



Working it out: helping to shape the future of Scotland's children's sector workforce

Seminar report

30 October 2008

**in association with Out of School Care Network
Stirling**

This seminar was held in association with the Scottish Out of School Care Network. It examined workforce reform within the school age child care sector, discussed implications of extending qualification requirements for work in school age childcare and related areas and shared visions for the future of the workforce.

A desire for the out-of-school care sector to become a more integrated part of the children's sector workforce was a key issue arising from *Working it out's* first seminar in Stirling.

Group discussions revealed pride among out of school care (OSC) workers in their work and a strong belief that OSC plays an important role in children's development and complements academic learning. There was frustration though that OSC workers can often feel very closed off in their day-to-day work from others in related professions, particularly from education, despite knowing that OSC could be a very effective bridge for children and parents who may find they need other services such as extra learning support. Better integration with education would enable better "holistic" care for children.

There were a number of different reasons for this concern, including having little in common, in terms of qualifications, training and terms and conditions, with those working in education, health or social work. Better communication can only be achieved if OSC workers share common language, values and skills with their colleagues in other areas of the workforce and they will only feel valued if they work with similar terms and conditions and have the same opportunities for career progression. It was felt that some local authorities are better than others in ensuring OSC is embedded in and respected by local plans. "In many areas OSC workers are on waiting lists to receive funding for qualifications. Demand is not being met and the current priority is for early years and

public sector staff”, said one delegate. By 2010 all OSC workers will need to hold, or be working towards, an appropriate qualification – SCQF level 8 for managers, level 6/7 for practitioners and level 5 for support workers. Managers working in early years will have to have level 9 qualification from 2011 and it is expected that the same requirement will be set for OSC managers after that.

There were mixed views at the seminar among OSC workers about whether a target date for the minimum level 9 qualification should be set imminently or whether more time is required in order to campaign for the extra resources they feel are required in order to fulfill the obligation.

The part-time nature of OSC, with many workers working two jobs, makes it difficult for many in OSC to find time to gain qualifications.

Solutions

There was strong openness to change at the seminar and many ideas put forward. Better integration of OSC with schools could be achieved with a more coherent qualifications framework. On a practical level, this could mean that OSC workers have the same training and qualifications as classroom assistants. Qualifications taken by the two already share many similarities anyway and could cross over. Not only would this create more work opportunities for OSC workers, and vice versa, it could also give children better continuity of care with those providing support in classrooms also working in OSC. “The same staff providing OSC could be part of the school team, providing classroom support, play activities and opportunities during break times, and project work with small groups.” Delegates were optimistic that the new Standard for Childhood Practice qualifications will provide opportunities for creating a more integrated qualification structure, but were also particularly open to exploring the introduction of pedagogy to the children’s sector workforce.

With wider recognition of the qualifications held and professionalism of the out of school care workforce, delegates hoped this would provide leverage for better pay and conditions. All agreed that more funding is needed to make changes but were sensitive to the financial restrictions of a sector which is run primarily by the voluntary sector.

Despite the challenges delegates acknowledged optimistically that the OSC workforce is growing and that, on a daily basis, they meet colleagues who enjoy their work because they love working with children, and show loyalty to the service.