

# School Age Childcare in Scotland

PROGRESS REPORT 2021



Scottish Government  
Riaghaltas na h-Alba  
gov.scot

# Contents

**1**  
Minister's  
Foreword

**2**  
Introduction

**3**  
Pre-pandemic –  
A Draft Framework  
for consultation

**4**  
Impacts of  
COVID-19

**5**  
Future School Age  
Childcare Policy

**6**  
Progress –  
Tests of Change

**7**  
Reflections and  
Forward Look

PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES

PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES

# 1. Minister's Foreword

By Maree Todd  
Minister For Children  
And Young People

**Our vision for school age childcare is a rights based, dynamic offer for all children and young people which supports choice and growth, enabling families and communities to reach their full potential.**

I know that learning for children doesn't begin and end in the school classroom. For school age children the experiences that help them to develop and flourish include those which happen round about the school day – in the friendships they develop, in the interests that are sparked by access to a new activity and in the supportive and trusted relationships they form with the many inspirational practitioners who provide our school age childcare and activity services.

I also understand the vital support that our school age childcare services deliver for the parents, carers and families by providing safe, nurturing environments for their children to enjoy while they access work and study, enabling them to provide for their families and meet their full potential.

2020 was a very difficult and challenging year for many children and families. We know that the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic are ongoing and will be felt for many years to come. The restrictions felt across society have highlighted the importance of social contact for all our children. Our Getting It Right For Every Child approach has been a crucial foundation in our response to the pandemic, and must continue as we move into recovery. School age childcare services have a central role to play in supporting children as they recover from the impacts of COVID-19 restrictions and I know that investment in high quality provision is essential

in supporting children and young people through the next recovery phase.

The critical childcare provided for many keyworker children has shone a spotlight on the importance of childcare in enabling our critical national infrastructures to continue to function. However, we know that there continue to be barriers for many to accessing childcare under normal circumstances.

Through the consultation on our "Draft Framework for Out of School Care" in 2019, children, parents and carers, and those working in the childcare sector told us about challenges with the affordability, accessibility and flexibility of childcare provision for school age children, particularly for families on the lowest incomes.

That draft framework laid the groundwork for developing an exciting and ambitious new policy for school age childcare in Scotland and work continues to evolve that policy. This progress report captures what we've learned over the last year since our consultation and sets out the steps we're taking to move closer to our vision in light of the challenges which we all now face.

I want to thank all school age childcare providers for their hard work and dedication throughout the pandemic. I look forward to continuing to work towards a new school age childcare policy framework which delivers for Scotland's children and young people, for their families, and for those working to deliver these vital services.

**Maree Todd**  
**Minister for Children and Young People**

**In 2019 we published our [Draft Framework for Out of School Care in Scotland](#) for consultation. In March 2020, just as we were about to publish the results of that consultation, the Coronavirus (COVID-19) transmission levels increased, leading to the decision to close our schools and childcare settings with very little notice.**

Our draft framework committed us to publishing a strategic school age childcare framework within this Parliamentary term. However, to fully absorb the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, and to understand how the changing demand for school age childcare affects business sustainability, will take time. In the current climate, it would prove impossible. It's important that our policy for school age childcare reflects those changes, and considers what they mean in terms of supporting children and families. It is equally important to consider these changes from the point of view of the school age childcare sector itself, so that our framework is fit for purpose.

Recognising that families rely on a wide range of services to support them around the school day and during holidays, we are considering the school age childcare sector in its broadest sense. This includes regulated after school and holiday childcare providers, registered childminders, breakfast clubs, activity clubs (including those centred around sports or cultural activities) and youth work provision.

The school age childcare sector have faced significant challenges since March 2020, not least in relation to their own future sustainability. Critical childcare services were needed and many stepped up to deliver for keyworker families and for those children most in need. Within our communities, organisations adapted and mobilised to deliver food and wider family supports as best they could.

There are so many examples of how services within communities have adapted at speed to support families throughout the crisis and there are important lessons to learn. Many families count on childcare providers not just for a safe and nurturing childcare placement, but also for relational-based support that can be crucial to wellbeing for the wider family. At this time, the need for a school age childcare policy that supports many more families is even more pressing.

Acknowledging the importance of continuing to develop this policy, despite the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, we have progressed work to understand the outcomes of our consultation, deliver tests of change projects through our Access to Childcare Fund and other pilots, better understand the current funding challenges for the sector, and to establish our public panel.

## 2. Introduction

## **We present this progress report which:**

- **Provides an update on the outcomes of our consultation at the end of 2019.**
- **Highlights insights into the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic for children, parents and carers and childcare providers.**
- **Confirms our vision and aims for the future of school age childcare in Scotland.**
- **Outlines our commitment to test the changes needed to deliver our vision including progress to date on our Access to Childcare Fund projects.**
- **Sets out our policy focus and approach for developing our strategic framework for school age childcare and activities.**



### 3. Pre-pandemic – A Draft Framework for consultation

**Over the course of 2018/19 we engaged with children and young people, parents and carers, and those delivering school age childcare services, to better understand the school age childcare landscape in Scotland.**

We conducted a range of research and engagement activities – such as surveys, interviews and events/workshops, speaking directly to children and families to find out about the childcare and activity needs they have around the school day and during the holidays, and the benefits school age childcare services provide. We found that families all over Scotland rely on childcare and organised activities for their school age children, using a wide range of providers – from after school clubs and childminders to arts activities, sports clubs and outdoor learning centres. These services provide children with opportunities to play, socialise, learn and develop with their peers, while giving parents and carers the time they need to work, train, study or rest with the knowledge that their children are being well cared and provided for. We engaged directly with childcare and activity providers too, learning about the challenges and opportunities that exist in delivering these important services.

A consultation on our Draft Framework ran from 30 August to 6 December 2019. This document set out our vision and 3 key aims for out of school care:

“A rights based dynamic offer for all children and young people which supports choice and growth, enabling families and communities to reach their full potential”.

- High quality services which provide children with life-enhancing experiences.
- Out of school care is accessible and affordable and meets the needs of children and young people, parents and carers and communities.
- Out of school care services are embedded in communities and enable children and young people to access a range of spaces including the outdoors.

We asked what the Scottish Government can do to ensure that school age childcare better meets the needs of children and families in Scotland. Questions focussed on the affordability, accessibility and flexibility of provision required to achieve this vision.

The consultation achieved a high number of responses: 1,270 substantive responses were received in the online consultation with the majority of these (62%) coming from parents and carers. We also ran 18 face-to-face consultation events across Scotland (including visits to island communities) to reach children and parents and carers who may not otherwise have responded through the online forum. In particular, we sought to hear the views of families who may typically face barriers in accessing suitable school age childcare including lone parent families, families with a disabled child and those with lived experience of poverty.

Responses were independently analysed and a full [report of the findings](#) was published in November 2020.

There was strong support from respondents for our vision and three key aims. Over 95% of those who answered the question agreed with the vision. Some responses suggested that the aims should include “flexibility” as a key concept, so we have decided to refresh our second aim to include this:

- Out of school care is accessible, affordable *and flexible* and meets the needs of children and young people, parents and carers and communities.

**Affordability** was highlighted as a key issue for parents and providers. This included affordability for low income parents, and financial barriers to providing sustainable services for children with additional support needs and in rural areas.

**Accessibility** of services for some families was impacted by affordability, but also included challenges in some areas due to lack of available services or specialist provision. This presented particular challenges in rural communities.

Parents and those working in the sector highlighted the need to promote and value school age childcare recognising the vital service they provide for families and the positive outcomes for children.

As well as questions about our proposed vision and aims, the consultation included further questions about school age childcare. The findings can be broken down into 3 main categories:

- range of services
- accessibility
- supporting the workforce.

Further detail of these findings is summarised in the image on the following page.

“...after supporting children and parents with funding for nurseries they go to school and suddenly you have to find £700/month school care for 2 children – my wife is about to go part-time as it no longer is viable for her to work with these costs.” (Individual, Parent/Carer)

“...offering places at a reduced cost regardless of income so it is affordable for everyone.” (Individual, Parent/Carer)

“All children regardless of disability should be given equal opportunities to receive this support.” (Individual, Parent/Carer)

“Ensuring every school has access to a range of out of school options for parents to choose from e.g. local access to childminders, sports clubs etc.” (Individual, Parent/Carer)



## Range of Services

Parents, carers and children and young people think that a wide range of different types of provision are necessary in order to offer choice and meet the wide-ranging needs and preferences of families.

The largest demand was for primary school age children, although there was still a perceived need of secondary school provision, especially for younger groups.

Services and activities should be age and stage specific, with fun nurturing environments being important for younger children and services that are tailored to attainment and life skills being preferable for older children.

Greater flexibility and reliability in school age childcare services was a key issue for many respondents.



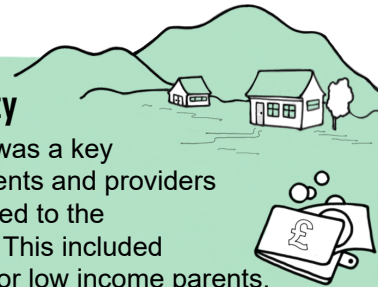
## Accessibility

Affordability was a key issue for parents and providers who responded to the consultation. This included affordability for low income parents, additional costs associated with meeting the needs of some children who require additional support and/or in rural areas.

One third of respondents who answered the relevant question suggested subsidised provision for school age childcare was needed.

Other factors that were considered important for accessibility were increasing the capacity of existing services, more flexibility within services, raising awareness for parents and having accessible places for disabled children and children with additional support needs.

Respondents noted that rural areas face particular difficulty with accessible services due to transport issues and lack of provision.



## Supporting the Workforce

The consultation found there was a slight preference for school age childcare staff to have or be working towards formal qualifications. However, parents and carers were evenly split over the need for qualifications or whether experience, skills and personal attributes were more important.

There was a relatively even split between respondents who thought the standard childcare qualification requirements should apply for staff across the range of provision, and those who felt different requirements should be accepted across different types of provision.

When asked to consider methods for promoting the school age childcare sector as an attractive career and how to improve diversity within the workforce, respondents suggested: more attractive salaries and employment terms and conditions, clearer

career progression routes, providing more support for staff to gain qualifications while also recognising transferable skills from other training or experiences.



## Shared Care Scotland – Holidays or Isolation?

In addition to our consultation findings, we have gained a rich understanding of the current picture on holiday activity provision for disabled children and young people in Scotland, thanks to a [report commissioned by Shared Care Scotland](#) which was published in April 2020.

The report found that disabled children and young people face significant isolation from their peers during the holiday period and that holiday activity provision, where it is available, plays a vital role in supporting both child and parental health and wellbeing. The research also tells us that holiday activity provision exerts a disproportionately powerful impact on the lives of disabled children and their families, which can be extremely positive when the system is working well, but problematic when it does not.

The landscape of holiday activity provision for disabled children and young people encompasses a wide variety of planned activities including bespoke playschemes, sporting and cultural workshops, and regulated childcare services. The research notes that the scale and scope of this provision is not understood under one single system and is therefore difficult to quantify. There is, however, inconsistent provision of holiday activity programmes for disabled children and young people across Scotland, with rural areas badly affected largely as a result of geographical isolation and related transport difficulties. The report notes that some families may find it difficult to access provision as it is generally not well advertised, and children with 'hidden disabilities' run the risk of losing out on accessing activity provision as they may not be seen as a priority.

The consultation findings and Shared Care Scotland report provide rich insight into the needs and preferences of families and providers, and we will give further consideration to these findings as we develop the new strategic framework for school age childcare and activities.

However, we know that there are still some gaps in our knowledge on the views of particular groups. This includes childminders, activity organisations, and older children and teenagers. It is also important that we better understand the views of families most likely to experience poverty, as they stand to benefit most from accessible, affordable childcare provision. As we progress our policy development, we will seek to engage with these groups to better understand their views and needs in relation to school age childcare. We will also continue to engage with the school age childcare sector about support for the workforce and with our Reference Group, made up of key stakeholder organisations, to inform future policy decisions and design.

## Overview

**Since our consultation, all aspects of life in Scotland have been affected and altered by the COVID-19 pandemic.**

COVID-19 threatens health and life directly and indirectly, through the impact it has on our health and care services and on how people are using those services. Beyond health, we know that the pandemic is also having wider societal impacts, with many people reporting feeling isolated and anxious; school closures affecting children's education and wellbeing; and economic impacts with damage inflicted on employment and prosperity.<sup>1</sup>

Parents' and carers' ability to access both informal (family and friends) and formal, regulated childcare has been significantly limited at points over the course of the pandemic to date. Even now, almost one year after the pandemic began, restrictions remain in place and childcare settings are open but in line with COVID-19 operating guidance. We know that the way families use childcare has changed as a consequence of the pandemic, at least in the

short term, and this has knock on effects for children, childcare providers, and employers alike. Childcare services remain a vital part of our economic infrastructure and play a crucial role in Scotland's ability to respond to and recover from the pandemic. It is important that we take stock of the new context families and childcare providers find themselves in and reflect on the impacts of the past year as we consider future direction for our school age childcare policy and indeed the context of the broader supports for families, of which childcare is an important component.

Scottish surveys carried out during or shortly after the initial lockdown showed a worsening in mental wellbeing among many children and young people, including anxiety and loneliness.<sup>2</sup> There were some signs of recovery following the reopening of schools/childcare in August 2020, with indicative evidence of improvements in children's mental wellbeing, particularly for younger age groups.<sup>3</sup> However, significant issues have remained for some children, particularly for older children and young people.

1 [COVID-19 in Scotland \(data.gov.scot\)](https://data.gov.scot)

2 [LockdownLowdown – what young people in Scotland are thinking about COVID-19, https://www.childrensparliament.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/How-are-you-doing\\_Survey\\_Final.pdf](https://www.childrensparliament.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/How-are-you-doing_Survey_Final.pdf), [COVID-19 Early years resilience and impact survey \(CEYRIS\) – Report 1 – Key behaviours](https://www.childrensparliament.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/How-are-you-doing_Survey_Final.pdf)

3 [Lockdown lowdown – a survey of young people in Scotland about their new normal lives as lockdown restrictions change, https://www.childrensparliament.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/How-are-you-doing\\_Survey\\_Final.pdf](https://www.childrensparliament.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/How-are-you-doing_Survey_Final.pdf)

## Children and young people

Children and young people in Scotland have experienced significant disruption to almost every aspect of their daily lives as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The restrictions imposed in response to COVID-19 were primarily concerned with protecting the right to life, but we know that these decisions have also had detrimental physical and mental health effects for children and young people, particularly in terms of social connection and education.

Research conducted by the Children's Parliament<sup>4</sup> over the course of the pandemic shows that the majority of children and young people reported that they enjoy being with their family. However, children and young people have also reported experiencing boredom, loneliness and loss of energy over this time. The evidence shows disproportionate adverse impacts on certain groups such as children experiencing poverty, disabled children, shielding or clinically vulnerable children and care experienced children and young people. Young carers, too, have seen an increase in their caring responsibilities.<sup>5</sup>

For example, a range of evidence shows that the pandemic has had a unique and disproportionate effect on disabled children, young people and their families.<sup>6</sup> Impacts on routines and accessibility of support have caused significant disruption, anxiety and stress for many. Three of the main issues are:

- reduced levels of household income for families, alongside increased household costs,

- a reduction in both formal and informal support, causing significant strain for parents and carers, and negatively impacting on the wellbeing of disabled children and young people, and
- concerns about the future, particularly, keeping safe from COVID-19, and accessing support which is both meaningful and safe.

Many siblings of disabled children, often young carers themselves, have also had to care for their siblings and their parents due to paid care services being withdrawn, which further impacts on their own wellbeing and education.

For all children and young people, the loss of friendships and regular social connection over the course of the pandemic has been particularly challenging. As schools, childcare settings and other services began to open up in August 2020, research pointed to the importance of re-establishing friendships and the critical role of positive and supportive relationships for children's wellbeing more generally. Some evidence highlighted that having somewhere safe to meet with friends was an important factor for children and young people.<sup>7</sup> Emerging UK evidence has also suggested that some children may have experienced a sustained loss of play and regular peer interaction during the pandemic, although the evidence on the impact on play is missed. Younger children (primary school age) appear to have been at greatest risk of loss of peer interaction (both online and in-person), with new evidence from the UK-wide Co-SPACE Study suggesting that this did not recover in the summer of 2020 when many restrictions were lifted. This evidence is consistent with Scottish evidence (Public Health Scotland CEYRIS survey) and suggests that even after the lifting of restrictions children may still miss out on regular peer interactions.<sup>8</sup>

4 [https://www.childrensparliament.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/How-are-you-doing\\_Survey\\_Final.pdf](https://www.childrensparliament.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/How-are-you-doing_Survey_Final.pdf)

5 <https://carers.org/resources/all-resources/109-2020-vision-hear-me-see-me-support-me-and-donot-forget-me>

6 [Family Fund, The end of lockdown? The last six months in the lives of families raising disabled children, September 2020; Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland, Response to the Education and Skills Committee Inquiry, 15 May 2020](#)

7 [COVID-19: Children, Young people and Families Evidence Oct 2020](#) p. 5

8 [COVID-19: Children, Young people and Families Evidence Oct 2020](#) p. 2- 3

School closures and remote learning for almost all have shaped experiences for children and young people over the past year, and evidence indicates that this has had a negative impact on learning progress and attainment for some pupils.<sup>9</sup> The Scottish Government has committed £330 million to support education recovery over 2020/21 and 2021/22. This includes investment to recruit additional teachers and staff to support those who need it most; devices and connectivity to lift children and young people out of digital exclusion as quickly as possible; and targeted youth work services.

Further, the Scottish Government's mission to reduce the poverty-related attainment gap remains central to our plans, with £182 million being invested in the Scottish Attainment Challenge in 2020/21 alone. Councils and schools have been able to redirect this Attainment Scotland Funding to help mitigate the impact of school closures on our most socio-economically disadvantaged children and families. This has for example, enabled the provision of digital devices to support learning at home and support for home-school link workers to maintain regular contact with children. It also supported the delivery of targeted learning and support programmes, including family support workers, provision of food and additional learning materials.

Youth work has an important role to play in education recovery. In September 2020, a £3 million Youth Work Education Recovery Fund was created to support opportunities for young people to engage or re-engage with youth work activities that build their confidence and skills; support their health and well-being; and that address the poverty-related attainment gap.

In the summer of 2020, the Scottish Government provided £400,000 for play charities through the Community Play Fund, to improve access to outdoor play for children in our most socioeconomically disadvantaged communities. The fund provided money to charities for organised play activities, equipment and clothing for children and young people to help as many of them as possible get back to being outside, being active and spending time with their friends.

We have also provided over £44 million to local authorities to continue the delivery of Free School Meal provision over school closures and holidays – on a cash first approach. This includes over £37 million for free school meal provision during school closures last year and holidays up to and including Easter 2021 reaching 156,000 children and young people and £7 million to continue free school meal provision during school closures in January 2021.

There is more work to be done to understand the ongoing impacts of the events of the past year for particular groups of children, young people and their families. It is vital that we listen to the unique ways the virus, and restrictive measures of the crisis, have affected different groups. This will strengthen future policy and enable us to consider both the current and future role that school age childcare services have to play in supporting children and young people as it becomes safe to broaden opportunities for in-person interaction, play and socialising.

---

9 [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): impact of school building closures – Equity Audit](#) pp. 63-66

## Parents and carers

Parents and carers have also been impacted across their personal and professional lives as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. With access to school and childcare – both formal and informal – significantly restricted, parents, carers and young carers have faced full time caring responsibilities, alongside work or other commitments as well as doing their best to support their children’s learning at home. There has also been a need for parents and carers to keep children entertained during the period of lockdown when usual activities and networks of support have been unavailable. Extended family support has also been negatively affected by the pandemic.

In addition, we know that many parents and carers have faced unprecedented challenges in terms of their employment arrangements and status. Home-working has become the default for many, while others have been unable to continue working. Other parents and carers will have experienced uncertainty and worry due to the strain being placed on their own businesses or work as self-employed people. The pandemic has resulted in loss of income and loss of employment for many families.<sup>10</sup> The strain of increased caring responsibilities, alongside work commitments, and financial pressures or worries can have negative impact on the wellbeing and mental health of parents and carers, which can in turn negatively impact children’s wellbeing.<sup>11</sup> Many families have and will continue to require childcare at hours that it has been traditionally difficult to find childcare for, including evenings and weekends.

For some families who were already experiencing poverty, the pandemic has had profound impacts. Aberlour, a children’s charity who work with vulnerable children, young people and families, have reported a rise in child protection and child wellbeing concerns, domestic abuse reporting and mental health issues. They have noted that the families they work with need additional supports to counter the worst effects and the consequential strain on family relationships, stress and anxiety caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>12</sup> We have provided financial support to Aberlour, and other children’s charities, to support families in need over the course of the pandemic – both through the £350million Communities Fund and then the Winter Social Support Package.

We know that many of the challenges COVID-19 has presented for parents and carers have been disproportionately felt by women. Women are more likely to have caring responsibilities which can limit their ability to maintain or take on employment under normal circumstances, but in the context of the pandemic, this has a heightened impact. UK-level findings suggests that during school and nursery closures, childcare responsibilities fell more on women than men.<sup>13</sup> This further limitation on women’s labour market participation may have longer term implications for pay and for future career development and adverse impacts will be more severe for lone parents in particular (women account for the majority of lone parents). The pandemic has brought into sharper focus the need to progress the Scottish Government’s work in the Gender Pay Gap Action Plan to “Develop an approach to treat investment in childcare and social care as economic infrastructure” as part of recognising the value that care – paid and unpaid – plays in both our economic and social wellbeing. This is a long-term action which aligns with our developing school age childcare policy.

<sup>10</sup> [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): impact on equality \(research\) – gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/Topics/health/COVID-19/equality-research)

<sup>11</sup> [COVID-19: Children, Young People and Families Evidence Dec 2020](https://www.gov.scot/Topics/health/COVID-19/evidence) p 3

<sup>12</sup> [Aberlour Response to the Scottish Parliament’s Education and Skills Committee Inquiry: Vulnerable Children During the Coronavirus Outbreak May 2020](https://www.gov.scot/Topics/health/COVID-19/education) p 2

<sup>13</sup> See for example: [Scotland’s Wellbeing: The Impact of COVID-19](https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/app/uploads/2019/10/Risky-business.pdf), <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/app/uploads/2019/10/Risky-business.pdf>; <https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/14860>, Coronavirus and the social impacts on Great Britain, How Are Mothers and Fathers Balancing Work and Family under Lockdown?

The longer-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic remain to be seen, but it is likely that changes to the economy, employment practices and job losses will have implications for the way parents and carers manage their caring responsibilities, and may alter their needs and preferences in relation to school age childcare well beyond the crisis response period.

## Regulated childcare providers

Regulated childcare providers have faced significant disruption over the past year, including:

- many being unable to operate for significant periods
- phased re-opening to support existing or new families as restrictions have allowed
- operating at reduced capacity in order to meet the requirements of operating guidance
- adapting to regular changes to operational guidance
- adapting to meet the changing demands of families for school age childcare

Childcare providers played a vital role in the lockdown phases of the pandemic response, delivering critical childcare to support those most in need and to ensure that keyworker parents had the childcare they needed to continue in their vital roles. Without the dedication of childcare providers and practitioners, Scotland would not have been able to respond to the pandemic in the way that it did. There have been valuable lessons learned from the critical childcare provision, particularly in terms of partnership working between local authorities and school age childcare care settings.

After the initial lockdown period, operational guidance for the reopening of regulated school age childcare services was published in July 2020, enabling settings to reopen safely. Since that time, the guidance has been refreshed to align with the Scottish Government's strategic approach to the pandemic response and providers have managed to adapt to new demands which have complex implications for their operating models. With further restrictions coming into place in early 2021, and with it further updates to operating guidance, school age childcare services have continued to adapt.

The Scottish Government, through the work streams of the COVID-19 [Education Recovery Group](#), has worked closely with sector representative bodies, including the Scottish Out of School Care Network (SOSCN), the Scottish Childminding Association, Early Years Scotland, and the Care and Learning Alliance, throughout the pandemic. This constructive dialogue helped to balance the required public health measures, underpinned by scientific advice, with the delivery of high quality childcare for children and families. We have also worked with SOSCN directly to better understand the medium-long term impacts on the out of school care sector. Through a series of online workshops at the end of 2020, SOSCN members shared their experiences with us and talked about the challenges brought about by COVID-19, the changes they have seen in their sector and the lessons they have learned. This included feedback on operational challenges, changing demand from parents, financial sustainability, and changes in practice such as increasing focus on outdoor play and learning.

In a climate of economic uncertainty, the important role of school age childcare in enabling parents to continue to access work has been vitally important, and with limited opportunities for children to meet and play together in line with restrictions, these settings have given children a chance to socialise and interact in a safe environment. In the context of the pandemic, the positive wellbeing outcomes that high quality settings support have been more important than ever.

The financial implications of the pandemic for regulated childcare providers relate to increased expenditure associated with staffing, resources and materials and reduced income as a result of closures, reduced capacity and changing demand for services. This is concerning for existing services whose operating models were developed to meet families' needs in the pre-COVID-19 world. With less demand for places, some services have significant concerns about their financial sustainability. We are continuing to work closely with childcare providers to better understand the financial impacts and to understand the longer term consequences and support required to ensure the sector remains viable for the future.

The Scottish Government and UK Government introduced a range of measures to support businesses through the closure period, including the Small Business Support Grant, Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, the Self-employment Income Support Scheme, and the Bounce Back Loan Scheme. The Scottish Government has also introduced a range of targeted support for childcare providers including £11.2 million through the Transitional Support Fund and additional support through the Temporary Restrictions Fund (TRF) in the first months of 2021 .

The third round of the TRF will provide targeted financial support for school age childcare settings, acknowledging that this sector has been particularly impacted by COVID-19 restrictions. Settings will be entitled to claim TRF grants for the full four weeks of March, depending on which weeks they are open and operating. Settings who decide to open from the 15th March, in line with phase two of the reopening of education and childcare, will be able to claim for each of the weeks they are open in the month. In addition to this, all school age childcare settings will receive a restart grant, to assist with costs of reopening, linked to their registered capacity. More information about this financial support will be available on the Scottish Government website.

In the coming months we will undertake a financial sustainability health check to understand the impacts COVID-19 has had across the childcare sector, including taking account of particular challenges for different service types including school age childcare. This will inform our future policy development and any additional financial support to the sector as Scotland recovers from the impact of the pandemic.



## CASE STUDY

COVID-19  
CRITICAL  
CHILDCARE



## Scamps Out of School Clubs Ltd, Aberdeen

As an organisation, and as individuals, we watched events around the world unfold with uncertainty and trepidation before COVID-19 arrived in March 2020. Following the decision from government to close schools and childcare settings, Scamps remained open as a hub to care for primary school age children whose parents and carers were working as frontline NHS staff and all categories of key workers. We worked as part of a co-ordinated partnership with Aberdeen City Council to support children from different schools across the city. We were allocated 24 funded places through the council and had a further 8 places for ad hoc usage. It has been a very positive experience for us building a stronger relationship with the Council, and is something that we hope to maintain going forward.

New safety measures were taken positively: socially distanced queuing, timed handwashing with increased frequency and temperature checks all very quickly became routine. The question “how are you?” became so important and we all learned to really listen to the answers. The first few days with very few children were difficult, but as children started to arrive from across the local authority, we could see how important the hub would be to getting keyworkers to the frontline of the COVID-19 response. We began to establish a routine, with each child having time to work on school lessons as well as coming together for physical activity, spending time outdoors, lunch and snacks, and of course playing together.

PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES

PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES

We spent time working on citizenship and emotional literacy with the children, exploring mindfulness and resilience and even collaborated to write a book on Scottish myths, which is in our library corner now. With children ranging from ages 5-12 from different schools, there were many unique challenges individual to each child, but staff quickly adapted to learning routines for each student. Some children thrived with the online learning challenges, others found it more difficult. Our staff quickly became experts in frozen computers (and turning them off and on again!). We managed to be creative with the holidays, making our own fun since normal trips weren't possible. We had a circus, picnics, dens, playparks, walks, and living history days where we learned about WWII and VE day or recreated 18th century recipes on the barbecue.

The legacy of the first lockdown was most keenly felt by students undergoing transitions. When our service reopened to all families we had a high numbers of primary 1 children joining and saw a distinct difference between children who had been in childcare during the lockdown and those who had been at home. Independent toileting and self-care (changing shoes, coats, dressing) was much harder for children who had been at home. Whilst physically they could manage these tasks, they struggled with following instructions as a group, being distracted by the sheer novelty of being around children again. Children from small families or those without siblings to play with had found lockdown particularly challenging, with some parents concerned about their wellbeing. Within half a day back in our setting, children who had been isolated through much of lockdown were settled, playing together and laughing.

We have seen unexpected positive outcomes from the past year in the form of resilience skills. We have kept this going by continuing to explore wellbeing, mindfulness and adaptability, and that question "how are you?" is one we use to reach out to each other and really listen to.

## Childminders

Childminders form a unique part of the regulated childcare sector, and are also facing challenges as a result of the pandemic. It is important to recognise that childminders are self-employed lone workers in most cases, who are not just providing childcare. They are also running a business, fulfilling obligations in respect of training, administration, and are responsible for marketing and attracting families to support through the service they provide.

Throughout the initial closure period over 1000 childminders remained open to provide critical childcare to children of key workers, and vulnerable children. Following the initial lockdown childminders were among those childcare services able to reopen first, and they remained open during the lockdown in early 2021. Safe reopening guidance specifically for childminding settings was developed based on scientific advice and in close consultation with the Scottish Childminding Association and Care and Learning Alliance.

Like other childcare providers, childminders have faced challenges related to increased outgoings and decreased income associated with the costs required to meet operating guidance and changes in the childcare demands of the families they support. Recognising these challenges, the Scottish Government has provided £3.2 million of business support for Childminding Services in 2021 by offering a grant of £750 to every registered childminder. This fund builds on support already provided to over 1,000 childminders through the Childminding Workforce Support Fund earlier in the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Organised children's activities

Our draft framework from 2019 noted that organised activities and services form another important part of the school age childcare landscape in Scotland. These include a wide range of activities and services, including arts and culture programmes, sports clubs, youth work and outdoor learning providers which provide access to such activities for many children and young people round about the school day.

Over the course of the pandemic it has been very difficult and at times impossible to deliver such activities and programmes, due to strict limitations on group activities for different age groups of children both indoors and outdoors. Even during periods where they have been permitted, physical distancing requirements, and other health protection measures, have reduced capacities in sporting and other activities. Such measures are likely to continue for some time and have a direct impact on the operational capabilities of venue operators and the economic viability of some facilities.

Though still subject to restrictions, youth work services have, at times, been able to continue to deliver support to children and young people, due to the educational nature of their approach. Youth work organisations have played a key role in providing crisis support for the most vulnerable families and mitigating the impact of COVID-19 on children and young people's mental health, learning and development.

Many community based activity providers adapted to the needs of their local communities supporting the delivery of food, clothing and other essentials for the children and families who would normally access these services. In some cases, these activity services are provided for free or low cost, which makes them more affordable for families. For this reason, families living with low income may be more likely to rely on these services though cost remains a barrier, particularly when fees are requested in advance. Expectations of low cost delivery can put strain on those providers to keep costs down, especially when demand for those services increases.

## Summary

We know that the [four harms of COVID-19](#) – the direct health impact, other health impacts, societal impacts, and economic impacts – and their wide ranging implications will impact different groups of people in different ways. We have seen the immediate effects of the restrictions and the resulting implications for children and young people, their families and service providers who normally support them around the school day and in the holidays.

We have also heard of the incredible resilience of children and young people and of the remarkable adaptability of service providers and staff to manage through times of change and uncertainty to deliver outstanding support, care and love for the families they work with. Over the course of the pandemic, school age childcare settings have, at times, been one of the only spaces where children have been able to play with their peers and spend relaxed, enjoyable time with others outside of their own home, continuing to build and develop important relationships with trusted adults.

Over the past year, we have seen a renewed understanding of the importance of high quality school age childcare and the vital contribution it makes to children's outcomes, family wellbeing and economic stability. COVID-19 continues to be part of our lives and we can expect to live with protective measures for some time to come. The full scale of the pandemic's impact is not yet known and as we move through to recovery we will continue to monitor the impacts and consider our plans for future school age childcare in that context.

## 5. Future School Age Childcare Policy

As we begin to plan for an economic rebuild, childcare – and particularly access to school age childcare for families – will be an important part of the future economic infrastructure in Scotland. We have developed a bold vision and set of aims which will continue to drive progress and guide our work as we look to the future.

Our vision and aims clearly arise from the National Performance Framework which sets out the Scottish Government’s purpose, values, and the national outcomes that describe the kind of Scotland we want to create.



Our vision focuses on positive outcomes for children, recognising article 31 of the UNCRC – a child’s right to play, and the importance of feeling included and part of a community. These are all aspects of children’s lives that have been tested during the pandemic and so our vision must remain fit for purpose in a post-COVID-19 world.

## Policy Direction – Future Approach

### Supporting Children’s Outcomes

The health, needs and wellbeing of the child continue to be central to developing school age childcare policy.

We know that high quality school age childcare and activities can benefit children by promoting positive social interactions and relationships, building social and emotional skills and confidence, and providing the opportunity for play in a safe environment, particularly for younger children and those from the most socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds.<sup>14</sup>

Accessing affordable school age childcare could help enable families to lift themselves out of poverty and enable more children and young people to benefit from a range of activities and experiences which will deliver positive outcomes.

Access to holiday programmes and youth work provision can deliver a range of potential positive impacts for the children and families who attend, including tackling food insecurity, and wider health and wellbeing, educational, and financial impacts. For families on low incomes, school holidays can increase financial pressure and may lead to food insecurity and missing out on opportunities that are available to children in families with higher income. The cost of childcare and extra meals during school holidays may also put pressure on family household budgets or make sustaining work difficult, particularly for lone parents. There is some research that suggests that circumstances experienced during the school holidays – including poor nutrition, social isolation and stress within the family – can negatively impact on children’s readiness to learn, cognitive functioning, health and wellbeing.

There is also some evidence showing that school age activities and programmes can have positive impacts on a range of children’s outcomes and indicate that they could play a role in reducing the attainment gap.

Scotland’s curriculum is defined as all the experiences that are planned for learners wherever they are being educated. It takes account of the experiences that children and young people have through learning outwith school and in activities that would previously have been thought of as extra-curricular. The purpose of the curriculum is to enable every child or young person to be a successful learner, a confident individual, a responsible citizen and an effective contributor. The curriculum aims to ensure that all children and young people in Scotland develop the knowledge, skills and attributes they need to flourish in life.

Outcomes for children are therefore linked not only to the learning that takes place during school hours but also to the range of life enhancing experiences and opportunities that are available to children outside of school hours and during holiday times. We know that for many children this range of positive experiences is often out of reach under normal circumstances and for others, access to these experiences will have been compromised during the pandemic.

Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC) has become part of our culture and our way of working to support families. It provides a consistent framework and shared language for everyone who works with children, young people and parents. Having a common approach that spans all children’s services enables everyone including children, young people and their parents, to work together to make a positive difference for individual children and young people.

Promoting and supporting the wellbeing of children and young people, and preventing additional stresses on families at this time have been, and will continue to be, paramount.

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/out-school-care-scotland-draft-framework-2019/pages/8/>

The Scottish Government is committed to recognising, respecting and promoting children's rights, as set out in the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child \(UNCRC\)](#). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation)(Scotland) Bill was introduced to Parliament on 1 September 2020. Incorporation will ensure that children's rights are afforded the highest protection and respect possible within the powers of the Scottish Parliament.

There are many articles contained within the UNCRC which are hugely relevant to school age childcare including Article 31 which describes a child's right to culture, leisure, rest and play. For many children their access to play opportunities will have decreased as a result of the pandemic and we should consider how our future policy can help support increased wellbeing and improved access to those opportunities.

We know that children thrive and develop through interaction with their peers and the Scottish Government firmly believes that play is key in facilitating this interaction. As families are spending an increased amount of time together, play is also important in building and maintaining positive relationships. It encourages interactions between all members of the family and allows free time for children to express themselves and work through their emotions. While the effects of all COVID-19 restrictions are yet to be fully revealed it is clear that we will need to support children to reintegrate and that play is a good facilitator for that.

PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES



## Supporting Economic Recovery

While the pandemic has surfaced real challenges for school age childcare providers, it has also thrown a spotlight on the importance of childcare in underpinning the economic recovery work that we, as a society, are undertaking.

The [Scottish Government's Economic Recovery Implementation Plan](#) focuses on jobs and employment at the heart of its actions. School age childcare has a crucial role to play in ensuring that parents and carers have the right support to access the labour market, help rebuild the economy and improve outcomes for their own families.

It is important that school age childcare continues to be considered across national, regional and local policy conversations. Building on the work we started with the draft framework, we will continue to ensure that school age childcare policy is considered appropriately in decision making at a time of social and economic renewal.

In recent years, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the commitment to achieve a wellbeing economy was already a central priority for the Scottish Government. Scotland is a founding member of the Wellbeing Economy Governments (WEGo) alliance, in which member countries collaborate to understand the key priorities for a wellbeing economy. The broad aims of the wellbeing economy are to create a society that is thriving across economic, social and environmental dimensions and that delivers sustainable and inclusive growth for the people of Scotland. There is little doubt that the current economic crisis induced by COVID-19 has made these aims harder to achieve in the short term, however it is integral that a focus on achieving the foundations of the wellbeing economy is at the heart of Scotland's economic recovery plans. The recovery will be an opportunity to do things differently – and crucially, to rebuild Scotland's economy with wellbeing, sustainability, and fair work at its heart.

Without accessible, flexible and affordable childcare options, many parents and carers may struggle to access employment which could deliver improvements for them and their families. Well supported working parents will be vital in the economic recovery and a well-positioned school age childcare sector that can react to their needs will prove valuable not just for parents and families, but for wider society too.

During the pandemic, Scottish Ministers set up an Independent Social Renewal Advisory Board to make proposals that can renew Scotland once we start to emerge from the pandemic. The Board was set up as a short-term group to come up with transformational ideas on how to deliver real change as Scotland embarks on its journey of renewal. The final report [“If not now, when?”](#) was published in January 2021. It contains 20 calls to action across 4 sections:

1. Money and Work
2. People, Rights and Advancing Equality
3. Communities and collective endeavour
4. Closing The Gap Between Promise and Practice

The Money and Work section focuses on ensuring everyone has enough money to lead a decent life and within that there is a call to:

*Extend free early learning, childcare and social care so all parents and carers can access the childcare they need, when they need it.*

This recognises the link between the cost of childcare and tackling child poverty as noted in our draft framework. Any reduction in the cost of childcare will increase disposable income for parents and can improve quality of life for families.

Ministers will publish a response to the report by end March 2021.



## Continuing to Engage

We are committed to working collaboratively with children and young people, and parents and carers to co design our future policy. Over the past two years, we have engaged directly with a wide range of stakeholders to understand people's views and first-hand experiences of school age childcare in Scotland.

Following the principles set out in the [Scottish Approach to Service Design](#), we want to continue to ensure that children and families themselves are empowered to actively participate in the definition, design and delivery of new policy on school age childcare. This means continuing and strengthening citizen participation in our policy development and delivery.

**This year, we will establish a diverse and inclusive public panel of parents, carers, children and young people from a wide range of communities across Scotland.**

We will work collaboratively with the panel, listening to their insights and ideas, and making sure that as we design future policy we do so in a way that supports the needs of all families in Scotland.

We will continue to work with partners such as the Poverty Truth Community, One Parent Families Scotland, National Parent Forum Scotland and others to ensure we include a wide range of parent and carer voices from different communities across Scotland. We know there's no one size fits all solution to childcare and we need to develop and test models to meet the needs of as many families as possible. We will take a tailored approach to engaging with the public panel, using the most suitable forum for each group or individual as appropriate. With COVID-19 restrictions easing gradually, face-to-face meetings we will instead draw on a mix of approaches that may include online surveys, focus groups facilitated on digital platforms, and one-to-one conversations over the telephone. We will also consider the use of online dialogue platforms which can be used to generate ideas and discussion between panel members.

Children and young people have a right to be heard and involved in decisions that affect them as set out in the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child \(UNCRC\)](#). The children and young people who make up our public panel will be involved in our school age childcare policy design and decision-making process, in line with [Article 12 \(right to be heard\) of the UNCRC](#).

The participation of children and young people will be an ongoing process, rather than a one-off event. We will work with the children and young people involved, and experts from the third sector, to agree an engagement approach that builds ongoing conversation between Scottish Ministers, government officials and the children and young people themselves. Considerable evidence supports the view that such participative approaches bring about effective policy and decision making, improved service design and opportunities for action on the part of children and young people.

**We will ask children and young people to develop their own charter for school age childcare in Scotland.**

The charter will reflect the views of children and young people across Scotland providing recommendations outlining how they could better access childcare, activities and wider support round around the school day and during the holidays, and the changes they would like to see in the school age childcare landscape. It will provide them with the opportunity to make recommendations – based on their own priorities and reflecting the communities they live in – for improving access to school age childcare in order to better meets their needs and aspirations.

**The Scottish Government is committed to developing a robust school age childcare policy and testing the change required to deliver our vision, even against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic.**

We have a good understanding of the wide range of services which some families currently access but testing how these services can be made more accessible, affordable and sustainable requires us to invest in a programme of innovative change projects.

Our engagement to date supports the position that there is no single approach to delivering successful school age childcare and that successful models will be different for different families and different communities.

Supporting a range of community based projects is fundamental to better understanding the potential benefits that school age childcare can deliver for the children and families who access those services, whether that's in supporting them to access childcare, activities, food, or wider family support.

We believe those delivering services within communities know their families best and we want to support them to innovate, test and expand their services to create the models of childcare their families need.

PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES

## 6. Progress – Tests of Change

## Access to Childcare Fund

In July 2020 we opened our £3 million Access to Childcare Fund which will test new models of school age childcare that will be more accessible, flexible and affordable for low income families. 15 projects have been awarded funding to deliver a range of childcare models, with particular focus on demonstrating impacts for families from the six priority family types identified in the Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan.

The fund is focussed on enabling organisations and services to test and deliver change through close collaborative working with those families accessing their services, creation of a mentoring and peer network across projects, and continual monitoring and improvement in order to continue with what works and to change what doesn't.

The fund is managed by Children in Scotland and supported by an expert advisory group. Projects will be further supported by a range of partners including Evaluation Support Scotland (ESS) and the Children and Young People's Improvement Collaborative (CYPIC).

Both evaluation and improvement are at the heart of the Access to Childcare Fund. The value in the fund is understanding how these innovative models of childcare are working for low-income families. This iterative process will enable us to test change across the school age childcare landscape and the evidence gathered from these projects will inform our policy aim of making services more accessible, affordable and flexible for low income families.

We are also working closely with local employability partners in order to maximise the opportunities to align the Access to Childcare Fund with the £12 million Parental Employability Support Fund (PESF) and PESF Boost to support parents to enter employment, training, study or to increase in-work progression.

Within the fund there are a range of projects which provide tests of change focused on particular creative solutions but also areas which we know present challenge for delivery of sustainable provision.



Six priority family types as identified in Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan

Access to Childcare Fund	
Project	Test of Change
Action for Children, Moray	<p>Action for Children are looking to test childcare provision in a rural setting with an established Employability Programme to encourage families into employment. The childcare will take place after school and during holidays, including provision of food.</p> <p>The test of change relates to actively linking their school age childcare provision to their established employability programme, reducing barriers to parents (particularly women) being able to take up work.</p>
Clyde Gateway, South Lanarkshire	<p>Clyde Gateway are the enabling organisation whose project – the Supporting Families project – involves a collaboration of delivery partners in and around Stonelaw High School in Rutherglen. The project aims to support a minimum of 150 children (ages 5 upward) to access subsidised or free school age childcare, combined with family support services. The test of change for this project relates to wrapping discrete services, provided by individual partner agencies, around the family so that support feels integrated.</p>
Flexible Childcare Services Scotland, Dundee and Aberdeenshire	<p>The Fund is supporting two FCSS services, one the well-established FCSS service at Fintry, Dundee and the other a new service being set up at Fraserburgh. Both services are consulting with parents and children to understand needs and wants, including establishing a children’s forum. This will trial a fully flexible model where parents pay only for the hours they use.</p> <p>The test of change in Fintry is the impact of more and better use of outdoor provision. The test of change in Fraserburgh is focused on the sustainability of providing a new service for low income families.</p>
FUSE Youth Café, Glasgow	<p>FUSE in Castlemilk, are working with Pavillion Youth Café (Easterhouse, Glasgow) to provide drop-in youth clubs for children and young people, offering them wider development activities too. They provide a mix of after school, holiday and weekend options for families to use.</p> <p>Fuse will extend the offer of youth club opportunities both at Castlemilk and Easterhouse to include some school age childcare linked to 2 local primaries at Castlemilk with support from an Family Support worker.</p>
Hame fae Hame, Shetland	<p>Hame fae Hame, are working to develop flexible childcare options for families, both before and after school, with a particular focus on outdoor provision. They will use their family monitoring system to track positive outcomes for families on low incomes.</p> <p>In addition to testing the impact of more use of outdoor space, this project is also introducing breakfast provision as part of its activity to improve the flexibility of the offer to parents locally.</p>

Access to Childcare Fund	
Project	Test of Change
Inverclyde Council	<p>A real need for holiday provision was identified as a barrier to opportunities for families in Inverclyde. The local authority is looking to focus on outdoor play, health and wellbeing and the creative arts in its targeted childcare offer for families, including children with complex additional support needs.</p> <p>The fund is supporting a trial of 2 school age childcare holiday hubs (one in Port Glasgow and one in Gourock) as well as a specialist hub for children with complex additional support needs.</p>
Stepping Stones for Families, Glasgow	Operating in Possilpark, Stepping Stones for Families will test the expansion of its holiday provision, offering a truly barrier-free experience for parents, as well as expanding its weekend childcare offer. They will also run a financial literacy programme for parents and carers to improve skills.
supERkids, East Renfrewshire	Focusing on providing high quality, parent-led childcare for children with significant or complex additional support needs in East Renfrewshire. The Fund will support supERkids to offer weekend provision to their families, to provide children experiences they otherwise would not have. They will also provide holiday clubs suited to children and young people with a wide range of disabilities.
The Wee Childcare Company, Angus	The Wee childcare company will open 2 new rural services in Angus to test rural childcare focused on flexible provision. One is based in Arbroath, serving two local primary schools, and provides a useful test of provision in a rural town setting. The other will be based in Monachie village, potentially serving up to 6 small remote and rural primary schools, testing improved access for remote rural families and addressing the hidden poverty associated with many remote rural communities.
St Mirin's Out of School Club, Glasgow	St Mirin's out of school club in Glasgow recognised a unique opportunity to work in partnership with the school in which they are based. They created an ambitious plan that incorporated improving the accessibility of their service by increasing the hours at both sides of the school day. The school and out of school work in collaboration supporting families who may work irregular hours. They are also creating a shared outdoor play and learning space within the school to build children's confidence in the outdoors.

See case studies for details on how Hope Amplified, LIFT, SHIP and The Indigo Childcare Group are using the Access to Childcare Fund to reach families who could benefit most from accessible, affordable and flexible school age childcare.

## CASE STUDY Access to Childcare Fund



### Indigo Childcare

Indigo is a long established childcare group in Glasgow. Established initially in Castlemilk, an area of multiple deprivation in Glasgow's east end, Indigo has a unique, seamless offering of learning and care for families of children from birth to 16yrs old.

Services include early learning and childcare, out of school care, a unique registered youth out of school service and a mobile crèche. Operating as a social enterprise, Indigo is a registered charity, focused on ensuring all families have access to outstanding quality learning and care regardless of where they live and parents can provide their families with the best possible start in life in confidence.

### Some Unique Characteristics of Indigo

#### Seamless Service

Indigo understands the challenges families experience trying to juggle multiple childcare providers with work, training or learning and family life, especially around transition points.

Our seamless service means that parents returning to work after a child has been born can register with Indigo and know that appropriate childcare is available until their child is 16yrs old, no need to 3 or 4 research points, re-registering, settling and so on.

#### Family Matters

Funded by the Access to Childcare Fund, Family Matters enables families experiencing difficult financial times to access quality school aged childcare whilst trying to get their finances back on track and progress out of poverty. It also offers the opportunity to pilot a weekend OSC service and is supported by a Family Support Co-ordinator.

PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES

PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES

To identify families who are most in need of support and well placed to engage with the support offered to help improve their family's quality of life and financial wellbeing, we have established a referral system with key partners in the community including schools, local authority joint support team, the DWP and a number of local third sector partners including referrals from our own staff team.

Referring partners have been briefed on the purpose of Family Matters. A degree of flexibility has also been built into the criteria to acknowledge the complexities of supporting working families during the pandemic.

The service will essentially test 4 things:

- Does subsidised school aged childcare support families to gain, sustain or progress in employment or learning?
- Does targeted Family Support empower families to improve their quality of life and enable sustained progression from poverty?
- Do working families in Castlemilk require weekend childcare?
- Can a referral scheme, subsidised childcare options and a family support function, support the longer term sustainability of out of school care provision for older children and young people?

It is our aspiration that families who access Family Matters will be able to:

- Improve their family's financial wellbeing
- Find, maintain or extend work, training or further learning confident that their children are safe and well looked after
- Be more flexible in their hours of work confident in access to weekend childcare
- Be more confident in the strategies and the resources available to them to improve their overall family wellbeing, be that, financially, family relationships, health and wellbeing, their home environment or work, education and training.

Information on our response to Covid can be seen here: [www.indigogrpinsights.com](http://www.indigogrpinsights.com)

## CASE STUDY Access to Childcare Fund



Two of our projects are focused on delivering more affordable and accessible childcare for disabled children and children with additional support needs. This was highlighted as an area of increased need within our consultation, noting the particular challenge associated with accessing appropriate school age childcare provision.

### Support Help and Integration in Perthshire – SHIP

**SHIP run youth clubs, sports groups, holiday clubs and after school clubs for children with complex additional support needs (5-18 years). The parent led charity has been running since 1986 and have extensive experience in supporting children to access activities and their local communities.**

SHIP's aim is to ensure that every child has the best possible chance to reach their full potential by running groups that promote life & social skills through fun activities and play. The time the children spend at the clubs also allows for their parent/carer and families some time for respite, work & study. All our clubs are run by highly trained experienced staff and trained volunteers (14 years +).

**PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES**



## COVID-19 highlights and challenges for out of school care

Our families have struggled with the pressures of full-time care, home schooling, work and juggling their other family members' needs. This having had a detrimental effect on family life and their health & wellbeing.

Over the summer 2020 SHIP successfully ran a holiday club programme. This was very different to those in previous years (supported less children and for shorter sessions) but 80 of our most vulnerable families were supported. We worked closely with the Care Inspectorate, Perth and Kinross Council inclusion team and social work to ensure those most in need were supported in a safe environment.

In August 2020 SHIP was delighted to receive a grant through the Access to Childcare fund. This grant was to allow SHIP to run after school clubs 5 days a week for children across Perthshire. By running the after school clubs, we would be giving families a chance to work, study and/or spend time with other siblings.

Because of our building owner's COVID-19 concerns, we had to find a new venue that had disabled access, large enough rooms to support "bubbles" of children, personal care rooms sensory room or space to make one and storage for all the equipment need to support and run the groups. We were delighted in November to find suitable facilities locally at Letham St Marks Church. By working in partnership with the Care Inspectorate, the building was approved for use on a temporary basis very quickly.

This allowed us to start up our after-school club by December 2020. We already have a total of 19 children attending the group from schools across Perth. Our plans moving forward are to be supporting at least 15 children per day and ensuring that rural families can attend a club. We are planning to achieve this by either supplying transport or looking at operating in more rural areas of Perthshire.

The main difference SHIP is aiming for is to improve the quality of life for families with children with complex additional support needs. Whether that be by offering respite at the end of a school day to allow parents to care for other siblings or by improving the families financial position by having a longer working or more flexible working day. To evidence changes happening we are working closely with families, schools, and the local authority to ensure we are offering a high quality, reliable and accessible childcare service. We will have regular meetings and surveys to ensure we are reaching every family needing childcare and being flexible with the care on offer.

## CASE STUDY

### Access to Childcare Fund



Some of our projects focused on the support and provision of childcare for lone parent families. LIFT (Low Income Families Together) tells us about how they're working in the local community to help improve outcomes for their families.

## Low Income Families Together (LIFT) – Muirhouse Community Centre

**After discussions with the families we support through our Support and Advocacy services we could see a pattern arising – childcare, or lack off, was having a huge impact on families, particularly single parents who had no one to help with after school care.**

Childcare was mostly required for either an hour or two while Mum or Dad were at work. Local schools finish between 3pm – 3.30pm and there is little after school care on.

We discussed this in length and proposed to trial a flexible childcare pilot with a cost to parents of just 50p. Children could come to the after-school care straight from school until 5.30pm.

We knew we would have 12 parents who would require this service to allow them to work, we had three who were planning to attend college.

We were aware we had children who have challenging behaviour who would benefit from a more relaxed childcare service, allowing them to mix with their peers, make new friendships and feel more confident in making their own choices. Increased mental well-being from having a safe environment to learn new skills has been report as well as improved communication, allowing children to take the lead in decision-making and programme delivery of the service.

We had six weeks of excellent service delivery. Children took turns in preparing the Tuck Shop and collecting the money, they worked together to hand out tuck, count the cash and keep stock of what would need replaced. The children planned the outdoor activities which were extremely successful – girls choose football and ball games as well as arts and craft, boys enjoyed the outdoor activities and the arts sessions. We had planned homework sessions after we had developed the after school care but the second lockdown has forced us to close.

We have had to adapt our services to online Zoom sessions, keeping to the after school club hours to keep continuity for the children.

Of the original 12 mums, eight are now working from home, two have sadly lost their jobs and two have other childcare arrangements in place. We managed to support four families to be allocated a place at schools as the children are vulnerable and require extra support. We had to negotiate with the local school regarding the school placements and give support and advocacy to secure two days at school for the four children.

We know how much our families need a service like ours, especially in an area of deprivation like Muirhouse. We currently have a waiting list and as soon as guideline's allow, we will have our services up and running again as they have proven incredibly beneficial to the families we support.

PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES



## CASE STUDY Access to Childcare Fund



A number of projects are exploring ways to reach minority ethnic communities in their areas, but one service in particular is focused on provision for such families. Working with the African Community in Glasgow and surrounding areas, Hope Amplified provide after school, holiday and youth club services that meet the community's needs, especially those who are unemployed or on Universal Credit. Here, they tell us how they are using their funding to make childcare more affordable to families from the African Community to allow them time for work, training or study.

### Hope Amplified

**Hope Amplified provide a range of services for the African community in Glasgow and South Lanarkshire, including youth clubs, after school clubs and support for young parents looking to enter work.**

The Access to Childcare funding is allowing us to make school age childcare more accessible and affordable for families from the African community who otherwise would be unable to afford childcare cost due to poverty and changes to the benefit system.

Before the pandemic we operated a Holiday Food & Activity Club aimed at helping vulnerable school-aged children and young people from the African community to build confidence, manage their behaviour, improve their life-skills and aspiration and maintain mental health. With the Access to Childcare Fund, we have expanded this from the original 61 participants to now over 180 places for vulnerable children and young people from the community.

We aim to bring about real and positive change to the lives of people in our communities currently struggling with financial and social issues who cannot afford the cost of childcare through the provision of out-of-school childcare. In South Lanarkshire, for instance, we are using Fernbrae Meadow, provided by South Lanarkshire Council at a reasonable cost, for gardening and outdoor activities for the community.

The Funding has helped us expand our organisation's capacity to recruit more sessional and part-time staff. Without these new staff members, we would be unable to serve the community well. Households that would otherwise be facing mental health challenge due to lack of social contact are benefiting from free activity packs and food parcels, helping young people to cope with the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Anika - not her real name - is a single mother who uses our services. She has three children, two of whom are aged 5 and 8 have been on waiting for an out-of-school childcare placement. This is her story:

*“I, like many other parents from the African community, had been on waiting list to access school age childcare facilities for some time. It is a frustrating experience for everyone in our community and to further compound the already difficult situation, we have no out of school childcare facility with the minority community in mind.*

*The lack of out of school care opportunities for children from the minority community have compounded and help sustain economic inequality due to lack of access to employment. I was at the point of giving up when my Housing Association referred me to Hope Amplified.*

*The out of school childcare facility was almost oversubscribed at the time I called to speak with the Project Manager to discuss the possibility for my two children enrolling at their facility. We were indeed lucky to secure two places at their project.*

*My two children are enrolled now, and they are enjoying going for activities. I am now looking for a part time employment where I can use my skills to contribute to the growth of the community.*

*I am proud of the organisation and the work they do. During this pandemic, they have lessened our financial burden because they also give us food parcels and other households essentials. I hope they will expand their services to more communities so minority people who are underserved have access to childcare and enable our children to have more opportunities for fun, growth, and development, including nutrition.”*

## Innovative Models of Childminding

Childminders provide valuable school age childcare options for many families often tailored to each child and their family's specific individual needs.

During the early part of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Scottish Childminding Association (SCMA) delivered two projects with the support of the Scottish Government and local authorities; the Wellbeing Service and their established [Community Childminding](#) model.

We are working with the SCMA to further develop these services to support access to school age childcare for those families who need it most. The SCMA will work in partnership with four local authorities to deliver childminding placements that will provide childcare to small groups of children in home learning environments, addressing children's social, emotional and physical development needs while supporting parents to move into employment or training.

The service will work with parents and carers who are engaged with local employability services to ease transition towards employment. We know the transition period between unemployment and employment is a difficult time for families to arrange, access and finance the childcare they need, particularly for those on low incomes. A number of placements will also focus primarily on families with children with additional support needs to provide complex care for the child and work closely with parents to consider employment opportunities. Our consultation noted that access to childcare is often difficult for families with a disabled child. This model looks to remove and mitigate some of the barriers associated with this, while measuring the impact this has on improving access to employment and wider outcomes for these families.

## Research into Breakfast and Holiday Provision

We understand the importance of aligning food and childcare provision during the holidays to ensure no child goes hungry.

The Poverty & Inequality Commission have recommended that, building from existing services, holiday club provision with nutritious and culturally appropriate food as a core element, should be available for children from low-income households. We have undertaken work to better understand the landscape from which we can build.

Working with colleagues in the Social Justice Delivery Unit's Tackling Food Insecurity Team, we have commissioned research by the Scottish Poverty and Inequality Research Unit (SPIRU) to carry out mapping and evaluation of activity and holiday programmes for low income families in Scotland. This research will provide us with a snapshot of school age childcare and holiday food and activity provision across a number of local authority areas and will help us to better understand what more might be needed to support low-income families who require childcare to access work, training or study and how this can be best combined with appropriate provision of food and other support where that's needed.

## Partnership approaches

We funded a pilot partnership project delivering holiday childcare, meals and activities to children in the Highland village of Milton, a rural area where many families experience poverty. This pilot project, coordinated by Highland Council, brought together a range of public and third sector partners who delivered free childcare, a range of different activities, trips and outings, as well as training and advice sessions for parents. We are working with the local primary school and Highland Council to continue this project, delivering a holiday hub in summer 2021 and considering what further term time childcare support would benefit families. Alongside the Access to Childcare Fund, evaluation of the project will feed into our future policy.

Understanding how to make school age childcare more accessible for low income families is key to a future sustainable model. However, we recognise that wider tests of change are required. Informed by the 2019 draft framework consultation, we will test the change required to deliver sustainable childcare services in rural locations and also to test how sports and activity clubs can provide part of the range of childcare options for families within their communities.

## Rural and Islands

Childcare providers in rural and island communities face challenges to setting up and maintaining sustainable delivery of services. Through engagement with the sector we have learned that, although these challenges are unique to each community, there are common themes such as fluctuating demand in smaller communities, additional costs relating to transport, and staffing costs for small numbers of children. There may also be difficulties in staffing services or securing suitable premises.

While by no means exclusive to rural and island locations, consideration for our Gaelic speaking communities is also important to the development of school age childcare proposals, in the communities where this is relevant e.g. Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (Western Isles Council) which follows a 'Gaelic First' enrolment to education across the local authority.

There is a clear vision for children and young people to develop their own charter for school age childcare in Scotland. The opportunity exists to capture representations from children and young people living in rural and island locations, both through the Rural Parliament and the recently launched Young Islanders Network. These forums empower young people through their engagement in policy development and provide an opportunity to directly influence change at a community level.

We understand the value that an accessible, affordable and flexible childcare offer can bring to rural and island communities. To better understand the needs and the potential solutions, we are working with Mull and Iona Community Trust to develop and deliver pilot school age childcare services on Mull. The project aims to explore models of delivery which can provide the flexibility required by local communities. The Trust seeks to promote a "whole family" approach, proposing the development of a network of childminders alongside childcare settings. The project will also explore the ways in which outdoor and mobile provision can enhance the quality and flexibility of childcare.

## Organised activities and youth work provision

We understand and recognise the important role that organised children's activities, play and youth work provide to ensure safe spaces for children and young people to learn, play and develop. Many of these services focus on one type of activity, such as a sport or arts, and while they would not necessarily recognise themselves as childcare, they often extend care for children beyond the school day, supporting parents and carers to work, train or study or to provide other caring duties. They also support children to invest and focus time on particular interests.

We will work with those delivering organised children's activities and youth work to better understand their place in the broader school age childcare landscape, and look to explore how services can work together in order to offer families the broad range of childcare options that they may require to support their needs.

### Ayr United Football Academy

We are funding a pilot partnership project with Ayr United Football Academy to work with three local primary schools and the local secondary school to set up an after school and holiday sports club. The after school clubs will take place at all four schools weekly, over 40 weeks each year. Sessions will last two and a half hours per night and will be open to any pupil who attends one of the named schools or from its surrounding communities. The activities will vary week to week but will be based around sport, outdoors activities and using the schools' facilities.

The funding will also allow AUFA to offer training and coaching qualifications to the parents or guardians of the children that attend. AUFA will engage with the local grassroots club, Whitletts Victoria, and the Ayr North Community Hub who are both situated in North Ayr. With this engagement AUFA will be able to encourage children, parents and carers to join pathways where they will experience playing, coaching or volunteering and begin a journey that can last a life time, leading to opportunities.

As part of the childcare offer, AUFA will also deliver two employability courses over the two years, each programme lasting 12 weeks each with participants taking part twice a week. The programme is aimed at parents/carers gaining new qualifications, experiencing job opportunities, exercising twice per week, linking with their local job centre and ultimately providing a package that will give someone confidence to start a new career or further the career they are currently involved in.



# 7. Reflections and Forward Look

**Our consultation has shown that there are challenges for children and families in accessing affordable and appropriate school age childcare and activities which provide a range of options to suit their particular needs.**

Our consultation also shows that there are challenges for the school age childcare sector in providing diverse and sustainable services, particularly for families on low incomes and families with children who have complex additional support needs.

We know that the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted families and providers in many different ways, introducing new challenges for all.

Further work is needed to better understand how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted childcare requirements, and how it has affected those organisations providing school age services to in terms of future adaptability and sustainability.

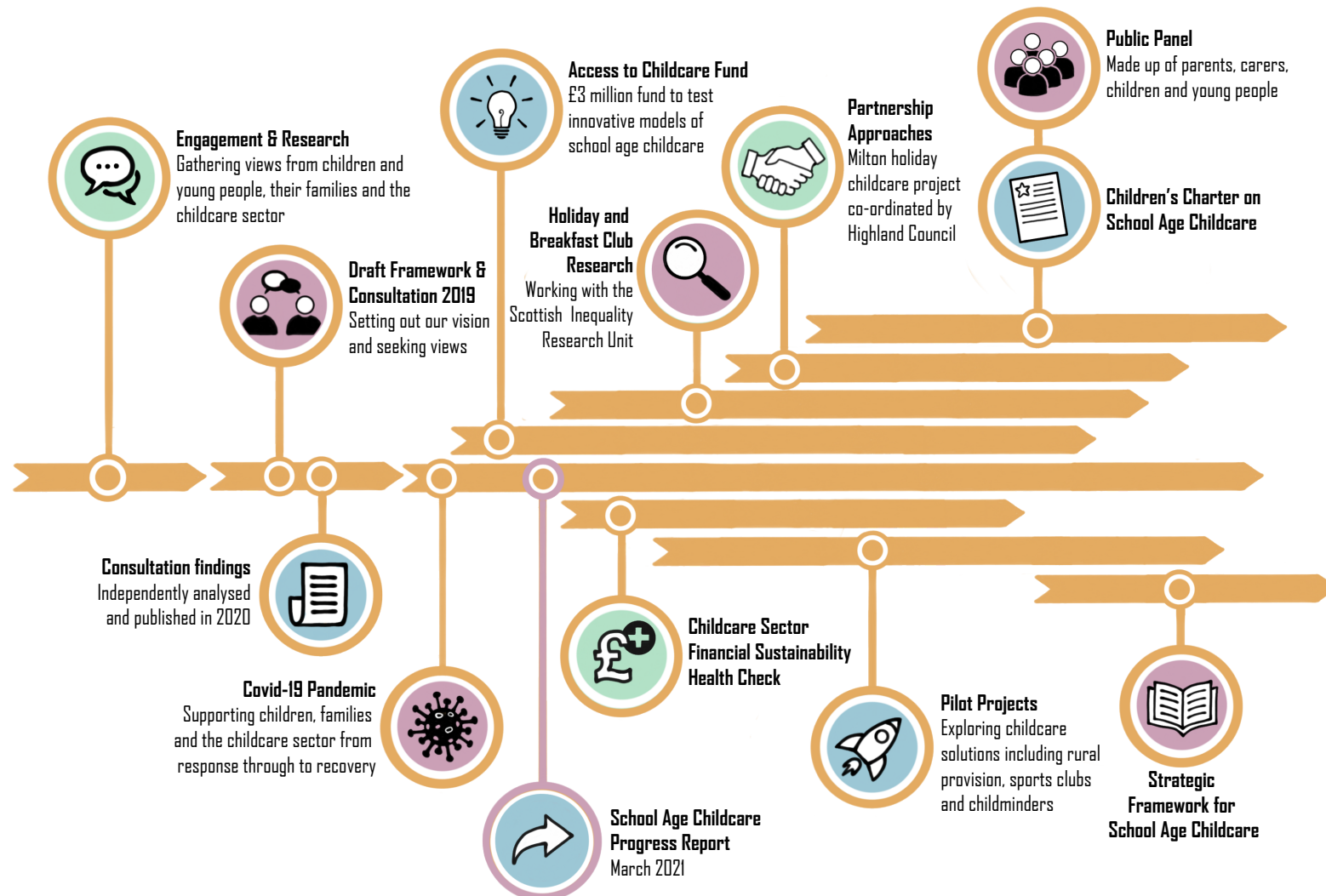
Our Access to Childcare Fund projects, and pilot projects exploring rural childcare, sports provision and childminder models, will provide us with information about how to remove some of the barriers associated with accessing school age childcare for low income families and those who typically find it difficult to access childcare services. We hope that the learning from these innovative projects will provide us with new models of school age childcare for the future.

We have committed within this progress report to:

- Continue to work collaboratively with a wide range of stakeholders to shape our strategic framework for school age childcare and activities.
- Establish a public panel of parents and carers and children and young people to ensure our developing policy meets their needs.
- Produce a children's charter for school age childcare to complement our strategic framework.
- Undertake a financial sustainability health check to understand the impacts of COVID-19 on the school age childcare sector taking account of particular challenges for different service types.
- Continue to support our 15 Access to Childcare Fund projects to test the changes required to deliver more accessible and affordable school age childcare for low income families.
- Support our childminding school age childcare project working in partnership with the Scottish Childminding Association.
- Work in partnership to support rural and sports and activity pilot projects to further test changes.

These actions will shape our strategic framework, which will be delivered in the next Parliament.

That framework will set out what will be required to deliver our future vision for school age childcare in Scotland as we emerge from the current COVID-19 crisis and enter a period of economic recovery and social renewal.





Scottish Government  
Riaghaltas na h-Alba  
gov.scot

© Crown copyright 2021



This publication is licensed under the terms of the Open Government Licence v3.0 except where otherwise stated. To view this licence, visit [nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3](https://nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3) or write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: [psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk).

Where we have identified any third party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

This publication is available at [www.gov.scot](http://www.gov.scot)

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at  
The Scottish Government  
St Andrew's House  
Edinburgh  
EH1 3DG

ISBN: 978-1-80004-656-6

Published by The Scottish Government, March 2021

Produced for The Scottish Government by APS Group Scotland, 21 Tennant Street, Edinburgh EH6 5NA  
PPDAS823106 (03/21)

W W W . g o v . s c o t