to this from parents, and in some cases from members of staff.
- 4.2 The Local authority is committed to providing early education for 3 and 4 year olds which focuses on the whole pre school experience and

promotes quality across the curriculum. This is based on the national document "A Curriculum Framework for Children 3 to 5".

4.3 There are many examples of research which include reference to mixed age groups in early years:

- Recent work commissioned by the Department of Education and Skills, found that: 'Mixed-age classes had a positive effect on children's social development and thinking skills.....Mixed-age groups should be encouraged.'
- Eileen Carmichael, Development Officer Early Years at Learning and Teaching Scotland; states that "I have worked in nurseries with 3 and 4 year olds together for 25 years and have no issues with the mixed age groups and would positively promote this."
- The latest research in the United Kingdom (the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project) shows that good quality childcare and early education promotes children's social development and learning - improving concentration, co-operation skills and their relationships with other children. The studies focus on the progress and development of 3,000 children from entering pre-school to the end of Key Stage Three in secondary school (from age 3 to 14 years old). The EPPE research is available at [www.ioe.ac.uk/projects/eppe](http://www.ioe.ac.uk/projects/eppe)

4.4 Staff with experience in larger centres, where there are only 4 year olds, have many examples of the huge developmental range within this one year. For example, in one centre, for a variety of reasons, some children had been assessed and were deemed to be functioning at various levels from a one and a half year old stage to eight and a half year old stage. This once again shows the need to look at developmental stages and individual needs rather than a flat chronological age.

4.5 The early education quality assurance team visit centres across the council area. They do not find any evidence that quality is better in centres catering for only 3 or 4 year olds, and find that within mixed age group settings, it is not easy to differentiate between a child who is 3 years and a child who is 4 years.

## **5 Quality Assurance**

5.1 Quality Assurance in every pre school centre is the responsibility of the Local Authority.

5.2 The HMIE document "Improving Scottish Education" highlighted that there were significant weaknesses in Leadership which was variable across different types of provision with Partner Centres more frequently weak in focusing on improving quality of experiences for children.

5.3 In general terms Highland inspections have reflected this finding. The Early Education team and Nursery Co-ordinator teachers are currently

addressing this by supporting all Centres on a proportional basis according to identified needs

## 6 Impact Assessment

### Equalities Impact Assessment

- 6.1 There are two stages to an Equalities Impact Assessment (EQIA). Stage 1 is an initial screening to assess for relevance. Stage 2 is a full EQIA.
- 6.2 An initial screening EQIA has been conducted on policies, functions, procedures and practices (collectively referred to as “policies”) for Pre-School Services. The appropriate pro forma is attached to this report as an appendix.
- 6.3 The Initial Screening indicates that Pre-School Service policies show that there are:
- No concerns or evidence that policies have an adverse impact on any particular group regarding **Race**. However a review will be carried out of provision of information in languages in addition to English. Currently there are leaflets for enrolment in English and Gaelic and website information in Polish.
  - There are concerns regarding **Disability**. There is evidence of good practice and a high attention given to all our duties but it is recognised that practice varies, particularly regarding the use and availability of additional support. Plans to improve the service are in hand but unlikely to be implemented imminently. It is therefore suggested that a full EQIA is required regarding Disability.
  - There are concerns regarding **Gender**. The single issue identified concerns the very low proportion of males employed in Early Years work. This is a long established pattern with no indication that it will change in the immediate future. It is therefore suggested that a full EQIA is required regarding Gender.

### Service Impact Assessment

- 6.4 The JCCYP previously decided that a service impact assessment is required where alteration in policy and/or funding is likely to significantly change future service provision.
- 6.5 Accordingly consideration should be given to the impact of the current Early Years Review on maintaining and developing a strong Voluntary and Private Sector provision for 3 & 4 year olds. The following outlines the main issues, and involves a recommendation for enhanced support to the voluntary sector.
1. There are increasing requirements on pre-school provision to meet Care Commission Standards, projected qualifications for staff and sustainability of service. This puts pressure on all providers but particularly upon the voluntary sector. There is clear evidence that

single committee run providers are experiencing the most difficulty and a small number of providers have closed at very short notice in recent years.

2. Direct support from Family Resource Officers (FROs) can help to sustain a committee run provision, provided it has a strong committee and can attract good staff. However, Committees rely on voluntary office bearers and the level of local support can change dramatically from year to year.
3. There is often a need for very practical day to day support and one solution has been for committee-run providers to seek assistance from CALA. In some cases, CALA will arrange to manage and run these provisions, and in other cases CALA can provide the paid staff. However CALA is not able to provide support in all cases – often, because they too have limited capacity.
4. CALA is of course an important voluntary sector provider itself.
5. Private providers continue to be commissioned to provide 3 & 4 year pre-school provision, where they can meet the required standards. To date, development has been limited to more urban areas where demand is highest for the full range of early years services which most attracts private providers.

## **7 Conclusions**

- 7.1 It is clear that provision in Highland will and should continue to involve a mixture of Voluntary, Private and Local Authority services.
- 7.2 While it is desirable to sustain the single committee run provider wherever possible, evidence suggests that many will continue to be vulnerable over time. It seems reasonable to conclude from past experience that an effective means of maintaining and developing a strong voluntary pre-school provision is to ensure that CALA has the long term capacity to be both a significant provider and an alternative source of support to Committee run providers.
- 7.3 The JCCYP has demonstrated its support for CALA in a number of ways, and most recently agreed to an increase in funding specifically to raise staff pay in what is traditionally low paid employment and which still compares unfavourably with the statutory sector.
- 7.4 It is recommended that the impact of changes in policy and expectation on voluntary sector pre-school providers can be offset by confirming a strategic commitment to support CALA as the principal partner provider with the statutory sector and by entering into detailed discussion with CALA regarding its role and long term funding needs.

## **Recommendations**

Members are asked to consider the issues raised in this report, and to agree:

- i. further to the outcome of job evaluation, work should commence to identify how some of the challenges and anomalies identified in local authority staffing arrangements might be addressed in the planning for the 15 hours nursery week from 2010.
- ii. that further work is undertaken to examine how commissioning arrangements can continue to support partner centre provision, including in relation to terms and conditions across the sectors, particularly in relation to management.
- iii. to confirm a strategic commitment to support CALA as the principal partner provider, and to enter into detailed discussion with CALA regarding its future role and long term funding needs.

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