

Informal Extended Education in Scotland. An Overview of School Age Childcare

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Introduction

Scotland has its own devolved Parliament since 1999, and the Scottish educational, legal and cultural context for out of school care has always been unique from the rest of the UK. Hence, in this article I will shed light on the education system and on the school age childcare services in Scotland. In the third part I will give an overview of the Scottish Out of School Care Network (SOSCN) which is the national organisation in Scotland that fosters high quality childcare, play and learning for children of school age.

In Scotland extended education and school age childcare is most often referred to as “out of school care”, then “after school care”, “holiday club” or breakfast club. There is also some extended education in Scotland in the form of homework support and other activities provided by teachers in schools, as well as summer schools for sports or the arts, however, the focus in this article is on the more prevalent school age childcare, which, although informal learning, is also a type of extended education.

Early Learning and Childcare is the preferred term of the Scottish Government for what might be called pre-school education or early education and care. Learning is used rather than education as this acknowledges what the child brings as an active learner. Care emphasises the relationships involved and that care and learning are part of the same processes.

The Education System

Children begin primary school at aged 4–5, after usually two years of part time free early learning and childcare, currently 600 hours per annum, with the Scottish Government aiming to increase this to 1,140 hours in the next five years. Disadvantaged two year olds also get free early learning and childcare. Parents pay for any childcare they need beyond the free hours, where available. Children move to high school or

secondary school generally at age 12/13 and are in full time education until they are 16 to 18.

Numbers

The population in 2015 was estimated at 5,373,000, with 17% of people estimated to be aged under 16, 65% aged 16–64 and 18% aged 65 and over (NRS, 2015).

There were 777,269 children, and over 50,000 teachers in education in September 2015; with 97,262 children in 2,492 early learning & childcare centres and 391,148 pupils in 2,039 primary schools, 281,939 pupils in 361 secondary schools and 6,920 pupils in 144 special schools (Scottish Government, 2016).

Schools Management and Curriculum

Local authorities manage all schools in Scotland, apart from some private fee paying schools, with only a handful opted out of local authority control; this is very different from developments in England. The Scottish Government sets the overall curriculum; this is the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) (Scottish Executive, 2004). All teachers have to register with the General Teaching Council Scotland and hold degree or postgraduate teaching qualifications.

School Hours

The school day starts at 9am and finishes at 3.30 pm, Monday to Friday, with some areas of Scotland operating a half day on Fridays. There are around 40–42 weeks of school, over three terms, six weeks summer breaks and midwinter, spring and autumn breaks. Parent's employment hours are often 9 to 5 or longer.

School Age Childcare Services

School age childcare services often operate in the morning, from 8-9 with a breakfast club, after school from 3.30 to 6pm, or later, and all day holiday clubs in the summer or school breaks, 8am to 6pm.

The Care Inspectorate in Scotland regulates all services; standards for childcare include staff ratios and environment indicators, the quality of staff interactions with children, the management processes and staff training and qualifications. Ratios for staff never go beyond 1:10 and are lower for younger children and those with additional needs.

Staff in services must register with the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) and, like early learning and childcare, out of school care managers must be qualified or working towards a degree level childhood practice qualification (unless a

registered teacher), while practitioners and support staff all have specific levels of qualifications for their role.

There are around 4,500 staff in out of school care. A total 79,000 children aged (5–12) were registered with a variety of services in 2014 (Care Inspectorate, 2015). Childminders, who do not need to be qualified, looked after about 21,000 of those children, while the majority were in out of school care and holiday services and provision which has out of school care as an additional service (e.g. nurseries, family centres).

Premises for School Age Childcare

Nearly half of services operate in school premises, but are not directly managed by the school, apart from a small number in the Highlands. The rest operate in community centres, church halls, a few have their own premises. Half are voluntary committee parents managed, with paid staff, while a few local authorities manage direct provision; the remainder are in the private sector. Most schools in Scotland are run by their local authorities and access to school buildings, to provide out of school care, varies, with some offering free or low cost access, and others charging market rates.

Scottish Government Policies for School Age Childcare

The Children Act 1995 (Scotland) includes a duty to provide daycare for school age children in “need” before and after school and during the school holidays, therefore local authorities can purchase childcare places to cover these children in specific circumstances (this is not a large number of places). The Children and Young People Act 2014 (Scottish Parliament) contains a duty to for local authorities to consult parents on their early learning and childcare and out of school care needs. However, while there is a corresponding duty to provide at least 600 hours a year of free early learning and childcare, there is no such statutory duty for out of school care.

Help with Costs of Childcare (UK)

Services mainly survive through parental fee income. Some working parents get help with childcare costs if on a low income (UK childcare tax credits up to 70% of costs) or if their employer chooses to provide childcare vouchers. Some councils offer small grants for qualifications or inclusion of a child with disabilities.

The Scottish Out of School Care Network – Supporting Children's Rights to Play, Care and Learning

The Scottish Out of School Care Network (SOSCN), a charity established in 1991, is the national infrastructure umbrella organisation providing support, mentoring, training, quality assurance, information and resources to the over 1,000 school-aged childcare and holiday services in Scotland, which provide childcare, play and learning to more than 50,000 children. The work of SOSCN is underpinned by a strong commitment to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

SOSCN provides training, quality development, networking and information events for the school age childcare sector, and works on a national policy level with the Scottish Government, local authorities and regulatory bodies.

Policy and Development

Currently SOSCN is supporting the development of an updated national policy for out of school care in Scotland. This builds on their experience of helping create the first national policy for out of school care back in 2003; *School's Out – a framework for the development of out of school care* (Scottish Executive, 2003). Since being first funded in 1993, when there were less than 160 school age childcare services across Scotland, SOSCN has helped in various programmes with the creation of new services and supporting the sustainability of existing services for children of school age.

The two senior staff are also qualified researchers, including research with children, and are experienced trainers. There is an information officer managing the website and membership resources, and a qualified physical activity and wellbeing co-ordinator delivering related physical activities training. The organisation is currently grant funded by the Scottish Government.

Quality Improvement

A child in a full time after school place and a holiday club could spend 1,170 hours a year in out of school care, over five or six years, therefore SOSCN stresses the importance of the attachment relationships formed in this time.

SOSCN has their own quality improvement framework, Achieving Quality Scotland, centred on the UNCRC, Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) and the importance of play.

Qualified Professionals

SOSCN pushes for better recognition of out of school care staff as qualified professionals and in workforce surveys finds that staff do enjoy their work and increasingly see it as a career, despite low pay (SOSCN, 2013). In consultation events (SOSCN,

2015) across Scotland, staff felt that they are not treated as fellow professionals by teachers, social work or health professionals, despite knowing their work contributes to children and families wellbeing.

What Children Think about Out of School Care

In 2014 (Audain, 2015) over 400 children responded to SOSCN's children's national holiday care survey. It was found that the opportunities to play, to make friends and spend time with friends are what children value the most about out of school holiday care. There were very few negatives such as annoying behaviour of others or feeling left out. The overwhelming majority also felt that the staff cared about them, listened to them and they could tell them if they had a problem or worry.

Research and International Role

Research has demonstrated e.g. Tanner et al. (2016) and Kadar-Statat (2015), that out of school care, in particular, benefits more disadvantaged children in improving literacy and numeracy, yet out of school care is still often modelled on providing childcare for working parents, and not, as SOSCN argues, on the needs of children for the positive play, care and (informal) learning good quality services provide.

SOSCN recently carried out research for the Scottish Government led Play Strategy for Scotland Implementation Group. This report *Learning about Play* (Audain & Shoolbread, 2015) is discussed in another article.

In developing evidence based policy on out of school care the shortage of robust, recent research in this field is a barrier, therefore SOSCN would encourage academics to help build up a new evidence base, both in Scotland and internationally.

SOSCN maintains links internationally with colleagues in the field of school age childcare e.g.: from Australia and New Zealand, the US, Canada, Denmark and Iceland. Staff were previously involved in the European Network for School Age Childcare (ENSAC) which, sadly, is no longer active. SOSCN is keen that all in this field take part in international co-operation and would be willing to help co-ordinate a new international network.

Please do visit www.soscn.org to find out more about us.

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