



Early Learning and Childcare Recruitment Improvement

OVERVIEW OF SESSIONS IN A RURAL, ISLAND COUNCIL

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

Case Study: Improving Early Learning and Childcare Recruitment in Orkney →

This case study examines work undertaken by the ELC expansion programme at Improvement Service and Early Learning and Childcare Leads & Managers from across Orkney, between December 2022 and March 2023, to explore approaches to improving local ELC recruitment levels.

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.



FOREWORD

Last year a group of early years managers, which included the central early years team and nursery managers, worked with IS to see if we could improve recruitment in our local authority. The work enabled us to understand our workforce dynamic and our recruitment challenges better. Our assumptions were challenged, and we developed a much better understanding of what might work. Our recruitment challenges are not over, but we have broadened the routes into the sector, drawing on our knowledge of what works best.

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BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

From December 2022 to March 2023 a group of ELC managers met with the Improvement Service to examine whether improvements could be made to the recruitment of ELC staff. The sessions came about as a result of previous discussions about the fragile and precarious nature of ELC recruitment during the expansion to 1140. Additionally, sustaining the workforce and preparing for increases in demand for the service, whether through further expansion, increases in uptake or deferrals, intensify the current and future challenges.

A demand and supply analysis of staffing likely to be required over the next three years indicated that there were no obvious sources of supply – where were the staff to come from? The specific challenges resulting from the island geography and council-wide difficulties in recruitment made solution- finding particularly complex.



PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY

Given the scenario mentioned above, it was agreed that the sessions would focus on ‘How can we improve recruitment to ELC?’ Meaning, the amount of interest, quality and number of candidates. An approach was agreed which utilised a variety of ‘improvement’ tools, including an approach from the Scottish Approach To Service Design in which ‘we explore and define the problem before we design the solution’.

To explore the situation, specific tools were utilised:



SWOT →

Strengths Weakness Opportunities Threats of the current situation.



Discussion, Data and Evidence →

‘Why Would Someone want to apply to work in the Council ELC’ and ‘Why would someone not want to work in the Council ELC’. Supporting this discussion was: Recruitment Data; Staff Profile Data on years of work, routes and qualifications; Staff survey/discussion on reasons for working/not working in the Council ELC and reasons for leaving.



Personas →

Representative character types of those recruited to the Council ELC.

To identify solutions, we utilised:



How Might We →

Turning challenges into exploring opportunities.

Culminating in:



ELC Improving Recruitment Action Plan →

A working document for the team to take forwards.

Additional Reading

Orkney Recruitment Improvements Case Study →

Orkney Recruitment sessions Outline - tools and approach used →

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

The expansion of ELC in August 2021 provided parents with yearly funded placements of 1140 hours and involved an extensive staffing increase. This brought subsequent concerns that the market for new staff has been depleted within the Council area. Potential candidates can only be sourced from island residents and therefore the specific island demography was at the core of discussions during the sessions. Summaries of findings and more detailed notes of the sessions are found in the Appendix, whilst the key findings, which will provide overriding principles for the staffing challenges ahead, are listed below.

- 1** | A continuous grow your own, qualification and training approach will be required to ensure a continuing supply of qualified staff
- 2** | Strategic overview and planning for qualifications and training, involving a review of the current arrangements, will be required in order to make best use of the trainees across all settings
- 3** | A more informed understanding of ELC as a career is vital for all career-related advisors of school pupils, students and adults, through briefings etc
- 4** | Early understanding of ELC as a career for all is needed to ensure that routes into the profession are understood – through voluntary and other groups (e.g. Guides, Cadets, Young Farmers)
- 5** | Volunteering and access to childcare for school pupils, students and adults should be increased in order to allow acquaintance with ELC and experience for those considering applying for a role





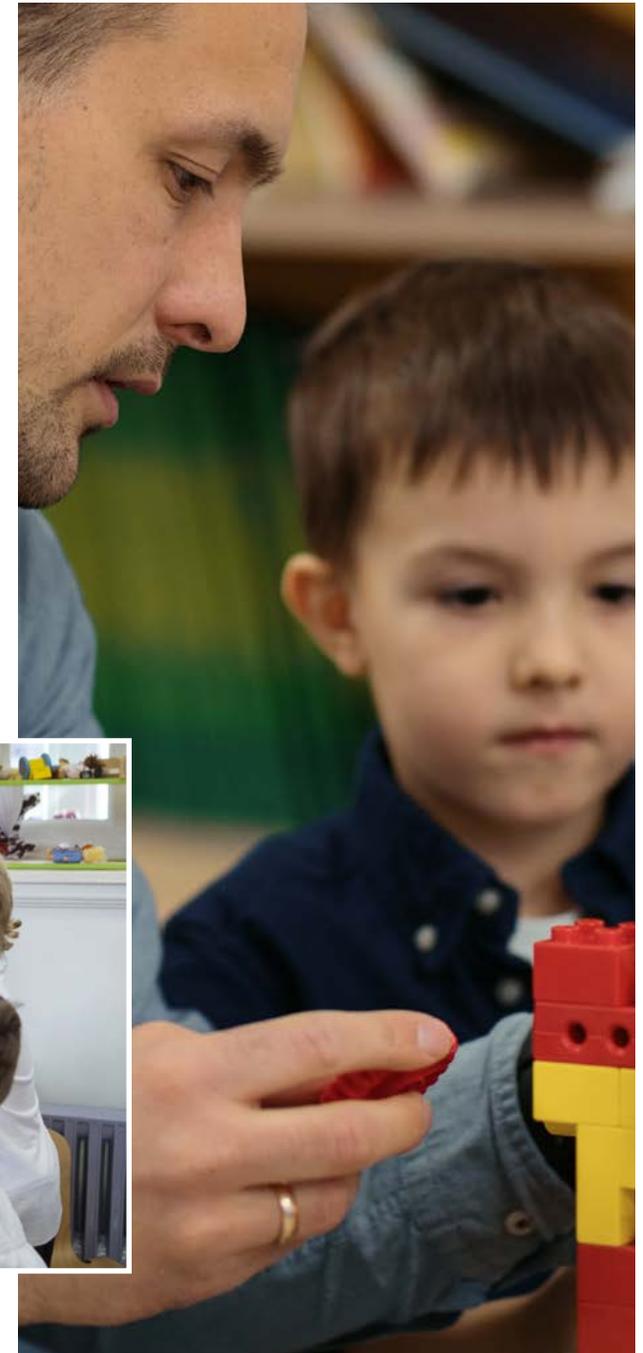
- 6 | Half the Island is not currently considering applying for ELC as a career – all approaches should include increasing male access and understanding of the profession
- 7 | Greater emphasis should be placed on the nature and type of advertising – using social media for example and focussing on what the Council ELC has to offer
- 8 | Retention of staff is part of the ‘recruitment solution’ – so a greater emphasis is needed on standard approaches to stress minimisation, support and training
- 9 | A strategic approach to Workforce Planning, considering staff utilisation across all settings including annual supply and demand mapping, will give space to plan for staffing changes and challenges.



NEXT STEPS

All participants in the sessions reported that they appreciated time to stand back and consider alternative approaches to staffing without the pressure of providing a service on a day to day basis. The [Recruitment Action Plan](#) will be an working document and will form the basis of the ongoing corrective activity the group have identified.

The Improvement Service will periodically link in with the group to provide constructive challenge, and will undertake a review of this process and sessions to identify lessons learnt and improvements made.



APPENDIX – FORMAT, PROGRESSION AND NOTES FROM THE SESSIONS

SWOT

To generate thought, the sessions commenced with a SWOT examination of the current situation, as noted below.

Strengths

Support students and trainees
Grow from own EYSW, move into prac roles
Letting people test and learn, e.g. try for senior or lead roles
Good at advertising roles in variety of places
Mentor and student pathways
Produce high quality staff via Prac in Training or MA
Good progression prospects
Lots of 'seed planting', e.g. introduction to ELC as a career
Links with DWP and other organisations for career paths

Opportunities

A chance to be more flexible
Challenge systems and processes
Stop being reactive
Trying new things

Weaknesses

JDs need revising - make getting people into right role hard
HR systems slow - up to 14 weeks
Willowtree a temp service so many temps
Long slow process to make changes in post or establishment

Threats

Discretionary deferrals - insufficient staff
EYP feeling undervalued especially v teachers
Further expansion - 1/2 year olds and OOSC
Losing staff due to lack of staff
Lose staff due to mental health issues - stress
Pay levels

Discussion, Data and Evidence

Subsequent sessions focussed on exploring the current situation; by considering two key questions and examining evidence from recruitment data, a staff survey and data on routes into the profession and qualifications. The notes below detail summaries of the findings from these sessions.



Why would someone apply to work in the Council ELC?

Because they love working with children – this is the main reason given by virtually all staff; being with children and watching them develop. A great selling point.

Because they are female – the vast majority of staff are female: 98%.

Nature of the role – varied, no two days the same; active, fun, rewarding and satisfying; working with families.

Support for students and trainees, and those on a career pathway - many grow-your-own staff, from Support Workers who have quickly move into Practitioner roles. People can try out e.g. try a senior or lead role. There are options for those coming into the role and progression with the job. If applicants meet the criteria but lack experience, they will be offered relief work.

Recruitment, marketing and advertising - work is done to plant the seeds: career fairs; work experience and seeing whether people want to work in the sector. The Council ELC advertise often and some settings are advertising locally and on Facebook.

Supportive culture – supportive environment where staff love children.

Make up of the workforce – most come from school, after having children, being volunteers, or after changing career.

Location – many live within the school catchment area (although some prefer not to work in their local school). Some cannot drive.

Terms and conditions (hours of work and working patterns) – many different patterns of work from term time to year round. Mix of part time and full time.

SW are very successful route into the role but the often are lost to support to learning – not staying because recruit on the relief list and they don't get work over practitioners as they can be on ratio. Not part of the permanent structure and arrangement.

Volunteering groups – how can we promote.



Why would someone NOT apply to work in the Council ELC?

If they were male – boys at career fair embarrassed to speak to ELC team; parents; school; culture all contribute to this being seen as a non – male career.

Perception of the role – much patience needed, a traditional job for women.

Expectations V reality – role seen as being like baby - sitting, caring and not very skilled. In reality it is physically and mentally demanding, requiring a complex range of skills. Many children with additional needs/challenging behaviour.

Recruitment, marketing and advertising – tends to be traditional, may be missed by those using different types of social media and may not be targeting a wide range.

Pay – does not match up to the importance of the job (although on Islands the pay can be a selling point).

Temporary posts – many temp posts and saturating market with adverts could put people off.

Relief list – many applicants come in through relief list and don't progress to post. The Council ELC not engaging these folk as much as needed. Others - as soon as they ready they are taking up post as it's a way to bring people in post.

HR system slow – can be 14 weeks before being in post, so other employment may be taken in that time.

Locations – for those unable to drive; poor transport systems; island settings.

Hours and patterns of work – depending on what a potential applicant wants, this could be off putting.

Cost or lack of childcare – for those with children and working in ELC with no family support.



Recruitment Data



BY ROLE

- Highest proportion of applicants hired are for relief/casual (61% of SW relief hired; 39% of Practitioners)
- 41% of all applicant are hired
- 15% of Support Worker and 15% Practitioners are hired



BY CONTRACT TYPE

- 43% of relief applicant are hired, followed by 16% temporary and 13% permanent



BY WHETHER RE-ADVERTISED

- 25% of those hired are re-advertisement; 19% first time advertised

Qualification Route Data



- More people have HNC's than SVQ3's (22 to 18)



- 31 to 35 age group have the highest number of SVQ 3 (5 from 18 in total)
- Age groups are evenly spread for HNC (although note the 'blanks')



- The largest group of HNC holders, by length of ELC service, have worked for 6 to 10 years
- The largest group of SVQ holders, by length of ELC service, have worked for 1 to 5 years

Personas

Before moving to exploring solutions, the group developed 'personas'. These are 'types' that represent different groups of people. 'Jenna' and 'Elaine' represent the types most likely to apply for posts in the Council ELC. They both have clear links to children, ELC and routes into the profession. For the others, the pathway into ELC was found by accident, with little knowledge, guidance or expectation of ELC as a career.



Jenna
18-24 years
Female

Jenna loves children. She's been around them all her life, even the neighbour's kids - they follow her around. She knows the routes into the profession (through a relative who works in ELC) and any support needed as she has dyslexia. She once wanted to become a teacher but came into ELC and loves working within a team. She helped with Brownies or Guides, organising trips, volunteering and placements within nurseries. She came into ELC via an HNC course, straight from school (or could have been an MA/SVQ3). Uses Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, be Real.



Laura
19-25+ years
Female

Laura left school and didn't go straight into ELC. She left home and at some point was told that she is good with children. Or she found her way back to ELC through a previous HNC or SVQ3. She may have wanted to be a primary teacher; or may have left school and gone into a job that did not suit (e.g. a non people-oriented job). She may have been pressurised into university and ended up not following her passion. Nobody at school suggested the idea of childcare and she didn't know anything about the pathways. She may have felt there was a stigma with ELC, not a valued career. She may enter by applying for supply or a Support Worker post and/or may have extensive experience of children outwith work.



Elaine
30-40+ years
Female

Elaine came to ELC after having children. She may have volunteered in her own children's nursery; gone onto a Support for Learning role. When her children were older/secondary school, she went back to the nursery in an ELC role. Spending time in the nursery and seeing her children grow gave her a different perspective on life. Perhaps her children needed support, which inspired her. Elaine personas may have a mixed bag of qualifications, coming from school, university or a different career before ELC.



Finlay

20-30 years

Male

Finlay left school to do an HNC but didn't plan to work in a nursery - saw it as a route into teaching if he didn't get the grades. During his HNC he had placements in nursery and P1 and loved the nursery. He also loved being with his very small siblings at home. He worked in many areas and jobs relating to children and young people before moving into ELC. Nobody at school advised him to work in ELC and he may have worried about the salary (as well as the stigma), especially if his future included buying a house and being the main breadwinner.



Alex

19-25 years

Male

Alex left his local area and then came back. He worked for a year and was very good with children (a swim coach) - he found he had the skill set and confidence to work with them. He headed up youth groups, Scouts and was interested in Forest Schools when he heard about them through a friend. Because he was living back at home, he was able to take up an MA post.



David

30-40 years

Male

David moved to an island after being a technician for many years; falling into working with children after having small ones around him, helping out and finding a change in career to ELC more fulfilling as well as fitting in with island life where people often have many roles. David is well known by parents on the island.

APPENDIX: IDENTIFYING SOLUTIONS

How Might We

'How Might We' is a way of exploring potential solutions by asking questions and looking for possibilities, without committing to specific actions or limiting ideas.

How might we...

Increase early interest in and understanding of ELC as a career?

- **School children:** work during the holidays; school more part of nursery? Work placements; update careers advisors; placement arrangers; Guidance teachers. Volunteering: review across settings; promote holiday volunteering, Friday afternoons? Speak to groups about ELC as a career: Boys Brigade, girls brigade, young farmers. Careers fairs –tutors promote courses?
- **Students:** HNC – paid work? Offer volunteering to try whether ELC for them.
- **Parents:** offer time in nursery; opportunities to engage parents in ELC as a recruitment opportunity; use funding to roll out family learning approaches and PEEP; develop learning projects with parents; use knowing the families; involve dads e.g Forest school blocks of time. Discuss possible employment earlier.
- **Career changers:** examine change the trainee posts from temp to a permanent; promote this; College – introduction to care course - promote deliver through colleges? Do a version for men?
- **Those not working** – career guidance for those who beyond school age; Speak to/brief: Job centre? SDS? Guidance?
- **Graduates:** role for them - a graduate post? After degree, e.g. Psychology or English – move into ELC as a career? Graduate apprenticeship – revisit. Make clear those with degrees and other backgrounds are welcomed; career fair for adults – career changers. Increase ways people can discover ELC and want to work there.



Improve how people hear about jobs?

- **Social media/adverts:** Facebook, Tic Toc, Instagram – do have anyone who exploring how to embrace? Update Adverts. Careers fair for adults.
- **Advisors:** get up to speed with ELC as a career; Briefings for Guidance staff; careers advisors; SDS; job centre; work placements in schools arrangers.

Address number of temporary posts advertised?

- **Explore/challenge why posts are temporary** – are all WillowTree and seconded backfill? Make Support workers permanent.

Make better use of Trainee posts?

- **Strategic approach to training staff:** map out training models; delivery for whole group offer/gaps. Use relief list to move to different settings. Increase college numbers from 10. Employ HNC on placement days so that technically we are not short of staff. Offer evening class for some SVQ modules for head start before working; the induction resources and the student pathway second year.
- **Change timescales** – college in morning; alternate college over 2 years to stop bulk of people out at once; evening for SQA class? Course loaded to start of the year? Start and finish early for college; work end of the week to see what the job is like? Release person for a full day and less time in the month.

Make better use of our relief list?

- **Use the relief list** to provide more trained and qualified staff? Advertise working, pick and choose hours; note, can't start the SVQ if they are not in employment- we need to think about when we deliver training.

Make better use of Support Worker post?

- **Be more strategic** about where SW posts are held; make permanent? More practical tasks helping the team. Work to do on this. Model staffing so SW part of the workforce/team, with possibility of moving to practitioners.
- **Advertise SW:** to entice people to come in with less experience – give them practical tasks and move to pracs if they enjoy.
- **Revisit the advert:** to show are part of the workforce, can get training and qualifications.

Improve retention of the people we have?

- **Minimise paperwork ask** - what do we expect and why?
- **Support workers employed** - to relieve pressure
- **Upskill of staff** re working with children with additional support needs
- **Additional hours** - sort disparity
- **Supervision** - make sure this is done in every setting

Improve strategic overview of staffing – workforce planning?

- **Demand Supply** analysis update for next year's intake
- **Strategic allocation** of SW and trainees across settings



Recruitment Action Plan

This is the first draft of the Action Plan and will be updated and amended by the management team as the project progresses.

How might we increase early interest in and understanding of ELC as a career?					
Action	Lead (s)	Priority 1,2,3	Start Date	Completion date	Notes
Review school work placement arrangements - options for work placements and how they work	Team/manager group to establish who to contact and send out invites after Easter-				Coffee and chat with managers, guidance staff and DYW, SDS people from both senior secondary schools during the summer term- Teams or visiting in person to schools Be clearer re Foundation App courses
Develop briefing for advisors and groups					See above- check out our information packs and merchandise
Speak to VO about increasing volunteering opportunities					Sound out VAO connections
Undertake group and advisor briefings Vol groups Career advisors					See above
Explore HNC paid work with college			At next college meeting		Speak to college to see if HNC students would like to be interviewed for the trainee relief list and to be paid on placement if needed and/or be on EYSW list
Develop Intro to ELC course via college and specific course for men					Note: PKC have developed a course for men into childcare Dad's days? Parent info nights?

How might we increase early interest in and understanding of ELC as a career?

Action	Lead (s)	Priority 1,2,3	Start Date	Completion date	Notes
Develop plans for promoting ELC work through parents ELC as a career Using PEEP experiences Learning projects	Working group				Myth busting leaflets EYSW posts Offering extra stay and plays
Supporting people with no experiences who want to join the workforce	Team/manager groups				Signposting and making sure all routes are advertised and well filled. Package for people who are unsuccessful- ensure we send email to explain how to improve application. Make a couple of attachments/links to send

How can we improve how people hear about jobs?

Action	Lead (s)	Priority 1,2,3	Start Date	Completion date	Notes
Review use of social media		Next meeting			Instagram, Facebook, Tic toc Set up comms team meeting
Improve Advert content	Team/managers				What do ELC offer Re-write generic advert and have add ons for each setting- how do we add a video clip- check with comms
Develop Careers Fair for adults; promotion etc					Including those with degrees

Make better use of Trainee posts?

Action	Lead (s)	Priority 1,2,3	Start Date	Completion date	Notes
Review use of Graduate Apprentices					
Review and map out the Trainee offer	Team/ELC				Add a page onto the ELC council page. Leaflets for ways into it/good things to know about etc digital world- a PLACE Place trainees in settings where there is capacity for training (in addition to where needed).

Address number of temporary posts advertised?

Action	Lead (s)	Priority 1,2,3	Start Date	Completion date	Notes
Assess temp post as they arise					Appropriate? Likely to being in candidates? Get temp posts out sooner- to cover training
Make Support Workers permanent once budget approved					Mix?

Make better use of our relief list?

Action	Lead (s)	Priority 1,2,3	Start Date	Completion date	Notes
Review relief approach – possible trainees?					HNC students- see above
Consider benefits of relief for new group of employed staff					Pick hours Move location

How might we make better use of Support Workers?

Action	Lead (s)	Priority 1,2,3	Start Date	Completion date	Notes
Review SW within the overall staffing model – making them part of the workforce					Target candidates, job purpose, tasks, perm/temp Helps with retention of current workforce- allocate in every larger setting

Improve retention of the people we have? Include travel/location?

Action	Lead (s)	Priority 1,2,3	Start Date	Completion date	Notes
Minimal paperwork ask- what do we expect and why- share paperwork (e.g keyworker plans)					
Support workers to relieve pressure					
Upskilling staff re working with children with additional support needs					

Improve retention of the people we have? Include travel/location?

Action	Lead (s)	Priority 1,2,3	Start Date	Completion date	Notes
Additional hours- sorting this out					Much disparity about how this is allocated
Supervision- making sure this is done in every setting					Develop skills; embed

Improve strategic overview of staffing – workforce planning

Action	Lead (s)	Priority 1,2,3	Start Date	Completion date	Notes
Demand Supply analysis update for next year					
Consider allocation of SW and trainees across settings (see above)					Consider leavers, turnover, new posts etc

Improvement area (new – template for use)

Action	Lead (s)	Priority 1,2,3	Start Date	Completion date	Notes

