

## Out of School Care – Believing that children matter



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Despite caring for more than 60,000 children, the 1,000 plus services providing out of school care in Scotland are all too often overlooked in terms of resources, funding and more crucially, recognition for the positive impact they have on the wellbeing and development of school-age children and young people. Why is this?

Out of school care is not a statutory service and has largely grown organically through local demand (rather than overall strategic policy) to meet the needs of children and families. Nearly 50% of out of school care services are still run by unpaid parent-led management committees but with paid staff. As local authorities must fulfil statutory obligations first, out of school care tends to be at the back of the queue for resources and support and, in certain areas, left standing out in the cold – it is not for nothing that out of school care is sometimes referred to as a ‘Cinderella service’.



Many services have to survive with little additional financial support other than that which can be raised through fees paid by parents/carers (or colleges in the case of students), and any additional fundraising. This makes out of school care at first glance appear expensive when

compared to free or subsidised early learning and childcare places. Often parents don't realise that they may be eligible for support to pay for out of school care through tax credits or the tax-free childcare system.

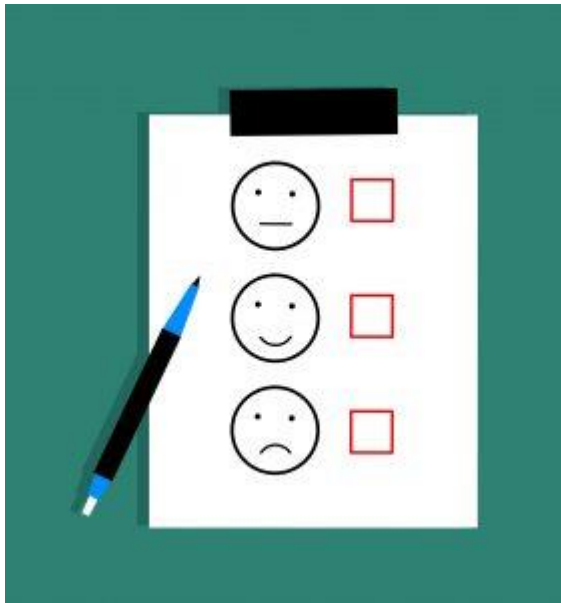
Furthermore, out of school care is often seen as a service only for children of working parents, or parents taking up training or education opportunities, and in the mid-90s it is true that the sector expanded through investment from local enterprise companies precisely for these reasons. However, this has shifted the focus away from a child's right to out of school childcare (as was the case initially in the 1980s in Scotland, and is currently in Scandinavian and Nordic countries) to that of parents'. Yet crucially, out of school care services are registered with, and regulated by, the Care Inspectorate as 'daycare of children' services which support wellbeing and developmental outcomes for children, the same as pre-school services. And whilst it is undeniable that having secure childcare does allow parents/carers to work and undertake training opportunities, the benefits to children and young people attending quality out of school care services need greater recognition.

So, what are the benefits? Children attending quality out of school care will be provided with a variety of play opportunities both indoors and outdoors, as well as stimulating and challenging physical and mental activities, and access to cultural activities. Through all of these they learn and develop cognitive, physical and emotional skills. Children should also be able to relax in the company of friends and have a say on how the service is run.

All this is not just 'nice or good' for children – out of school care services ensure that children's rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) are being met. For example, article 31 of the UNCRC states that children have the 'right to access culture, leisure, rest and play opportunities, and this is precisely what out of school care provides.



Out of school care services work within the Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC) approach, and by meeting the SHANARRI (Safe, Healthy, Achieving, Nurtured, Active, Respected, Responsible, Included) Wellbeing indicators, they also fulfil the four outcomes of Curriculum for Excellence that children are: successful learners; confident individuals; responsible citizens and effective contributors. Children's learning and development is not the sole responsibility of school – it is also the community's, and out of school care is very much part of that.



Research shows that out of school care can have a positive effect on children's learning and attainment, none more so than for children from the most disadvantaged backgrounds. Tanner et al (2016) in their research found that among disadvantaged children, of those who attended after school clubs (activity clubs and care services) there was a significant correspondence with higher educational school attainment and prosocial skills than for those who did. Why is this? We would argue that the economically disadvantaged children were accessing additional

opportunities and experiences that ordinarily would not be available to them, but which wealthier children are more likely to take for granted, so out of school care club and services are able to reduce the opportunity, wealth and attainment gaps in society.

Despite this of course, it goes back to the lack of additional funding for services and, as the national organisation for out of school care in Scotland we would like to see, as a minimum, services receive financial support to pay for places for the most disadvantaged children in society.

To close, the final words should go to children using the services. These selected comments are from a national survey we are currently undertaking on what children think about out of school care. These responses are to the question "What is the best thing about your club?"

*"The best thing is that I love that we get to choose, and speak, and get listened to."*

*"The best thing is that we get to know the staff. We also get to know other children in the club. Everybody gets a chance to share their opinion when they want to and we also get to choose a list of the trips we go on."*

*"Everything is different when I come and it's fun and I like it."*

*"I can be myself."*

*"Best thing is to make friends from other schools."*

*"I like the freedom."*

And perhaps most importantly:

***"Believing that you matter."***

### **About the Scottish Out of School Care Network (SOSCN)**

SOSCN is the national charitable intermediary organisation for school-age childcare in Scotland. For further information: [soscn.org](https://www.soscn.org)