



Case Study

# IMPROVING EARLY LEARNING AND CHILDCARE RECRUITMENT IN ORKNEY

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# CASE STUDY

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*This document should be read alongside the other resources in this series:*

## **ELC Recruitment Improvement : Overview of Sessions in a Rural, Island Council →**

This document includes the output from the sessions undertaken to examine the question 'How can we improve recruitment in Orkney Early Learning and Childcare'

## **Orkney Recruitment Sessions Outline of tools utilised →**

The purpose of this outline is an overview of the tools and approach taken during sessions undertaken by a group of ELC managers to examine and address the difficulties faced in recruiting a sustainable workforce.

## **Thinking about a career in Early Learning and Childcare? Recruitment Video →**

This video, developed by the ELC Team in Orkney, reflects some of the change in thinking brought about by a deep dive consideration of alternative approaches, informed by data.

## **Between December 2022 and March 2023, Early Learning and Childcare Leads and Managers from across Orkney worked with the ELC expansion programme at Improvement Service to explore approaches to improving local ELC recruitment levels.**

The provision of Early Learning and Childcare in Orkney is provided through a range of setting types including local authority operated nursery classes within schools and larger stand-alone settings, and through partnership childminders. Due to the rurality of some communities accessing provision, settings can vary in size from 1 to 90 children.

Approximately 402 children access funded ELC in Orkney. Of this, 60% of eligible children are accessing between 600 and 1140 hours per year.

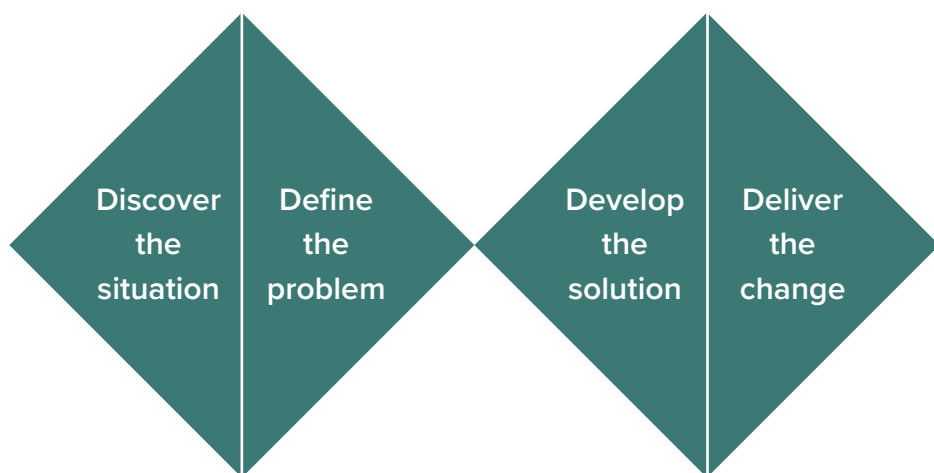
**Recruitment challenges** came to light during the 1140 expansion that the market for new staff had been depleted. Prior to the expansion to 1140 hours, Orkney Islands Council had a stable workforce with few unfilled vacancies. Over the course of the expansion, it seemed that the market for new staff had been depleted and recruitment challenges increased due to retirements and the personal circumstances of some staff who were unable to move to a full-time, full-day model.

Geography also brought a set of unique challenges; Orkney is an archipelago with logistical challenges moving between islands and as such there is significant dependency on the workforce at locality level.

These local recruitment challenges soon monopolised management discussions. Having tried different approaches and spent a significant amount of time addressing these, there was a feeling that nothing was working. ELC Managers reported feeling a state of anguish, were concerned about failing to meet statutory duty and were staring at what felt like an intractable issue.

**In response to critical friend discussions about ELC recruitment in Orkney** and building on the relationships established between the central ELC team and IS during the expansion programme, it was agreed that an exercise to examine whether improvements could be made to the local ELC recruitment process should be conducted. This was led by Improvement Service and sought to refocus attention, get under the surface of the problem, and reach an appropriate solution.

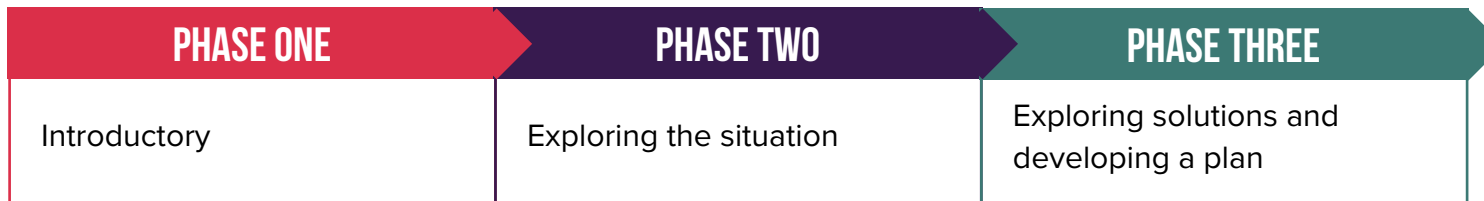
An earlier demand and supply analysis of staffing likely to be required over the next three years indicated that there were no obvious sources of supply whilst the specific challenges resulting from the island geography made solution-finding complicated. Based on this **“How can we improve recruitment to ELC in Orkney?”** was agreed to be the focus of these improvement sessions.



The approach suggested by IS was different to those that had been applied previously. From the outset, an Improvement group made up of council officers from the Central ELC team, ELC Managers representing larger settings and the EY teaching teams who represented smaller Head Teacher led settings, was established. This meant the whole service came together to systemically address issues and move into a solution-focused mindset. The group was engaged from the beginning due to all having a vested interest in the issue.



Different improvement tools were introduced by IS throughout the process, including the Scottish Design to Service Approach which guided participants to explore and define the true extent of the ELC recruitment challenges before attempting to design a solution. The improvement group worked through three distinct phases.



**Phase One** was the starting point; it was the driver to enabling discussions and formulate thinking amongst the Improvement Group. To assist with this, the group undertook a SWOT analysis of the 'as was' recruitment situation.



**Phase Two** focused on getting under the skin of the situation through two simple questions:

#### Why would someone apply to work in the council ELC?

- Make up of the workforce
- Recruitment, marketing and advertising
- Because they are female
- Because they love working with children
- Location
- Nature of the role
- Support for students and trainees and those on a career pathway
- Supportive culture
- Terms and conditions

#### Why would someone not apply to work in the council ELC?

- Pay
- Locations
- Relief list
- Expectation v reality
- HR system slow
- If they were male
- Hours and patterns of work
- Cost or lack of childcare
- Perception of the role
- Recruitment, marketing and advertising
- Temporary posts

Moving into **phase three**, the improvement group considered a series of “how might we” questions; designed to aid with turning challenges into possible opportunities. During this, the group reviewed the key themes and questions that emerged in phase 2, this was an iterative process of considering themes and asking questions before considering solutions; without committing to specific actions.

**After a period of the reflection**, the improvement group acknowledged the importance of adopting a solution focused approach and being supported by an impartial facilitator to ask reflective and challenging questions.

Results emerged as the group worked through each phase, informing and framing discussions as they moved to the next. Key learnings and area of focus included.



### Rigorous review of temporary and permanent posts

Members of the Improvement Group reviewed the number and nature of jobs posted on my job scotland adverts to ascertain the true picture of ELC recruitment between 2020-2023. This highlighted the significant proportion of temporary posts within the service. In response to these findings, all temporary posts are reviewed to ascertain where there is opportunity for these vacancies to be turned into permanent posts.



### Qualification demography

Despite investing a significant amount into training, many staff were leaving after two or three years in post. In response to this, a new SVQ Trainee Support Worker post was created, and a strong cohort of skilled support workers has been established.

Being equipped with solid data, the central ELC team engaged in discussions with the college. Through these discussions, the central ELC team were able to change the narrative of the messages coming from the college about childcare related qualifications being a steppingstone into teaching and instead promote these qualifications, and a career in early years as fulfilling and valuable.



### Staff profile data and survey of the workforce

This examined What attracted staff to their role within ELC, what encouraged them to stay and, what they liked/ disliked about their role. As part of this exercise, the improvement group examined Modern Apprenticeship data. Without examining the data, it appeared that first year Modern Apprentice route and the second-year trainee route was working well. However, securitising the data revealed that retention was approximately one third, and was much worse for the youngest Modern Apprentices.



### Understanding how to engage with people

The Improvement Group worked with IS and discussed anonymised individuals who most represented the different type of people within the workforce – they considered age, gender, education and qualifications, background, characteristics, and values. They also explored what would drive them to work in the sector, their perceived ideas of the sector, how they found vacancies and their likely application route etc. This exercise was extremely valuable in creating and strengthening the understanding of the different people to target in future recruitment marketing.

Recognising the value of this work, and how this approach could support other areas of the council, the improvement group also shared this with the HR department.

The detailed output from the phase 3 'How Might We' discussions were then transferred into an ELC Improving Recruitment Action Plan. The [ELC Improving Recruitment Action Plan](#) is now an embedded way of working and is being used to consider practical actions, but to also assess the progress and impact.

The work with the Improvement Service helped to shift the mindset of members of the group and moved this into a different place where staff could think differently. The improvement group reported how much they appreciated having time to stand back and consider alternatives approached to staffing, informed by data.

## Additional Reading

Early Learning and Childcare Recruitment Improvement – Overview of Sessions in a rural, island Council →

Early Learning and Childcare Recruitment Improvement – Session outline →

Thinking about a career in Early Learning and Childcare? Recruitment Video →



