



CUPE Newfoundland and Labrador Submission to the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador

Meeting with Department of Children, Youth and Families (October 20, 2010)

CUPE NEWFOUNDLAND and LABRADOR

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UNESCO: Ten facts about Early Childhood Care and Education

- ECCE is a right, recognized in the Convention on the Rights of the Child ratified by 149 countries.
- ECCE is the bedrock of Education For All and the first step in meeting all the other EFA goals.
- ECCE can improve the well-being of young children, especially in the developing world, where a child has a four in ten chance of living in extreme poverty and 10.5 million children a year under five die from preventable diseases.
- ECCE contributes to the Millennium Development Goal of reducing poverty, as well as to the education, health and other international goals and instruments.
- ECCE has a beneficial effect on later schooling and leads to higher school enrolment, particularly for girls.
- ECCE is cost-effective in that it's a preventive measure supporting children early on rather than compensating their disadvantage when older.
- ECCE in the form of reliable child care provides essential support for working parents, particularly mothers.
- ECCE investment yields high economic returns, offsetting disadvantage and inequality, especially for children from poor families. It benefits taxpayers and enhances economic vitality.
- ECCE has positive effects on female labour force participation and older siblings' schooling.
- ECCE levels the playing field by reducing inequalities between rich and poor and is thus a key component to breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty.

(Background information, First World Conference on ECCE, UNESCO, September 26 – 29 2010, online at <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/world-conference-on-ecce/>)

CUPE represents more than 600,000 members across Canada including 6,000 in Newfoundland and Labrador. Many of our members are parents who work and who are often trying to cobble together child care arrangements for their children. We also represent early childhood educators who belong to a sector whose wages are notoriously low. The low wages, poor benefits and working conditions contribute to the sector's shortage of educated workers, which, in turn, affects the quality and availability of services. Finally, CUPE has always promoted universally accessible high quality child care as a component of a social justice agenda, with specific reference to child care's role in anti-poverty strategies, women's equality and as a children's right recognized in multiple United Nations agreements ratified by Canada.

Where does CUPE stand on early learning and child care?

The Canadian Union of Public Employees and its partners in the child care community, social justice groups, teachers, nurses and other unions have been advocating for universal high quality child care for more than 30 years. As part of this, CUPE has always advocated for universal access, public funding and not-for-profit ownership of child care programs.

At a national level, CUPE and many of its advocacy partners now have taken the position that blending early childhood education and child care into one seamless program is fundamental for effective provision of both "early learning" and "child care". At the same time, based on

international comparative analysis and research, we have come to understand that systems that are both publicly funded **and** publicly delivered are most likely to be beneficial to children and families. The evidence shows that public systems are most likely to blend early childhood education and child care into one seamless day program, delivered and/or managed by public authorities—usually local education, municipal governments or ELCC-specific local authorities -- to deliver the high quality services that both benefit early learning and can deliver equitable affordable access to parents so they can work or pursue education and training.

A public system is also most likely to deliver equitable service distribution when service creation and maintenance are publicly managed, planned activities. A public system by its very nature, lends itself to solid planning, target setting, accountability, ongoing quality improvement and evaluation.

Finally, well-designed public ELCC systems can support diversity of approach and innovative programming through local delivery, a democratic approach that includes parents, and various program options. The evidence shows clearly that public and public-managed systems are not about “one size fits...all” but about doing the very best for children and families.

With this in mind, we suggest that public or quasi-public ELCC systems could replace the current privatized approach employed in Newfoundland and Labrador and other Canadian provinces where child care programs rely mainly on parents’ ability to pay and are delivered by the private sector—unregulated private arrangements and regulated private for-profit programs.

We believe that the current consultation and policy development processes that are underway within the provincial government can contribute to building a made-in-Newfoundland system to meet the needs of children and families. From our perspective, a new well-designed coherent approach to educating and caring for young children while – at the same time - supporting families and strengthening the province’s economy can take into account both our local realities and the best available knowledge derived from research and best practices.

We are here to speak to the benefits for this government of developing a comprehensive ELCC system that will support families, parents, and children and that will leave this province with a well-deserved legacy in a 21st century Newfoundland and Labrador .

A legacy for the government

Limited public funding and ELCC policy have had some key results in Newfoundland and Labrador – and, in fact, across most provinces: child care and kindergarten are still divided; quality in regulated child care is too often mediocre at best; high fees and inaccessible ELCC programs may drive parents to unstable and unregulated child care arrangements of unknown quality. Parents – especially mothers -- may be kept out of education, training and the labour force because child care is not accessible and most young children still miss the opportunity to participate in enriching early childhood education until age five.

We are most encouraged that the government has undertaken to develop a new approach to ELCC. We believe that a restructured early learning and child care situation in Newfoundland and Labrador has the capacity to make a significant contribution to the province's current and future economic prosperity, social fabric and its citizens' well-being and satisfaction. A strategy that is based on best practices and tailored to create a new made-in-Newfoundland ELCC system would not only be historic but legacy-building for a government that seizes the opportunity.

As a federal government report on a national child care program (1986) commented, "We are convinced that the government that initiates and perfects these systems will be rewarded in the short run by the accolades of the people, and in the long run, by the favourable judgment of history" (Task Force on Child Care, Status of Women Canada).

Newfoundland's ELCC initiatives

The government's strategy has a number of components including a ministerial Early Learning Council, with five departmental members (Education; Child, Youth and Family; Health and Community Services; Labrador and Aboriginal; Human Resources, Labour and Employment).

There are as well two concurrent initiatives, with two different departments taking the lead:

- The Ten year Early Learning and Child Care initiative (Child, Youth and Family);
- The Early Learning Strategy (Education).

Based on best practices, we believe that it is in the best interests of the province of Newfoundland and Labrador and its children and families to treat these as parts of one coherent, integrated strategy. With this in mind, CUPE will address remarks and recommendations regarding ELCC to the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador as a whole, while recognizing current directions and responsibilities of the different departments and ministers.

CUPE's ELCC vision for 2020

To do the best for its children and to meet the needs of a 21st century workforce, Newfoundland and Labrador needs to begin with a transformational vision for ELCC. We propose a comprehensive, specific and achievable vision that includes both "early learning" and "care" for children 0-6 and up to age 12 outside regular school hours. This vision includes education, resources and other supports for parents in their parenting role and recognizing other key family policy initiatives such as improved parental leave.

The 2020 goal

In the long-term, CUPE envisions a publicly-funded, publicly-managed and primarily publicly-delivered ELCC system made up of programs that seamlessly blend care and early childhood education -- a system that is available for all parents and children aged 0-5 years and for school-age children up to age 12 outside regular school hours.

Principles

Universal accessibility: All families have access to an affordable program in their community that supports their employment needs and is appropriate for them.

High quality: All programs would be of quality high enough to enhance children's development and to provide a good quality of life for children.

These principles mean that:

ELCC programs would be staffed by qualified, well-paid early childhood-educated teachers, and would be educational in a non-didactic, play-based sense.

The ELCC programs would be based on the most forward-thinking early childhood education pedagogy-- broadly educational in the "whole child" sense, not narrowly restricted to "school readiness" goals.

ELCC programs would be multifunctional in that they would provide care in parents' absence, early childhood education, and family support at the same time (for example, by incorporating child care, nursery school, kindergarten and family resource programs).

ELCC services would be available to children with families with a parent at home (perhaps for a shorter day) and those with parents in the labour force, training or education.

Parents would have a reasonable choice of high quality centre-based or well supported family child care services; these would be noncompulsory, available on a full-day or part-time basis, full-year basis and would offer flexible hours within reason, as the parents choose.

ELCC programs would be part of a planned, sustained, well-resourced, publicly funded, publicly managed and provincially-organized system everywhere in Newfoundland and Labrador.

There would probably be parent fees (at least for portions of programs or for certain age groups) but programs would be affordable and accessible to all, supported through a global funding approach, not by subsidies on behalf of individual families or vouchers.

Rather than relying on parents, volunteers or entrepreneurs to initiate, fund and operate programs, ELCC would be publicly managed and primarily publicly delivered.

Programs would be responsive to and involve parents and would be shaped and delivered at the local level.

In order to ensure public accountability for public funds and ensure that programs are most likely to be high quality, expansion and public funding would be directed only to public and community-based not-for-profit ELCC programs.

Consistent with Canadian values, programs would include families and children across the socio-economic spectrum and cultural diversity would be respected.

Children with disabilities would be fully included.

ELCC programs—whether in the public education system or under another public or quasi public auspice -- would constitute a flexible multifaceted “system” rather than a loose collection of free standing programs.

The ELCC system for children aged 0-12 years would be under the auspice of one government department – preferably Education, in an Early Learning and Care division.

The ELCC system would be supported by ongoing data collection and analysis, research and evaluation of policy and services.

Implications

We know from comparative examples that this vision is achievable. However, accomplishing such a vision will be at least a decade-long proposition, so it will have to be accomplished in phases.

An effective strategy will include clear long-term goals, objectives, targets and timetables. It will be important to ensure that subsequent policy and program decisions are guided by vision, a common perspective and a common goal.

A fundamental shift in approach is required to move towards this vision – from a market approach to a planned, publicly managed approach.

Most developed (and many developing) countries today offer ELCC programs, usually for a full school day, for all four year olds, and – in many countries – three year olds too. These programs are usually part of the public education system, with the best models (such as those in Northern Italy, Sweden and Finland) based on play-based learning and staffed by trained early childhood educators. In the best instances, these programs operate on a full-year, full work-day basis so as to meet working parents’ needs as well as providing early learning opportunities. There may or may not be affordable parent fees. In most countries, education is non-compulsory until age six or sometimes even seven years.

Meeting the twin principles of universal accessibility and high quality will be doable only if best policy practices are incorporated. For example, the research is quite clear that developmental or educational benefits to children do not accrue if programs are not high quality, and programs cannot be high quality unless staff are well-trained in early childhood development, wages and working conditions are good enough to ensure high morale and low turnover and staff: child ratios are sufficient to ensure good interaction.

It is also not possible to achieve high quality accessible ELCC without substantial public funds. A fully mature ELCC system will be expensive, even if parents pay affordable fees. Newfoundland and Labrador, like the rest of Canada, contributes considerably less than the *at least* 1% of GDP (public funds) to ELCC for children aged 0-5 set as a minimum benchmark by UNICEF in its Innocenti Research Centre Report Card (2008). Newfoundland and Labrador, like other provinces --even other “have” provinces -- will have difficulty paying for these programs alone. If ELCC is to be successful in any region of Canada, the federal government will have to become a full player. Yet in the absence of a federal partner, it is most welcome that Newfoundland and Labrador – like a number of the other provinces -- has committed to transforming its ELCC situation.

From two perspectives – financial and the best interests of children and families – one of the key issues that will have to be addressed in Newfoundland and Labrador is that of for-profit provision of child care. An “early learning” strategy will require a strategy for moving Newfoundland and Labrador’s child care supply from a predominantly for-profit model to public, quasi-public and/or not-for-profit models. The research supports CUPE’s view that the dangers of the for-profit approach to child care are significant, especially in a globalized era where child care companies can cross boundaries to exploit public funding. It is clear from the research that the principles of accessibility and high quality cannot be accomplished in a for-profit environment and that public funds could be better spent on other approaches.

At a practical level, however, the strategy should include a clear plan for addressing the situation of the for-profit operators who have developed services to date.

With this in mind, we propose, for discussion, four options for Newfoundland and Labrador’s transition from a predominantly for-profit model to public, quasi-public and/or not-for-profit model.

OPTIONS FOR A TRANSITION TO PUBLIC/NOT-FOR/PROFIT ECEC SYSTEM

Options	Rationales and issues
Option 1. Eliminate/close/phase out all for-profit centres (with all expansion in a new public and/or publicly-managed model)	This option seems neither feasible – as the for-profit sector provides almost 70% of regulated child care spaces – politically salable nor fair to the owners who have contributed to child care to date.
Option 2. Establish a “conversion” program with incentives and processes to enable owners to become directors of non-profit centres under the direction of a legal board, (with all expansion in a new public and/or publicly-managed model)	Based on the Ontario experience with a conversion program, a broad conversion programs is not recommended. In Ontario, it was expensive, with public funds spent for “good will”, difficult to administer and ultimately, difficult to determine which “conversions” result in true non-profits.

	While a full conversion program is not recommended, it could be beneficial to develop a plan to allow some child care centres to move from for-profit to non-profit or public, on a selective basis.
Option 3. Provide funds to for-profit operators who choose to close down their licenses, and phase out public funds to for-profits within five years (with all expansion in a new public and/or publicly-managed model)	This option, which could be adapted from PEI's <i>Preschool Excellence Initiative</i> , could be effective if it were closely monitored and if there could be sufficient expansion.
Option 4. Grandparent existing for-profit centres, allowing them to access all/most funding, with enhanced regulatory requirements and monitoring (with all expansion in a new public and/or publicly-managed model)	This option, which has been proposed by some of the child care advocacy groups, would be the most likely to satisfy the for-profit owners and – if expansion were sufficient – would build a not-for-profit system

These options could be used in combination. But from CUPE's perspective, some kind of clear workable plan for taking Newfoundland and Labrador from a province in which most of the regulated child care is for-profit, to one which truly takes children's and families' needs into account, is fundamental.

In summary

Developing an effective legacy-building ELCC system in Newfoundland and Labrador will require collaboration among the interested parties – the provincial government, school authorities, the ECE community, NGOs, unions and parents – it is in all our interests.

We believe a legacy-building ELCC vision that recognizes the challenges and realities of 21st century Newfoundland and Labrador process needs to envision a strategy for young children and families that not only ensures good early learning but supports women's participation in the labour force, repatriates young families back home, revitalizes communities, builds capacity in our population, and generally prepares its citizens for the 21st century. In other words, we would like to see the vision speak to the breadth of good public policy that a public ELCC system could provide in terms of governance, planning, democratic participation, inclusivity and workforce recruitment and retention.