

South Lanarkshire Council's Approach to Professional Learning in ELC

South Lanarkshire Council (SLC) has developed a dynamic and inclusive professional learning programme that supports Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) practitioners across both local authority settings and partner providers, as well as childminders.

Rooted in an understanding of the complex and evolving needs of the workforce, this approach reflects the Council's ongoing commitment to improving outcomes for children through practitioner development, effective planning, and sector-wide collaboration.



SLC's professional learning programme continuously evolves in response to feedback, workforce demographics, and national priorities. A strong focus

is placed on accessibility, training is offered free of charge to all ELC practitioners, including childminders, and scheduled at varied times, including evenings, to ensure inclusive participation. Recognising the time pressures practitioners face, training is often delivered through flexible formats such as short webinars, twilight sessions and online learning, making it easier for teams to engage without compromising their operational responsibilities.

The programme has been shaped by the challenges that define the current ELC landscape. Staff shortages, increased workloads, and the rising complexity of children's needs, particularly in relation to additional support needs (ASN), trauma, and communication delays, have informed both the content and delivery of training. In response, SLC has developed a tiered and integrated support model. Quality Officers and the Peripatetic Team provide bespoke mentoring and targeted professional input, particularly in literacy, numeracy, and digital learning. These supports are offered flexibly, including evening visits, to ensure settings can fully benefit from expert guidance.

Specialist training programmes have further strengthened practitioner capacity. These include outdoor learning delivered in partnership with Eolas, woodwork and play-based learning programmes such as those developed by Pete Moorhouse, and a focused three-day Froebel in Practice course. SLC has also invested in long-term workforce development through the South Lanarkshire Care Academy, supporting practitioners along Foundation, Modern, and Graduate Apprenticeship pathways. Leadership development is a key priority, with tailored programmes supporting team leaders, deputies, and aspiring heads, helping address pipeline issues and encouraging progression within the sector.

Collaboration and communication with providers play a central role in shaping training agendas. Annual consultations and post-training evaluations provide actionable insights, with each session concluding by asking practitioners, “What do you need next?” This continuous feedback loop ensures training remains relevant, impactful, and aligned with emerging priorities. Showcase events, both virtual and in-person, have become a vibrant part of SLC’s professional learning culture. These sessions, often attracting hundreds of participants, provide platforms for best practice sharing across local authority settings, partner providers, and childminders, further strengthening community learning networks.

Despite its successes, SLC continues to confront sector-wide challenges. Staffing shortages often make it difficult to release practitioners for training, particularly in standalone nurseries with extended hours. Financial constraints have led to the adaptation of some high-cost programmes, but creative solutions, such as condensing multi-day courses, have preserved training quality. A notable area of focus for the future is enhancing ASN training. New collaborations with the Inclusion Team aim to create a more standardised and accessible approach to ASN support across all settings.

The local authority held its annual ELC conference in February this year which had a focus on raising attainment. Alan Fleming of Education Scotland led a keynote session on the importance of leadership, data literacy, and understanding poverty demographics in shaping ELC outcomes. He emphasised the value of integrating diverse forms of data pedagogical, observational, demographic, and perceptual, to make informed decisions. His message of fostering small, incremental changes through accessible data and peer leadership resonated deeply with participants. A key takeaway was the need to value and empower early adopters within teams, while maintaining the balance of collective capacity and individual responsibility.

To ensure continuity of learning and effective transitions into Primary 1, SLC has introduced a consistent tracking framework. Practitioners share detailed information at transition points, avoiding the “fresh start” approach and ensuring children’s learning journeys are acknowledged and supported. These trackers, using CfE levels 00A–00C, are complemented by moderation sessions that support professional dialogue around progress and expectations. One such example is Milburn ELC, where staff engage in collaborative moderation using shared proformas and CfE benchmarks, creating a culture of reflective practice and evidence-informed planning.

Equity of access to training remains a priority, particularly for partner providers and childminders. SLC ensures evening training is available to accommodate their unique schedules. Resources for outdoor learning have been co-developed with childminders to ensure practical relevance, and efforts to create networking opportunities between settings continue to build a collaborative ELC community.

SLC’s model demonstrates how a thoughtful blend of strategic planning, partnership working, and practitioner voice can drive meaningful improvement in ELC.