

Key learning points for policy and practice

The mothers-performers interviewed for this report have provided valuable insights on the challenges they face in relation to accessing childcare, as well as the organisation of their work pattern. These suggests that action is needed to develop workable and lasting support solutions for mothers working in the sector (including those in technical and support roles), as well as parents in paid employment more widely. The following learning points seek to stimulate a re-thinking of policies and practice and focus on the reduction of childcare-related barriers faced by parents who undertake paid employment, particularly those in atypical employment. Given the difficulties mothers-performers experience, the learning points are focussed both on how childcare is provided and on how employers need to adapt to better accommodate the childcare needs of their workers.

1. Increased investment is needed to deliver universal, high-quality, wrap-around childcare in ways that make it more affordable for parents to return to paid work and to sustain it.

The longer mothers stay economically inactive, the harder it is for them to return to work, especially in professions requiring a high level of specialist skills and continuous practice to maintain excellence. Affordable childcare is a necessary foundation for economic activity, and early support for mothers is crucial in helping them to return to work. As such, the Scottish Government should commit additional funding to expand universally available, funded childcare provision to one- and two-year olds, while ensuring increased funding for the delivery of wrap-around school age childcare (including pre- and after-school childcare such as breakfast clubs) to provide much-needed flexibility for parents employed in roles with non-standard work patterns.

2. Improved access is needed to flexible, wrap-around childcare, including greater recognition of the needs of parents working in non-standard forms of paid employment.

The needs of mothers in irregular work patterns which do not easily align with nurseries' 'traditional' opening hours seem overlooked within existing policy and practice. The existing model of childcare should be re-thought to address the realities of non-standard forms of paid employment. These require more flexible childcare provision. The Scottish Government should incentivise childcare providers to provide flexible solutions that help support all mothers to remain economically active. This should include making access to childcare equitable and available to those working atypical hours (e.g. working in the evenings, at night, and on weekends). Freelance status should also be looked at as a case for additional support that is required when income varies and return to work tends to happen earlier than for employed mothers.

3. To maximise their impact, childcare solutions should be co-designed and evaluated with parents, including those working within non-standard forms of paid employment.

The Scottish Government should commit to a process of co-design to improve, and not just expand, state-funded childcare provision. The Scottish Government's Early Learning and Childcare Directorate-led roundtables and working groups should therefore include mothers, fathers, guardians, relevant trade unions, the sector's employers (national and small performing organisation and venues), Creative Scotland, Parents and Carers in the Performing Arts (PiPA), the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC), local authorities, childcare providers (public and private), and the Scottish Childminding Association (SCA) representing childminders and nannies. Particular efforts should be made to meaningfully consult with parents working in non-standard forms of paid employment to ensure provision better meets their needs. This process of co-design should also encompass participative monitoring and evaluation of impact.

4. Family-friendly working practices, such as more flexible working hours and access to childcare facilities, need to be promoted and championed, particularly within sectors characterised by non-standard forms of paid employment, such as in the performance and entertainment sector.

Creative Scotland, as the national arts and creative industries agency, should work closely with Parents and Carers in the Performing Arts (PiPA), the arts and creative sectors' unions (Musician Union, Equity, BECTU), the Federation of Scottish Theatre, and individual employers to find ways to actively promote changes in work patterns and workplace practices to reflect the needs of mothers and parents. Flexible work patterns, shorter hours and job shares are all potential solutions to the problem.

5. The caring responsibilities undertaken by those in paid employment, including non-standard forms, need to be made more visible and valued within workplaces to help unlock the changes needed to better support those who juggle paid work with unpaid care work for children and others.

There is a clearly identified need to boost understanding amongst employers of the challenges facing workers who juggle childcare responsibilities. Crucially, work needs to be done to help arts organisations to be supportive employers. It is recommended that Creative Scotland use its position of influence to encourage (for example, by signing PIPA's Employer Charter), but also to appraise and reward positive support initiatives. Furthermore, to foster the development of better workplace policy and practice, relevant stakeholders should organise training on how to improve work sites to better support working mothers. Support initiatives should be implemented sector-wide; these could include the provision of creches on sites of work, childcare hubs, breastfeeding facilities, or other support for mothers both working and auditioning for work.

6. Robust metrics are needed to drive and transparently track progress in enhancing support to those with childcare responsibilities working in the performing arts and entertainment sector.

Robust and transparent monitoring of policies and practices within the performing arts and entertainment sector will be crucial to evaluating what works best. It will be important for identifying which support initiatives have the biggest potential in helping to change the sector's culture, while preventing career breaks, and reducing the outflow of female artists to different industries. Once evaluated, the outcome of support initiatives can guide evidence-based funding decisions for new initiatives in the sector, and inform other activities focused on improving policies and practices relevant to fair work, the roll-out of family-friendly practices, and the wider promotion of equality, diversity and inclusion within these workplaces and sites of work.

7. A new National Outcome to value and invest in care should be introduced within Scotland's National Performance Framework and include robust National Indicators to transparently track the progress achieved to improve childcare provision nationally.

The barriers facing mothers working in the performing arts and entertainment sector are indicative of the challenges facing all those with unpaid caring responsibilities in Scotland, whether for children or those with additional support needs due to illness, disability or age. Therefore, while sectoral change is needed within the performing arts and entertainment, transformative change is likely to require concerted national action to better value and invest in all forms of care in Scotland. This would be supported by the introduction of a dedicated National Outcome to value and invest in care within Scotland's National Performance Framework, with robust indicators to track progress (Maclean et al., 2021; A Scotland that Cares, 2023). These indicators should link to appropriate data sets that capture the experiences of those with childcare responsibilities who work in non-standard forms of employment, such as the performing arts and entertainment sector.

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