

Education, Children and Families Committee

10 am, Tuesday, 23 January 2024

The Early Years Service

Executive/routine
Wards
Council Commitments

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 The Education, Children and Families Committee is asked to:
 - 1.1.1 To note the range of services and model of delivery within the Early Years Sector
 - 1.1.2 To note the analysis of Early Years Parent Survey 2023
 - 1.1.3 To note the constraints and opportunities of the current financial pressures.
 - 1.1.4 To note that the Strategic programme Board is overseeing the revision of Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) delivery model to ensure that the service is delivered within budget.
 - 1.1.5 To note a report on the Early Years hourly rate for partners 2024-25 will come to committee in April 2024.

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Report

The Early Years Service

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 The Scottish Government committed to deliver an increase in funded Early Learning and Childcare from 600 hours to 1140 hours for every child aged 3-4 years and Eligible 2 year-olds to address poverty and to enable parents into work and training. The Local Authority successfully planned and implemented this strategy within the agreed budget and continues to deliver a high-quality service. Since 2020, there has been an increase from 35% to 42% of families accessing their funded provision via Partner Provider Nurseries despite a decline in the quality of provision; the increased number of children equates to a significant cost increase from the central budget.
- 2.2 The Scottish Government reviewed its grant funding for Edinburgh ELC from £46.4m in 2021-23 to £41.3m in 2022-23 and then reduced again to £40.4m in 2023-24. The overall reduction of £6m is therefore a major budget pressure. To continue to deliver a high-quality service, we need to reshape the model of delivery for ELC.
- 2.3 At the meeting held on 27 April 2023, The Education, Children and Families committee requested a full report on the early years` service. This report sets out all areas the early years` service has responsibility for. These are summarised under the themes in the table below:

Quality	Operational	Families
Support & Challenge – Local Authority, Partner Providers & Childminders	Compliance with Statutory guidance.	Family engagement and learning
Implementation of strategy using Education Scotland and and CI Quality Framework	Funded ELC	Parenting Programmes
Health and Social Care Standard	Non funded ELC	Temporary accommodation & Homelessness
Curriculum for Excellence – Early Level	Deferral/early entry	Income maximisation.
P1 Pedagogy- developing leaning through play	Additional Support Needs (audit support)	Sharing learning(digital)
Continuous Learning – Training, qualifications and development of apprentices through EELCA	Workforce- providing and developing a workforce that meets the needs of all children	
Outdoor learning	Estates/infrastructure	
Additional Support Needs(intervention and support)	Partner contracts	
Digital learning	Breakfast clubs and School Aged Childcare (SACC) (5-12 year olds)	

3. Background

- 3.1 The Local Authority duty to provide funded early learning and childcare to eligible children as required under The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 (Modification) (No. 1) Order 2019 and the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 (Modification) (No. 2) Order 2019.
- 3.2 Edinburgh's Early Years Service provides support to children and families from babies to 12 years old.
- 3.3 There is a central early years` quality improvement team which is comprised of 1 Quality Improvement Manager, 4 EY QIEO and 2 Early Years Managers to deliver the following support to 110 local authority registered early years settings; of which 32 settings provide ELC all year round and 78 settings open term time only.

City of Edinburgh are in partnership with 104 providers from the private, voluntary and independent sectors and 42 childminders to deliver funded early learning and childcare.
- 3.4 Approx 11K children are supported through the work of the early learning and childcare service.
- 3.5 All 90 primary schools are supported by having an Early Years Practitioners at Primary 1 stage to support developmentally appropriate learning through play.
- 3.6 All expansion plans came in on time and within budget however the recent budget settlement has presented a significant budget pressure in the delivery of a quality service.

4. Main report

- 4.1 The Local Authority has a duty to secure provision of Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) for eligible children from term after 3rd birthday, including Gaelic medium, and for Eligible 2 year-olds according to the specific criteria. The LA also provides non-funded places for babies through a centralised application system and discretionary provision based on needs of families.
- 4.2 Parents` views are sought regularly and the feedback from this provides data to inform the delivery models of provision to meet parents` needs. See data analysis of survey attached in Appendix 1.
- 4.3 The quality of provision in all settings is supported and challenged through the Quality Improvement Team whose remits are noted above in 3.3. The impact of this work creates a universal, targeted and intense model of support across all settings. Any setting that fails to meet any of the 10 points within the National Standard are placed into the Service Improvement Protocol (SIP) and have 1 year to show improvement. Currently there are 3% Local Authority (LA) settings and 22% Partner Provider Nurseries (PPN) settings who are in SIP- with 10 PPN plus 1 LA settings in the Extended SIP process.

4.4 The following data shows the average Care Inspectorate (CI) evaluations since September 2022 until now, for both Local Authority and Partner Provider settings. All ELC settings are required to achieve an evaluation of GOOD (4) or better by the CI to meet the National Standard and be in partnership with the local authority.

	Number of inspections	How good is our play and learning?	How good is our Setting?	How good is our leadership?	How good is our staff team?
Local Authority settings (105)	15	4	4	4	4
Partner Provider settings (104)	53	3	4	3	3
Childminders (42)	4	5	5	4	5

(where 6 excellent, 5 very good, 4 GOOD, 3 adequate, 2 satisfactory, 1 unsatisfactory)

4.5 Care inspectorate have been prioritising settings for inspection that were not previously meeting the National Standard prior to its introduction in August 2021. The LA team, as the guarantor of quality for every setting, works a large amount of time in partner settings to ensure that the quality of their provision meets the basic standards. Leadership as well as recruitment and retention of skilled qualified staff appears to be the biggest challenge for a number of partner provider settings within a service improvement period. This also poses a challenge in terms of sustainability of support from the local authority quality improvement team. Significant support can be given to support and upskill staff who then move on to other settings. The support from the local authority has been proportionate and focusing on settings that fall short of the national standard. Several larger private companies who manage multiple settings where several of their Edinburgh settings fail to meet the national standard are within a service improvement period. Despite having the support from their own internal quality improvement teams and that of the local authority, these settings remain a significant risk, with many of the settings within extended service improvement periods.

4.6 His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) also inspected 7 LA and 1 PPN settings; the average evaluations for period 2022-23 were: -

QI- 1.3	QI- 2.3	QI- 3.1	QI- 3.2
Leadership of change	Learning, Teaching & Assessment	Ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion	Securing Children's progress
5@Very Good	4@Good	5@Very Good	4@Good

The 1 inspection of a partner setting which was evaluated at 4 (good) for both 2.3 and 3.2 (short model of inspection.)

The quality of provision within those Partner Providers inspected by the Care Inspectorate is therefore variable with the average evaluations of quality being below the National Standard. The main contributors to partners being in SIP, is quality, leadership and retention of staffing. Despite intense support from the LA, staffing changes and lack of quality assurance means that settings are in a constant cycle of improvement and then declining standards.

- 4.7 The Early Years service also manages the P1 deferral process where parents can choose an additional year of funded early learning and childcare. There has been a substantial increase in the numbers of families choosing this option since implementation in 2022 with 502 requests and 702 in 2023. Current budget pressures are therefore projected to rise in coming years with no additional funding being provided to cover these costs. The Scottish Government pilot project on deferrals indicated that there was no initial significant increase in the number of families requesting deferrals, however in Edinburgh it is evident that a deferred year has been requested by a growing number of parents (see Appendix 1). To minimise the need for deferrals, the service has implemented play-based learning in P1 as the universal model of delivery benefitting all learners. To support this approach, the service provides significant resources for learning for ELC staff and P1 teachers. Early Years Practitioners further support a developmentally play-based learning approach in all schools at P1 stage, to help Realise the Ambition at Early Level.
- 4.8 In 2020, EC&F committee approved the retention and deployment of 20 EY teachers to work across ELC settings identified through the EY quality improvement support model. This team of teachers support staff and children and has a positive impact on children`s learning experiences within settings.
- 4.9 20 Equity and Excellence Leads (EELs) support closing the poverty related attainment gap focusing on supporting children with communication and literacy as we know that this has the best impact on positive outcomes for the future. These are Scottish Government funded posts and are allocated to specific setting with the highest number of children living in SIMD Quintile 1.
- 4.10 To deliver a quality service the Early Years budget is deployed to deliver services for and with children and their families through a range of homeless support, parent and early education programmes, leadership and aspiring leadership programmes at all levels, outdoor learning as well as Forest and Beach Kindergarten, IT, a grow-your-own practitioners` approach through Edinburgh`s Early Learning and Childcare Academy (EELCA) and a researched-based creative curriculum.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 The expansion of a high-quality Early Years` service in Edinburgh has been extensive and has been planned and managed within budget. To continue to deliver

this level of service, with a £6m reduction in budget, a review of the delivery model is urgently required. It is recognised that by providing service inhouse that quality of service can be more assured. It is essential that the EY delivery plan meets the principles of the EY expansion (quality, flexibility, accessibility and affordability) whilst also delivering best value for the council. In response to the significant reduction in revenue budget from £46.4m-£40.4m, governance of the review of the ELC delivery model is being overseen by Strategic Programme Board (SPB).

5.2 To bring the ELC service back within budget, the following areas are being considered by the SPB (Appendix 2) -

- 5.2.1 Maximise the use of local authority places by reducing the need to commission external provision and providing places for children from other local authorities whose parents/carers work in Edinburgh.
- 5.2.2 Provide greater flexibility for parents to access affordable childcare by enabling them to purchase additional hours in local authority settings.
- 5.2.3 Reduce the number of local authority settings open over the Christmas holiday period when the uptake of places is lower.
- 5.2.4 Review demand for term time and full year provision across the city to ensure local authority provision continues to meet the changing needs of parents/carers.

6. Financial impact

Finance

6.1 The table below sets out the funding made available to City of Edinburgh Council for the 1140 expansion programme. While there were significant increases between 2019/20 and 2021/22, since that time the funding has reduced by over £6 million.

This was due to a change in methodology applied by the Scottish Government along with changes applied to the total 'pot' of money available for distribution.

- Total quantum reduced by £15m in 2022/23 and a further £9.1m in 2023/24
- Introduction of rurality (5%) and deprivation (20%) elements to funding formula in 2022/23

Year	1140 Grant	Change
2019-20	£24,427,688	
2020-21	£41,462,688	£17,035,000
2021-22	£46,433,688	£4,971,000
2022-23	£41,313,984	-£5,119,704
2023-24	£40,405,000	-£908,984

It should also be noted that further funding will be provided to allow providers to pay a £12 hourly rate to their employees, however at the time of writing the level of funding has still to be confirmed.

- 6.2 The change in methodology has impacted particularly on Edinburgh and we now receive the third lowest rate of funding per child of any authority in Scotland, we were however paying the sixth highest rate in 2022/23 and significantly higher than rates paid by other city authorities (2023/24 comparable figures will be available in coming weeks)

West Lothian	£6.40
Moray	£6.30
Scottish Borders	£6.21
Argyll & Bute	£6.11
East Lothian	£6.04
City of Edinburgh	£6.03
Midlothian	£6.02

Other cities for comparison

Glasgow	£5.79
Aberdeen	£5.55
Dundee	£5.45

- 6.3 Further pressure has been put on this fund with the introduction of the right to deferral, which is estimated to cost £2.007m for City of Edinburgh in 2023/24. The funding is also required to cover associated inflationary costs such as pay award and any increases to hourly rates paid to providers.

Significant work has been progressed to manage staffing levels for council led provision which has managed the budget shortfall down to £3.5 million, however this level of overspend is not sustainable and must be brought back in to line with the available budget.

7. Equality and Poverty Impact

- 7.1 The Standards and Quality report Appendix 3 reflects and aligns with the wider Edinburgh Learns strategy to provide a Fairer, Greener and Healthier city for all our children and young people.

8. Climate and Nature Emergency Implications

- 8.1 Children in Early Years should be learning outdoors at least 50% of the time in ELC
- 8.2 7 Care Inspectorate registered Forest Kindergarten sites provide fulltime outdoor learning
- 8.3 New builds are built to Passivhaus standards.

9. Risk, policy, compliance, governance and community impact

- 9.1 Risk related to the project will be managed by the Strategic Programme Board. Financial risk is mitigated within the project.
- 9.2 EY Standards and Quality and Improvement Plan are aligned to the wider Edinburgh Learns for Life strategy
- 9.3 2023 Parent survey analysis Appendix 1

10. Background reading/external references

- [Early learning and childcare: statutory guidance - July 2021 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/early-learning-and-childcare-statutory-guidance-2021/pages/introduction.aspx)
- [Funding Follows The Child and The National Standard for Early Learning and Childcare Providers: Operating Guidance - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/funding-follows-the-child-and-the-national-standard-for-early-learning-and-childcare-providers-operating-guidance-2021/pages/introduction.aspx)
- [Quality framework for early learning and childcare 2022 PRINT FRIENDLY.pdf \(careinspectorate.com\)](https://www.careinspectorate.com/quality-framework-for-early-learning-and-childcare-2022-print-friendly.pdf)
- [How good is our early learning and childcare? \(education.gov.scot\)](https://www.education.gov.scot/inspections-and-regulation/early-learning-and-childcare/how-good-is-our-early-learning-and-childcare/)
- [Health and Social Care Standards: My support, my life \(careinspectorate.com\)](https://www.careinspectorate.com/health-and-social-care-standards-my-support-my-life/)

11. Appendices

- 11.1 Appendix 1 Data Analysis of Survey
- 11.2 Appendix 2 Revised Delivery Plan
- 11.3 Appendix 3 Standards and Quality Report

Appendix 1

Duty to consult and plan on delivery of early learning and childcare.

Education authorities have a duty to consult with parents and carers on the delivery of early learning and childcare at least once every two years.

Our most recent survey of parents and carers which ran from 23 October to 24 November 2023 covered the following themes.

- Delivery of 1140 hours
- The application process for a funded place
- Parent/carer satisfaction with the quality of provision
- The criteria for allocating funded places
- Support for children with additional support needs
- Parental engagement and involvement.
- Deferring entry to primary 1

546 parents/ carers responded to the survey. 56% access their funded early learning and childcare at local authority nursery and forest kindergarten settings and 44% in private partner provider provision.

Most parents/carers were able to access their first choice of setting 91%. Of the 48 responses who did not receive a place at their first-choice setting, 85% received a place at their second or third choice setting.

The following information is a summary of findings and where applicable, the actions we will take as a result of the survey.

Delivery of 1140 hours

92% of parents/carers were informed directly by their early years setting if they had a place, but 8% (42 parents/carers) were not directly notified and had to 'chase up' for information. 1140 hour placements are provided through a variety of delivery models including full year and term time provision. 78% of parents/carers had a term time placement and 22% a full year placement. Of the full year placements, 38% had the option to purchase additional hours. 21% of respondents stated a preference for a full year placement in a local authority setting with the option to purchase additional hours beyond their funded entitlement.

1. **Theme** - Flexibility

Issues – access to more hours in local authority settings

Solution – introduce the option to purchase additional hours in local authority settings that have capacity.

The application process for a funded place

37% of respondents provided feedback on how the process could be improved. The following provides details of the key themes, issues for parents/carers and what could be done to address these.

1. Theme – Communication

Issues – Knowing in advance if a child will get their first-choice setting.

Solution – Update the nursery admissions guidance to ensure settings inform parents/carers where their child is on the waiting list when they apply. Bring forward the date for notifying parents/carers when their child has a place.

2. Theme – Online centrally managed applications.

Issues – Parents/carers complete multiple applications. Requirement to email or hand in personally to settings.

Solution – The creation of an online application process started in 2019 and this was due to be linked with the new national SEEMIS early years system with an expectation it would be in place for August 2020. Unfortunately, significant delays to the national system has negatively impacted on the availability of the online application process for parents/carers. The newly created online application form has been tested with a sample group of parents/carers and is ready to start as soon as the new SEEMIS early years system goes live in October 2024

The admissions criteria for allocating places

The criteria for the allocation of funded places is set by the Scottish Government. However local authorities have discretion to allocate places for children who are not eligible and in March 2022, the Education, Children and Families Committee agreed to use this discretion to allocate Terrific Two-year-old places to children living in temporary accommodation or homeless and for children who had been supported from birth by the NHS Family Nurse Partnership programme.

- 68% of respondents agreed with the admission criteria for Terrific Two year old places. Most comments were either of the view that income threshold for places was set too low or stated that Terrific Two year old places should be available for all children.
- 88% of respondents agreed with the priority order for the allocation of places for children the term after their third birthday. Some commented that funding should be available the week after a child's third birthday rather than the term after. A few comments stated that funded places should only be for Edinburgh residents.
- 89% of respondents agreed with the criteria for allocating forest kindergarten places.

1. Theme – Forest kindergarten places

Issues – Ensuring children from disadvantaged backgrounds are able to access places at forest kindergartens

Solution – Introduce a new criteria for allocating places in forest kindergartens which prioritises children where 30% or more are living in SIMD 1 & 2 areas.

Parent/carer satisfaction with the quality of provision

Parents/carers were asked what was important to them when considering the quality of early learning and childcare based on a scale of 1-6 where 1 is the most important.

The following is the result with *How staff interact with my child* being the most important factor for parents and carers.

Order of priority	Factor
1	<i>How staff interact with my child</i>
2	<i>How much individual care and attention my child gets.</i>
3	<i>The Range of different experiences which support my child's learning.</i>
4	<i>Setting inspection reports</i>
5	<i>How much my child is learning.</i>
6	<i>Qualifications of staff</i>

When asked how satisfied parents/carers were about their current setting, *How staff interact with my child* also received the top response.

Parental/carers engagement and involvement.

The parent/carers survey in November 2021 was the first after COVID when parents had little or no access to their child's nursery. The findings of this survey noted 79% of respondents wanted to find out more about their child's learning and 59% wanted to be more involved in their child's setting. As a result of this feedback, we reviewed our staff training to enhance skills in working in partnership with parents to support engagement and family learning. This has clearly had a positive impact as the most recent survey feedback notes 8% of parents would be interested in finding out more about their child's learning and 6% expressing an interest in being involved in their child's setting.

I would be interested in finding out more about engaging in my children's learning e.g. linking learning from home to early years setting and vice versa.	8%
I would be interested in finding out more about how to be involved in the early years setting e.g. volunteering, aims of setting, parent groups to support setting.	6%
I would be interested in finding out more about family learning e.g. how I can improve my own and my families skills to help my child.	8%
I would be interested in finding out more about learning at home e.g. how everyday experiences support my child learning.	8%

Support for children with additional support needs

24% of parents/carers (76) responded to the questions regarding additional support needs. 98% felt their child was welcomed and included in the early years setting and appropriate support is in place to meet the needs of their child.

Deferring entry to primary 1

316 responses stated their child was eligible to start Primary 1 in August 2024. 29% stated they planned to defer entry to Primary 1 and apply for an additional year at nursery. This is more than double of the 14% of parent/carers who indicated their plan to defer entry to Primary 1 for the August 2022 school year and reflects the year on year increase of parents/carers choosing to have an additional year of funded early learning and childcare.

This trend will need to be closely monitored to ensure we have sufficient capacity to meet the demand for places for newly eligible children the term after their third birthday.

1 Theme – Deferring entry to Primary 1.

Issues – Ensuring sufficient capacity to meet the demand for places for children eligible the term after their third birthday.

Solution – Provide information for parents/carers on development of play pedagogy in Primary 1 classes across Edinburgh which is providing continuity of learning across the early level of Curriculum for Excellence.

Appendix 2

Reviewing the plan for the delivery of Early Learning and Childcare

The local authority is required to review their plan for the delivery of early learning and childcare every two years and take account of the views expressed by parents and carers through consultation.

In preparing our revised plan for the delivery of early learning and childcare, we are also required to ensure that our delivery is manageable and affordable within our resources.

The key principles of the early years expansion from 600 hours to 1140 hours of funded early learning and childcare are Quality, Flexibility, Accessibility and Affordability. Whilst we have continued to provide high quality provision with 97% of our local authority settings evaluated by the care inspectorate as good or better, there is scope for improving the delivery of funded early learning and childcare to provide parents/carers with more flexible delivery options that enable them to also be able to access affordable additional childcare.

Scottish Government funding for the delivery of ELC in Edinburgh has been reduced by approximately £6m. Therefore, to provide best value and ensure we can provide Edinburgh's parents and carers with flexible and affordable childcare we need to ensure we utilise our local authority resources efficiently to align with the councils Medium Term Financial plan.

The Strategic Programme Board for the Medium Term Financial Plan has agreed to support the early years service with a revised delivery plan which will

- Maximise the use of local authority places by reducing the need to procure external provision and providing places for children from other local authorities whose parents/carers work in Edinburgh.
- Provide greater flexibility for parents to access affordable childcare by enabling them to purchase additional hours in local authority settings.
- Reduce the number of local authority settings open over the Christmas holiday period when the uptake of places is lower.
- Review demand for term time and full year provision across the city to ensure local authority provision continues to meet the changing needs of parents/carers.

Appendix 3

EARLY LEARNING AND CHILDCARE

STANDARDS & QUALITY STATEMENT June 2023



The vision for Early Years in Edinburgh focuses on our children:

To ensure all our children have the best start in life. Their voices are heard, they are happy, well cared for and have quality opportunities to have fun, play and learn.

(UNCRC Article 6)

In August 2021, the CEC (City Education Council) successfully implemented the Scottish Government's commitment to provide additional funded entitlement for Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) to 1140 hours per year for all 3- and 4-year-olds, as well as 2-year-olds who would benefit the most.

The expansion plan has prioritised improving the quality of ELC provision, aligning to the essential characteristics of quality outlined in the Scottish Government Quality Action Plan. To achieve this, a 3-year improvement plan for ELC was developed in August 2021, focusing on the following key areas:

- 1140 Expansion: Ensuring the full realisation of the 1140 hours funded entitlement for eligible children.
- Leadership: Enhancing leadership capabilities within ELC settings to drive positive outcomes for children and families.
- Curriculum & Pedagogy: Improving the curriculum and practice to support children's learning and development.
- Equalities: Promoting equality and ensuring all children are valued and treated with respect within high-quality ELC settings.
- Equity & Inclusion: Creating an inclusive environment that caters to the diverse needs of children.
- Parental Engagement: Encouraging active involvement of parents/carers in their children's early learning journey.

The Improvement plan considered the Edinburgh Children's Partnership Plan, specifically focusing on the following aspects:

- SO1- Best Start in Life: Continue to provide high quality early years services across the city whilst implementing the increase in hours to 1140.
- SO4- Equity: Improve the availability of accessible, affordable and flexible early learning and childcare, particularly in areas of deprivation.

Throughout this process, Early Learning and Childcare settings have achieved success through being creative and flexible whilst facing challenges ensuring high quality care and learning experiences for our youngest children.

1140 Expansion

Our current estate consists of a wide range of early learning and childcare settings in Edinburgh, including 109 local authority settings, 8 Forest Kindergartens, 112 Private and voluntary settings, and 43 childminders in partnership.

Since August 2017, Edinburgh has been gradually implementing increased funded hours, and by the 2020-2021 session, an impressive 75% of eligible children were already benefiting from the extended hours ahead of schedule. By August 2021, all eligible children in Edinburgh were offered a funded 1140-hour place. This achievement continues to provide high-quality early learning and childcare to 10,500 children, with 65-70% of them receiving some or all their funded hours within local authority settings.

During particularly challenging times by August 2021, CEC were able to ensure that every eligible 2-, 3-, and 4-year-old in the city could access 1140 hours of early learning and childcare within their chosen locality. A survey conducted in November 2021 revealed that most parents/carers (92.37%) were able to secure their first-choice setting. Even among the 60 respondents who didn't receive their first-choice placement, 95% were accommodated in their second or third-choice setting. Of the placements, 56.15% were for term time, 41.67% for the full year, and within the latter, 17.82% had the option to purchase additional hours. The remaining respondents opted for blended placements, resulting in a successful outcome for 74.1% of the parents/carers surveyed. A further survey of parent/carers will take place in November 2023. It will be essential to review and adapt our delivery models in line with the feedback provided from this survey.

Supporting the growth of a qualified workforce to meet the expansion's demands, Edinburgh's Early Learning and Childcare Academy (EELCA) has played a crucial role. This session, they have delivered 14 Foundation Apprenticeships and 50 Modern Apprenticeships/Trainees. To enhance the qualifications of the ELC workforce and achieve the 2024 targets outlined in the initial plan, a draft pathway from level 6 to level 9 has been developed. EELCA continues to offer training and qualifications to create a highly skilled and effective workforce that is dedicated to lifelong learning and achieving the best outcomes for children and families.

In addition to the wide range of settings, there are currently 43 childminders in Edinburgh supporting more than 70 children. These childminders receive support from the quality improvement team for self-evaluation and transition approaches. Moreover, parents/carers are provided with valuable input to enhance the delivery model's quality. Recent care inspections of childminders have had positive results, reflecting the dedication to maintaining high standards.

To further support settings and parents in using more than one service for their funded ELC hours, CEC blended/split placement guidance has been developed.

Edinburgh's commitment to the 1140 Expansion demonstrates the city's dedication to providing high-quality early learning and childcare to its young population while nurturing a well-qualified and skilled workforce to ensure the best possible outcomes for children and families.

Leadership

Effective leadership plays a crucial role in ensuring the provision of high-quality Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) for our children. Leading the Strategy meetings held in September, January, and April have been effective in fostering collaboration and supporting self-evaluation among leaders across the sector, driving continuous improvements. In response to participants' preferences, these sessions have now returned to in-person events, however we offered an option of both in-person and online in April. This approach has been well-received, with a strong representation of settings in attendance.

To further strengthen leadership roles within ELC, various leadership programmes have been developed. Notably, the New Head of Centre (HoC) and Aspiring HoC programmes have received positive feedback, inspiring the creation of similar programmes for SEYO and EYO leadership roles. The Aspiring SEYOs programme, consisting of six sessions, has covered a range of relevant topics, resulting in attendees reporting an enhanced understanding of the SEYO role and increased confidence in their current EYO position. Encouragingly, half of the participants are now prepared to take the next step and are actively applying for promoted posts. Similarly, the Aspiring EYOs program, which commenced in March, received overwhelming interest, with over 100 applications and 30 participants benefiting from four sessions covering various aspects of leadership, all of which received positive feedback.

The central team has been proactive in expanding the Continuous Learning and Professional Learning (CLPL) offer, building on the resources provided within the Professional Learning Hub on the ELC Team page.

The outcomes of the ELC Quality Thematic Review have recommendations which will be taken forward this session. This review identified Senior Leadership Teams within ELC as needing further networking and collaboration support, which is being addressed through the creation of a forum for the designated leader to join led by the EY QIM.

Pedagogical leadership within ELC settings has been supported by the recently formed Early Years Teachers (EYTs) and Equity and Excellence Leads (EELs) as part of the central team. Allocation to settings is based on identified needs through the Risk and Capacity register for EYTs and SIMD data for EELs, leading to positive feedback from ELC settings benefitting from this additional support.

This strategically planned support is building capacity and empowerment of ELC teams which will lead to sustained continuous improvements in pedagogy and improved outcomes for children and families.

Curriculum and Pedagogy

The refresh of core CEC curriculum and pedagogy guidance in line with CfE and Realising the Ambition national guidance is supporting the development of an ELC curriculum and pedagogy framework aligned with the Edinburgh Learns for All Strategy. The Edinburgh Learns Board for Learning Teaching and Assessment includes representation from the Early Years (EY) sector. The EY QIM and a HoC attends the board meetings.

Planning for Learning & Children's Progress: Self-Evaluation through scrutiny activities and inspections has led to development work on equalities, curriculum, and progress tracking. This has impacted CEC's guidance on planning for learning, with a renewed emphasis on skills. Refreshed versions of "Planning with Children" and "Experiences and Spaces" documents have been developed and will be launched, integrated with guidance for 0-3-year-olds in the new session.

Capturing and monitoring children's progress: Guidance has been shared and feedback sought from local authority settings. Expectation is that all settings will engage with this next session. Using and analysing data as part of regular progress meetings with key staff and parents is essential to understanding and securing children's progress and ensuring equity for all children. It is integral to the child centred pedagogical cycle which underpins all the CEC refreshed guidance supporting high quality ELC provisions.

The refreshed suite of guidance will support the ELC core strategy for Play and Learning, enabling ELC settings to create their own play and learning frameworks.

Supporting Communication and Literacy: To support implementation and embedding of the communication and literacy guidance, CLPL bitesize sessions have been designed to assist settings and practitioners to engage with and upskill their knowledge and understanding. This complete guidance will form part of the wider CEC Literacy strategy being developed. A QIEO is part of the wider strategy group for Edinburgh Learns.

Numeracy and Mathematics: CEC Numeracy Guidance has been shared for feedback, and meetings with the Numeracy Development Officer are planned to refresh the progression pathway from Early Level to First level. A first draft of the wider Maths guidance titled "Mathematical Thinking: It's all connected" has been developed and will be shared in the new session. This guidance will form part of the wider CEC strategy currently being developed. A QIEO is part of the wider strategy group for Edinburgh Learns.

Health and Well-being (HWB): Work is underway on a draft HWB EY overview, which will encompass a range of guidance, documents, and links related to health and well-being, nurture, transition, UNCRC support, and CLPL. This will be shared in the new session. This will align with the wider CEC HWB Framework. An EY QIEO is part of the Edinburgh Learns HWB Board.

Digital Pedagogy: A successful rollout of devices has been completed, ensuring that all Early Years Practitioners (EYPs) and Early Years Officers (EYOs) now have their own iPads. Additionally, resources like Padlet and an updated Teams site are available to facilitate professional learning and knowledge sharing among practitioners.

Device Distribution and Empowered Rollout: The majority of devices have been delivered to practitioners, with ongoing efforts to provide them to Early Years Teachers (EYTs), Equity and Excellence Leads (EELs), and P1 EYPs. The empowered rollout has been mostly completed, although certain issues need to be addressed concerning P1 EYPs, EELs, and EYTs.

Basic Skills Development: Continuing to prioritise professional development, basic skills are being developed across the Early Years workforce.

Creativity in ELC: Collaborating with the ERASMUS project on creativity, practitioners, including representatives from Hailesland EYC and Canal View PS ELC, have engaged in this exploration. The experiences gained will contribute to a creativity strategy for the City of Edinburgh Council (CEC). A Creativity position paper, along with links to wider strategic leads for creativity, has been established for a cohesive approach.

Creative Skills Sessions: A series of in-person creative skills sessions have been delivered, with more planned for next session. An online creative skills course will also be available next session. The partnership with ERASMUS remains ongoing, and connections have been made with various organisations through Joan Parr.

Impact Assessment: To gauge the impact of Creative Skills sessions on practice and children's experiences, case studies are being conducted with participants from Angie Casside (CM), Leith Primary School (LA NC), Victoria Quay (PPN), Viewforth ELC (LA), and St John-Vianney (LA NC).

Cultural Entitlement: The establishment of a strategic-level working group (SLWG) aims to explore cultural entitlement across Edinburgh, bringing together various experts and representatives.

Outdoor Learning in ELC: Recognising the significance of Outdoor Learning as a national priority and the commitment to ensuring that children receive equal time outdoors as they do indoors in their funded Early Learning and Childcare (ELC), it was evident that support was necessary to enhance the quality of outdoor provision for children. To address this, a Strategic-Level Working Group (SLWG) has been established, led by the Early Learning and Childcare Manager (ELCCM).

A recent sector-wide survey was conducted, focusing on two key aspects: the available outdoor facilities at individual settings and the resources within local 'Greenspaces.' This comprehensive survey aimed to gather valuable insights to inform the improvement of outdoor learning environments.

To assist practitioners in enhancing outdoor provision for children aged 0-6 years, specific guidance has been developed and made available through a Padlet. This guidance places emphasis on three crucial elements:

1. Staff Confidence: Supporting educators in feeling confident and capable of conducting Outdoor Learning activities effectively.
2. Interactions, Experiences, and Spaces Outdoors: Focusing on creating meaningful and enriching experiences for children in outdoor settings while promoting positive interactions with the environment.

3. Clothing, Personal Care, Food, etc.: Addressing the practical aspects of outdoor learning, including appropriate clothing, personal care, and food arrangements.

By providing comprehensive and practical guidance through the Padlet platform, we are supporting improved quality of outdoor learning experiences for young children reinforcing the benefits of learning in natural and outdoor environments.

Play for Learning Project in Primary 1: The Play for Learning Project aims to promote and integrate play pedagogy across Early Level into P1. While there is a willingness among teachers to engage with play-based learning, baseline data revealed some barriers. These included challenges such as low adult-to-child ratios, limited understanding of play pedagogy, resource constraints for continuous provision, meeting the needs of EAL learners and those with additional support needs, school day structures, and assessment-related concerns.

To address these challenges and ensure sustained positive learning outcomes through play, the Early Years Quality Improvement team have engaged with Education Scotland (ES) for a three-year project. A strategic action plan was devised, targeting the identified barriers. One of the key tasks involved updating and refreshing the Play for Learning guidance in alignment with national practice guidelines, RtA. This helped boost staff confidence and understanding of play-based teaching approaches. Furthermore, specialised support through Continuous Professional Learning (CLPL) sessions with ES have been delivered. These sessions covered topics like national context, research principles, child development, responsive planning, observation, moderation, and assessment.

Additionally, a digital platform was established on Teams to facilitate collaboration, networking, and sharing of best practices. To enhance staffing, each school was allocated a budget to employ an additional Early Years Practitioner (EYP) with a focus on supporting play in Primary 1. While recruitment challenges were faced, schools with skilled EYPs reported positive feedback on the impact of this support.

For effective assessment and moderation, three P1 QAMSOs were trained, and they tailored the Moderation Cycle for learning, teaching and assessment to play pedagogy. Using this model for moderation within schools and across learning communities will increase teacher confidence in making robust judgements for end of P1 ACEL data.

The project has seen ongoing engagement with Education Scotland, and various in person networking events have been organised to share good practices. Monthly networking sessions for EYPs in Primary 1 have also been introduced, and the insights gathered here have been used to inform training for the wider team, including school leadership and teachers.

Training sessions were arranged with the central QCIS team to ensure a shared understanding of effective play pedagogy among colleagues.

Looking ahead, through the project we will explore pedagogy from early years through the whole school. Monthly networking events will continue online to support practitioners in Primary 1 and inform the central approach for further support.

The role of the Early Years Practitioner in Primary 1 has been communicated across our networks and a "Role of the Adult" document has been developed to foster teamwork in the delivery of P1 education. The Child's Voice survey was used to gather feedback from 10 children in each P1 class to inform CLPL support for next session. Feedback from children's experiences in P1 has been collected through a visual support project.

The project has made significant strides in promoting play-based learning and aims to continue building on its successes next session.

Equalities

As part of the local authority priority, we are committed to ensuring that all children in ELC settings are understood, valued, and celebrated by our dedicated staff. To achieve this, our focus in the ELC sector has been on developing staff awareness through high-quality CLPL. This has involved reviewing policies, the ELC curriculum, and available resources within ELC settings.

Two significant CLPL sessions were conducted to support staff awareness and initiate professional dialogue:

1. In June 2021, a Hakim Din event was organized for the Head of Centres.
2. In May 2022, we had the privilege of hosting Dr Stella Louis, who delivered a keynote and workshops. The keynote session was recorded and shared widely across the sector, and the workshops were attended by the EY central teams. The feedback from these sessions was overwhelmingly positive, with practitioners appreciating the opportunity to discuss this important but sometimes uncomfortable topic. Many participants expressed increased confidence in having conversations with their colleagues.

In our efforts to promote cultural inclusivity, we reviewed ELC resources and established connections with suppliers Findel and TTS to acquire culturally inclusive materials. Our aim is to envision culturally inclusive ELC settings, where these resources are seamlessly integrated into everyday work rather than being treated as "special" artifacts. We recognise the need to further develop this approach by focusing on interactions, experiences, and creating inclusive spaces.

As part of our efforts to support inclusive practices, the EAL service has developed a self-evaluation session for ELC, successfully trialled with Sighthill and Stenhouse Early Years Centres. Our recently developed Communication and Literacy guidance and Maths and Numeracy guidance emphasises the visibility of diverse languages and scripts.

Focused work last session has included reviewing policies to include equalities training and guidelines for tackling racist incidents, necessitating collaboration with the English as an Additional Language (EAL) service. We have also begun to review our ELC curriculum to ensure an inclusive curriculum. Recently, the EY QIEO attended a productive cross sector meeting with the national anti-racist education group, with representatives from the Scottish Government and Education Scotland, at Juniper Green Primary School.

The curriculum work is ongoing and strongly linked to all core CEC guidance. We continue to offer CLPL and guidance on developing an inclusive curriculum. Already, these sessions have been delivered to EYTs and EELCA students. This work is closely related to our efforts in enhancing our planning guidance and focusing on essential skills.

We remain committed to fostering an inclusive and culturally sensitive ELC environment, valuing the diversity and uniqueness of each child in our care. Together, we strive to create a nurturing and respectful setting where every child can flourish.

UNCRC: To foster a rights-based approach and pedagogy rooted in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), Universal Staff Training sessions have been delivered and recorded and available for staff to engage with. The feedback from these sessions has been overwhelmingly positive, as practitioners reported increased confidence and understanding of implementing a rights-based approach in ELC settings.

In collaboration with EY Teachers, we have developed a comprehensive document on learning about and through rights-self-evaluation tool. This document has been shared with Education Scotland to promote this rights-based framework more widely. Furthermore, a Padlet with resources has been developed and shared across the SEIC. The resources have now been shared on a national and international level with Education Scotland.

To ensure the continuous improvement of our efforts, an evaluation form will be issued next session to gather data on staff confidence, knowledge, and the impact of adopting a rights-based approach on practice and the outcomes for children. This valuable information will inform the development of future CLPL and guide our next steps for children's rights and well-being in ELC settings.

Parental Engagement and Support for Families Experiencing Poverty

Learning together: Our primary goal is to foster strong partnerships between ELC settings and parents/carers. To achieve this, we have undertaken various initiatives and delivered a range CLPL sessions. The CLPL training sessions had 40 settings attending this year and 43 the previous year. The CLPL sessions have centred on parental engagement, evaluation toolkits, and sharing good practices. Additionally, we have made resources available on Teams, such as a narrated PowerPoint CLPL and a self-study SWAY, to introduce working in partnership with parents. A celebration event took place with 40 settings participating, and valuable practice-sharing occurred among 13 settings and 9 CEC partners.

To support practitioners with learning together with parents/carers the CLPL sessions have focused on all four aspects of partnership as defined by Education Scotland. These sessions have been delivered and are available for further engagement on the EY Teams page. The attendance at the termly network meetings has increased, and monthly data collection is now being shared.

We are proud of the progress and the impact of the Peep learning together network, where skilled practitioners can deliver high-quality parent/carer sessions directly to families. All Equity and Excellence leads have now been PEEP trained, resulting in 20 more trained staff members.

The waiting list for Peep training follows a targeted approach. Our aim is for all settings with 40 or fewer members to have at least one trained Peep member, and larger settings to have at least two trained staff. Peep training is now offered three times a year.

A dedicated Development Officer is now in place supporting the wide range of activities supporting parental engagement and learning together.

Intensive family support: Families of children within ELC facing financial challenges have been supported in accessing available assistance through Maximise, initially in the North of the city and now we have extended this support to the South of the city. For families facing significant challenges, the Intensive Family Support Services continue to hold monthly meetings, where data and information are shared between the third sector and Heads of Centres (HoCs). Notably, between April 2022 and March 2023, the North project supported 51 families, with 44 receiving advice, 15 benefiting from employability support, and 26 receiving IFS assistance. Financial gains amounted to £155,075.26, with three parents entering further education and three securing employment.

Similarly, the South project provided support to 33 families between 1st August 2022 and 31st March 2023, with 25 families receiving advice, 16 benefiting from IFS, and two receiving employability support. Financial gains reached £4,359.00, with nine families achieving financial benefits, 13 finding stable housing, and one engaging in volunteering or study.

Through these ongoing efforts, we are committed to creating an inclusive and supportive environment for all families, ensuring that every child's needs are understood, valued, and celebrated.

Equity and Inclusion

To promote equity and inclusion within the Early Learning and Childcare sector, collaborative working with various teams, including EY ASL (Additional Support for Learning) team, and the EP (Educational Psychology) Service. These initiatives have resulted in targeted CLPL sessions to upskill practitioners in supporting all children, with a particular focus on those with Additional Support Needs (ASN).

The CLPL sessions covered topics such as Getting It Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) process, ASN pathways, Individual Education Plans (IEPs), and planning to meet children's individual needs. By enhancing practitioners' understanding of GIRFEC processes, we aim to better support all children within ELC settings. Plans are in place to revisit and refresh GIRFEC processes in the next session.

Additionally, we have collaborated with Speech and Language Therapy (SALT) to support early language development, leading to the creation of the 'Communication is Key Calendar.' This resource shares monthly focuses and materials to aid children's early language development. The EY newsletter has been used to promote the use of these resources in all ELC settings, encouraging their dissemination to parents and families.

Information on the impact of poverty and Covid restrictions on children's Health and Wellbeing (HWB) and language development prompted a renewed focus on providing Hanen training sessions. A new model of delivery has been developed, comprising a 4-hour in-service session

and two twilights, with activities for practice in between sessions. Working collaboratively with SALT and the EP service, these training sessions target settings based on low SIMD (Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation) data. All EELs are trained in Hanen, and five of them are additionally trained as trainers. EELs are actively engaged in a Hanen project that involves embedding Hanen approaches within their settings, while also working closely with the SALT lead to create a toolkit to support leaders to effectively ensure consistent use of strategies, and link to early language assessment of each child. This toolkit will support to monitoring and securing children's progress.

Leadership for Equity (LfE): the EY SLT has undergone initial training, and the QIEO team is collaborating with the LfE team to adapt and contextualise the current leadership training offer for ELC. Plans are in place to deliver this training to the wider EY team and the Heads of Centres next session. Additionally, the 1 in 5 training is being updated to be delivered next session, reinforcing our commitment to promoting equity and inclusion at all levels of ELC provision.

Homelessness: Efforts to support homeless families and ensure their inclusion during transitions have shown positive results in recent years. The data indicates a significant increase in ELC service uptake among homeless children, with a rise from 10% in 2021, 59% in 2022 and 69% in 2023. The transition project and school links have successfully supported 89 homeless children in P1 school entry in 2023, with ongoing efforts to track the progress for subsequent years.

