

A woman with blonde hair and glasses, wearing a blue short-sleeved uniform with the name 'Hannah' on it, is sitting in a wheelchair. She is holding an open book and looking towards the camera with a slight smile. The setting appears to be a childcare or early learning environment, with colorful toys and a shopping cart visible in the background. A teal banner is overlaid at the bottom of the image containing the title and her name.

Achieving Diversity in the Scottish Early Learning and Childcare Workforce

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Introduction

Skills Development Scotland commissioned independent research to identify challenges in recruiting and retaining a diverse workforce for the early learning and childcare (ELC) sector. This report presents key findings from the research and looks at approaches that would help achieve this and sets out recommendations for partners and stakeholders to consider and take forward.

Background/context

By 2020, the Scottish Government will increase funded entitlement to ELC to 1,140 hours per year. This expansion, with an increased focus on flexibility, is expected to provide more opportunities for parents to move into employment, increasing their hours to work, study or train. The increased funded entitlement is also expected to contribute towards giving Scotland's children the best start in life and improve their outcomes. To achieve this, it is estimated that up to 11,000 additional workers will be required to meet the needs of expansion by 2020.

Skills Development Scotland (SDS) published a Skills Investment Plan (SIP)¹ for the ELC sector. The SIP, developed by and for the ELC sector, sets out a clear plan of action, with evidence, to ensure the sector can access a high quality, skilled workforce to fuel that expansion, all while meeting the needs of Scottish Government's inclusive growth strategy.

Creating a diverse ELC workforce which better reflects the wider Scottish society is a key action in the Scottish Government's Policy Blueprint for Expansion to 2020². Improving the diversity of the workforce is a key priority within the SIP – there is agreement within the sector that there is significant potential to recruit from groups who have traditionally not considered a career in the sector. Clearly, if the sector is to meet the Scottish Government's commitment and the ambitions set out in the SIP, then it should broaden its reach and achieve a more diverse workforce.

Workplace diversity is important for widening the recruitment pool, and to contributing to a secure, sustainable workforce. In terms of organisational performance, a diverse workforce can offer more balanced views and perspectives, which is crucial to a team. It is also important for children, as a more diverse workforce provides a broader range of role models for them and reflects the profile and demographic of the communities they live in. Employing people from different cultural or religious backgrounds, or even people with different life experiences, can provide a learning opportunity – not only for the children themselves, but also for staff, parents and carers. Alongside these benefits, it is important that people from under-represented groups can benefit from the employment opportunities in ELC.

Data from the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) shows that there were 39,267 people working in the Scottish ELC sector in 2017. Most of these (87%) were employed in day care of children (DCC) services. Of the 34,010 people employed in DCC services, 41% work in the private sector, 40% in the public sector and 19% in the voluntary sector.

¹<https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/media/44206/early-learning-and-children-sip-digital.pdf>

²<https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/strategy-plan/2017/03/blueprint-2020-expansion-early-learning-childcare-scotland-2017-18-action/documents/00515637-pdf/00515637-pdf/govscot%3Adocument/00515637.pdf>

The workforce is overwhelmingly female (97% are women) and relatively young, when compared to the rest of the social care sector. The average age of employees in the sector is 34 years, however there is variation across the sector. Private sector employees in DCC services have an average age of 28 years while the average age of their public sector counterparts is 43 years. Data from the SSSC suggests that 2% in the DCC category report as having a disability, with 3% recorded as unknown³. Data also shows that 1% of ELC workforce identify as mixed, black or Asian ethnic minority group with 7% recorded as unknown⁴.

The composition of the ELC workforce shows that there is scope to improve the proportion of those working in the sector, from notably under-represented groups: men, those from ethnic minority groups and disabled people. The sector is also aiming to attract people with more life experience (career changers and returners).

Information about each of these four groups in ELC is provided in table 1.

Table 1: Under-represented groups in ELC workforce

Group	Definition	Proportion of ELC workforce Source: SSSC Workforce Data, 2017	Scotland's workforce Source: Annual Population Survey, Jan 2018 – Dec 2018
Men	To address the gender imbalance	Men currently account for 4% of DCC ⁵ workforce	Men accounted for 52% of Scotland's workforce overall (aged 16+, 2018)
People with more life experience	This group includes career changers, and people returning to the workforce after a break (often over 25s). The national campaign for ELC identifies career changers/parental returners as one of the key audiences	It is difficult to estimate the proportion of career changers and returners in the current workforce. Where known, 31,230 of the 38,380 workforce are aged 25+ (81%). However, the proportion of over 25s undertaking education and training through the college route and apprenticeship route is low compared to the 16-19 and 18-24 groups. Data from the ELC SIP suggests that almost three quarters (73%) of those enrolling for ELC provision in colleges were aged under 25 (2014/15). In 2017/18, over 25s made up 15% of all the total Modern Apprenticeship starts	Overall, 87% of Scotland's workforce aged 16+ were aged 25+ (2018).
Ethnic minority groups	This includes both the white ⁶ and non-white ethnic minority population of Scotland	1% of ELC workforce identify as mixed, black or Asian ethnic minority group	Overall, 4% of Scotland's workforce (aged 16-64) identified as mixed, black, Asian or other ethnic minority group (2018)
Disabled groups	This includes people with both physical and learning disabilities, as well as those with long-term mental health conditions	2% of DCC workforce -and only 1% of childminding workforce - have disabilities	Overall, 12% of Scotland's workforce (aged 16-64) were Equalities Act (EA) core disabled (2018). Note: Use of EA core disabled only is consistent with UK Government regional reporting, other definitions are available and could be used

³SSSC note that the data on whether workers regard themselves as having a disability is difficult to interpret due to a large proportion of unknown responses

⁴As with disability statistics, a high percentage of unknowns makes the data difficult to interpret

⁵DCC – Day care of children. This is defined as any service which provides care for children on non-domestic premises for a total of more than 2 hours per day and on at least 6 days per year. It includes nursery classes, crèches, after school clubs and play groups

⁶For example, the White Polish population and the White Gypsy/Traveller population

Research method

To address the objectives, the study used a combination of primary and secondary research methods. A literature review was carried out initially to gain clearer insight in to the specific barriers faced by different under-represented groups. Research was also undertaken around employer incentive schemes (and eligibility criteria) and approaches that support people in the under-represented groups into employment. This covered schemes and approaches that targeted not only the ELC sector, but other sectors where individuals were supported to move into, and where employers were incentivised. This desk research was supported by the employer and stakeholder consultations. Over 30 qualitative interviews were undertaken with ELC employers and key stakeholders.

The primary and secondary research identified that activities to diversify the ELC workforce were already being carried out by employers and training providers in Scotland. The analysis stage identified those approaches that could be applied in the ELC sector to recruit and retain a more diverse workforce and draw out the lessons that could be built on.



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Challenges of achieving a more diverse workforce

The barriers that prevent many groups and individuals from considering a career in ELC are well known and documented. In fact, there is, for most people, not one barrier, rather, it is a complex interplay of intangible as well as tangible barriers such as attitudes and perceptions, terms and conditions, and information not being communicated as well as it might be.

Some of the barriers are very longstanding and will take time to address as they are rooted in society's perceptions, so the answer will be a long-term commitment and focused activity across a range of organisations, starting from when children are very young, through the education system and more broadly, how diversity is reflected (or not) in every aspect of life, from toys and books to films, language the media and much more.

The desk research and consultations identified a number of key challenges in achieving a more diverse ELC workforce:

- **training and workplace culture, and a lack of role models:** Most ELC employees are female and relatively young resulting in a homogenous workplace environment which may be daunting for people who might want to work there but don't fit the mould. This applies to a range of characteristics including gender, age, disability and ethnicity
- **attitudes and perceptions:** People⁷ may have ingrained attitudes/perceptions towards people from under-represented groups who choose to work in the ELC sector. There is also a perception that the sector is 'women's work' and it is held in low esteem, often viewed as 'work that anybody could do'
- **terms and conditions:** There is a perception that the sector is low-paid, with limited opportunities to progress. However, the terms and conditions are a barrier to all individuals entering the sector, and not specific to any under-represented groups. The new National Standard for the sector is expected to support providers to help implement Fair Work practices and to deliver the real Living Wage commitment. Another challenge is the costs associated with undertaking training – including loss of earnings for some groups such as career changers
- **career progression:** There are several pathways into the ELC sector – and clear career progression routes. The research identified that more needs to be done to improve awareness levels around career progression routes, indicating a need to provide career influencers (parents/carers, teachers, career advisers) with current and most up to date career related labour market information
- **physical limitations:** Some groups of people from the under-represented groups may need particular adaptations and support in the workplace. More work needs to be done to address barriers around employers' perceptions of ability, indicating a need for an asset-based approach where the strengths and abilities of people with disabilities (visible and invisible) are identified and emphasised
- **influencers:** The ingrained attitudes of some influencers may affect advice given to those from under-represented groups. It is vital therefore that these influencers provide help to potential entrants e.g. young people and their families, career changers and parental returners to the labour market to understand the options around developing their learning/skills and undertaking education/training

⁷This includes service users of an ELC setting i.e. parents/carers of young children, employers/ training providers; and influencers

- **recruitment:** The perceived barriers to entering the ELC sector (including low pay/status and limited opportunities for career progression) make the sector less attractive and recruitment more difficult. To ensure a diverse workforce is being recruited, employers and training providers need to address unconscious bias that is likely to influence their recruitment decisions. Open recruitment policies will attract people from different backgrounds (including marginalised and excluded groups)
- **language:** Where English is not their first language, access to ESOL support may be a barrier to some people. In addition, there may be negative employer perceptions where potential recruits don't have English as their first language. Employers may need to consider alternative assessments/ recruitment processes to assess suitability of candidates in terms of language ability.

Whilst some of these barriers are specific to one group, others are cross-cutting and impact on more than one under-represented group. Also, some of these barriers are not specific to people from under-represented groups, but affect the wider population for example, the perception that the ELC sector is a low-paid sector with unattractive terms and conditions coupled with limited opportunities.

Current approaches to diversifying the workforce and financial support for employers

The ELC SIP presented a strategy and action plan to encourage positive perceptions of the sector as a career destination offering development and progression opportunities. There are a number of routes into the ELC sector, and a wide range of provision is in place to support the development of skills for the sector including apprenticeships, college and university provision, and work-based learning. Qualification requirements are in place for the workforce at all levels, as a condition of registration with the SSSC.

There is a range of initiatives and activities aimed at diversifying the ELC workforce in Scotland. There are also activities that support and encourage particular groups in to the workforce. Some of these activities are national, and others are being delivered at local level. The initiatives fall in to seven themes:

- tailoring support for specific groups
- diversity awareness training (for employers and training providers)
- mentoring support
- work placements and volunteering opportunities
- marketing events and campaigns
- networking opportunities
- in-work support.

There are several approaches that have already shown some success or have the potential to start to impact on the homogeneity of the current workforce. Changes in ELC are also helping to make it more attractive to a wider group of potential recruits, including the increasing number of outdoor/forest-based ELC provision (which evidence suggests can be more attractive to men than traditional ELC settings) and out of school care, which has also been successful in attracting a diverse workforce (including men and older workers).

However, whilst individual approaches can have an impact on improving workforce diversity there is no single solution that will diversify the ELC workforce, and the research points to the fact that a combination of approaches is most effective. For instance, whilst a recruitment campaign aimed at attracting men into the ELC sector may encourage more men to consider a career in the sector, other factors may work against it, for example the training and workplace culture, lack of peer support and poorly communicated career pathways may mean they do not remain in ELC training or employment.



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Consideration should also be given around influencing a number of audiences namely: potential recruits from under-represented groups; career influencers; and training providers/employers. Some activities (e.g. a recruitment campaign showing positive images of people from under-represented groups working in ELC) could influence all of these audiences. Recognising this, there are some overarching principles that can help create a more diverse ELC workforce. These are:

- a strategic and blended approach where messages are reinforced through a number of routes
- tackling the challenges of both demand (employers) and supply (employees)
- recognition that under-represented groups are not homogenous
- providing positive messages at every stage (including school and Foundation Apprenticeships)
- retention of under-represented groups in ELC (as well as recruitment) should be considered
- multi-agency and cross sector collaboration.

Recommendations

The recommendations identify further support that might be provided for ELC employers in diversifying their workforce, and for individuals from under-represented groups entering the ELC sector. They are based on the findings of the research in terms of the barriers to recruiting and retaining a diverse workforce and the approaches that could help to address the lack of diversity.

Some of the recommendations are about changing perceptions of ELC as a career choice for under-represented groups and communicating the pathways and opportunities more effectively. Others are about encouraging employers and training providers to recruit a more diverse workforce, and importantly, to change the attitudes and perceptions of the influencers who impact on an individuals' career choice. Realistically, there needs to be wider changes in society, particularly relating to gender, about the perceived segregation of aptitudes, sectors, roles and occupations.

A number of recommendations are already being developed or are underway. They are included to reinforce their importance and ensure that the activities have national reach and are seen as part of a holistic approach.

Raise awareness and promote opportunities for under-represented groups

- the ongoing work to run a national recruitment campaign to address the perceptions of ELC should continue and information on ELC pathways should be widely communicated to ensure that it reaches people from under-represented groups
- clear and accurate information should be promoted to all audiences and used in media coverage and recruitment campaigns. It is vital that clear and accurate information about the opportunities and pathways in ELC is shared with prospective entrants and their influencers
- the research found that intermediary organisations are skilled at working with particular groups and will often have a particularly high degree of credibility and influence with their specific audiences - there are already some good examples of this, and these should be continued and built on.

Improve support for individuals, employers and training providers

- individuals from under-represented groups can feel isolated in the ELC workplace and may lack peer networking and support. Creating specific and themed ELC groups and networks can help people from under-represented groups feel less isolated and give them an opportunity to share experiences and solutions. Examples include networks of men working in ELC
- diversity awareness guidance should be available and disseminated to ELC employers in the public, private and voluntary sectors to build capacity in the system. Written guidance should cover good practice in equal opportunities recruitment and encourage employers to take a more creative approach to assessing a person's ability to do a job, using an asset-based approach
- information on funding support and incentives should continue to be shared widely with employers, partners and prospective entrants. An example is SDS's National Training Programme's Equality Support Guide which provides information on incentives, funds and support in Scotland across the Modern Apprenticeship and Employability Fund programmes
- the research identified a range of financial incentives available to employers e.g. the Workplace Equality Fund, Access to Work and Open Doors Scotland. Some of these schemes are already available for the ELC sector, so consideration should be given to how they can be leveraged to help address the lack of diversity. This may be around ensuring that employers and training providers are aware of these schemes and by encouraging them to think about how to apply them as a part of the answer to the lack of diversity
- a common approach should be developed to offer information and guidance on recognition of prior learning and skills to address some barriers that career changers and returners may face
- a number of training providers deliver courses outside of normal working hours, which can help people to remain in employment or care for dependants as they work towards qualifications. Evidence suggests that this has had some success, however it is only part of the solution and should be provided alongside other barrier-removal activities
- consideration should be given to linking ESOL provision to ELC education and improving language skills of those already in the workforce. Consideration should also be given to further understand and support employers assess the English language skills of candidates during recruitment.

Monitor diversity

- it is important to continuously monitor participation across under-represented groups to assess impacts and shape activity in the sector
- there are gaps in the evidence base for e.g. evidence on intersectionality between groups, evidence on care experienced groups and this needs to be addressed going forward. This will help the sector identify evidence-based actions and prioritise activities to drive forward change.

Conclusion and next steps

The aim of this research was to identify the ELC sector's challenges in recruiting and retaining a more diverse workforce and look at approaches that would help to achieve this. The research acknowledges that this requires a long-term strategic commitment and collaborative effort to address barriers that give rise to under-representation in the ELC workforce.

This research presents evidence and insights on improving the diversity of the ELC workforce and sets out recommendations for stakeholders, partners and employers to take forward. It is clear from the recommendations that several actions are already underway through the work being led by SDS, Scottish Government, and other national agencies, and employers/training providers. The research and recommendations reiterate the importance of these, and the need to pursue these actions at pace to truly achieve a diverse and inclusive ELC workforce, which reflects the wider Scottish society.

SDS will continue to work with the sector, the Scottish Government and through the ELC Skills Group, to build a more diverse and inclusive workforce.

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