Key Findings from Parent Focus Groups

Through the month of March 2019, officials from the Uptake, Eligibility and Engagement Team within the Early Learning and Childcare Division of the Scottish Government, undertook a number of focus groups with parents to discuss the 1140 expansion.

These focus groups took place in a number of settings including local authority nurseries, private providers, third sector providers and with childminders. Geographical spread and parent demographics were also taken into account when arranging these sessions in order to gain a wide spectrum of views and opinions. Practitioners also participated in the focus groups and were able to share their experience of working with parents.

Throughout all the sessions a number of themes were reoccurring, these are detailed below. We hope that these insights will prove useful when considering how and when to communicate the 1140 expansion to parents and carers.

Consistency of messaging

- All parents and practitioners were in agreement that SG messaging had to be consistent with LA messaging and vice versa. Parents thought they might lose trust in SG and LA if messaging conflicted, as this creates confusion.
- Majority of parents in agreement that SG messaging needs to be high level with LA messaging delivering the lower level local information with local detail.
- All parents keen for practitioners to know what was going on or at least to know where to signpost parents to get information.
- Parents keen for stakeholder organisations to have access to information. They thought this would help with consistency for all parents, but particularly parents who may not have a support network or have not had children of ELC age previously. (Although they recognised that those with previous experience of ELC might have outdated information).
- Parents felt that messaging on the 2 year old offer could be confusing and more clarity was needed on eligibility.

Key messages

- Parents felt that ‘1140 expansion’ should not be used in parent comms. Unclear as to what this means. Parents suggested that describing as ‘30 hours per week term time or year round equivalent’ was more relevant.
- Parents want clear messaging on eligibility.
- Parents want clear messaging on what types of provider can be used. Parents were largely unaware of childminders being a good option and offering same standard of ELC. They thought that clear information on ‘blended models’ was also necessary to ensure parents are aware of this.
- Parents were largely in agreement that information on the benefits to children was an important message to deliver. Some were interested in evidence around this.
- Parents in agreement that information on benefits to parents/carers was also useful. Parents thought that case studies would be useful in highlighting this, especially for the different eligibility groups.
Parents in agreement that messaging should not ‘tell’ them what is best for their child but rather offer options and information to allow parents/carers to decide what is best.

Parents unanimous that messaging should be clear that expanded hours are an offer and not mandatory.

While some parents want reliable information that they can access in advance, they also recognised that for some, particularly those who are less prepared, it’s more helpful to have the information when it’s relevant – e.g. when they can actually apply. Parents largely unaware about what phasing was happening locally and why. They responded well to explanations about testing local models. However they were less concerned about the models being tested but were rather looking for a simple explanation as how and why some received the expanded hours now and others didn’t.

Some parents thought messages reassuring that children will be following Curriculum for Excellence and won’t be ‘bored’ during longer days would be helpful.

Flexibility – parents keen for messages on flexibility to be available. Parents keen for messaging to be realistic and not over promise, practitioners also want this.

Methods

- Parent Club – parents agreed site with all information on is helpful, as long as messages are clear, consistent and relevant. Some concern around accessibility in terms of navigation ease, also with data on mobiles being used up with videos etc.
- Leaflets – largely agreed leaflets in places relevant to parents would be useful but messaging would have to be up to date. Health visitor clinics, toddler groups, libraries, Bookbug were all agreed as good places for them.
- Posters – parents agreed these would be useful and suggested locating them in places such as GP community parent boards, libraries, bus stops etc.
- Health Visitors – parents in agreement that health visitors would be a good way to get information out. Parents suggested that a leaflet handed to parents at vaccinations on or around 2 years was a good point.
- Social Media – parents mentioned Facebook, Twitter, Instagram etc. but with caveat that not all parents on social media. However, they felt that even for these parents, it could be a good way to share info more widely and then word of mouth would get this to other parents.
- One focus group suggested disseminating information via large employers.

Accessibility

- Different languages – there was a concern that producing comms solely in English will exclude a lot of people from different backgrounds and make it more likely that children who would benefit most from offer won’t take it up as parents are unaware. Parents advised that having a leaflet or other resource with the most common languages would be most helpful.
- Parents who are new to the country, for a variety of reasons including seeking asylum, were heavily reliant on third sector organisations who provide support and assistance.
Some of the national parental comms activities have been developed in response to the feedback above.

- Parent Club ELC pages ([www.parentclub.scot/elc](http://www.parentclub.scot/elc)) now provide a trusted place for parents to access information about ELC, as well as linking to local authority pages.
- New ‘Bringing you More Funded Early Learning and Childcare’ leaflet and poster [insert link] to include information about expansion and signpost to local authority for further information. This is being distributed via providers and libraries.
- Multi language leaflet in development. This will contain a high level outline of the ELC offer in 6 languages: Mandarin, Cantonese, Urdu, Gaelic, Polish, and Arabic and signpost parents to where they can get further info on ELC.
- Toolkit resources are designed to increase consistency of messaging and language. As with the Parent Club website, our parent facing resources are designed to be accessible and make the most of peer group advice.
- Video case studies have been developed. Initial videos are available on Parent Club and on the Youtube page: [https://youtu.be/JLn78C0aAY0](https://youtu.be/JLn78C0aAY0) [https://youtu.be/Gg8E0UtbfqE](https://youtu.be/Gg8E0UtbfqE) [https://youtu.be/FAzKcaTAZaU](https://youtu.be/FAzKcaTAZaU)
- The toolkit also includes some insights and message testing carried out by an independent agency. These insights should assist when addressing the concerns from parents around language, clarity and consistency of messaging.