

Out of School Care in Scotland – draft framework consultation

1. Introduction

Connect is a long-standing independent parents' organisation and the only Scottish charity which is dedicated to parental engagement in education. We provide membership services to Parent Councils and PTAs, as well as offering advice and information to individual parents about any aspect of the education of their child or the wider education system. We support education professionals in developing their skills and understanding around effective partnership working with families and the wider community.

We welcome the opportunity to respond to the Scottish Government's consultation on its Out of School Care framework. To inform our response, Connect draws on our experience working with parents and parents groups and supporting them in their work to benefit school communities. Some of their activities include providing out of school activities such as after homework or activities clubs. We also carried out a survey of parents through our Parents' Voice survey group and advertised it through our social media channels. In total **143 individuals** took part in our survey from across **27 local authorities**, with children in the following age groups:

- 0 to 3 years: **4%**
- Pre-school 3-5 years: **13%**
- P1-P3: **37%**
- P4-P7: **69%**
- S1-S3: **31%**
- S4-S6: **13%**

58% of all respondents answered their child attends out of school care. Of the **42%** who do not access out of school care, **19%** answered the family is not interested or does not need it, **10%** answered it was not available, and **13%** for another reason. Of those, reasons given include the cost, lack of provision for children with Additional Support Needs, lack of flexible care, and not enough places available.

2. Range of services used and needed

We asked parents what kind of out of school care their child attends, with the opportunity to select more than one answer. 103 responded:

- **54%** answered their child attended an afterschool club
- **35%** used informal out of school care such as grandparents, friends, relatives, neighbours
- **31%** attended a breakfast club
- **20%** attended a holiday club
- **18%** attended an activity based club (such as sports, wildlife, arts etc.)
- **14%** answered they used a childminder

We asked who organises the out of school care used. 109 responded:

- **35%** answered a private company
- **20%** answered the school
- **20%** answered other, with the opportunity to comment further, which included local church, charity organisation, private school and family.

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- **17%** answered an individual such as a childminder
- **16%** answered a sports club/organization
- **13%** answered local authority
- **8%** answered Parent Council/PTA/other parent group
- **8%** answered community group
- **7%** answered specialist such as an art, drama or wildlife specialist
- **2%** answered youth group

We also asked parents if there was a type of out of school care their family needs but is not available in their area, with the opportunity to select more than one answer. 95 responded:

- **44%** needed an afterschool club
- **35%** needed a holiday club
- **29%** needed an activity based club
- **26%** needed a breakfast club
- **11%** needed a childminder

Parents were asked who they thought should be providing out of school care, with the opportunity to select more than one option. 138 answered:

- **80%** answered local authority
- **55%** answered the school
- **32%** answered a sports club/organization
- **30%** answered an individual such as a childminder
- **28%** answered a private company
- **27%** answered community group
- **20%** answered specialist such as an art, drama or wildlife specialist
- **12%** answered Parent Council/PTA/other parent group
- **12%** answered youth group

3. Importance of out of school care services

Parents were asked what they think are the most important benefits of out of school care, with the opportunity to select more than one. 139 responded:

- **74%** answered I can go to work
- **56%** answered my child enjoys being with other children
- **50%** answered my child enjoys playing and having fun there
- **38%** answered my child learns new skills
- **31%** answered it helps our family life
- **15%** answered the club/group provides a meal/snack
- **2%** answered none

20% answered other reasons, with the opportunity to comment further. Here is a small sample: "Gives flexibility to our busy schedule." "It means I can go to work and my son has activities and friends to play with." "Allows me to go to college." "It means I can care for a disabled relative." "It gives me extra respite as a single parent." "The sports club contributes to my child growing healthily and developing physical competence."

4. Challenges to using out of school care

We asked about the biggest challenges to using out of school care. 131 people answered and were able to select multiple options.

- **47%** answered the cost
- **28%** answered long waiting lists
- **27%** answered it was not available in their area
- **24%** answered the need to cater for different ages of children
- **15%** answered there was no way to get to the care, activity, or provision.
- **9%** answered their child was not interested in using it.
- **6%** answered their child had additional support needs which could not be met locally.

Further comments highlighted lack of flexibility and work hours not being catered for, a particular service the parent needed but was not available, and services only available at certain points in the year.

5. Community based approaches

5.1 Based on local needs and views

We are glad to see the consultation ask about how to support community based approaches. Different communities have different needs and challenges, and so will need different types of support, as what may work in an urban environment could be useless in a rural area. It is of utmost importance that this involves consultation and planning at the local level, and includes parents, families and children in a central role if it is to meet their needs. The Scottish Government can use its national position to look at what's working across Scotland, share good practice, and help support ways this could be adapted to different local contexts.

5.2 Funding

Another vital component is funding. There have been many excellent programmes across Scotland which have supported young people to develop life skills while providing a safe environment but have had to shut down due to cuts. Short funding cycles also has a negative impact on community groups, as they cannot look beyond the next round of funding. Funding needs to be long term so community initiatives do not have to be withdrawn to the detriment of children and their families. They should also support the continuance of a successful approach rather than constantly push for new approaches, if the existing ones work for families.

National and local government should also consider providing a support package for community organisations/social enterprises wanting to start up in areas where provision is limited or non-existent.

5.3 Access to school facilities

A few of our survey respondents gave their views on challenges to establishing out of school care:

"We have a need for it, but it is so difficult to get something set up. The fact that the school charges for using the facility and has so many regulations in place puts private companies or individuals off running something."

"It is extortionate in East Renfrewshire with the only feasible option being the use of a private company. It lacks variety and is at the mercy of the facilities the school makes available to them."

We have also had parent groups come to us with issues around holding meetings and events on school premises, and we conducted a survey in 2018 which highlighted issues with complex booking systems and excessive charges in some local authority areas.¹

¹ <https://connect.scot/news/connects-snap-survey-parent-groups-experiences-booking-school-lets>

Use of school buildings should be encouraged by making letting process affordable and straight forward. They are a wasted community resource if not used after school and in holidays.

6. The Framework's three key aims

The three key aims identified by the government are laudable goals, recognising the need for high quality and accessible care which meets the needs of those who use it. We believe it should also recognise the importance of national, local government and providers seeking the views of children and young people, parents, carers, and communities.

We also asked our survey respondents how much they agreed with the three aims, from 1 'not at all' to 4 'very much.' 142 respondents answered.

Weighted average:

1. High quality services which provide children with life-enhancing experiences: **3.61 (with 65% selecting 4 'very much')**
2. Out of school care is accessible and affordable and meets the needs of children and young people, parents and carers and communities: **3.80 (with 80% selecting 4 'very much')**
3. Out of school care services are embedded in communities and enable children and young people to access a range of spaces including the outdoors: **3.65 (with 68% selecting 4 'very much')**

7. Ensuring all families have access if they want it

One of our survey respondents commented that "care available locally has developed in an ad hoc way - there needs to be strategy and overview so that it is available to all at times when it is needed."

It is important that all families are made aware of what is available in their area, when it is available, and what they need to do to sign their child up for it.

It is also vital there are enough spaces available. "In my area, the breakfast/after-school club at the school is significantly oversubscribed with a waiting list of over a year."

Transport can also be an issue, especially in rural areas. Transport should be available to take children and young people from and to home outwith school hours.

The framework also needs to consider how looked after children, traveller children, and their families will be supported to access out of school care services.

8. Making sure it is affordable

We asked parents how much cost shapes their decision for their child to attend out of school care, rating from 1 'not at all' to 4 'very much.' 139 respondents answered, and **54%** rated it a 3 or 4.

"I don't think the cost is high for what is provided but low wages and a lack of well-paid employment means it's costly. Also I would prefer to be incentivised to look after my own children than to do low paid work and others look after them." "Cost is often prohibitive for many families." "I have two kids in once a week and it is £22 which is quite costly...I pay £25 at the start of every year (annual fee)"

Subsidised out of school care for families receiving certain benefits such as free school meals could help some of the poorest families, however this depends on eligible families signing up for the benefits in the first place. Some do not do so because of stigma, or they are unaware they qualify, or have fluctuating incomes.

It is important to remember cost is also an issue for families who are just above the threshold for benefits or are having to pay fees for multiple children.

A possible solution could be to provide free activities vouchers for everyone, with the ability to buy more if required, with extra provided free for those who qualify. Glasgow City Council has introduced a scheme

where families claiming benefits are automatically signed up for free school meals and clothing grants: a similar model could be used.

9. Additional support needs

As mentioned above, some of our survey respondents highlighted the issue of finding provision for their children who have support needs: "Special needs and medically complex children have limited opportunities in Clackmannanshire out of school. It is a long time for the child and the adults to deal with when there is no support. Some of the children find it challenging to deal with the upset to routine and attending a special needs school means that her friends are not local so there is no opportunity to meet up."

Funding is a key issue for services where a child has ASN: services need to be resourced with appropriately trained staff and equipment if necessary.

Some families access specific care for children with additional support needs, for example as provided by The Yard. Others want their child to attend mainstream activities and clubs with siblings and friends.

One size can't fit all! Out of school care has to meet the needs of the young person, but also take into account the preference of parents regarding mainstream or specialist provision.

10. Flexibility of out of school care

Our survey heard from parents and carers who work shifts, and so require out of school care occasionally:

"The lack of flexibility - you need to sign up for at least 2 sessions per week on set days. That doesn't fit my work pattern. Other authorities seem to have a lot more flexibility and space."

"More flexibility in afterschool clubs would be helpful. If you don't work standard shifts then flexibility is key. Needing to pay for every Wednesday so that you keep the space is impractical."

Some parents also reported not being able to access out of school care due to it not fitting with regular work hours.

"I feel like having a (non-flexible) full time job is punishing. Most parents are in this position yet we are treated like we are an anomaly. While I understand that education is not childcare, it is impossible to work during school hours only. I'd love for a standard after school care programme to be rolled out so that I know my boys can stay put for an extra hour or so without them being dragged to a child minder or put into an 'outdoor' nursery."

There is a need for wrap around care, before and after school hours.

11. Ages of children for whom parents/carers require provision

Parents reported a lack of services for young people in secondary school:

"There are no facilities for children once they leave Primary. Secondary age children don't have the same access to out of school services."

"I can't be at home when my child finishes school and she is still of an age that I don't like her being at home on her own (she's in S1). Knowing she is in a safe place, like school, would certainly help family life."

"I'm worried about early secondary school after school care because our current after school and holiday clubs stop in p7."

Another issue was parents looking for care which could accommodate the different ages of their children: "I would love my children to all attend the same after school care but at present they all have to attend different days and times due to age, this does not benefit us as a family atm. I am a single parent who gets little help so affording after school care can be tough."

Services aimed at young people should look to the Youth Work model, focussing on activities and skills which are relevant to the age group. Non-competitive sports and similar should encourage self-motivation.

12. Conclusion/recommendations

- It is vital consultation with families, children, providers of out of school care and other relevant community organisations takes place at local authority level.
- An audit of current provision and current models of provision needs to be carried out at the local level to identify gaps, including an audit of places suitable for children and young people with additional support needs
- Research into a charging structure for out of school care, with the focus on affordability for families and support for families in accessing care.
- A support package for community organisations/social enterprises wanting to start up in areas where provision is limited or non-existent.
- Encourage use of school buildings by making letting process affordable and straight forward. They are a wasted community resource if not used after school and in holidays.

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