

**James Hemsall**

**Club Central Friday 20 May 2022**

**Keynote speech skeleton outline (30 mins):**

**New slide: Title.**

Hello everyone. I would like to take us through a journey called...

Out of school childcare, then, now and next.

Whilst this child on my first slide is too young to attend school, for me he represents all our future ambitions. As a very famous person recently said, “recollections may vary”. This is my own take on out of school so far, where we are now, and what could or should happen next. There’s so much more I could say, but there is not time, and Tanya has put together an excellent programme that I am sure will more than adequately cover all the key issues for us.

**New slide: then, now and next...**

**That is why it is called ‘then, now and next’.**

- **THEN** A brief potted history of out of school.
- **NOW** How out of school sits in the sector in recent times and now. including the impact and effects of COVID-19, and opportunities through the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme, and perhaps Tax-Free Childcare.
- **NEXT** Calls for a better deal for out of school.

- And for the latter, I have a roundtable session at the end of the day, do join me should you wish to discuss further.

### **Slide: arts into play**

I am someone who started out as an arts student in the 1980s and entered this amazing world of early years, childcare, and out of school activities by accident. That in itself is not that unusual.

Armed with a toolbox of arts and crafts skills **I started to assemble a collection of various jobs once out of university.** So many, I needed a bike to travel from one to the other.

In the morning I might have been teaching art and design to various students in FE. In the early evening I was working in after school clubs in disadvantaged communities, in the school holidays they became open access playschemes or events.

On a Saturday morning I ran an **Arty Crafty Club** for 5-11 year olds. I worked as an arts/playworker on Traveller and Gypsy sites.

All of a sudden there I was using my skills in a range of holiday and after school clubs, building and extending my skills into play activities, sports, child development and working with families.

My interest in the potency of **how such services could affect opportunity and tackle disadvantage** and support children, young people and families was sparked. In part, by attending inspiring workplace training. And that was an

experience that also made me want to become a trainer. I was learning a lot about children, families, playwork and best practice during that time. Most of all, I had learned the power and potential of playwork and of how training can change lives.

As a student I had never imagined I would be using those arts skills in that way then, and I had not imagined over thirty years later I would still be working in early years, childcare, family services and on the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme, amongst other things such as COVID-19 recovery training, and some psychotherapy and coaching as well. I bet lots of you here today had similar journeys and have various hats to wear.

#### **THEN:**

This was around 1990. The year the Children Act (1989) was starting to be implemented. It had set out new standards and expectations for everyone working with under eights. Before then, there was huge local diversity, there were no national standards, no registration, only local arrangements (some of them good, some not). After school and out of school childcare was pretty limited. Less women (mothers) were working than now, although more and more were working. It was a growth area. Children were perhaps more likely to be looking after themselves after school than they are now. maybe even the extended family was mor available to form part of that childcare supply.

The new legislation saw a shift from parental rights to parental responsibilities. Child protection expectations had changed a gear. I attended a roadshow on the Children Act (1989) run by a charity called Kids' Clubs Network (KCN). They

had been set up following the UN Year on the Child in 1979, and were originally named the National Out of School Alliance. This wasn't their only rebrand in the time they were in existence, later becoming 4Children before they ceased operating. They were adeptly championing out-of-school-clubs on a national scale, and supporting people who wanted to set-up clubs, run them and work in them. They offered a range of information for their members and through contracts with local agencies (known as TECs), guidelines of good practice, as well as training, events and conferences. Things like Getting Started Workshops, and Action Training. They became a strong lobby for more support and recognition. The call was for quality, affordable and accessible out of school.

Much of that lobbying worked. I wondered then what it would be like to work for them? Some four years later I got to find out.

That was not before I consolidated my long list of different jobs. I gave them all up, and became the coordinator of a voluntary sector community children's centre primarily offering after school open-access play services for 5-12 year olds, with a programme of pre-school playgroups and holiday playschemes.

This was a challenge I could not resist. The centre needed a strong focus on quality improvement, change management, staff training, fundraising, and the building of multi-agency cooperation and partnership. Funders were falling out of love with the centre and social services wanted it to close. There was a big turnaround job needed. After the core work was achieved, we also set up our own out of school childcare service in the school over the road. All of which was a fabulous experience, from which I still draw upon. During that

time, we also saw the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child a seminal event that has defined play and the approaches to childcare ever since. It was two years in which I learned a decade's worth of skills and approaches.

I left all too soon because a KCN job came up. I became a development officer working across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland. I was now helping others to set up out of school clubs. Because the government had in 1993 opened a National Out of School Initiative with start-up funding grants. Every area across England was allocated funding and targets and I was making sure we delivered that. There were start-up workshops to deliver, business training courses to run, and lots of grant application, business planning and business support to provide, and networks bringing providers together locally, regionally and nationally. The aim of the initiative was to make available childcare for school-aged children to support parental, mostly maternal, employment. It recognised that the school day did not match most working days – it still doesn't.

It was a good example of how such an initiative can give equal regard to the needs of children and their parents. Employment has become much more flexible since those days, and the effect of the pandemic has increased some flexibility even further. So, the relationship between out of school and family life is slightly different, and mostly the same – if that makes sense. The view was that if provision existed then parents would be better supported in work, and enabled to return to or to start work where they may not have done before. A 'supply before demand' model. I have found them to be rarely effective. It is demand that drives supply, not the other way around. In childcare anyway. Unless of course you are prepared to invest in longer-term

initiatives that don't expect quick fixes and are willing to effect change and opportunity across multiple generations. I mean to give it 20-40 years.

Available funds grew and grew, and this became an important initiative, unique really in that government was seeking to extend the sector through central policy and resources. There were interesting and exciting developments in quality development, funding, strategy and national profile. We were making demands for more, in the form of key lobbying documents for the 'Next Steps for Out of School Childcare' amongst other key asks.

Then in 1997 we saw a change in government. The Labour Party who we had lobbied in opposition, formed the government. They soon launched a National Childcare Strategy containing ambitions for all aspects of early years and childcare for all ages, including Sure Start (a year later), early years funding, and not least a New Opportunities Fund - massively increasing the scope and scale of start-up funding for new out of school provision.

Every council needed to convene an Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership (EYDCP), building upon emerging interest in early years, including a voucher scheme that didn't really get the opportunity to become established. We were all asked to audit provision (its supply, quality and demand for it) and create and deliver local action plans, and was given targets for the number of out of school places that should be created.

**Slide: Hempsall's – your partner**

At work, things were starting to move quickly away from what I understood to be my own core mission. It was at this moment I took the decision to go independent, and set up Hemsall's, with the goal to support everyone make as good a success of all this change as possible. That continues to be our pragmatic mission as an organisation at Hemsall's.

I became the out of school representative on the Leicestershire EYDCP and won a contract to support new and existing out of school providers, including training, business support and funding.

Creating new provision has never been without its challenges. And the levels of demand and the growth of provision was out-of-step with each other. By that I mean that places did not fill up as quickly as policy makers imagined – or at the same scale. Ongoing funding to fill gaps wasn't adequate enough. That was a test for even the savviest businessperson. Parents were not as able to pay for places in the quantity and frequency required. There were winners and losers. Many providers set up in those days still exist. On the flipside many don't. There was a continued tension between childcare and play, learning and leisure, the needs of the child and the needs of parents. Many people in this room fully understood that. It created divisions we didn't want or need, and there were winners and losers as a result. That was a shame.

At this time, there was an equal regard for childcare and early years. That was to change though. And this was a pivotal moment for out of school. There came more ambitions and goals for early years. We saw a huge interest in extending funded pre-school learning from 12.5 hours a week, delivered sessionally, to what we have today. A combination of universal 15 hours for all

three- and four-year-olds, and targeted offers of 15 hours for least advantaged two-year-olds, and an extended 15 hours for three- and four-year-olds of working families (called 30 hours childcare). a wonderful and much needed development, driven in part by a growing and convincing evidence base.

The commercial, paid-for, full daycare childcare market ballooned. All that change happened mostly in those 10-15 years. The spotlight had followed early years, leaving childcare to some extent, most especially away from out of school childcare – leaving it in the shade. Creating a forgotten sector, some say.

There was a new Sure Start out of school fund to replace the New Opportunities one. The fund remained focused upon setting up rather than keeping going. The issues with setting up provision, supply first, and on shaky foundations, hadn't been resolved properly. And no one was really advocating for the sector either. And there were many other things that demanded attention.

KCN had now rebranded and refocused its efforts to the wider agenda. Becoming 4Children. That left the sector without a determined champion – which was regretful at least, a scandal at worst. Their mission to work across the sector ended when they went into administration in 2016. 30 hours childcare was introduced, which I must admit I had hoped would have become a much bigger opportunity for out of school than what was realised. Financial changes and priorities in local authorities meant that again, out of school childcare was a 'nice to have' but not a top priority. And in the remaining national membership organisation space, they all reinvented and/or rebranded

to occupy what all seems to be the same space. On-one thought that including out of school was a good enough idea. Seduced in expect from the short-term and not the long-term picture.

**Slide: Once a playworker always a playworker I say!**

**NOW:**

Where does that leave us now, I wonder? Despite all that change and work.

Ellen will talk about the 'Cinderella' nature of out of school. It does often feel like an afterthought for too many. Thank goodness there are still people ready, willing, and able to promote, defend and deliver it. It has been good to see local networks be sustained and for larger networks such as the Out of school alliance, and the National out of school network, and ones further afield like the Scottish out of school network.

With a greater focus on the language of early years in terms of closing the attainment gap, pre-school learning outcomes, and school readiness, then out of school language feels askew. I constantly challenge local authorities about their legal childcare duties in The Childcare Act (2006), to ensure a sufficiency of childcare not just for 0–5 year-olds but for all children, and to take into account their parents learning and employment needs. I question the delivery of local training and development, of business support and of communications that all too often aren't tuned in to the realities out of school. Many areas do get it right, but not nearly enough of them. It is not their fault, with stringent targets in other areas, and a reducing budget and capacity to deliver local

childcare market management some things that are desirables don't make it to become essentials. The universal entitlement for three- and four-year-olds has been the big story of the past 20 years, and the 30 hours and two-year-olds programmes (both ones I have worked on) are demand led funding streams – that creates a welcome shift away from being a supply led model – but it is far from perfect.

Almost every, if not every childcare sufficiency assessment I read, or indeed manage, finds a lack of out of school childcare, and this is made worse if a child has SEND. Engagement with out of school is often patchy. The relationship between out of school providers and the local authority, and indeed between local providers with local providers is unstable at best. It isn't just about language it is about timing as well. This is not only unfair and short-sighted, it isn't sensible, and certainly not equal. It is out of kilter with families need and want. They experience good pre-schools offers, and then left to fend for themselves on a school-aged childcare cliff edge.

We have seen a raft of new initiative after new initiative adding on bits to the sector, rather than effecting root-and-branch reform. That is fair enough. It is how things work. But there are advantages and opportunities, and disadvantages and consequences. And as if things weren't bad enough, we had the pandemic and all its effects. Which in summary saw an instant and unexpected inability to deliver out of school, a drop in demand from families when things started to open again, and ongoing changing patterns of use that are uncertain as to how they will carry on in the short-, medium- and long-terms. Guidance for schools did not always knit-in with that for childcare providers and it resulted in relationships between the two that were at best

strained. The cost-of-living crisis will only serve to continue to place additional pressures on parents and providers.

I do want to talk about two things yet to be fully exploited in out of school. The first is HAF and the second Tax-Free Childcare.

**New slide: HAF**

Since April 2021, I have been working as national programme manager for Childcare Works HAF to help deliver national support for the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme across all councils in England – on behalf of DfE. HAF aims to offer free enriching activities with nutritious food in the three main school holidays, for children eligible for and in receipt of benefits-related free school meals (FSM). This has far-reaching and wide-ranging benefits across all of government and society. Our goal is for it to be a success for the long-term benefit of children and families.

We know from first-hand experience school holiday activities have been diverse and delivered over decades. Recently it has been very interesting to see how the Programme emerged (since 2018), collected evidence and real-time learning and has developed to become this national £220m programme for 2021.

**I believe Every out of school provider needs to be thinking about HAF.**

In October, the Government announced a further £200m per year for the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme for the next three years to 2025. At first glance you might think this programme isn't for you, but it really

could be. Because HAF places go to children who would not otherwise use clubs (parents not working or unable to afford) so it is indirectly helping club sustainability with increased attendance.

We all know the idea of activities for children and young people in school holidays is not new. We also know the impact and value and difference they can make to a child's confidence and whole learning. But the national HAF programme is a relative newcomer on the scene. It follows a growing interest in the needs of children in receipt of benefits-related free school meals when they are not at school, and the issues of holiday hunger, food poverty, summer learning loss, and gaps between the attainment of disadvantaged children and their peers. Combine with that the real sense that parents find a lack of out of school childcare, and we have a new provider opportunity.

Provision is fully funded and free to families, and typically runs for around four hours a day, four days a week, for four weeks in summer, and a week at Easter and Christmas holidays.

Activities should include provision (with good hot food) across a range of outdoor and indoor sport, physical activities, arts and crafts, games and play, food and nutrition learning and cooking, and trips etc. All with the aim of supporting outcomes for children and families:

- Eating more healthily and being more active in the school holidays.
- Taking part in engaging and enriching activities to support development of resilience, character and wellbeing, along with wider educational attainment.
- Being safe and socially connected.

- Building greater knowledge of health and nutrition, and adopting good food behaviours.
- Being more engaged with school and other local services.

In short, HAF can be a huge agent of change, breaking cycles and opening up new experiences and relationships for families who need it most. This is where out of school childcare providers come in. You can support HAF provision, help families find and use it, or become a HAF provider yourself. One thing I am predicting is that need and demand for HAF will grow over the next three years. You could play your part by:

- Sharing HAF information with families with school-aged children.
- Supporting families to understand HAF, find it, and use it.
- Connecting up or partnering with HAF provision to join up services.
- Becoming a HAF provider for four- to eight-year-olds, or older for example.
- Extending HAF through much needed paid for childcare supported by parents' fees, and/or Universal Credit or Tax-Free Childcare.

Want to know more? Contact your local council HAF Coordinator.

Based on reporting from local authorities, over 600,000 children and young people attended in the 2021 summer holidays. Over Christmas, local authorities reported that over 335,000 children received support.

In April 2022, Ecorys UK published an [Evaluation of the 2021 holiday activities and food programme - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/104444/evaluation-of-the-2021-holiday-activities-and-food-programme.pdf) The report highlights a range of positive impacts for children attending the holiday clubs, including in terms of their enjoyment, socialisation and levels of physical activity. The reports also made recommendations for the future delivery of the programme. It is worth a read.

We are very pleased with the levels of reach so far. And are super-focused that with growing numbers of children eligible for and taking up their FSM, the likely growing demand for HAF following positive experiences in 2021 and children returning to the programme in 2022, and increasing awareness of HAF, and perhaps even a post pandemic year, then demand could be significantly higher in 2022.

There is a role and there are opportunities for out of school providers new and old. We would like to see a stronger connection with out of school childcare providers, who have the potential to offer a more-rounded offer combined with childcare expertise.

It was wonderful to read that 77% of children were feeling more confident as a result of attending HAF and the enjoyment ratings being as high at 8.5/10. It was good to read about how HAF had improved healthy eating amongst children. We are particularly keen that the evidence on supporting working families be highlighted as the findings were impressive. The value of out of school is being measured and recognised and the language is sounding very familiar and helpful to the sector.

Moving on, there is something else that deserves a look...

### **New slide: Tax-Free Childcare**

I think we should all take another look at TFC.

HMRC recently asked us to help them take another look at Tax-Free Childcare (TFC). They wanted us to work with 10 local areas across the UK to support local reviews and action planning to see if more could be done to support an increase in take-up of this much needed childcare costs support. We also were asked to hold two helpful webinars. One for early years and childcare providers (including out of school) and one for councils and people in roles that bring them into contact with families. These were held in March 2022, and you can watch them on You Tube.

It was a challenge we couldn't resist. We knew that parents want more help with the cost of childcare, which take a significantly large proportion of take-home pay from the household budget. We also knew that most parents are eligible for some sort of support, even if it isn't TFC. We were also keenly aware all types of provider wanted and needed to realise more financial revenue into their businesses. Especially during this time when costs to deliver childcare are rising, families are experiencing financial pressures and are changing their childcare needs and demands, and levels of paid-for childcare are reducing.

We believe all sorts of family facing professionals and indeed other parents, have an important role in sharing information, helping to raise awareness, and

supporting the process of taking up Tax-Free Childcare. Family facing roles include, for example, health visitors, social workers, housing officers, children's centre staff, early help, early years and childcare providers, schoolteachers, job centre staff (or all such equivalents) across the public, private and voluntary sectors.

The fact is that TFC is worth up to £2,000 per year, per child. Double that if they are disabled. And it is open to childcare costs for children aged 11 and under (17 if they are disabled). It was phased in from April 2017, and an estimated 1.3m families could be eligible. Take-up is steadily growing at 328,000 families (Dec 2021). But it means almost one million families aren't taking it up, and so there is scope to do more to reach them and support them. Our approach has been to look at how we can best make the current system work. That is a pragmatic approach. It hasn't been in our commission to look at ways of changing TFC or to point out what doesn't work about it. We quickly understood that the best way for us to do that was to think about improving information, helping to raise awareness, and knowing who to signpost or refer to, and how.

This is because information doesn't always reach eligible families, and sometimes when it does it isn't always understood. Myths and misunderstandings can occur. TFC is too often conflated with 30 hours. And because every family is different, we need to ensure the message is different and meets their needs, because it doesn't work alongside vouchers or Universal Credit for example. Information about TFC needs to be on your website and childcare bills. We all need to be talking about it a lot more – word of mouth makes a huge difference. Make sure your staff know about it

and are positive about it as well. The application process for parents is quick and straight forward, as it is for provider registration, if you have all the information and IT to hand. That is where referring to sources of support can make a real difference, such as information services and the childcare costs calculator.

Knowing what support is available, families feeling the likelihood they will be eligible, and getting advice and support can make all the difference.

Find out more. Visit the government's Childcare Choices website

[www.childcarechoices.gov.uk](http://www.childcarechoices.gov.uk) You can find resources to use to help spread the word. [www.childcarechoices.gov.uk/providers/communications-toolkit](http://www.childcarechoices.gov.uk/providers/communications-toolkit)

Use the childcare costs calculator [www.gov.uk/childcare-calculator](http://www.gov.uk/childcare-calculator) to help families make their choices.

**New slide: invent...**

**NEXT:**

**If I was to invent everything 'childcare' now from scratch, would it look like this?** I guess not. The past 30 years has been a journey with high levels of incremental change sometimes at large scale, sometimes small. The passion and commitment in this sector is high, as is the willingness to get things right. Energy levels may be low. Resilience may be compromised.

If it was up to me, I would commission a **really good literature review** of all recent reviews and take the best from them, and complete a root-and-branch

examination where there are gaps. This should include the scope, scale and findings from LA childcare sufficiency assessments. I know there will be a patchy picture, and easily identifiable common themes.

Next, I would start **a year-long debate and discussion so a new 20-year plan can be coproduced**. The plan must address all the inequalities and anachronisms. But that can only be achieved with a generation-long, high value investment to finally establish the sector and shake off its Cinderella past and create true equality.

In it, I would want to see ways in which we achieve **level playing fields** within the sector, so all parts of it have parity, respect and the ability to deliver differentiated services tailored to children's and families' needs. The workforce would need to be equal with other parts of the education and children's services system, properly resourced, and qualified practitioners should be no different to qualified teachers.

**Funding should invest in quality at all points and be linked to operational costs fairly across the diverse structure of the sector.** Systems need to be robust to ensure quality and accountability but must not act as a deterrent for parents and children in accessing their entitlements, nor a barrier for the workforce to enter, succeed and remain in the sector.

That way, we will be much closer to the rewards we all want and need from supporting our youngest and most vulnerable children, and their families. Because every experience is a learning experience, and childcare changes lives.

I think is reasonable, sensible, ambitious and necessary for the out of school sector - for the benefit of children, young people, families, the workforce, communities, employers, and local and national government. Because out of school childcare achieves many things:

- It offers a whole range of learning opportunities beyond those provided by school. Supporting children and young people's social, physical, intellectual, creative and expressive development.
- It helps families to balance work and life, enabling parental employment, especially that of mothers.
- It helps children transition from early years and childcare provision into school and meets their childcare needs.
- They can play a huge part in tackling the effects of disadvantage by providing breakfast clubs where children are guaranteed a healthy breakfast before the school day.
- They provide safe spaces after school until children are collected by their parents or carers.
- They can better support children and young people throughout the holidays through engaging and enriching activities, and access to healthy food and nutritional learning.
- They can play their part in identifying families in need of additional support or the protection or safeguarding of children and young people. Thereby connecting families to wider services.

**What does out of school deserve in return? I have 10 things to ask...**

**New slide: 10 things.**

1. **Connecting better to HAF** would be a good start. This is a big opportunity as the wider understanding of definitions of learning and childcare outcomes are being recognised and a common language is within reach.
2. We want to see **HAF funded in the longer term** (beyond the three years) and for it to become a more extensive programme, with wider and deeper reach.
3. Until the day that **TFC** is reformed and reviewed, we need to do what we can to help families claim the support it offers. **More ambitiously, TFC** needs to be simpler, more accessible, and more widely used. With a more generous financial offer, beyond the £2,000/£4,000 is offers currently.
4. Perhaps there should even be a specific **OOS offer from TFC**. Because at the moment TFC is too associated with early years funding, especially 30 hours.
5. I would like to see **OOS providers receive forms of revenue funding**. Such as a fairer share of 30 hours funding for three- and four-year-olds. It would make sense for me for all 0-8 year-olds to benefit from up to 25 funded hours a week for every week of the year, with the ability to stretch and flex it to suit family work and life patterns. That would support baby places, 0-2s, 3-4s and out of school in equal measure. A 0-8 learning, play and childcare continuum.
6. **Funding levels need to better match the ambitions we all should and could have for childcare**. They should not be based on imperfect research that attempts to quantify the cost of delivery. We should fund outcomes and impact, not inputs and outputs.

7. Funding should be further enhanced by a **'Disadvantage Premium'** to better tackle the needs of children in disadvantage and to better support providers' ability to develop and sustain provision in areas where the local market is insufficient to do so.
8. There needs to be a stronger connection with local area strategy for early years and childcare, information, networking, training and support. **A new duty placed on LAs**, with resources to achieve it, should be given to LAs. I am sure they would relish that.
9. Schools have an important role as hosts of OOS, or connected to PVI providers, or to provide OOS themselves where others cannot. **School-based provision should be a welcome addition to the local supply not provision that has other advantages and has a deficit effect on the local market.** A school's charter, sponsored by key organisations and leaders, could set out what reasonable expectations and standards there could or should be.
- 10. The sector needs greater recognition and respect, parity and equality, and much of these ideas will go far in making that happen.** As will working together to collaborate, network and share, support each other and become positive advocates for the sector as it occupies a new contemporary space.

There we have it a journey through 'then, now and next'. Then and now are certain, we know what they entail. The next? Well, we need to work out how to make that happen. That is all of our mission today. Thank you to Tanya for making that happen.