



the National Parent Forum of Scotland

Early Years Learning and Childcare

In January 2015 the National Parent Forum of Scotland held a focus group on early learning and childcare in conjunction with the Commission for Childcare Reform, in Girvan, South Ayrshire. This was followed up by a national online survey.

Overall results are as follows:

Affordability:

78% of online respondents stated that childcare is not affordable. Some explained that they are no longer able to work due to the costs of childcare and that it becomes particularly difficult with multiple children. Free places did not help with affordability as parents still had to pay for wrap around care. Of those who found that childcare was affordable, some commented that it is because they felt they were high-level earners. Focus group participants explained that in their area there was heavy reliance on family and friends living nearby to provide wrap around care whilst they used the local school nurseries for the free statutory entitlement of 600 hours. This clearly creates a disadvantage for those who don't have this type of support.

Availability and flexibility:

Focus group respondents did not think there were any problems with nursery availability locally although did point to a lack of child minders and not much clarity on procedures for attending providers in neighbouring authorities. Online respondents provided a more varied response: again frequent comments on the lack of child-minders and also problems in some authorities with long private nursery waiting lists and parents unable to access the statutory entitlement in nurseries in their area.

Overall there was a great deal of criticism of the flexibility provided by childcare providers. The focus group respondents explained that school nurseries kept very rigid hours and emphasised that there are particular difficulties when having siblings in different locations. 60% of online respondents felt there was not a good choice of flexible childcare available to them, and those who had flexibility explained they got flexibility 'for a fee', i.e. private nursery provision.

Quality of care and learning and catering for children's' individual needs:

The majority of online respondents felt that care was good or excellent (80%). Focus group participants agreed but did question the continuity of care and the extent to which staff can get to know children personally. There were comments online that despite GIRFEC CfE could possibly be restricting

personalisation, as the emphasis on working to a curriculum may prevent children develop at their own pace.

It is also noted that several responses noted a lack of Gaelic medium providers.

Communication:

85% of online respondents were happy with the way their provider communicates. The majority said they had face-to-face communication supported by letters or emails, diaries / journals and parents' nights. A small number explained their provider used texts, Facebook or Twitter too. Some parents felt emails would be better than letters for real time information and to prevent the overlooking of information. The focus group respondents were similarly happy with communication; however, they had not received any information on CfE. It seems that this was possibly a local issue as 75% of online respondents had received such information from their provider. Most parents who did not receive information would find it useful (the exceptions being those already working in the area who had pre-existing knowledge).

Consultation on 600 hours:

None of the focus group participants were aware of the consultation in their area. 44% of online respondents were aware, and of those 47% found it useful. Many explained that they felt it was just a council requirement and that their opinions were not really being taken into account.

Focus group participants discussed ways they thought the local authority could best consult as per their duty. Parents thought a web survey would be more accessible than focus groups but did emphasise this would have to be advertised in a variety of ways and suggested that every early years parent in the authority should be made aware.

Named Person:

Responses were very varied amongst online respondents on whether they agreed with the Named Person approach (44% agreeing, 36% disagreeing and 20% unsure). There were concerns about the pressure on already limited resources and stretched staff. Both some online and focus group respondents mentioned that they did not feel that health visitors knew their child and were therefore not the appropriate person to be the Named Person.

Recommendations for NPFS:

- Continue to support and inform the work of the Commission for Childcare Reform to address issues of affordability and flexibility
- Communicate with nurseries to reinforce that parents want information on CfE.
- Help to create this information where required
- Work with local authorities to improve the consultation process
- Continue to work with the GIRFEC team to ensure information for parents is effective and available.