



# the National Parent Forum of Scotland

## **Out of School Care in Scotland Consultation**

The National Parent Forum of Scotland (NPFS) welcomes the Scottish Government's commitment to out of school care, and the recognition that it increases the opportunities for children and young people. A successful framework for improving flexibility and choice could also help parents access work, training, or study. This would provide parents with greater opportunities to increase their earnings, which could in turn reduce levels of child poverty.

NPFS representatives have been asked to provide feedback at various stages in the consultation process. This has included two visits from the Scottish Government's Out of School Care Team at our Forum Meetings as well as input from parents to the consultation document. This enabled parents to raise concerns and recommendations as the consultation progressed. Our Representatives also noted that the documents communicating the draft framework were 'parent-friendly' and well laid out.

## **Availability of Out of School Care**

Out of school care can be difficult to access for many reasons. One barrier for parents accessing out of school care can be the limited availability of childminders and after school clubs often being full. This has become an increasing problem as local authorities have implemented the increase to 1140 hours of funded Early Learning and Childcare (ELC). Another challenge for parents is that Childminders are taking on more younger children which impacts ratios and limits the availability for school age children. It is becoming increasingly difficult to find childcare for before and after school and during school holidays. These issues will continue to grow in the run up to August 2020. It is important that strategies are put in place to increase the out of school care on offer, such as encouraging more people to become childminders or organising more in-school provisions, in order to meet demand.

Therefore, we would recommend that the Scottish Government encourages Local Authorities, Schools, and Nurseries to expand the number of childcare places offered for out of school care, with due consideration to both the affordability and accessibility for families. It is also important to consider the difficulties schools can face in organising such provisions due to the availability of staff, volunteers, and the bureaucracy involved.

## **Qualifications Required for Out of School Care**

Parents suggested that the level of qualification required of childminders may need to be reviewed. This is due to the level of qualification required sometimes being too high. The level of qualifications required can be a barrier for those wanting to work

as a childminder, and it is important that qualifications are used as a means for up-skilling individuals rather than limiting their access to job opportunities. The potential barrier posed by qualifications to more people training as childminders is concerning to parents, as there currently are not enough childminders available.

The issue of level of qualification was also raised in relation to after school clubs and activities. Although the Scottish Government draws a distinction between after school clubs and after school activities, with after school activities often requiring staff with more qualifications, many of our representatives were in agreement that parents use clubs and activities interchangeably for after school care.

Similarly, parents have identified that although disclosure processes have an important role to play in protecting children, there are often requirements to have a PVG for parents and individuals who would like to volunteer for their schools and communities. Due to the time and cost this requires disclosure processes can result in less parents being able to volunteer.

Therefore, we would recommend that the Scottish Government reviews the levels of qualifications required for those wishing to work as childminders, and to consider when PVGs are absolutely necessary for parents to be able to volunteer.

### **Choice, Flexibility, and Structure**

NPFS recognises and welcomes the Scottish Government's commitment to ensure that out of school care is affordable for families, as well as accessible, especially to those living in rural or more remote areas. We are in agreement that these are important factors to be considered, as low incomes can have an impact on parents' ability to access out of school care. Travel is a significant factor in affordability in both rural and urban areas. The lack of public transport available in rural areas can make travel expensive, as families may be expected to own a car, or travel long distances which carry high fuel costs. Urban areas can also be expensive due to the higher cost of public transport in some central areas.

Due to various circumstances, such as alternating shift patterns, zero-hours contracts and low incomes, in addition to the factors mentioned above, many families struggle to find suitable childcare. All children should be able to access opportunities for play and learning beyond school hours. Affordable local childcare with adequate choice and flexibility is crucial so that all parents, if they choose to do so, can have the opportunity to access employment or training.

Parents identified how a review on the restrictions which are often placed on school buildings and community sports areas would be beneficial. This would provide more spaces for community and volunteer groups to offer out of school care and would increase the choice and flexibility for parents. It would increase the availability of out of school care beyond the school day for parents working different shift patterns or zero hours contracts. It could also be beneficial for those living in rural or more remote areas as clubs and activities could be hosted in local schools and centres, reducing the need for families to travel to access clubs and activities which can be both time consuming and costly.

## **Opportunities for Children and Young People**

In order to increase the opportunities available to children and young people, it is important that there are a variety of clubs and activities available to meet a variety of needs. Throughout the consultation, it has been highlighted that the socioeconomic background of children and young people has an impact on the activities they are able to access. For example, more expensive activities such as swimming or music lessons tend to be out of reach for some families and require equipment that children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may not have access to. This limits their opportunities and reduces the options their parents have for out of school care. This is also important, as it is children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds who often have less opportunities to learn and play beyond the school day and on weekends due to the high cost of activities, working patterns and commitments of families, and transport restrictions. Therefore, it is these children and young people who can benefit the most from cheaper or free out of school care, often provided by Local Authorities or Volunteers.

Parents emphasise the importance of equal opportunities for children and young people and view out of school care as having a key role to play in closing the poverty related attainment gap. For this reason, we would suggest that the Scottish Government consider the use of Pupil Equity Funding for accessible out of school care provisions.

We would also recommend that there is a review of the distinctions between out of school clubs and activities organised by schools and those run by volunteers, especially in relation to minimum qualifications and disclosure requirements. Often children and young people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are provided activities, clubs, and opportunities through community and voluntary groups, and it is these groups that can be limited by qualifications and disclosure requirements.

Our recommendation for Local Authorities, Schools, and Nurseries to expand their out of school care provisions is also relevant for choice, flexibility, and structure, as it is often these groups that are in a position to offer more affordable or free out of school care run in the community or by volunteers. A review of the restrictions placed on buildings such as school and sports centres as mentioned above is also important for enabling community and voluntary out of school care, as these spaces are often more affordable for community and voluntary groups to access.

## **Summary**

The NPFS would like to suggest:

- encouragement of local authorities and schools/nurseries to expand the number of childcare places offered for out of school care, with due consideration to affordability and accessibility for families.
- a review of the qualifications required in order to be a childminder.
- a review on the restrictions which are often placed on school buildings and sports areas in order to make these spaces more available for local out of school care.

- a consideration of the importance of out of school care in closing the poverty related attainment gap, and the potential for Pupil Equity Funding to be used for out of school care provisions.
- a review of the distinctions between after school clubs and activities organised by schools and those run by volunteers, especially in relation to minimum qualifications and disclosure requirements

We welcome the opportunity provided by the Scottish Government to contribute to and be involved in the Out of School Care consultation.

Kind Regards,

Joanna Murphy, Chair, National Parent Forum of Scotland