

Guidance on adult to child ratios in early learning and childcare settings

Publication date: 30 March 2018

Publication code REG-0318-054

This guidance will support commissioners, planners, providers and parents on supporting the best outcomes for children attending all ELC settings. It sets out the Care Inspectorate's expectations around staffing levels in ELC.

Background

When the National Care Standards for early education and childcare up to the age of 16 were replaced by the Health and Social Care Standards in June 2017, some of the previous input standards were no longer included under the more outcome focussed standards, which describe what people should experience from their care and support, rather than what providers need to do. For early learning and childcare (ELC) services including childminding and out of school care settings, adult to child ratios are no longer specified in the standards. Therefore, we have developed this guidance to support providers, commissioners and planners consider deployment of appropriate workforce levels within settings.

We are focused on working flexibly and collaboratively with providers to support the delivery of high-quality ELC that achieves the best outcomes for children. We will continue to work with providers and partners to establish best practice guidance based on evidence and research in relation to delivering a high-quality workforce model.

Rationale

Evidence supports that the early years in a child's life are crucial to a child's skills and confidence and has a lasting impact on outcomes in health and education. To support positive outcomes for children, the Scottish Government has given a commitment that children should access high-quality ELC that will give children opportunities to develop positive social, emotional and educational outcomes. The single most important factor on the quality of a child's ELC experience is a high-quality workforce. It is the provider's responsibility to ensure at all times that staff with relevant skills and knowledge and ability are employed within the setting in appropriate numbers and that they are deployed at all times to meet and deliver quality care and learning experiences for all children.

There is no current evidence indicating that the previous minimum staffing ratios for ELC settings should be adjusted or that the needs of children were not being met with this workforce model. Changing these longstanding ratios could potentially cause significant disruption to planners, commissioners and providers, particularly at a time of considerable ELC expansion and resource decisions currently being made to increase capacity based on the existing staffing ratios.

New models of provision will continue to be developed and we will work with providers through the registration or variation processes to encourage the development of new staffing models that support innovative improvements and high-quality ELC that meets the needs of children and families within their communities.

The Health and Social Care Standards set out what people should expect when using ELC settings. They seek to provide better outcomes for children and their families and to ensure that people are treated with respect and dignity. The

objective of the standards is to drive improvement, promote flexibility and encourage innovation in settings and providers should consider the following in relation to a high-quality workforce:

“I have confidence in people because they are trained, competent and skilled, are able to reflect on their practice and follow their professional and organisational codes.” (Standard 3.14)

“My needs are met by the right number of people.” (Standard 3.15)

“People have time to support and care for me and to speak with me.” (Standard 3.16)

“If I experience care and support in a group, the overall size and composition of that group is right for me.” (Standard 1.8)

There is also a legislative framework of the Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act 2010 and the associated regulations state:

“A provider must... ensure that at all times suitably qualified and competent persons are working in the care service in such numbers as are appropriate for the health, welfare and safety of service users.”

(The Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland (Requirements for Care Services) Regulations 2011 (SSI 2011/210).

Adult to child ratios

Adult to child ratios in children’s day care settings including out of school care

We expect that the following ratios will apply to children’s daycare settings, including out of school care.

Age range	Ratio
0 to under 2 years	1 adult to 3 children
2 to under 3 years	1 adult to 5 children
3 to under 8 years	1 adult to 8 children *
Over 8 years	1 adult to 10 children

*Where children aged three and over attend settings for fewer than four hours in any one day the adult to child ratio can be one adult to 10 children.

We recommend that two adults be present in the premises when children are being cared for. If a staff member is working on their own, providers must ensure systems are in place to enable them to access support if required.

An essential characteristic of high-quality provision is a quality workforce supported by strong leadership and adults with whom children have secure and strong

attachments. Therefore, only adults in contact with children for the majority of the session should be included in the ratios.

We may agree to vary the ratios up or down where warranted, for example attendance of children with additional support needs, the layout of the premises and additional support staff on the premises. It is the responsibility of the provider to ensure that children's care and learning needs are met at all times. Where there are a number of children with additional support needs, providers may have to vary the ratios to meet children's individual learning and support needs.

Adult to child ratios in childminding settings

Usually, childminders can care for a maximum of six children at any one time under the age of 16 years, of whom a maximum of six children will be under 12 years, no more than three children will be under primary school age, and only one child will be under one year old.

The numbers of children cared for at any one time includes the childminder's own children or family members whether or not they are present in the service.

We may vary the adult to child ratios to take account of special circumstances, such as siblings under one year old, additional support needs, the layout of the premises or other special circumstances that support the best outcomes for children. Ratios will also be varied where more than one childminder works from the premises or the childminder employs an assistant.

Headquarters

Care Inspectorate
Compass House
11 Riverside Drive
Dundee
DD1 4NY

web: www.careinspectorate.com

email: enquiries@careinspectorate.com

telephone: 0345 600 9527



@careinspect

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