

Working it out

help shape the future of Scotland's children's sector workforce

Symposium Dinner, 31 March 2009 The Bonham Hotel, Edinburgh

Report

Overview	page 2
Proposed actions summarised	page 3
Proposals for future reform	page 4
Symposium participants	page 7

Children in Scotland
every child - every childhood

Overview

A dinner symposium brought together key stakeholders from across the children's sector in Scotland to discuss future workforce development. The event was co-chaired by Adam Ingram, Minister for Children and the Early Years and Bronwen Cohen, Chief Executive of Children in Scotland. Participants included chief officers, senior staff from different sectors and a range of services, and regulatory and funding bodies (see full list on page 7).

The symposium considered the implications of the reform agenda and policies such as the Early Years Framework, Equally Well, Achieving Our Potential, the Single Outcome Agreement and the Concordat. These policies require increased workforce capacity and new skill development in a tough economic climate.

Children in Scotland has been commissioned by the Scottish government to undertake a 12-month project to November 2009 to raise debate about future development of the children's sector workforce. This symposium was organised to discuss ideas for taking forward future reform in light of the following issues that have emerged from the debate.

- Gaps in available data that prevent a totally accurate reflection of the children's sector workforce. This poses a serious obstacle to workforce planning and reform. Unless the workforce is clearly defined, it is difficult to plan in a joined up way to provide the skills that are required.
- Deep-set boundaries between professions despite a significant amount of activity over the last 15 years to develop services that respond in a holistic way. Questions have been raised over the way the children's sector is regulated – whether a number of different regulators fits with the reform agenda.
- New policies such as the early years framework have placed new emphasis on people having a much broader range of skills to work with children, families and communities in general. Its focus on prevention and early intervention also requires a much broader range of people to have the skills to identify needs and risks at an early stage. A skills gap has emerged and the workforce training will need to be reviewed in light of this.

Proposed actions summarised

Adam Ingram, Minister for Children and Early Years, asked participants for concrete suggestions on how to overcome some of the challenges the children's sector workforce is currently facing. Suggested actions are summarised below. These suggestions can be viewed in more detail on pages 4 – 6:

- Develop shared values and a common language across the children's sector workforce as a priority (page 4)
- Develop the lead professional and managerial roles to support integrated working and collaboration across the sector (page 4)
- Focus on improving the professional identity and status of those groups in the workforce that are currently undervalued (page 4)
- Introduce a common core of skills, knowledge, values and goals right across the children's sector workforce through a simplified and more coherent qualifications framework (page 4)
- Explore further the potential for using the pedagogy model in Scotland, to introduce a professional standard for working very broadly with children, young people, families and communities across settings (page 5)
- Explore further the potential for the Childhood Practice Standard to be recognised by other groups in the workforce, beyond early years and play practitioners (page 5)
- Encourage creative ways of maximising workforce capacity at local level. (page 5)
- Explore potential for pilots between education providers and employers which explore their role in delivering ambitious reform of initial education and professional development. (page 5)

Proposals for future reform

Shared values and common language across the children's sector

Development at national level of shared values and common language across the children's sector workforce should be the starting point. There was broad agreement its absence remains a significant barrier child-centred working.

Development of lead professional and managerial roles role

The workforce is increasingly working in multi-disciplinary teams and effective leadership, not just within professions but beyond, has become paramount. There was broad consensus that leadership and management skills to support integrated working and collaboration across the sector must continue to be developed.

A strong focus on 'undervalued' parts of the children's sector workforce

There is a large and diverse section of the children's sector workforce that is undervalued in terms of pay and conditions and is still struggling to find a professional identity and status. They make up approximately half of the entire children's sector workforce. Play workers, childcare workers, family workers, classroom assistants, out of school care workers, health care workers, social work assistants, home/school link workers and many others are all critical for the effective implementation of the new policies such as the Early Years Framework, which require a broader skill set to work more closely with and engage children, families and communities.

There is often overlap in the type of work that they do and a simpler way of organising this part of the workforce could result in huge gains.

Local authority education and children's services directors and the Scottish Social Services Council agreed that the main focus of reform should indeed be on this section of the workforce.

A simpler and coherent qualifications framework could help improve professional recognition of this group. A framework built from a common core of competencies for the wider children's sector workforce could act as a foundation and entry point for working with children and families across settings, and also as a springboard for progression into specialist areas. A more flexible workforce where people are able to work across different settings could also increase the capacity of the workforce.

Core competencies and a simplified qualifications framework

There was broad agreement among participants that a common core of skills, knowledge, values and goals right across the children's sector workforce would be beneficial. For established professions it could help achieve the shared understanding and sense of purpose that is a missing link in child-centred working. As seen above, it could also simplify entry to the children's sector, improve the professional identity and status of a large section of the workforce, improve opportunities for career progression and increase workforce capacity by making it more flexible.

A number of different stakeholders are required to take this forward – leadership and a clear statement of policy from national government; commitment from bodies such as the Scottish

Funding Council, Scottish Qualifications Authority and regulators of the children's sector such as the General Teaching Council and Scottish Social Services Council; and strong, long-term relationships between providers of initial education and training, and workforce employers.

Introducing a new qualification and new role

There is also increasing interest in the concept of pedagogy and development of a Scottish Pedagogy qualification. Representatives of both residential care and out of school care highlighted the benefits to their workforce of exchange programmes they have run with North European pedagogues. Pedagogues have a strong professional identity and they are trained to have a very broad understanding of work with children and families, and to work with them in a holistic way. In Denmark, for example, pedagogues are qualified to work with people from 0-100 years of age in settings across education, social services and health, although two-thirds work with children under the age of 10. Out of school care workers in Scotland (and throughout the UK), who are generally low-paid and part-time, are working towards achieving a more professional identity. Some have felt that exchange work with pedagogue students from Denmark has helped them find the professional identity they are looking for. In Sweden, pedagogues and teachers are considered co-professionals who work together to manage the school day. They are in the same building and work with the same children. Pedagogues have also been an inspiration to those working in residential care – an area of the workforce where qualification levels remain quite low (although they are working towards a minimum level of qualification for registration with the Scottish Social Services Council) and professional identity an issue. The sector has a very positive interest in pedagogy as a means of developing a qualified workforce that understands the broader picture of young people, rather than just, for example, the youth justice agenda.

Broadening the new Childhood Practice Standard

There are possibilities for the relatively new Childhood Practice Standard to become broader so that it is standard not just for those working in early years or play work, but in many of the other areas mentioned above.

Local creativity

At a time when there is demand to increase workforce capacity yet budgets are tight and may even decrease over the next few years, local authorities are having to be creative and look at new ways of making the most of their existing workforce.

Glasgow City Council's plan to undertake a mapping exercise of paraprofessional staff groups working in the children's sector, including catering and cleaning staff, was offered as an example. "They are all child and family service workers. We are not going to have more staff, so how can we make better use of those we have? We are looking at ways of upskilling this group to create a more flexible workforce across the city."

Changing the way we deliver initial education and professional development

Education providers are already working to help ensure initial education and professional development reflects the strong policy focus on outcomes and child-centred working.

Participants agreed that more ambitious reform will only be possible with stronger and long-term relationships with employers and with support from funding bodies. The Scottish Funding Council

agreed it would be happy to consider supporting any ideas that education providers and employers want to develop, as long as there was “demand at the other end” – reforming initial education is pointless without taking employability into account. There needs to be relevant jobs at the end of courses.

Exploring more flexible mediums for delivering courses was also raised. Online delivery, for example, is relatively new and has opened up initial education and training to people who would otherwise have been unable to access it. Closer relationships between education providers and employers could also help deliver courses locally, particularly where grounding theory in practice is so important. Conducting pilots, where and when this might be appropriate, is a possible solution for exploring not only new qualifications but new ways of delivering them involving a closer relationship with employers. Again, achieving this will require partnership from a number of different stakeholders – education providers, employers, the Scottish government, regulators and funding bodies.

Symposium participants

Adam Ingram, MSP (Co-chair), Minister for Children and Early Years, Scottish Government

Bronwen Cohen (Co-chair), Chief Executive, Children in Scotland

Val Cox, Deputy Director, Workforce and Capacity Issues, Scottish Government

David Purdie, Workforce Development Unit, Scottish Government

John Kemp, Deputy Director of Strategic Development, Scottish Further & Higher Education Funding Council

Carole Wilkiinson, Chief Executive, Scottish Social Services Council

Margaret Doran, Executive Director of Education & Social Work Services, City of Glasgow Council

Joan Parr, Head of Education, Scottish Arts Council,

Professor Bernard King, Principal, Abertay University

Gillian Tee, Director of Children & Families, City of Edinburgh Council

Tom Hamilton, Director of Educational Policy, General Teaching Council

Norma Hart, Senior Lecturer, School of Education, Aberdeen University

Irene Audain, Chief Executive, Scottish Out of School Care Network

Janet Brown, Chief Executive, Scottish Qualifications Authority

Graham Bell, Chief Executive, Kibble Education & Care Centre

Dr Patricia Jackson, Consultant Paediatrician, Community Child Health, NHS Lothian University Hospitals Division

Karen Mountney, Programme Development Manager, Children in Scotland

Nicola Pay, Communications Officer, Children in Scotland