

# Gender Friendly Nursery Evaluation



**the collective**

WORKING TOGETHER FOR CHANGE

the collective 2022

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## Our evaluation:

the collective was commissioned by Glasgow City Health Improvement team and Zero Tolerance to undertake a two-part review of the Gender Friendly Nursery programme. This review was to;

- explore the impact of the programme thus far and;
- explore where the programme could go next.

## Our research questions:

To do this, we worked to answer the following questions;

- a) What are the barriers and facilitators to engaging with the Gender Friendly Nursery programme? What elements of the Gender Friendly Nursery programme are successful and which are less so and why? Who does it work well for and why?
- b) What needs to happen to ensure that early years staff in Glasgow and beyond can continue to access messaging and learning to support practice change around gender equality in ways which place the needs and experience of children at the centre?
- c) Who is best placed to take this work forward both in Glasgow City and beyond?
- d) How does the Gender Friendly Nursery programme fit with other nationally available programmes focused on gender equality in the early years? What impact has it had beyond Glasgow City?
- e) What needs to happen to ensure that gender equality work in the early years is embedded in practice across Scotland?

## How we did this:

We did this through a mixed methods approach including;

- Desk-based literature review
- Reviewing previous evaluation documents
- Interviews and surveys with nurseries that had completed the GFN programme
- Surveys with nurseries that had not completed the GFN programme
- Interviews and surveys with stakeholders
- Iterative exploratory discussions with the GFN team

## Challenges of data collection

Whilst we were able to gather survey responses from 76 people, interview four, and host a focus group with three, we were unable to secure focus groups or have engagement from a wide range of stakeholders or strategic leads. To overcome this data challenge, we issued two surveys, rather than the planned one, and sent interview questions via email to strategic leads. The research was undertaken over the summer months, meaning that many school nurseries were closed for the summer holidays and staff were unavailable for interview. Moreover within the course of our research we found that many nurseries had high staff turnover, due to their own caring responsibilities, low pay,<sup>1</sup> and the introduction of the 1140 hours.<sup>2</sup> Data gathered by the GFN team was also collected and recorded differently before and during the pandemic, meaning comparative data collection was a challenge. However, we were able to work flexibly in response to these challenges in order to produce this final report.

## How this report is structured

In the first section, we'll outline the context in which the GFN programme operates; what the learning is from previous evaluations, what the current policy and practice landscape is and the funding available for the programme should it wish to expand, streamline, close or adapt. In the second section, we then turn to outline a theory of change and provide recommendations around what could happen next.

## What is GFN?

The Gender Friendly Nursery (GFN) is a programme of training for Early Learning and Childcare settings (ELC) on understanding and addressing gender equality, with follow-up work towards accreditation by Health Improvement which includes a nursery audit.

It was developed by a staff team from Glasgow Health and Social Care Partnership - North East Health Improvement following attendance at the 2014 Respectme conference, Gender Is Everyone's Agenda, where Zero Tolerance presented their new resource for promoting gender equality in early years, Just like A Child<sup>3</sup>. The development was supported by Zero Tolerance, Respectme, LGBT Youth Scotland, Men in Childcare and Fathers Network Scotland, and received guidance from Dr Nancy Lombard.

The overall goals of the GFN programme are to<sup>4</sup>:

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<sup>1</sup>

<https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/independent-report/2020/03/implications-national-local-labour-markets-social-care-workforce-report-scottish-government-cosla/documents/early-learning-childcare-workforce-final-report-scottish-government-cosla/early-learning-childcare-workforce-final-report-scottish-government-cosla/govscot%3Adocument/early-learning-childcare-workforce-final-report-scottish-government-cosla.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nurseryworld.co.uk/news/article/scottish-pvis-in-staffing-crisis-as-1-140-hours-loom>

<sup>3</sup> Care Inspectorate & Zero Tolerance (2018) Gender equal play in early learning and childcare

<sup>4</sup> Birman, Megan (November 2020) The Gender Friendly Nursery: A Research Proposal. Produced in Partnership with the Glasgow City HSCP Northeast Health Improvement Team

- provide the tools to begin to redress the (gender) balance
- grow nurseries where regardless of gender, children are nurtured in a way which allows them to reach their full potential, and which offers limitless opportunities for all
- celebrate and champion gender equality in all aspects of nursery life

Within this, the intended learning outcomes from the training are to (see; Briefing for Education):

- Define gender, gender equality and gender stereotypes
- Identify gender stereotypes that exist in the world around them
- Discuss the potential harm that can come from gender stereotypes
- Understand the role of pre-5 settings in promoting gender equality and reducing gender stereotyping
- Identify ways that pre-5 settings can promote gender equality and reduce gender stereotyping
- Challenge gender stereotypes they encounter at work and in their personal lives
- Understand the process for becoming a Gender Friendly Nursery, and the support available.

The GFN ‘whole school approach’ encouraged nurseries and staff to explore areas such as leadership, management, resources and public communications to determine how these can be used to develop a more gender equitable nursery<sup>5</sup>. It is based on a strong evidence base that shows that gender stereotyping in early years can impact across a number of areas later in life, including: gender based violence; mental health; suicide; help seeking behaviour; relationships; sexual health; LGBT; parenting roles; post-natal depression; breastfeeding; emotional literacy; health behaviours; employability; healthy weight; physical activity; eating disorders and educational attainment<sup>6</sup>

Specific issues facing ELC settings that the initial project proposal set out to address included<sup>7</sup>

- staff behaviours such as complimenting girls on their appearance rather than their intelligence, courage etc.
- parents and family members who are very opposed to activities they do not see as appropriate, for example boys participating in dancing (mentioning in particular ethnic minority families<sup>8</sup>).
- Both staff and involved parents/carers are disproportionately women, and assumptions made about fathers/male carers and male staff
- Issues and approaches varying according to the community served by the establishment as well as whether it is a Local Authority, partnership or private setting.

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<sup>5</sup> Birman, Megan (November 2020) The Gender Friendly Nursery: A Research Proposal. Produced in Partnership with the Glasgow City HSCP Northeast Health Improvement Team

<sup>6</sup> Adzajlic & Heywood (Sept 2015) HIEG proposal - Gender Friendly Nurseries

<sup>7</sup> adapted from Adzajlic & Heywood (Sept 2015) HIEG proposal - gender friendly nurseries

<sup>8</sup> In the course of our research, we queried this statement to explore where the data had come from. It was reported that it was shared anecdotally by nurseries, but no further exploration had taken place around it this was an presumption from nurseries or if it was an experience shared by others rrier.

The programme was piloted between 2016-2018, which included full-day training for entire staff groups of ELC establishments. This was mostly undertaken on in- service days; however two courses were delivered as twilights over three sessions. The training was delivered by staff from the North East Glasgow Health Improvement Team with support from Glasgow East Women's Aid<sup>9</sup>. Other organisations have since also been involved in helping deliver sessions, including a 1-hour awareness session on LGBT led by Education Services (see; Briefing for Education).

Ten nurseries engaged with the process over the pilot phase and the first two of these were recognised as Gender Friendly Nurseries in May 2018. This was followed by rollout firstly to all partnership nurseries for 18 months (which were not included in the pilot), beginning academic year 2018-19. The Leaders of Early Learning (LEL) team supported the promotion of the programme.

By May 2019, the programme was delivered to 35 staff from 25 nurseries.

## Pilot evaluation

The pilot was evaluated by the Health Improvement Team in 2018 to determine to what extent it has generated change in the policy and practice of participating nurseries. The pilot evaluation utilised a mixed- method approach of semi-structured interviews, focus groups, online surveys and a review of previously completed post-course questionnaires. A total of 16 staff members and 4 nursery leaders took part in the study. The evaluation concluded that GFN is successfully improving gender knowledge and practice and is considered to be a useful programme by participating staff members<sup>10</sup>.

This evaluation highlighted the successes as;<sup>11</sup>

- Previous evaluations and write-ups of the programme have shown very positive feedback from participants on the training, particularly on: how “the programme affirms and enhances existing knowledge and practice” as well as introduces new learning; the discussion elements of the programme; the fit with the wider agenda; the tools they could put to practical use when engaging with both children and adults and helping them to realise the enormity of the impact of stereotypes in early years settings. Participants commented on the quality of delivery as well as the relaxed discursive style of the activities. They particularly enjoyed the videos, clips and media presentation that form part of the programme. Many participants valued the opportunity to think over and discuss some of these issues, and found the training informative and useful.

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<sup>9</sup> Heywood, Susie (2018) An Evaluation Of The North East Glasgow Pilot Of The Gender Friendly Nursery Programme

<sup>10</sup> Birman, Megan (November 2020) The Gender Friendly Nursery: A Research Proposal. Produced in Partnership with the Glasgow City HSCP Northeast Health Improvement Team

<sup>11</sup> adapted from Heywood, Susie (2018) An Evaluation Of The North East Glasgow Pilot Of The Gender Friendly Nursery Programme

- Previous post-course feedback has indicated that the training challenged participants' attitudes and increased knowledge around gender; affirmed existing good practice and provided ideas for changes in practice
- One participant explained how GFN complements other existing social and emotional learning programmes at their nursery, such as Creating Confident Children, as well as other initiatives and training programmes including Early Protective Messages and Equalities training and the PATHS programme.
- In the pilot phase, all but one of the nurseries completed a thorough assessment of current nursery policy and practice using the audit tool provided. The audit process appears to be a particularly essential step toward encouraging gender equitable practice. Nurseries describes it as a reflective and honest process
- In their 2018 Standards and Quality report to GCC<sup>12</sup>, Milton Community Nursery stated becoming one of Glasgow's first GFNs as their main improvement/achievement

### Challenges

- Some issues around coordination and crossover within and between Health Improvement programmes, notably with the Early Protective Messages (EPM) project, where the solution was to divide the projects by partnership nurseries and LA establishments, then swap around (GFN 2019)
- The small number of nurseries that have participated in the GFN training progressing to receive the full GFN award<sup>13</sup>. The evaluation of the pilot programme suggested that reasons for this likely included staffing changes, not having the time currently, or not fully understanding what was required<sup>14</sup>.
- GFN participants have raised that reaching the parents can prove challenging – “not because they are necessarily resistant, but simply because they are busy”<sup>15</sup>. The pilot evaluation notes that nurseries felt that there was potential for them to engage more formally with parents on the topic of gender if suitable materials were available, for example by holding a parents event on the theme of gender, or by presenting information at curriculum evenings<sup>16</sup>.
- Lack of male staff engaged (though participants were able to recognise the benefits of having males in the nursery environment)<sup>17</sup>
- Need to be clearer about the differences between equality and equity, and what this means for work around gender, as it was the intention for participants to recognise that it may not

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<sup>12</sup> GCC (Aug 2018) Milton Community Nursery SQ 2018

<sup>13</sup> Birman, Megan (November 2020) The Gender Friendly Nursery: A Research Proposal. Produced in Partnership with the Glasgow City HSCP Northeast Health Improvement Team

<sup>14</sup> Heywood, Susie (2018) An Evaluation Of The North East Glasgow Pilot Of The Gender Friendly Nursery Programme

<sup>15</sup> Care Inspectorate & Zero Tolerance (2018) Gender equal play in early learning and childcare

<sup>16</sup> Heywood, Susie (2018) An Evaluation Of The North East Glasgow Pilot Of The Gender Friendly Nursery Programme

<sup>17</sup> Heywood, Susie (2018) An Evaluation Of The North East Glasgow Pilot Of The Gender Friendly Nursery Programme

always be most appropriate to treat boys and girls exactly the same when in some circumstances certain groups may need extra support or encouragement above the others.

### Lessons learned<sup>18</sup>

- The importance of engaging with parents and carers and supporting communication with parents, to challenge their attitudes and practice around gender, and to reinforce the good work that takes place in the ELC environment. There was a commonly held acceptance among staff that although addressing gender in the nursery setting is crucial, there was only so much impact nurseries can have as children will inevitably be influenced more by what happens at home or when they move on to primary school.
- The benefit of having an award as well as the training: the pilot evaluation found that the award provided an incentive for nurseries to fully engage and commit to making changes, it made them reflect more on their practice, and it was also a good conversation starter for engaging with parents around the topic of gender.
- The importance of remaining pragmatic and flexible in terms of the audit and action plan (participant interview quoted in Care Inspectorate 2018<sup>19</sup>) in order to fit around the busy nursery year, including being able to choose 5 of the 10 actions
- The need for it to be in the nursery's Improvement Plan "There are so many initiatives and unplanned issues arising that if it was not on our plan then we would not have made as much progress and it would have slipped down the priority scale." (participant interview quoted in Care Inspectorate 2018<sup>20</sup>)
- The need to acknowledge the good practice already happening in ELC settings and to build on existing knowledge and practices
- Need for passionate and knowledgeable trainers to deliver the programme. Nursery staff felt that given the high levels of discussion and variance in opinion it was crucial that trainers had the knowledge, skills and kudos to manage this whilst maintaining the integrity of the message. There was also a sense that there was a danger of the message being diluted or biased if it was being received second hand through a training for trainers model, whereby staff would attend the training and cascade to staff throughout the ELC setting.
- Discussion is a key part of the programme, and it is important to allow space and time for discussion and to work through differences of opinion. Discussions need to be managed well. Some participants from the pilot programme felt more time was needed for discussion at certain points.
- Need to build in support for participants and be mindful that there may be staff who have been or are being directly affected by some of the topics for discussion, for example, gender based violence, mental health concerns and suicide. The training needs to acknowledge this, offer immediate support to anyone affected and signposting to ongoing support should it be needed.

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<sup>18</sup> from Care Inspectorate & Zero Tolerance (2018) Gender equal play in early learning and childcare and GFN 2018 pilot evaluation

<sup>19</sup> Care Inspectorate & Zero Tolerance (2018) Gender equal play in early learning and childcare

<sup>20</sup> Care Inspectorate & Zero Tolerance (2018) Gender equal play in early learning and childcare



- Ensure continuing relevance of training: Gender is a fairly hot topic currently and there are constantly new resources, videos, talks and representations of gender (positive and negative) being produced which may be incorporated into the training.

Areas for improvement identified in pilot evaluation include: (1) more time for post-training discussions, (2) further development of support pack, (3) additional support for sensitive topics, and (4) additional guidance on how to communicate with parents<sup>21</sup>.

The team are also collecting data as they go, including before and after forms, trainer reflections feedback and additional information from the nurseries as a result of their audits. In conversations with the team, they shared that capacity to collect data on impact was limited, and that evaluations tended to focus on post- training surveys and nursery initiated engagement.

Overall, the GFN programme;

- Has been shown to have an impact on improving staff’s ability and confidence in having conversations around gender equality
- Needs to be live to new understandings around gender and intersecting inequalities
- Provided useful tools to support gender equal resources within ELC settings (for example; gender friendly toys and books)
- Shown to have worked well using a whole school approach
- Needs to be flexible to respond to the needs of ELC settings

Building off the findings of the pilot evaluation, a revised training-for-trainers model was developed in partnership with Educational Services to extend the GFN programme to more nurseries throughout Glasgow. In the updated model, staff attending the initial GFN training are provided resources and support to deliver the training themselves to the remaining staff at their nurseries<sup>22</sup>. While the model has allowed the GFN to extend its reach across Glasgow, there are concerns that the cascade model of delivery may come with the risk of weakening the messages of the initial training and hinder the experiences of participants<sup>23</sup>. Feedback in our interviews around staff delivery was mixed, with some relishing the opportunity to have conversations with their own staff, and others noting that the delivery of training by nursery staff left some feeling “like it was saying men were the problem, a few folk in other nurseries felt it was harsh on men and making people feel rubbish”.

The training for trainers model requires real care and support for trainers to reduce the risk of message dilution or misinformation, as raised by the stakeholders focus group . However, In 2020, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, this model continued but was made virtual, with a series of four

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<sup>21</sup> Birman, Megan (November 2020) The Gender Friendly Nursery: A Research Proposal. Produced in Partnership with the Glasgow City HSCP Northeast Health Improvement Team

<sup>22</sup> Birman, Megan (November 2020) The Gender Friendly Nursery: A Research Proposal. Produced in Partnership with the Glasgow City HSCP Northeast Health Improvement Team

<sup>23</sup> Heywood, Susie (2018) An Evaluation Of The North East Glasgow Pilot Of The Gender Friendly Nursery Programme

sessions for each intake, two of which were interactive discussions on Zoom, and two were pre-recorded video sessions followed by individual reflections.

In the next section, we review the policy and practice context, and how this relates to the aims of the GFN programme.

## The policy and practice context

In the past decade, a great deal of the national policy and budgetary conversations around early years in Scotland has been on increasing investments in childcare and addressing the attainment gap<sup>24</sup>, with some discussion also of gender segregated pathways into work and the low paid, female heavy early years workforce<sup>25</sup>. Much less focus appears to have been on intersecting inequalities or protected characteristics equality issues for children, or on professional development of the workforce in these areas.

Specific policy areas of interest to GFN are;

- o **National Outcomes**, and the outcomes relating to: “We have tackled the significant inequalities in Scottish society; Our children have the best start in life and are ready to succeed; Our young people are successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens”<sup>26</sup>
- o **Realising the ambition: National practice guidance for early years in Scotland Education Scotland**<sup>27</sup>
- o **‘Getting It Right For Every Child’ (GIRFEC)** and specifically the SHANARRI wellbeing indicators: Safe, Healthy, Achieving, Nurtured, Active, Respected, Responsible, and Included
- o **How good is our early learning and childcare? Education Scotland**<sup>28</sup>. This document also includes;
  - o Self-evaluation tool that replaces previous tool: Child at the Centre.
  - o A quality indicator around ‘Ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion’

A number policy documents and guidelines make specific reference to the need for initiatives that address gender stereotyping. ‘How Good Is Our School’ includes challenge questions and self evaluation statements such as: “we challenge gender stereotypes within careers”; “the school is proactive in addressing gender imbalances across the curriculum and challenging any prejudice-based choices about future careers and learning pathways”; “equity in education means that personal or social circumstances such as gender, ethnic origin or family background are not

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<sup>24</sup> For example, “Boosting attainment and early years interventions that give every child a fair start in life” is also part of Scotland’s Economic Strategy (2015) under ‘Promoting Inclusive Growth’. See also papers such as Sosu & Ellis (May 2014) Closing the Attainment Gap in Scottish Education published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation

<sup>25</sup> For example, Developing the Young Workforce (2014-2021) has lots of focus on reducing gender imbalances across courses and apprenticeships and other opportunities

<sup>26</sup> <https://nationalperformance.gov.scot/national-outcomes>

<sup>27</sup> Education Scotland (Feb 2020) Realising the ambition: National practice guidance for early years in Scotland

<sup>28</sup> Education Scotland (February 2016) ‘How good is our early learning and childcare?’

obstacles to achieving educational potential”; and “we understand, value and celebrate diversity and challenge discrimination.”

Similarly, in the Equally Safe performance framework, the first outcome is “fewer people adhere to gender stereotypes”, and one of the indicators/measurements is social attitudes around toys you might buy for a 3 year old boy.

There also exists a number of task forces, detailed below:

- o **Improving Gender Balance programme partnership** between SDS, the Institute of Physics, and Education Scotland. The early years and primary school work for Improving Gender Balance Scotland looks at preventing early bias in career choices. They launched two new courses in 2021: gender aware practice and gender aware leadership and a new gender equality self-evaluation framework is available.
- o **The Gender Equal Play Working Group.** According to the ToR<sup>29</sup> this group meets four times a year. The purpose of this group is to support connections, collaboration and coordination both between these organisations and between the organisations and practitioners, and will share learning as well as coordinate activity. The working group has a set of shared intended outcomes around increased understanding of gender equality in ELC settings, effective signposting and increased opportunities and experiences of gender equal play for children nationally.
- o **The National Advisory Council on Women and Girls.** In their 2018 report they called for “a pathway to safe and nurturing gender neutral education and learning in all settings” and “a radical, evidenced based and gender-competent national strategy, providing much needed coherence and a pathway to safe and nurturing gender neutral education and learning in all settings”. In the Scottish Government’s 2019 response, the Scottish Government recognised “that there is a case for further, bolder and better coordinated action.”<sup>30</sup> The response also noted areas where work was already being undertaken, including; improving diversity in the ELC workforce to both improve workforce sustainability and increase the range of role models available to children in early years settings;
- o From the recommendations produced within this report the **Gender Equality Taskforce in Education and Learning** was established<sup>31</sup>, the collective delivered workshops and a Theory of Change model for the Gender Equality in Education and Learning taskforce early 2022, due to be published this year.

Other areas of work that are currently underway in relation to gender equal play and education are; the Care Inspectorate’s work with Zero Tolerance to publish a new resource to promote gender equal play in early learning<sup>32</sup>; and preparation of national induction materials for new early learning and childcare professionals.

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<sup>29</sup> Education Scotland (Oct 2020) Gender Equal Play in Early Years Working Group Terms of Reference

<sup>30</sup> Scottish Government (June 2019) Response to the First Minister’s National Advisory Council on Women and Girls

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/groups/gender-equality-in-education-and-learning-taskforce/>

<sup>32</sup> Care Inspectorate & Zero Tolerance (2018) Gender equal play in early learning and childcare

The GFN team shared with us that whilst they have been engaged with The Gender Equal Play Working Group, they have had some minimal engagement with others, and little beyond initial conversations due to the geographical focus on GFN as opposed to the national focus of some of these groups (particularly the Gender Equality Taskforce in Education and Learning). This is a reoccurring theme around one of the barriers to fully resourcing the programme, and prioritising it's learning. We explore further the gap between policy and practice in the next section.

A number of organisations are also coming together to work towards the implementation of the UNCRC in Scottish early years settings. One of its requirements is that nurseries look at undertaking children's rights and wellbeing impacts assessments. Toolkits are being produced and some bodies are working in partnership with a few nurseries to support them to take an intersectional approach to this work.<sup>33</sup> Education Scotland have reported a lot of traction from practitioners around gender equality around the way the UNCRC underpins gender equality and vice versa, and are producing some supporting resources with Zero Tolerance<sup>34</sup>.

In our desk review, we also found that in Glasgow specifically;

- Education are seeking to address the gender imbalance in the early years workforce – nationally around 2% of the workforce is male but in GCC less than 1% of early years workforce is male. Education have also piloted with Corporate HR a career change pathway for GCC employees seeking to re-train and come to work in early years to support the expanded services. They state that “this approach has been very successful with 60-80 potential trainees identified from over 600 expressions of interest. Around 8% of the potential trainees are men, which will assist in improving the workforce gender balance”.<sup>35</sup>
- Glasgow Equality Forum (GEF) also brings together representatives of voluntary sector equality networks. As a city wide strategic policy forum, it encourages better cooperation across equality issues. GEF has a number of full members including; Glasgow LGBTI Voluntary Sector Network, Glasgow Disability Alliance, Glasgow Women's Voluntary Sector Network (co-ordinated by Wise Women) and Glasgow Voluntary Sector, Race Equality Network (co-ordinated by CRER)

## Policy coherence

There is clearly, then, a plethora of national policies, taskforces, working groups and priorities that should make for fertile ground for the delivery, update and resourcing of GFN.

However, certain key national strategies, such as the National Play Strategy, make little no reference to gender, while others, such as 'Realising the ambition: National practice guidance for early years in Scotland', acknowledge gender equality saying “issues of equality and diversity,

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<sup>33</sup> see Minutes from Meeting 3 of the GEPWG (24 Feb 2021)

<sup>34</sup> see Minutes from Meeting 4 of the GEPWG (14 June 2021)

<sup>35</sup> Glasgow City Council (2017) Equality Progress report 2017

although not specifically noted, are taken as being implicit throughout the text and are integral to the delivery of high quality early learning and childcare” but does not make explicit how to do this. This is also replicated within the GIRFEC guidance, with no mention of early years or gender equality in related policies.

Similarly, when looking at public health and violence against women and girls (VAWG) Scotland’s Health and Social Care Standards has very little focus on children in their guidelines and no mention of gender or priorities for early years, Scotland’s Mental Health Strategy (2017-2027) has no mention of gender equality, and there is nothing in the VAWG partnership strategy (attached to **Equally Safe**) about early years partnerships. There are, therefore, a number of gaps and a lack of cohesion across areas of policy.

We also found that overall, there is also very little understanding of, and barely no mention of, intersecting inequalities across the majority of these documents. For example, what does it mean to be a girl who is also Asian, Black or from a Roma Gypsy community? What further cultural, stereotypical barriers exist for them and how should nurseries/schools break these down?

## Funding environment

In terms of how the funding for working with ELC settings is distributed, we found a GLA report which suggests the current pattern of spending on education and training in the UK shows a spending skewed towards older age groups (despite the ‘high returns’ of investing in early years)<sup>36</sup>.

There is a willingness on the part of the Scottish Government to fund preventative work in general, and a recognition of the flexibility required around this. In 2017, Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport Shona Robison described the government’s approach in supporting preventative work: “Our preventative approaches are many and diverse, and any definition must give us flexibility to address different challenges across a range of policy and delivery contexts. We therefore believe that prevention should be defined in broad terms as activity that maintains positive outcomes and breaks cycles of negative outcomes, helping to tackle persistent inequalities for people and communities.”<sup>37</sup> She cites the early years framework and the early years collaborative as examples of the government engaging in structural reform with the aim of prevention, and willingness to “try new and challenging ideas.”

In 2016 Scottish Funding Council in their Gender Action Plan<sup>38</sup> to tackle gender stereotypes said they’d work “with colleges to tackle gender stereotypes through their training of early years care practitioners” and “identify improvements in teacher and early years training to tackle gender stereotyping” as well as “expand the work of colleges and universities to inform and support teachers” and increase the number of men entering the childcare and teaching professions.

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<sup>36</sup> GLA (Jan 2011) Early years interventions to address health inequalities in London

<sup>37</sup> Scottish Parliament Meeting of the Parliament Tuesday 18 April 2017 Official Report

<sup>38</sup> Scottish Funding Council (SFC) (Feb 2016) Gender Action Plan: Interim report

In the next section, we turn to look at the evidence base around GFN and the impact it has had thus far on ELC settings.

## Evidence base

Alongside strategic and national support for the GFN model, there is a very strong evidence base showing the need to address gender equality in early years settings, making the links between gender inequality and gender stereotyping at a young age and:

- educational attainment and gender segregation in the labour market<sup>39</sup>
- violence against women and girls
- mental health and suicide<sup>40</sup>

There is also a general evidence base that supports the idea that pre-school programmes are particularly effective in addressing health and other inequalities, especially for disadvantaged groups<sup>41</sup>. Many of these papers are making a case for the value for money of early years interventions and how they “provide high returns on investment”.<sup>42</sup>

There is also evidence to show that teachers have an important role in “promoting cross -gender play, discussion, activities or friendship within the school community and communicating with parents” as well as in “promoting and maintaining inclusive practices.”<sup>43</sup>

More generally, the paper by Melhuish et al<sup>44</sup> provides evidence that “the quality of many young children’s experiences and opportunities in ECEC depends on the skills, dispositions and understandings of the early childhood adult educators” and that “increasingly, research has shown that the quality of children’s interactions with educators and their peers, more than any other programme feature, influence what children learn and how they feel about learning”, supporting the GFN decision to focus on training early years educators.

They conclude that providing sector-specific qualifications and personal development for educators improves children’s learning and wellbeing. However, few studies focus on the processes or strategies that teachers use to acquire new knowledge or improve their practices<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> For example;

<https://www.oecd.org/gender/data/women-with-low-levels-of-education-face-a-double-disadvantage-in-the-labour-mark.htm> and <https://www.savethechildren.org/us/charity-stories/how-gender-discrimination-impacts-boys-and-girls>

<sup>40</sup> See here for more information <https://www.equimundo.org/resources/?resources-keyword=mental+health&resources-paged=1>

<sup>41</sup> GLA (Jan 2011) Early years interventions to address health inequalities in London

<sup>42</sup> GLA (Jan 2011) Early years interventions to address health inequalities in London

<sup>43</sup> European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (2017) Inclusive Early Childhood Education: Literature Review. (F. Bellour, P. Bartolo and M. Kyriazopoulou, eds.). Odense, Denmark

<sup>44</sup> Melhuish et al. (2016) Fostering Effective Early Learning (FEEL) through a professional development programme for early childhood educators to improve professional practice and child outcomes in the year before formal schooling: study protocol

<sup>45</sup> European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (2017) Inclusive Early Childhood Education: Literature Review. (F. Bellour, P. Bartolo and M. Kyriazopoulou, eds.). Odense, Denmark

Therefore, the programme has the potential to be incredibly effective and impactful on reducing the long term harm caused by gender inequality and gendered stereotypes. We found that due to the current resourcing of the programme, GFN is unable to track any long term, systemic change, however, it is able to show short term impact, specifically on staff practice, play activities and resources offered to children within ELC settings.

## Feedback from the current GFN programme

Overall, the response from nurseries taking part in GFN was extremely positive. We surveyed 76 people<sup>46</sup> and interviewed four. In our second survey for nurseries who had completed the GFN programme (nine completed) we found that these nurseries had all undertaken online training (100%) with a third also having undertaken face to face training. 78% had achieved their objectives in attending the training, with the remaining 22% unable to do so because of lack of staff time and different priorities.

Attendees completed the training as they believed it enabled “all children.. [in reaching] their potential”. Some nurseries also mentioned the need to bring gender equality into ELC settings either due to having male staff begin in post or because children who were attending nursery were exploring their own gender identity.

The majority of feedback was incredibly positive. One manager told us; “we’ve found it really interesting and thought provoking and it’s really benefited our practice- it’s really flourished with it” with some commenting that they “wouldn’t change anything” and that the materials have been “easy to follow”.

Overall, the nurseries we spoke with found it a “great resource” and were able to demonstrate real world impact including; realising that “stereotyping is very dangerous and prevent[s] children from achieving their goals” and; “it made me reflect on my practice and also gave me the opportunity to explore my colleagues' perceptions of gender equal play.”

Another noted that “I feel there’s a lot more conversations between children and staff, a little girl said princesses can’t be smart, and then we had a conversation with her- ‘well you’re smart, and mummy’s smart’ so we’re more confident about having conversations tackling children’s own beliefs. We’ve got good opportunities for children to play in non-stereotypical ways here.” Another noted that “We took away the superhero dressing up but kept the dresses as all the children (boys and girls) loved wearing the dresses, so we kept them”<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> This survey took place instead of planned focus groups due to low take up

<sup>47</sup> Interestingly, this comment speaks also to confusions around equity and equality; for example, enabling girls to play as superheroes would also support the GFN aims and objectives.

These represent the two biggest impacts of the GFN programme that we found; the impact the audit tool was having on play activities and books as well as the ability of staff to talk to each other, and children, about stereotypes and representation.

Other feedback included a sense that there could be more communication between nurseries and the GFN team, and the potential need to explore returning to face to face training. As noted previously, however, lack of capacity and strategic direction has made this a challenge for the team.

Areas that nurseries had identified themselves as possible avenues for development were 1) engagement with parents and carers and 2) a community of practice group in order to work through emerging issues with other practitioners.

Engagement with parents and carers, and their response to GFN approaches was mixed; with some nurseries sharing that whilst they have “completed audit and ordered books on LGBT, not sure how parents will react but trying to involve parents more sensitively.” highlighting a real thoughtfulness around bringing parents and carers alongside the nursery in their GFN journey.

As another nursery staff member told us; “What I find most challenging is communicating it to the families, I’m wary of how to challenge them, I don’t want to be saying you’re doing the wrong thing or I’m criticising them. I’m not sure how to overcome that, I’d love to hear from other GFN nurseries about what they do”. This is a recurring theme from the previous evaluation, and as such should be considered in work going forward.

Whilst those who attended the online training reported that they enjoyed the training and found it useful, few have gone on to complete the audit; something that the nurseries who have completed it have found incredibly useful. Whilst this tool has the potential to have real impact on resources and play, in our research, it became apparent that ELC settings are incredibly stretched, and the looser the evaluation and audit tools were, the better. For example, they felt the observations they made of children’s play and staff’s own behaviour showed the impact of the programme rather than utilising or developing paper work heavy tools to capture impact.

As such, in our fourth conversation with the GFN team we discussed whether the language used to describe the “audit” was appropriate, and if this may be off-putting to already over-stretched staff teams. In these discussions, it was apparent that the use of language such as “reflective tool” or “resources” would be more advantageous.

Overall, however, despite the lack of take up on the audit tool, programme attendees shared how positive the programme has been for children and staff; with one commenting:

“ We have seen children being happier in that they are seen and represented in books, and conversations with staff and children are deeper than previously now that staff have the tools for



communication, especially when it's conversations such as 'only girls can be princesses' and talking through how they got to that"

## Nurseries across Scotland

In a separate survey, we also asked 67 respondents from a variety of nurseries across Scotland to share their thoughts on gender equal practice in ELC settings, to get a sense of what else may be occurring across Scotland that GFN could link in to, as well as identifying any barriers that may prevent nurseries from engaging in gender equality training<sup>48</sup>.

We asked if these respondents had heard of any of the following resources;

- 16% had heard of Gender Action Schools Award
- 54 % had heard of Education Scotland/ Improving Gender Balance programme
- 22% had heard of the You Can Be Campaign
- 12% had heard of Breaking the Mould
- 50% had heard of Let Toys be Toys
- 22% had heard of Just like a Child
- 26% had heard of GenderEYE Toolkit
- 6% had heard of Gender Loops Toolbox
- And 68% had heard of The Gender Friendly Nursery

48% of respondents never used any GFN resources. As the GFN programme is only directed at nurseries in Glasgow, this is unsurprising, however it gives a sense of if the programme is well known outside of the Glasgow area.

When asked if they had seen good practice around gender equality in ELC settings, 58% of respondents said yes, with 42% stating they had not, of those that had, most comments were related to general practice, such as "we encourage staff to practice gender equality through language for instance, we are encouraged to use terms such as 'Teachers' instead of 'ladies' or refrain from saying 'boys and girls' " rather than relating it to any particular training or resource, with some mentioning GFN explicitly.

79% of respondents who had not received any gender equalities training wished to receive it, and what would help them to attend included;

- Timing 58.3%
- More resource in nursery to cover staff when they're on training 53.3%
- Mixture of online and offline 41.7%
- All online 45.0%

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<sup>48</sup> Survey respondents represent a self-selecting sample, with respondents contacted either directly through GFN mailing lists or self-selecting to respond through social media requests

- All offline 6.7%

## What are the barriers for other nurseries in taking part in gender equality training?

### **Lack of understanding around gender equality:**

Of all respondents, most people had a clear understanding of what gender equality means and why it is important for the early years. However, some understandings were rooted in misunderstanding around fairness and a sense that “boys and girls just play with the things they want”, whilst two responses spoke to a sense that gender equality means “Wokeness, toxic feminism/misandry”.

Whilst these responses may not have come from nurseries themselves, as this survey was open to all and completed online, comments made to us in interviews from two other respondents as well as further survey comments, highlighted the need to be mindful of the myth of equality, and challenge misconceptions around inclusion and intersectional inequality.

One interview respondent told us “some staff felt like it was saying men were the problem, a few folk in other nurseries felt it was harsh on men and making people feel rubbish” and another telling us in response to the questions around the use of an intersectional lens “What message are we giving to young white boys?”.

This was further reinforced by the majority of nurseries who responded to this survey, who shared they haven’t focused on gender equality work as “I don't think it really plays a huge part in our Nursery because we are inclusive.”

### **Resourcing**

Other barriers included; “we are a work in progress” or “we can’t afford new resources” as well as training and resourcing issues, with one saying “since the introduction of 1140 hours, less trained staff in the setting with less awareness. Short staffing and long hours mean the workload is becoming unmanageable”.

When thinking about how to engage with new nurseries then, it may be useful for the GFN team to think about how to bring to life different strategies to target different resistance. For example, who is the “moveable middle” and whose mind can’t be changed? What strategies and engagement tools do we need to use for these different groups?<sup>49</sup> How can GFN or other partners support resourcing to enable the work to happen?

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<sup>49</sup> See here for more guidance

<https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/-/media/ResourceCentre/PublicationsandResources/PVAW/Encountering-Resistance-Gender-Equality.pdf>

### **Lack of training opportunities on intersectional inequality**

For the nurseries who responded to the survey; 44.6% had received training in disabilities (and particularly around ASN), 30% had received training around Race; 21.5% on Sexuality; 35.4% on Human rights; 16.9% on Environmental crisis and 35.4% had not received training on any of these issues. Whilst all of these issues are interrelated, we did not find any training opportunities that would address these issues using an intersectional lens. This reveals a gap between policy making around equalities and practical application, as noted in the Policy Coherence chapter.

### **Whole team engagement**

For respondents, the following learning options were thought to be helpful if they were to attend training:

- Training sessions for the whole team 80.3%
- Professional accreditation schemes 49.2%
- Online workshops 60.7%
- Online resources 54.1%
- Printed materials 50.8%
- Mentoring support 26.2%
- Peer to peer workshops 21.3%

With over 80% of respondents calling for whole staff training, the GFN team may wish then to consider returning to whole staff training alongside the accreditation model

In the next section, we explore where the programme could go next, based on our conversations with the GFN team, stakeholders and nurseries.

## **Strategic challenges for the programme**

Whilst the strategic environment should provide ample opportunities for GFN to flourish, we found a number of national and strategic barriers to developing and resourcing the programme. These are;

- o **The policy environment is confusing and private providers are not always well suited to implement public policies:** There is a wide range of potentially relevant policy documentation available, which is incredibly challenging for practitioners to navigate. Most practitioners cannot keep up to date with all this and need a simple framework that can be applied across different contexts. Relatedly, Urban et al note in their paper on global early childhood programmes post-Covid that “too often, the local delivery of programs remains segmented and follows established practices rooted in distinct traditions, professions, and disciplines: for example, health, pre-primary education, and developmental psychology. Additionally, an

increasing presence of private providers operating for profit in a supposed market makes it difficult, if not impossible, to implement public policies aimed at the integration of services for young children, their families, and communities across different sectors.”<sup>50</sup> While this is a point about the global situation around early years work, this feels very true in Scotland.

- o **There exists an implementation gap between national policies and local delivery:** Whilst national policy does support gender equality in ELC settings as outlined above, there is little guidance for practitioners or strategic leads of how to do this. For example, within 'Realising the ambition', there is a section on under 'what I need to grow and develop' on the impact of conscious and unconscious gender bias and gender stereotyped messages – a short overview of the important role of ELC practitioners in reflecting and challenging, but there is nothing on support available for them to do this, except signposting to other resources. Whilst outwith the scope of this evaluation, we recommend that when the GFN team makes representations at the strategic level to ensure that the importance of policy coherence and implementation is raised
- o **There is a lack of social and economic value placed on ELC practice:** As one nursery lead told us, they are “losing knowledge and skill set. It’s all down to funding- we’re never going to retain staff without that funding” Anecdotally from the evidence gathered practitioners aren’t moving around to different nurseries but are in fact leaving the ELC workforce all together. This may be due to low pay, long hours and the incredibly demanding work undertaken by a primarily young, working class and female workforce. Supporting the development of the ELC workforce should be a priority for any strategic interventions in how ELC is delivered in Scotland.
- o There is a lack of an intersectional lens and practice within national policies.
- o Whilst the Scottish Government and Scottish Funding Council have supported the work of preventative and early years work around gender equality, it is unclear how this has been enacted. Our recommendation around the funding environment is to pursue what the Funding Council’s new priorities are and what they funded under this banner from 2016 onwards, as this could potentially provide additional resource to GFN.

## What we found on where the programme could go next

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<sup>50</sup> Urban et al (2020) Post-Covid-19 to 2030: Early childhood programs as pathway to sustainability in times of global uncertainty. G20 Insights

We asked Leaders in Education and Learning (LEL), as well as stakeholders to tell us where they think the programme could go next, and how they might be positioned to support any future developments.

We were unable to secure focus groups or interviews with this group, however, we were able to receive email responses. When we asked how the GFN programme fits in with their work, we were told; “We would see the GFN programme fitting in with our current programmes we offer in Literacy for All at Early Level and other curricular areas”.

Leads also gave indicative support of further meetings to explore how the programme could work with education saying: “Possibilities for all suggestions about a further group discussion with education would be good to see how we can support moving forward.”

We also hosted a focus group with stakeholders to explore what their interactions have been with GFN and where they think the programme could get next.

This group spoke positively about the role of GFN in bringing gender equality into ELC settings, saying “the training is so important, giving people time to discuss and speak with one another. Linking up settings together is important and sharing best practice - sometimes people are more receptive to peer ideas. Basically a network of practitioners is gold dust.” reaffirming the impact of GFN in giving practitioners time and space to think through the issues and gain peer support.

They also noted that there is a lack of training for ELC practitioners around the use of an intersectional lens saying; “there’s no universal EDI training, so their knowledge is patchy, and their ability and confidence to talk about race is patchy.”

When asked what other organisations are doing similar work, they told us that “quite a few groups in the women’s sector.. are doing work near this- Amina, YWCA, ZT, the people who are making stuff for practitioners, LGBT Youth Scotland” as well as the TIE campaign. We recommend then, to enhance an intersectional lens and reduce the resourcing pressure on nurseries to attend multiple trainings around equalities, GFN could explore re-developing the programme alongside these partners.

For the stakeholders we spoke to, the sense was that GFN should be further resourced to do “development work with nurseries” as well as “scaled up and expanded across equality strands” and that “GFN hasn’t had the profile it merits to test and measure impact. Needs to be a national programme rolled out across early years”. As we found however, this was not due to staff reticence or lack of attempts to raise the profile, rather the biggest barrier for the GFN team to do this was in fact resourcing and that the current remit is to work within Glasgow City.

In the next section, we outline a theory of change that GFN could formally adopt as well as outline our recommendations in order to meet these outcomes.

## A theory of change

Drawing on our desk review, interviews, surveys and focus groups, we worked with the GFN team to develop a draft theory of change towards the end of our evaluation. This process is outlined below.

High level priorities: The programme is linked with other national strategic outcomes- equally safe at work, long term employment opportunities within the public sector, gender budget analysis

There are improved long term mental health and employment outcomes for girls and boys  
Children's development and play is more gender equal

**GFN mission and vision: To create nurseries where children, staff and families are not limited by the social expectation places on them because of their gender, and where everyone can be protected from the many limiting negative consequence of gender inequality and discrimination.**

GFN objectives are therefore: A core group of nursery practitioners are sustained and supported and there is an establishment of a strong community of practice.

To do this:

- Every nursery in Glasgow has had the opportunity to engage with some training/engagement around gender equality: face to face
- A number of nurseries nationally are working on gender equality in depth and in a sustained way
- Every nursery in Scotland has had some training/engagement around gender equality: via access to online resources and online training

The activities we need to do this are:

- Mentoring & discussion groups for nursery practitioners
- Face to Face training
- Online training
- Audit & 10 step action plan for nursery teams
- Discussion prompts for ELC staff to use with their teams
- Full package of training and tools made available online- with the caveat that these should be updated regularly

The people who we need round the table to do this are

- GCC LEL and equalities dept
- NHS Health Improvement team(s)

- Zero Tolerance or another national VAWG, equalities or mental health organisation
- Education Scotland
- Other global citizenship groups

Based on our conversations and data gathering with stakeholders, strategic leads and the GFN team, in the following section, we outline our recommendations for future travel;

## Recommendations

1. In the first instance **GFN and Zero Tolerance should agree on the scope of their partnership** as well as the capacity to deliver. Whilst GFN is restricted to delivering within Glasgow City, Zero Tolerance has national reach, which could be used to promote learning from the local programme at the national level, or to support the development of other local initiatives based on the GFN model.
2. Thereafter, **GFN and Zero Tolerance teams should develop a resourcing plan;** including staffing and other costs, to be able to fully develop a plan for future funding and co-design opportunities. This could include costing for Glasgow based work, as well as the cost of delivering this project in other local authority areas with Zero Tolerance as the lead, depending on the agreements made around what the partnership could look like.
3. **The GFN team secure strategic support for this work within Health Improvement, and Zero Tolerance should raise the profile of GFN at the national level.** The programme already has been seen to be linked to national priorities, the evidence base around tackling inequalities and local improvement plans. However, there's been limited practical and strategic support and a lack of strategic linkage between work in Glasgow and national facing work. GFN should be able to share local learning at the national level to support national understanding of good practice on the ground.
4. **The GFN team raise awareness at the national level around the importance of closing the implementation gap and the need for better policy coherence.** As noted there are many areas of policy that support the need for a programme such as GFN, however, there are also many gaps between policy and implementation that would need to be filled in order for funding to be sourced and the programme itself be prioritised. This could be supported by the reach Zero Tolerance has and that it convenes the Gender Equal Play working group, as well as within other working groups as outlined in the Policy and Practice chapter.
5. **Further, the GFN team alongside Zero Tolerance should advocate for the development of the ELC workforce;** this includes highlighting the high turnover rate of the workforce

relating to the intensity of the work, the low wages and the impact of the additional funded hours.

6. **The GFN team secure more resourcing to develop this programme of work; including partnership working with third sector organisations.** There are potential in roads in relation to the national policy as well as the national funding environment, and nurseries by and large are keen to undertake this training. Whilst few nurseries have been able to take forward the accreditation, there is a desire to be engaged, to do audits and to work towards professional accreditation. Taking a partnership approach to the programme will support the development of funding opportunities, learning around intersecting inequalities and strategic prioritisation, as well as support the GFN team to develop nursery specific strategies for engagement. Whilst Education Scotland has been identified as a potential partner for this work, and have been flagged by nurseries themselves as someone who holds resources, they have not engaged thus far with the evaluation. Identifying other equalities partners interested in this programme of work and developing a co-designed funding arrangement may be more useful.
7. **The GFN team update resources to tackle intersecting inequalities.** This should be done in partnership with other equalities organisations as outlined above, and should be taken on as a priority. Nurseries fed back to us that many had not received any equalities training, and by working with other organisations, GFN could potentially enhance take up of the programme by re-developing the work to incorporate an intersectional analysis, and develop a model for collaborating with other equalities organisations.
8. **The GFN team return to whole school approaches to delivering the programme, with additional components focusing on parent/carer engagement and men in the workforce.** A whole school approach was seen by many nurseries as the most helpful way of delivering training. As such, it may be more useful for the GFN team to return to direct delivery with all staff. A whole school approach could also support the creation of a support network for practitioners to explore parent/carer engagement, challenging conversations and problem solving.
9. As this is likely to involve more resource, we propose **GFN consider that the programme be delivered to a small cohort of Glasgow based nurseries;** from training, to peer support across ELC settings to support with the audit tool and accreditation. This is likely to have more impact than a light touch model aiming to work with a broad range of nurseries, reduce message dilution and support a more focused approach to engaging with different nurseries. This could be limited to 5 in the first instance to road test this model of working. As nurseries were mixed on their feelings towards face to face or online modes of delivery, it could be possible to design a more bespoke package involving either online or offline aspects of the programme according to each particular nursery's needs. The audit tool



could also be redeveloped as a more collective, reflective tool whereby the process of completing as a staff team is just as important as the results . This model would also enable the GFN team to **more deeply capture the impact of the programme**, with potential learning gathered from child observations and family/carer engagement. Each cohort of nurseries would be provided with bespoke support to capture changes in staff and children's play and language in a way that was child led and reflective of the constraints each individual nursery is under.

10. If funding and strategic support is unable to be secured; **the programme could be streamlined to provide online training and audit support for a small cohort of nurseries.** It is not recommended that resources are available online without training or support due to organisational and reputational risk and the dilution of the training message. Should no financial support be forthcoming, it is recommended that in terms of legacy planning, the learning from GFN be shared with other equalities and statutory agencies.



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