Agenda Item	18.
Report No	CLH 55/19

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Care, Learning and Housing

Date: 21 August 2019

Report Title: Deferred and Early Entry to School

Report By: Chief Executive

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 The "*Give Them Time*" campaign was launched in October 2018 aiming to achieve "a more transparent, consistent and child-centred approach to considering funding requests for an extra year of nursery for a child who has a legal right to be deferred". The campaign met with Maree Todd, the Minister for Children and Young People, in January 2019. Scottish Government officials have subsequently indicated that there is no appetite for additional legislation and would not be supporting the campaign's call for all discretionary referrals to be funded due to the potential resources required. Highland Council has now updated its policy to ensure that the transparency, consistency and child-centred decision making that was sought is more explicitly delivered by our processes.

1.2 Simultaneously, there was a need to clarify the guidance and policy around requests for early entry to school.

2. Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:

i. Approve the Guidance (at **Appendix A)** on being educated out-with the peer group including deferred and early entry to school.
ii. Note the supporting information and references

3. Implications

3.1 Resource - Since no additional funding is coming for an additional year of ELC when the child's birthday falls between the first day of term in August and 31st December, any failure to follow this guidance may result in additional expense when unfunded

deferral requests have to be granted.

3.2 Legal - All decisions about education provision in this area takes account of the relevant education legislation.

3.3 Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural) - The consistent application of this Guidance across the Highlands addressed equality and rural issues. *The fact that some parents may elect to pay for another year of ELC whilst others cannot may exacerbate poverty related issues and needs to be considered further. However, with external funding available this will need to be considered in terms of budget.*

3.4 Climate Change / Carbon Clever - There are no climate change implications arising from this report.

3.5 Risk - There are no risk implications arising from this report.

3.6 Gaelic - This guidance will operate in all settings and therefore there are no specific Gaelic implications to it.

4. Introduction

4.1 Under current legislation, parents of children aged 4 years old at the start of the school session in August (i.e. those with their 5th birthday on or after the first day of term in August and up to the end of February the following year) have the option to request a deferral about enrolling their child for primary school. These children can start school before they are 5 or can defer their start until the following August. Most parents choose to send their child to school as soon as they are eligible to start. This guidance explains what a parent or carer should do if they do NOT wish to send their child to school as soon as they are eligible.

4.2 In April COSLA agreed that local authorities be asked that the following high-level principles be incorporated into their approach to deferrals going forward:

- There is a consistent approach to communications about the rights of parents to defer their child's entry into P1, which includes:
- That any child born between the school commencement date and December has the legal right to defer.
- A distinction between the legal right to defer and the local authorities' discretion to fund the additional year of ELC for children born between commencement date and December.
- The right for children born in January and February to defer and to be guaranteed an additional year of ELC.
- When considering deferrals for children born between the school commencement date and December local authorities should retain their discretion with decisions made in line within local policies and procedures.
- Local authorities will be clear about who is involved in the decision-making process for the deferral funding decision and that local policies and procedures are freely available to the public.

4.3 On page 3 of the guidance there are a range of factors which need to be considered by parents and professionals when considering requesting and approving a deferral. It is intended that these give all concerned a clear and transparent start point for discussions.

5. Deferred Entry

5.1 There are two different processes, depending on when the child is born. If their child's birthday falls within January or February and they wish to defer entry to primary school, their child is entitled to an additional year of provision within an ELC setting. Continued funding is available to support this entitlement. The guidance explains how parents should communicate this wish.

5.2 However, If the child's birthday falls between the first day of term in August and 31st December, the situation is more complex should a parent/carer wish to request to defer entry to school. These children have no automatic entitlement and no central government funding is made available to support an additional ELC year for these children.

5.3 In both cases the guidance lays out the process through which parents should make their wishes known and by which officers will reach a decision about the request.

6. Early Entry

6.1 Arrangements for entry to primary schools in Highland are on a once a year basis - at the start of the new session in August each year. Only children whose fifth birthday falls between 1st March of that year and the last day of February of the following year will automatically be admitted to school. However, in exceptional cases, parents/carers may wish to make a request for early entry to primary school for a child whose fifth birthday falls after the 28th February the following year. The guidance (Page 8) lays out a range of factors that need to be considered by the parents before arriving at this decision.

6.2 If parents wish to request early entry they should apply to the school once enrolment starts. Due to the time required to complete an assessment of the child in relation to this request, it is essential that requests be made to the Area EQIM in good time, to allow the procedures to be followed and to ensure that should the request be granted, the child would be able to commence school at the start of the new session.

Designation: Chief Executive

Date: 13 August 2019

Author: James Vance, Interim Head of Education

Background Papers:

- Appendix A - Guidance on being educated outwith the peer group including deferral and early entry to school
  - Appendix 1 of Guidance: Research Findings
  - Appendix 2 of Guidance : References

Guidance on being educated out-with the peer group including deferred and early entry to school

Updated May 2019

Introduction

This guidance relates to individual children who are placed within a class of a different age group. It does not apply to mixed age (composite) classes, where the child is part of an age-matched peer group within the class.

This document sets out the council's position in relation to additional years, often referred to as deferral, retention, being held back or having an advantage year; and advanced years, in the early years this is often referred to early entry to school.

This is a complex area and can be contentious, with varying views, however across a number of studies, it has been found that there is no significant difference in long term academic outcomes between children who are educated alongside their age peers and those who have been advanced or retained by a year (Bonvin, Bless & Scheupbach, 2008; Ehmke, Dreschel & Cartensen, 2010; Lamote,Pinxten,Noorgate & Damme, 2014). This finding has been replicated at both an early school level and a secondary school level.

There is an agreed process for parents and staff to follow if it is being considered that a pupil be educated out-with their peer group and this guidance provides details of the process agreed by Highland Council.

Guiding Principles

These guidelines are rooted in a philosophical framework which recognises that:-

- As a general rule, children should be educated with their year group.
- Parents are the primary educators of their children and work in partnership with early years and school staff to support their children and young people throughout their educational experience.
- Children have a right to an education that is focused on the development of their personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential (UNCRC article 29).
- Early years establishments and schools should provide the right help to the right child at the right time and provide an adapted and differentiated curriculum to meet the needs of children and young people with any additional support needs.
- Decisions made that relate to children and young people should be based on information specific to those children and young people and also based on best practice.

CONTENTS

Issues to consider for any child educated outside their chronological year group

This guidance relates to individual children who are placed within a class of a different age group. It does not apply to mixed age (composite) classes, where the child is part of an age-matched peer group within the class.

Requests for children to have a 'repeat year' or to advance a year once they start school, can happen at any stage. The same general rule applies in all cases - **children should be educated with their chronological year group**. However, it is helpful to consider the following before any final decisions are made following a request from a parent/carer.

- has the child recently moved to Scotland and been educated in a particular stage already eg a child from an armed forces family who had already transferred to S1 in England, but may be the same age as P7 pupils in Highland. Evidence suggests that changing schools can negatively impact on academic attainment and it may be that having time in primary rather than moving into an S1 class mid-way through a session could settle a pupil emotionally and make this transition more successful for them academically, in the longer run;
- is the child particularly able and mature and only misses the age 'cut off' by a few days;
- if the child already has had an advanced year or been accelerated into an older peer group and this request is to move them again, back with their age peers, will this cause further confusion and disruption for the child;
- what level of differentiation and accommodation can be made to meet the child's developmental needs within their peer group;
- placing the child in another year group may deny some other child a place at that setting;
- as they mature the child may realise that the rest of the class are of a different age, causing an emotional impact;
- the child may begin puberty at a different time from their classmates, which could be confusing for them;
- if the request is for an additional year with a younger age group, the child will be eligible to leave school at 16, and if they have had an additional year, may leave without completing their education, or gaining qualifications;
- other interventions may be more appropriate in the long-term and assuming an additional year will help the child develop, may delay these interventions;
- the needs of a child with significant additional support needs are unlikely to change substantially in 12 months;
- children learn a great deal from their peers, and receive social, emotional, and academic support from each other;
- the evidence (see Appendix 1) suggests that placing students in a different year group rarely makes a positive difference and can lead to negative long-term effects;
- the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child requires local authorities and parents to ensure that children are educated in a way that develops their personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential. (article 29)

These statements are not conditions to be met, or a checklist for parents and practitioners, but issues that may be helpful to consider in the overall discussion when a request is made.

Deferring a Child's Entry to School

Under current legislation, parents of children aged 4 years old at the start of the school session in August (i.e. those with their 5th birthday on or after the first day of term in August and up to the end of February the following year) have the option to request a deferral about enrolling their child for primary school. These children can start school before they are 5 or can defer their start until the following August.

Most parents choose to send their child to school as soon as they are eligible to start. The following information explains what a parent or carer should do if they do NOT wish to send their child to school as soon as they are eligible.

Reasons for Deferral

If parents/carers have any concerns or wish to discuss their child's entry to school, staff will always be happy to help better understand their child's progress and needs and to support them in considering the issues pertinent to their child. Parents may be concerned that their child is not socially or academically able to cope with the demands of school and formal education and it may be helpful for them to visit the P1 class and/or to discuss aspects of the early level curriculum with the Head Teacher.

Different processes apply according to the reasons why a parent may make a request for their child to defer and also according to when the child has their birthday.

In all instances parents and carers should be encouraged to discuss this first with the Head Teacher or Manager of the early learning and childcare (ELC) setting the child attends, which may also include a child minder.

Requests to Defer Entry to P1

The evidence (see Appendix 1) shows that placing children with classes of younger peers, at best makes no difference to outcomes, and at worst can lead to poorer emotional health, leaving school early, lower attainment, and poorer employment outcomes. The only compelling reason to defer is if there is general agreement that the 12 months will allow the child to develop to a point where they will be able to more independently access the curriculum alongside their stage peers.

No research evidence consistently identifies any groups or circumstances in which it is helpful to place a child outside their normal year group. However, common sense suggests that there may be some exceptional situations in which deferred entry could be considered an intervention. For example:

- the child may have temporary additional support needs affecting their development,
- the child has only recently arrived into the UK and has not experienced ELC at the same level as their peers and needs time to adjust to nursery/school life,
- the child may have missed a lot of ELC through illness,
- the child has a summer birthday and was born very prematurely.

For children with significant additional support needs, deferred entry may be considered as an intervention if it is agreed by the child's parents and the core team around the child that this would be in their best interests. However it should be noted that in most situations the child will continue

to have significant needs, even with an additional ELC year and so it is most often better to assess the needs of the child and agree an appropriate support package for school rather than deferring school entry.

In all cases where the child's school entry is to be deferred due to their additional support needs, the reason why the ELC setting is the best place to meet the child's needs should be noted as an intervention on the Child's Plan, with clear targets to be worked on within this additional year. For those children whose school entry is significantly deferred i.e. those for whom deferral will make them 6 years old prior to the first day of term on the following year, a request for assistance and advice must be made to the Educational Psychology Service, to ensure that an Educational Psychologist can add to the assessment process and can be consulted on the decision to defer, with involvement requested in good time.

By the time they reach the age of 4 or 5 years old, there are already differences in each child's development, learning, and levels of independence. Parents and carers may be considering a request to defer their child's entry to school simply because they feel that their child is not yet ready to enter Primary 1. In such circumstances it may be helpful to consider the general development of the child using a very broad range of criteria. Assessment at this stage should be completed by ELC staff, who are asked to ensure the child's assessment record is backed by evidence that shows the areas of immaturity and development. This assessment process may include information and assessments completed by other professionals working with the child, to provide a wider context upon which the final decision can be made. Developmental overviews monitored in all settings by Early Years Education Support Officers, are also key to reaching the correct decision.

If parents/ carers are concerned about whether or not their child is ready for school, they should speak directly to the staff who care for their child and/or to the Head Teacher or Manager of the ELC setting their child attends. This initial discussion can take place at any stage in the child's pre-school year. At that and/or subsequent meetings, discussion should focus on the child's progress in their pre-school education, with a particular emphasis on the child's:

- approach and attitude to learning
- ability to communicate their own needs, feelings and ideas
- levels of independence and self help
- emotional and personal development, including self-confidence and esteem
- their relationships and friendships with other children and adults
- additional support needs

Discussions should include:

- the opinion of the child, parents, school and other staff involved about whether it is right for the child and their family
- making sure parents understand any likely future issues
- checking that the child will integrate effectively into the new group
- making sure that any other services the child needs are also involved
- making sure there is a plan for what happens after that year
- checking that the decision is being made for the child's benefit and with cognisance of their right to be educated with their peers.

Requests relating to January - February birth dates

Parents of children with birthdays close to the end of the February cut-off date for school entry, are sometimes concerned about whether their child is ready to start school.

If their child's birthday falls within **January or February** and they wish to defer entry to primary school, their child is **entitled to an additional year** of provision within an ELC setting. Continued funding is available to support this entitlement.

Parents/carers should speak directly to the Head Teacher or Manager of the ELC setting their child attends. They should be asked to complete an enrolment form for an ELC place for the following session. These children will be automatically **prioritised** for a continued place.

Requests relating to August (after the start of term) - December birth dates

If the child's birthday falls between **the first day of term in August and 31st December**, the situation is more complex should a parent/carer wish to request to defer entry to school.

These children have no automatic entitlement and no central government funding is made available to support an additional ELC year for these children.

A request for deferred entry should be made in writing to the Head Teacher/Manager of the ELC setting, who will alert the Early Years Education Support Officer, to start the process for considering the request. The Head Teacher/Manager of the ELC setting can provide information to the EYESO, but can not make the decision about an additional placement and should therefore not give any assurances to the parent about the possible outcome of their request.

In all cases parents/ carers should be advised to also consider enrolling their child for a Primary One place as this ensures a place will be available should their application for a funded deferred place be unsuccessful **or** should they decide nearer to the start of term, that they do wish their child to start school in August.

Decisions about deferral are best made as part of the ongoing profiling of a child and the dialogue with the parents which should take place in the ELC setting their child attends. The information gathered about the child within their ELC profile should form a sound basis for the discussion with their family.

An individual assessment should be made of each application for deferred entry received for children with August (after the start of term) to December birth dates. Assessment at this stage should be completed by staff in the ELC setting, working alongside the Early Years Education Support Officer, who is asked to ensure the child's assessment record is backed by evidence that shows the areas of immaturity and development. This assessment process may include information and assessments completed by other professionals working with the child, to provide a wider context upon which the final decision can be made and how the child's needs could still be met if they transition to school at this stage. Information from the Developmental Overview for the child will also be helpful.

This information will then be passed to the Area Education Quality Improvement Manager (EQIM), who will consider the request and the evidence available and provide a formal written response to the parent/carer. Where it is agreed that a child will significantly benefit if their entry to school is deferred, a continued ELC place may be agreed by the Area EQIM. The cost of this place will be met by the Council.

Even if a parent/carer has been offered a deferred entry place they can change their mind and decide to send their child to school right up until the start of term in August. However, if they do decide to defer their child's entry they must let the school know that they will not require the Primary 1 place.

What will happen if the parents/carers do not agree with the decision?

If the EQIM does not agree that the child should have a funded additional ELC place, and the parents/carers do not agree with the decision reached, they have an opportunity to appeal against that decision. Information on how to appeal will be included in the letter sent to them.

The appeal will be conducted by the Area Care and Learning Manager on the basis of the information already available regarding the child plus any additional information the parents/carers may wish to add. **The decision of this appeal will be final.**

Possible decisions are:

- The child can defer entry to school and the local authority will fund the additional ELC year.
- It is not in the best interests of the child to defer entry to school and the request for an additional funded pre-school year is not agreed. The child should either start school with their age peers in August or the parent can choose to find an alternative ELC placement and be responsible for meeting the cost of the provision.

Early Entry into School

Arrangements for entry to primary schools in Highland are on a once a year basis - at the start of the new session in August each year. Only children whose fifth birthday falls between 1st March of that year and the last day of February of the following year will automatically be admitted to school. It is however in exceptional cases, parents/carers may wish to make a request for early entry to primary school for a child whose fifth birthday falls after the 28th February the following year.

If parents/carers are concerned about whether or not their child should enter school early, they should speak directly to the staff who care for their child and/or to the Head Teacher or Manager of the ELC setting the child attends. At that and/or subsequent meetings, discussion should focus on the child's progress in their early level education.

Discussions should include:

- the opinion of the child, parents, school and other staff involved about whether it is right for the child and their family
- making sure parents understand any likely future issues
- checking that the child will fit into the new class
- taking into account the long-term effects on the child
- making sure that any other services the child needs are also provided
- the effect on children who might otherwise get the place
- checking that the decision is being made for the child's benefit
- a child moving from a school setting in another country

Parents/carers should be aware of the following issues associated with early entry into primary school.

Physical development

Is the child physically mature enough to cope with a full-time programme of education?

School places physical demands on children for approximately five hours each day. If the child is not physically mature enough to deal with the school situation, problems may arise in relation to:

- concentration on a task
- mastering of basic learning skills
- acceptance by other children in relation to the demands of both classroom and playground activities

Emotional/social development

Is the child emotionally and socially mature enough to cope with a full-time programme of education?

As a consequence of early admission to school the child would be younger than the other pupils in the class. Difficulties may arise for the child in relation to:

- separating from parents and carers
- making friends with others within the class group
- play activities within the classroom and the playground
- behavioural problems due to lack of maturity

Cognitive development

Has the child developed sufficiently to cope with the learning demands in a school?

The child learns informally through play and through other individual, social and family experiences in the ELC period. Early entry to school may reduce the opportunities for such activities and experiences, which prepare them for the more formal learning situation.

Long-term implications

Have the parents/carers considered the long-term implications for the child throughout their career?

- the evidence (see Appendix 1) suggests that placing students in a different year group rarely makes a positive difference and can lead to negative long-term effects;
- it may emerge during P1 that the child is not ready to proceed to P2, because of difficulty in adjusting to the school learning environment;
- it may emerge during P7 that the child is not ready to proceed to SI in secondary school;
- at the end of secondary education the child may be too young or immature to successfully transition to work or higher education;
- as they mature the child may realise that the rest of the class are of a different age causing an emotional impact;
- the child may begin puberty at a different time from their classmates, which could be confusing for them;
- the child will not be eligible to leave school until their 16th birthday. Starting school early will mean that the child will not be eligible to leave after completing formal examinations in S4 and therefore may miss the start date for a college course generally available at the end of the summer term to S4 school leavers.

Early entry requests

A press advertisement will appear in the local press in the month prior to enrolment, advising parents and carers of the procedures for enrolling their child in primary school. Applications for early entry to primary school should also be made at this time to the Education Quality Improvement Manager (EQIM), in order to allow requests to be processed timeously.

Parents or carers do not have to give reasons for making an early entry request. It is however helpful to have this information and if there are more requests than places available, this information could be requested.

Due to the time required to complete an assessment of the child in relation to this request, it is essential that requests be made to the Area EQIM in good time, to allow the procedures to be followed and to ensure that should the request be granted, the child would be able to commence school at the start of the new session.

Parents/carers should complete an ELC enrolment form along with the written early entry request, to ensure that the child has an ELC place if the application for early entry is unsuccessful.

What happens next?

Arrangements will be made to meet with the parents and where necessary to see the child. There may be sufficient information from the early years setting the child has been attending, or the child may be able to be observed in this setting or at home, but in some circumstances, it may be necessary to assess the child more formally. Parents/carers will be informed of how information on their child will be gathered and the nature of any planned assessment.

The information will usually be gathered by the Early Years Education Support Officer (EYESO), who are specialists in ELC education. If the child attends an ELC establishment a report will be requested from the establishment. The purpose of the report will be to determine whether the child has reached the level of development which will allow them to settle happily into a primary one class.

Following this period of information gathering and assessment, a report will be sent from the EYESO to the Area EQIM, with a copy to the parents/carers. If it is decided that the request should be granted, parents/carers will receive a letter inviting them to enroll their child in primary school.

In considering requests for early entry the authority must take into account the normal constraints affecting the provision of education generally. Therefore, in determining any request, in addition to making an assessment of the child's suitability, the authority will require to consider whether additional resources, in terms of staff or adaptation of school buildings or facilities will require to be committed as a result of the early entry request.

If the authority decides to refuse the request, the parents/carers will be advised in writing. **There is no right of appeal against a refusal of an early entry request.**

Appendix 1 Research on the impact of education out-with the peer group and Appendix 2 References can be accessed at this link

https://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/file/12333/guidance_on_being_educated_out-with_the_peer_group_including_deferred_and_early_entry_to_school_research_and_references

Guidance on being educated out-with the peer group including deferred and early entry to school

Appendix 1

Research on the impact of education out with the peer group

Executive Summary

Deferred Entry:

- Deferral characteristics vary, with choices made primarily around birthdate and maturation effects. There is some concern over the delayed identification of needs and the influences parents may have in choosing to defer, with advice often sought from fellow parents and professionals out with education.
- Negative effects can be observed in the long term when children are placed substantially out with their chronological year group.

Retention:

- Retention at worst results in small negative effects on achievement, but this depends on the method of analysis employed. Alternatively, there is either no effect which justifies the practice.
- Social, emotional and behavioural outcomes may vary over time; with an initial boost to begin with. But these effects do not last over time and indicate serious concerns in long term outcomes.

Early Entry:

- Academic performance relative to age varies, and comparisons to older age peers tend to show delay within younger entry students. This is dependent on the method of analysis, where age standard scores often show no deficit.
- Whilst social and emotional outcomes may not necessarily vary massively, there is scope to seriously consider the long term outcomes with further research as well as with the concerns over the possibility of bullying in the younger children.

Research Findings

Deferred Entry: the decision has been made, by reason of birthdate or another reason, that enrolment into the oncoming academic year is postponed until the following year. This will result in the child being older than their class level peers.

In examining the prevalence and characteristics of children who were more likely to defer, Graue (2000) reported that males were more likely to wait a year; whereas girls are likely to enter school early. Even for deferred entry males, they are still more likely to be retained in a later part of their school lifetime and to be referred to specialist services for additional needs. Those born just before summer, and would eventually be the youngest in their class that year, are likely to wait to enter school and subsequently more likely to be retained later in

their school career. Those eligible for a free school meal entitlement are more likely to be retained than deferred at school entry.

Within a Scottish context, the Scottish Government (2012) examined early primary school experiences. 87% of children started school in the August when they became eligible, whilst 13% had entry deferred. Of those children deferring entry, 42% of children were under 5 years of age, 49% were aged between 5.0 – 5.5 years and the minority (9%) were aged older than 5.5. years. Approximately half of children born in January or February deferred entry, with more boys starting school at a later age. The reasons for deferring as reported by parents, related to concerns regarding child being reported as 'not ready' (44%) or that they were too young (32%). 8% reported deferral due to health or developmental reasons and 5% reported that deferral was recommended by the child's nursery or health visitor. 10% did not provide a reason for deferring entry.

Notably, whilst the idea of deferred entry is based on the maturational perspective, which could explain the difference between higher rates of female early entry versus the higher rates of males deferred entry (Graue, 2000), the decision may itself be influenced by community perspectives. As Graue (1993) reported, trends in the community influence parents' decisions and standards to defer children. Parents of children in a younger setting stressed the importance of not pushing children too much, whilst parents of children at early primary level discussed the lack of challenge in early years.

In terms of investigating performance, a study by Jaekel, Strauss,Johnson,Gilmore and Wolke (2015) looked at achievement findings, comparing those who had delayed entry to school and those who entered school aged appropriately. They find that whilst teacher ratings on mathematics, reading and attention do not differ between the groups, standardized achievement on these outcomes are significantly lower for the delayed entry pupils as opposed to the age appropriate entry pupils. However, there is some caution to be applied as by the time this assessment was done, the age appropriate pupils had a greater level of time in education. Whilst the authors have attempted to demonstrate and correct findings based on this and speculate that there would continue to be a significantly lower level of achievement within the delayed entry group, this should be interpreted with caution.

Looking at a variety of outcomes, Martin (2009) examined curvilinear effects of younger and older secondary students. Three groups were stratified. In a 12-month age span, two groups were formed. One group was classed as 'young' if they fell into the lower 3-month band of the 12-month span. The other 'age appropriate' entry group was composed of students whose chronological age fell into the 3-12-month band. The third 'older for cohort' group were those whose chronological age was greater than the 12-month time span. For those older than their age appropriate peers, students were higher in disengagement, lower in positive intentions, homework completion and lower for literacy and numeracy performance. Younger for cohort students were reported as higher in their enjoyment for school, positive intentions, attendance rate, homework completion and higher in literacy and numeracy performance. Such work investigating the curvilinear trends is one of few, as most statistical analyses often consider there to be a linear effect of increased age and decreased performance, but this may not be the case.

In summary, there is evidence to suggest there may be short term academic benefits to deferral. But, there is a risk that whilst it is reported that this is a method to control for

developmental immaturity; it could fundamentally be postponing the need for specialist support which would otherwise be identified within chronologically placed education.

The placement of young people who are chronologically older than their peers can impact upon performance negatively through a host of behaviours which revolve around school disengagement. This can lead to a detriment in performance to academic attainment, as well as attendance.

Retention: Where children repeat a year at the same level because of poor academic achievement and/or lower capacities in cognitive, social or emotional skills. This often leads to the 'retainer' being placed amongst those out with their chronological age group, in that the retainer is typically one year older than new class mates.

Several factors are involved in the decision to retain. Davoudzadeh, McTernan and Grimm (2015) report that low academic ability in reading, writing and general knowledge skills were the biggest predictors of repeating a year. Younger entry males with lower motor skill ability as well as lower social and emotional skills were more likely to be retained. Whilst children from ethnic minorities were at a greater risk to be retained, it was dependent on whether English was or was not their primary language at home. The author's attribute this finding to the perception that teachers are likely to perceive any language difficulties within the minority group as a result of a barrier in learning a second language, whereas white individuals with English as a first language are more likely to be perceived as having a specific impairment. Huang (2014) also supports the finding of younger children being more likely to be retained if their approach to learning was significantly low. Huang also reported that children with a smaller height were also more likely to be retained, and this is likely to be associated with maturational viewpoints; as children who are taller are likely to be older and perceived more mature and ready to learn.

Finally, Davoudzadeh et al.(2015) note the school factors which may have an impact. Schools with pupils for whom the majority live in poverty was a big risk factor, as well as a composition with a large ethnic minority population. Schools that had a greater proportion of socially deprived individuals, who were from a minority ethnic groups, were more likely to retain students.

As noted in Docket and Perry (2013), the majority of retention literature cites children with "special needs" as a majority group for retention. One study by Barnett, Clarizio and Payette (1996) investigated the prevalence of retention amongst children with diagnosed learning disabilities (LDs). They find that retention practices often precede referral to specialist services. Individuals with LDs who had been retained were often a year older when referred to specialist services than those with LDs who had not been retained. Children with LDs who had been kept with their age peers, scored significantly higher on standardised measures of written expression and mathematical calculation. Whilst there was a difference in performances across these measures, the decrease in scores within the retained group cannot necessarily be attributed to the fact these children were retained. The findings of Barnett et al. are associational and descriptive of the practice of retention within children with LDs.

The decision to retain has been based on the likes of performance in academic areas, as well as social and emotional development. Such decisions are fundamentally based on

teacher assessment judgement. With academic performance being the biggest predictor (Davoudzadeh et al. 2015); some studies have matched and tracked those who are at equal risk of being retained due to lower academic ability. This has led to quasi-experimental designs consisting of one academically low achieving group transitioning as usual to the next level whilst the other, equally as low achieving group, is retained. Across a number of studies, it has been found that there is no significant difference in academic ability at baseline between these at risk groups who were promoted or retained (Bonvin, Bless & Scheupbach, 2008; Ehmke, Dreschel & Cartensen, 2010; Lamote,Pinxten,Noorgate & Damme, 2014). This finding has been replicated at both an early school level and a secondary school level.

Bonvin et al. pointed to factors which play a part in the teacher's perspective and the decision to retain. This was related to whether the teacher had a more positive attitude towards retention, viewed the child as developmentally immature and whether they under rated the child's performance in terms of their academic potential. As their findings indicated, teacher's had lower expectations of academic achievement for those that were going to be retained, as well as those children being more developmentally immature. The suggestion is that there is a significant level of inaccuracy in regards to the judgement of true academic performance, and this may be influenced by the likes of confirmation bias.

Wu, West and Hughes (2008) investigated the rate of growth in maths and reading. This involved children at around 6 years of age. When examining standardised mathematic achievement scores, the overall growth over 3 years was negative. This negative effect seemed to be stronger for those who were retained and did not possess English as a first language. However, the sample size considering English proficiency was relatively small and conclusions cannot be definitively drawn in regards to English as an additional language being a moderator of negative effect. Whilst standardised reading achievement scores showed a smaller growth for the retained individuals in comparison to the promoted, it was not statistically significant. However, the work of Gleason, Kwok and Hughes (2007) evidenced a significant difference in the repeat year, where retainers standardised scores on maths and literacy assessments were significantly lower than their promoted peers.

Work by Vandecandelaere, Vansteelandt, Fraine & Damme(2016) further examined the effects of early retention, but also examined whether prior achievement and age altered the effects. They examined a group at risk of being retained and stratified them by age and prior achievement. For low achieving children who were retained, there was a significantly large effect between them and the equally low achieving children who went through education with their age peers. Initially, performance takes a steep dip at the point of retention and gradually follows the typical trajectory of improved performance. However, there is a continuous gap between matched promoted peers and those who were retained, with retained students falling behind their matched peers. For the higher achieving at risk group, this trend continued but was no longer significant in the medium term. For those who were classified as at risk and younger in age, retention led to significantly lower performance across the short and medium term, whilst for the older group this effect was relatively short term. As a result of these findings, the authors suggest that continuous promotion would be likely to be a better solution as opposed to grade retention.

In secondary school, the effects of grade retention seem to be much the same in regards to achievement. However, Klapproth et al. (2016) reported that for secondary school students,

who were approximately 12 years old; retention predicted a boost in mathematics achievement in comparison to their promoted counterpart's grade performance. But, this advantage disappeared over time where eventually, there was no significant difference in performance in mathematics between the promoters and the retainers. Lamote et al(2014) mirrors a similar trend, with a steep decline in language achievement evidenced four years post retention year. Uysal (2010) estimated that academic outcomes, in particular the likelihood of graduation, ultimately worsened for anyone retained. The strength of that negative effect increased for those who were retained when they were older.

Typically, meta-analyses report medium to large negative effects of retention on academic outcomes (Bright,2011). A considerable portion of previous work has usually resulted in biased outcomes both in terms of deciding between same-age vs same-grade analysis, but also around issues of sample size and controlling for pre-existing effects. Ignorance of these factors by previous meta-analyses has ultimately led to inclusion of poor study designs and biased estimates of effects. Allen,Chen,Wilson & Hughes(2009) attempted to counteract this by analysing the impact of both same-grade vs same-age analysis on academic outcomes whilst also filtering out the studies which were of poor quality. They find that the methodological quality of work significantly impacted the intensity of the effect. When they ran the analysis, there was a significant negative effect of grade retention on academic outcomes when adopting the same-age analysis. There was however no effect whatsoever of retention on academic outcomes when looking at same-grade analysis. In other words, same-grade analysis findings indicated that there was no positive or negative outcome associated with retention and academic achievement. Same age analysis provided evidence of small negative effect, suggesting that retention leads to lower academic achievement.

Academic self-concept is defined as one's perception of academic ability (Villegas, Tomasini & Lagunes, 2013). The promotion of such a concept has been of high interest, as it predicts positive learning outcomes. Whilst Klapproth et al (2016) revealed initial positive effects which favoured the retainees in the short term, the benefits did not last in the medium term. There was no significant difference between promoters and retainers in their reported academic self-concept, school anxiety levels, student satisfaction with school or interest in learning. Notably, in Lamote et al. (2014), academic self-concept was found to be significantly greater within the retainees' year of retention in contrast to the promoters. Over the medium term, this increase in academic self-concept within the retainees dropped and remained at the same level as the promoters' self-concept. This short term boost in academic self-concept has been replicated in a secondary sample in Ehmke et al(2010). Cadiex (2003) report a similar finding amongst young, equally low achieving students who were either promoted or retained. In that, there was no significant difference in their academic self-concept over a short time period. However, Cadiex (2003) between subjects design consists of a relatively small sample, which means the results should be interpreted with caution as there may be an effect present but there has been insufficient observations to detect it.

Gleason, Kwok and Hughes (2007) investigated the impact of retention and peer relations during the year of retention. Those who were retained were accepted more by class peers than the promoted children. This was mediated by peer and teacher rated academic competence, in that the more competent academically the retainers were perceived the more accepted they were by their peers. However, this peer acceptance seems to be only applicable to the first year of retention, as peer liking of retainees seems to decrease

significantly in the long term (Wu, West & Hughes,2010). In addition to this, Wu et al., note that retained children report higher academic self-efficacy overtime in comparison to their promoted counterparts. Sense of school belonging was also higher in the short term, but failed to maintain itself in the long run.

Mathys, Veronneau and Lecocq (2017) examined retention and psychosocial adjustment for secondary school pupils. Their findings show that retained students show significant decreases in student self-esteem and perceived a significant lack of support from their parents which is either helpful or lacks meaningful involvement. The findings also indicate a lack of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, as well as social withdrawal.

Gleason et al., (2007) report finding a greater sense of peer acceptance amongst younger children who were retained; but they were also rated as less engaged in their school setting. Contrary to this, Wu et al (2010) indicate that teacher rated engagement was higher on the short term, yet did not differ from the promoted children in the long term. In addition, teacher rated hyperactivity was rated lower in the short and medium term, as well as peer rated withdrawal.

There may be an issue in sustainability of an effect in terms of retention. Or, for some outcome measures assessments, there was a bias in the assessment of engagement. It may be the case that the teachers who suggested retention may be re-assessing the child within the short term time period and selecting items which support teacher's decision and views of retention. By the time the child has progressed into a new classroom and entered the medium term assessments, the retained children have been assessed by a new teacher, independent of the retention decision.

For those in secondary education, as investigated by Mathys et al (2017), there were negative features of behaviour because of retention. There was a greater frequency of aggressive and delinquent behaviours amongst those who were retained. In addition to this, Martin (2011) presented a model for secondary school retention and its effects. The model predicted that retention resulted in higher absence rates from school, lower homework completion and was accompanied by the lower levels of academic self-concept and self-esteem.

Overall, the literature has placed most emphasis on tracking outcomes in either primary or secondary settings. There has been a question of further longitudinal work assessing the impact of retention, particularly from an early age right through to secondary school performance. One piece of work which examines exactly that is Jimerson and Ferguson (2007). They studied four groups: one which consisted of promoted (P) children, one which consisted of children suggested for retention but were promoted (RP), another with children who were retained (R) and a final group which was retained but attended a specialist transition programme (TR). Tracking of these four groups took place from primary entry and followed them through to secondary.

The findings initially suggested that academic achievement showed significantly higher academic performance amongst the P group, whilst the RP, R and TR groups did not differ to begin with. Towards the end of primary education, the group which was suggested to be retained but was promoted (RP) was found to be achieving significantly more academically in comparison to the retained R & TR groups. This continued to be the case throughout

secondary education. Notably however, the high school scores should be interpreted with caution, as there were high levels of school dropout from both retained groups. This dropout rate from school for retained students in comparison to promoted counterparts was significantly different. In addition to this, aggression scores amongst retained students were significantly higher than promoted students, including those who were recommended for retention but promoted.

Whilst caution is applied in interpreting the findings of Jimmerson and Ferguson (2007) due to the increased dropout rate leading to relatively small group sizes; similar findings have been replicated. Over a 10 year period in secondary children, Uysal (2010) found that that graduation from secondary education was less likely for retainers in contrast to promoters, and this was particularly prominent for males in contrast to females. Even in Mathys et al (2017), there are similar effects observed. Surprisingly, such effects of aggression related behaviours have not been observed in primary settings when examining the effects of retention.

In summary, two outcomes are likely to exist within the evidence for academic achievement. At worst, there is a small to medium impact of retention, in which it harms academic achievement. Or at best, there is no effect either positive or negative of retention on achievement, which proves difficult to justify the practice. Whilst same-grade comparisons and initial observations may show biased increases in the performance of retainers, it is likely that over time such observed advantages will disappear.

Early Entry: Where entry is earlier than expected, whether by birthdate or another reason, entry into the oncoming academic year is imminent. Children are significantly younger than their class level peers.

Reports published within the Institute of Fiscal Studies (Crawford, Dearden & Greaves, 2013) have synthesised various longitudinal studies and reported on early entry in England, where the academic year typically runs from the 1st of September to 31st of August. Most of local authority policies in England state that all children start school in the September they turn 4 years old. Those children who turn 4 at the end of the academic year are likely to be significantly younger than those who have birthdays at the beginning of the academic year, with the largest age gap being 11 months.

Crawford et al. (2013) indicate that the largest gaps between the youngest for cohort children and age appropriate entry children are strongest in the earlier stages of schooling, with an achievement gap of 26 percentage points between the two at age 7. This gap closes over time, with a gap of 6.5 percentage points at 16 years of age. The magnitude of this gap differs on assessment method, with standardised tests indicating a smaller gap as opposed to achievement on national curriculum tests. Such a finding leads the authors to question whether this is due to the appropriateness of the curriculum for the younger entry students, or bias in teacher judgement. Notably, these findings regarding the achievement gap have also been found by Fleishman (2007) within early primary, with gaps identified in mathematical and reading performance.

However, there remains the issue of same-age vs same grade analysis (or as the Crawford et al. refer to it: ‘same time effects’). If comparisons are made at the same time between age mismatched peers who share a classroom, the findings will bias the older children who are

more developed in their approach to learn (Huang,2014). But when same age analysis is utilised and the test is conducted at a different time where the ages between groups are comparable, there is no difference in performance regarding achievement.

In terms of social and emotional development, Crawford et al. (2013) show that difficulties (as measured by the Strengths and Difficulties questionnaire), are greater for younger entry students in comparison to older peers. This gap continues into late primary according to teacher observations. However, there is no data beyond this point, making it hard to determine true sustainability of the effect. For academic self-perceptions, younger students view themselves as academically incompetent at the ages of 8 and 14. Analysis indicates that the changes in self-perception can be explained considerably by the comparably lower academic performance in earlier stages. This is likely to feed into the fact that these younger students are less likely to consider university education. But for those younger students who do attend university, they tend to achieve more in their university education. Again, the same time effect of assessment applies to the measures of social and emotional development. The differences between older and younger students drop substantially when comparing them via same age methods. However, the difference between perceived academic competence remains. Younger entry students continue to perceive themselves as academically less competent in comparison to peers.

Another item worth noting is that for younger children, there was a greater percentage of reporting a strong dislike of school in comparison to older class mates. Whilst child reporting of bullying to parents was not different between groups, younger children self-reported a greater incidence of being bullied in contrast to older class mates (Crawford et al. 2013). The source of bullying was not reported.

Overall, children who progress to school early and who are significantly younger than their peers are perceived to be less able in a number of domains in regard to academic achievement when compared to their chronologically older peers. Yet, when younger entry students are matched on age, they are on track in terms of their age standardised performance. Comparable development is also evident in some social and emotional domains when comparing age matched levels, but approaches to learning itself is an aspect which tends to be lower for younger children in contrast to their older class peers. Other risks are also present in terms of possible bullying and disengagement from school, which can pose issues in the long run.

Limitations of the evidence

Same Age vs Same Grade (vs Same Time)

Same age analysis typically allows for comparisons between chronological age levels. In cases of retention, same age analysis will show a negative effect of retention as the retained group will be compared to those who have transferred to the next level with their age peers. Typically, the promoted group increases in achievement because they naturally progress to more advanced topics and teaching. In contrast, the same grade approach will show benefits of retention by taking the retainees performance by the end of their repeat year and comparing that with the performance of either i) their current, younger class peers or ii) the previous performance of peers who have been promoted. This biases retainees, as they have essentially studied the same materials again.

Same time analysis also follows this process. Where a chronologically older child and a chronologically younger child start school at the same time, and sit a test at the same time,

the findings will likely benefit the older child due to their increased approach to learning as a result of their developmental progress. But compare the performance of the younger child in the future in comparison to the initial performance of the older child; the gap will have closed as the comparison is more age appropriate. This is evidenced in studies where standardised age equivalent performances are used.

UK studies

Very few studies of grade retention are conducted within the United Kingdom. The majority of countries where the practice takes place include the likes of Australia; America; Canada and Central Europe (Germany & Belgium). With these various educational systems, it is difficult to say with absolute certainty that the negative findings of retention on academic, social, emotional and behavioural outcomes apply to a Scottish context. Nonetheless, it is worthwhile noting that a number of outcomes have been consistently replicated across these varied educational systems which encompass various practices.

Control for multiple comparisons

Whilst the quality of studies has certainly improved within the likes of increased sample size, for example, thus improving generalisability; there are a surprising amount of studies which do not control for the Type I inflation rate. It is likely that, with the high number of outcomes tested via Null Hypothesis Significance Testing, there may be a risk of detecting a significant difference where one does not exist at all. This would be ideally controlled through the application of an appropriate statistical correction, but this does not seem to have been applied in the majority of studies. Hence, there is a risk of detecting a false positive.

Even for studies which have many outcomes and a low number of participants, the variation around the mean may be considerable and subsequently lead to inaccurate estimates of effects as a result of this variability; increasing the likelihood of statistical error.

Control for pre-existing differences

Causality is difficult to prove within this design due to the lack of experimental assignment, but the increased use of propensity score matching alongside the statistical control of confounds has allowed for less biased estimates of effect. Whilst recent research has been helpful in utilising this technique, it has proved heterogeneous in the varied use of co-variates and the various levels of control between studies. Nonetheless, it has proved to be a considerable boost to the validity of findings in contrast to work completed several years ago.

The risk of longitudinal studies losing external validity over time

Many studies have aimed to establish validity in tracking individuals over the time course, over various periods within the past 20-40 years. This has been extremely useful but there is a risk that the sample studied may be historic and whilst even in a similar setting, may not reflect the educational reforms which currently exist within the current context.

Effects could be non-linear, but are not assessed

Authors tend to pick up within their discussion sections that effects of retention, deferral or early entry may be nonlinear. They may represent a quadratic or a cubic function, as opposed to a straightforward linear association. Yet, there are few studies to assess this

directly, making it difficult to ascertain the true extent of linear and non-linear effects and whether they are replicable.

Multi-level effects

Alongside the increased use of propensity score matching, multi-level modelling has been implemented to examine the various levels of effects surrounding the issues described. These may examine effects, for example, at the level of the individual child, the classroom, the school and consist of various measures which will aim to statistically control for confounds and understand their effects at each individual level. Of course, these measures themselves must be valid and reliable, and as it has been discussed there may be inadvertent biases within the reporting of these variables dependent on the method. Nonetheless, even after controlling for a multitude of effects there is the risk of leaving variables unexamined which may ultimately explain the variance in the predicted outcome better than the current variable(s) under investigation.

Appendix 2

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