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**SUSTAIN
THE AMBITION**

**The Contribution of
GTCS - Registered Teachers
in Early Years**





The independent 'Sustaining the Ambition' research that the EIS funded confirms the importance of maintaining a registered teacher workforce in all pre-school settings.

The clear message, echoing much other research on the subject, is that early exposure to a quality educational experience in the nursery setting brings a whole host of benefits to young children, many of which continue long-term. The findings also support the conclusions of previous research that employing the skills and leadership of qualified teachers remains the best way to ensure a quality educational experience in all nursery settings.

Importantly, the report questions the varying commitment by councils across Scotland to the deployment of teachers in nurseries in spite of the evidence that nursery teachers make a difference. This is particularly important in light of the planned expansion of the early learning and childcare entitlement to 1140 hours by 2021.

Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence offers an enhanced learning experience for young people of all ages, supported by a seamless curricular model spanning the 3 to 18 age range. It is crucial, therefore, that there is an appropriate level of teacher involvement in every nursery setting, providing continuity into school.

It is important that EIS members in all sectors are aware of the unique contribution of GTCS registered nursery teachers to the education of all of our children and to delivering the early interventions that are essential in minimising the impact of poverty on children's educational outcomes both within Early Years and beyond.

Susan Quinn
Education Committee Convener

“Early exposure to a quality educational experience in the nursery setting brings a whole host of benefits to young children, many of which continue long-term.”

THE EARLY YEARS LANDSCAPE IN SCOTLAND



“Over a ten year period there has been a 39% reduction in the number of GTCS registered teachers employed in Early Years...”

EIS Campaign on Nursery Education

As part of the campaign to arrest and reverse the decline in the number of qualified nursery teachers employed within Early Years establishments, the EIS recently funded research by the Child’s Curriculum Group into the contribution of qualified teachers to nursery education.

Led by Professor Aline-Wendy Dunlop of the University of Strathclyde and education consultant Chris Miles, the research included review of the relevant published literature, and analysis of published statistics about early learning and childcare in Scotland; local authority responses to freedom of information requests; and the views of 1440 teachers gathered through surveys and focus group discussion, on the role and contribution of qualified teachers within the Early Years workforce.

This document highlights some of the key messages from the research and the subsequent final report published in January 2016, entitled ‘Sustaining the Ambition: the Contribution of GTCS - Registered Teachers in Early Years’.

The over-riding messages as outlined in this document are important for EIS

members in supporting the campaign for the introduction of a legal entitlement to a child’s right to nursery education and the establishment of a minimum threshold of entitlement to meaningful interaction with a GTCS registered teacher.

Early Years Provision - a Troubled Landscape

The root of the problem in relation to nursery teacher numbers grew between 2002 and 2005 with the rescinding of the Schools Scotland Code (2002) which had stipulated a ratio of one teacher to twenty children per nursery class. This statutory provision was replaced with legislation requiring local authorities only to provide ‘access to a teacher’ for nursery children.

The consequential flexibility afforded to local authorities in managing the Early Years workforce has resulted, particularly from 2005 onwards, in significant changes to the employment and deployment of teachers in the sector.

Over a ten year period there has been a 39% reduction in the number of GTCS registered teachers employed in Early Years but only a 4% decline in the number of children.⁽¹⁾

During the same time-frame, in the name of equality of opportunity and quality improvement, and to provide children in local authority partner provision with ‘access to a teacher’, in many local authorities the existing teacher workforce has been redistributed among a variety of settings.

Differing and ambiguous interpretations of ‘teacher presence’ and ‘teacher access’, both within and across local authorities, have resulted in inequality of children’s experiences in nursery, contributing to the ‘postcode lottery’ that is likely to result in inequality of outcomes.

Worryingly, the research⁽²⁾ highlights that:

- Nationally, 25.7% of children aged 3-5 have no access to a teacher
- The current average nursery teacher to child ratio is 1:94
- 50% of local authorities state that children do not have equal access to a teacher
- 50% of local authorities have no minimum stipulation of teachers’ contact time with children
- Only 12 of Scotland’s 32 local authorities continue to employ full-time teachers in each of their Early Years establishments
- Five local authorities indicated their intention to review provision therefore the above figures are subject to change.

(1) Summary statistics for schools in Scotland No.6: 2015 Edition 9 December 2015

(2) Sustaining the Ambition, The Contribution of GTCS - Registered Teachers in Early Years, January 2016



Misalignment of Policy and Practice

Against such a backdrop, Scottish Government policy aspires to make Scotland the ‘best place in the world to grow up’ and to give children ‘the best possible start in life’ by reducing inequalities of outcome and investing in Early Years education and childcare on the basis that its long-term benefits to individuals are well-evidenced.

In pursuit of these aims, the Scottish Government introduced the 600 hours’ entitlement to early learning and childcare for all 3 and 4 year olds, and has legislated for this entitlement to be almost doubled to 1140 hours by 2021, and extended to the most vulnerable children.

Scottish Government also commissioned an independent review of the Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) and Out-of-School Workforce to examine

how the skills, qualifications and training of staff working within ELC and out-of-school settings can contribute to improved outcomes for children, help to reduce social inequality and close the attainment gap. A key recommendation of the report was an increase in the number of graduates in the ELC workforce.

On the one hand, therefore, the policy intention is to increase the number of graduates within the ELC workforce, and on the other, local authorities, in the face of severe financial pressure, are removing and diluting the services of one group of graduates already in the workforce, namely teachers.

Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) is based on an understanding of children’s development and learning which is common to all learners from 3-18. CfE makes clear the importance of coherence of curriculum, pedagogy

and assessment, and recognises the importance of teaching. CfE Early Level, covering the 3 to 6 age range, provides the architecture to support children’s wellbeing and learning in a continuous way across the nursery and Early Years and early primary school settings.

Furthermore, the Scottish Government has committed to decisively tackling educational inequality. Evidence shows that state funded nursery schools, nursery classes and integrated care and education settings continue to provide the highest overall quality of Early Years provision, helping to tackle child poverty and narrow the gap that disadvantage brings to educational outcomes. Nursery teachers themselves are aware of the importance of their role in supporting young children’s learning and development, and of the particular challenges presented with regards to this as a direct consequence of economic austerity. Nursery teachers, therefore, are essential to the realisation of these key policy intentions.

The essential Role of Nursery Teachers

Overall, the ‘Sustaining the Ambition’ research supports the view that the Scottish Government’s ambitions for positive life outcomes for all its children are much less likely to be fully achieved unless teachers, including those with specialism in early childhood, are included and supported as part of the ELC workforce. The following sections of this document provide a more detailed rationale for this conclusion.

CLOSING THE GAP

In Scotland we aspire for our country to be the best place for children to grow up, yet figures show that 1 in 5 children, and rising, experience poverty (Scottish Government, 2015)⁽³⁾. Teachers can be an invaluable resource to help 'close the gap' which we know exists well before children start school.

There is clear recognition that poverty impacts on life chances, that children deserve the best, and that society has to invest in the future. This has led to the aspirations expressed in Scottish Government policy. Teachers have been in the forefront of closing the gap for a very long time, but without continuous input and recognition of their capacity to make a major contribution to that task, much energy and many resources are taken up with treading water.

🗣️ *The success of Scottish Government's policy ideas in actually 'closing the gap' boils down to opening a door, rolling up your sleeves and getting on with the task of acquainting yourself with these young people, to knowing them in great detail, tailoring their learning to their needs and to their struggles so that something changes for them for the better. It requires the knowledge and understanding of exactly what to do and how to do it after the coats are hung up in the staff room.* 🗣️
(Support for Learning teacher)

Inconsistent policy about employment of teachers means that access to additional support is also uneven. In some local

authorities, so many teachers have been removed from the nursery classroom that many children's additional support needs are not being identified until Primary 1.

Teachers, with their understanding of the relationship between children's experience, learning and development, have a critical role to play in observing, evaluating, recording, interpreting and then acting upon all they recognise to be significant in children's learning, wellbeing and development. Their skills in these areas support the

whole staff team. The planning and interactions that follow are critical to building on what children already know and are able to talk about and do.

Education alone will not close the gaps in attainment and outcomes that exist for too many of our children, but the nursery teacher and the nursery team are able to build strong relationships with parents, grandparents and the wider family and community. This family engagement is part of effective practice and takes place in many ways: the daily contact at the start and end of sessions, creating opportunities for parents and children together; making time and space for parents to enjoy time alongside professionals to share experiences of nursery and home; offering learning opportunities for families and also learning from them.

🗣️ *I work in an area of multiple deprivations – a key target is to look at ways in which children's nursery experiences can be enriched through formative assessment, sharing current research with staff, including parents and families.* 🗣️ (Nursery class teacher)

Equity

🗣️ *It is important to bear in mind that while there is evident inequality due to, for example, poverty or living in a very rural area, there are also more affluent areas with extremely long waiting lists for nursery places, perhaps due to the closure of local authority nurseries. The result is that many children in densely populated areas do not even have access to a nursery, far less a teacher. I believe firmly that geography affects outcomes immensely.* 🗣️ (Support for Learning teacher)

Access to a teacher is part of all 3-5 year old children's entitlement: this may also be eroded by the senior management team moving nursery teaching staff to cover absences elsewhere in the school. If nursery teachers are pulled out of class often, this leads to a further loss of nursery children's access to a teacher.

🗣️ *We have been cut down to 2 days nursery teacher contact which means I only have 2 days a week to complete my role. (...) I feel nursery teachers need their role to be given more importance and also to be clarified. I very often have to cover for early years officers due to absence and am often pulled out of nursery to cover classes in the school.* 🗣️
(Nursery class teacher)

“it is essential to sustain the expertise that teachers bring to the nursery team.”



There are other challenges, as while many nursery settings in Scotland provide part-time or full-time funded places for 3-4 year olds, fewer offer part-time funded places to 5-year-olds or to vulnerable 2-year-olds. A few nurseries offer extended provision (full-time places offered to families in a time of crisis) for up to 12 weeks. However, more and more nurseries have long waiting lists for funded places and as a result, many eligible children in Scotland are not receiving their full entitlement to funded hours.

Without that full entitlement, the ambition to improve learning and to close the gap, and the aspiration for Scotland to be the best place to grow up, will not be a reality. It is therefore essential to sustain the expertise that teachers bring to the nursery team. This will mean all promoted staff with a responsibility for ELC, all teachers and all nursery teams being supported to have an understanding of what teachers offer and the contribution they can make to supporting and developing the work of the team, the engagement of parents, and planning opportunities for children's learning, development and wellbeing.

The work of nursery teachers with children, their families and other professionals makes their role uniquely complex, demanding and valuable.

Key message

THE WORK OF NURSERY TEACHERS WITH CHILDREN

Unique Complexity of the Role

Working with children is complex and demanding, and also rewarding and exciting. Children, families and colleagues are at the heart of what teachers do. Their initial teacher education equips them to observe, plan, implement and develop learning and teaching, promote the personal, social and emotional development of all children, and work with parents and fellow professionals within and outwith Early Years settings.

Early Years teachers make many valuable contributions to young children's learning, such as support for creativity, early literacy and numeracy, other learning, and health and wellbeing, consistent with the aims of the curriculum and the four capacities. Four key aspects of this contribution are:

- leadership of learning;
- modelling responsive teaching for other staff;
- challenging learning while sustaining high quality interaction; and
- supporting transitions for child, family and community wellbeing.

Each of these contributions is informed by teacher education and is linked to teachers' registration standards which require a commitment to social justice.

The varied profiles of the nursery teacher's role provided by 16 Local Authorities described the responsibilities



as: facilitating focused learning experiences and opportunities for children; supporting the transition to primary school; interacting with children with a focus on literacy and numeracy; supporting the development of quality learning experiences; and promoting quality experiences for literacy, numeracy, health and wellbeing.

Scottish Government expects the work of nursery teachers to include the identification of children with additional

support needs, as well as planning for their learning, working directly with them and supporting their transitions.

It is plain that these responsibilities are more difficult for a teacher to fulfil if she or he is serving in a peripatetic role or is solely responsible for 'planning for learning' without the opportunity to experience any responsive teaching of children in the nursery.

Teachers, with their knowledge of CfE, combined with their understanding of child development and commitment to career long professional learning, are uniquely placed to support children's learning across the Early Level.

Key message

Knowledge of the Curriculum

Teachers bring their knowledge of learning and development to their implementation of the curriculum, their understanding of its intentions and appropriate pedagogy. Teachers are trained in Curriculum for Excellence and this knowledge and experience of expectations in primary school, added to their understanding of child development in the earliest years of life prior to nursery, allows them to guide and support children across the Early Level.

Teachers' work is informed by understanding the importance of ongoing professional development because knowledge and methods change over time. They are responsible for observation, peer discussion, reading and self-reflection about teaching practice, and they bring valuable knowledge of relevant learning

and teaching theories, and research to their work with children. They also have an understanding of children's thinking and holistic development that enables them to provide appropriate educational challenges and individual support.

14 *Knowledge and skills make the teacher a hub of learning for children, parents, colleagues, staff working with older children, students and the community.* **15**
(GTCS-registered teacher)

Curriculum for Excellence 'Active Learning in the Early Years': Early Level, in focusing on children aged 3-6, creates important opportunities to bring learning and teaching together into age and developmentally appropriate approaches. Knowledge of individual children enriches the experiences offered and enables the best timing to enhance learning. Learning at this time is across many domains: emotional, social,

physical, creative, linguistic, spiritual and intellectual. These domains form foundations through which children's capacities, dispositions and funds of knowledge grow.

Teachers are uniquely placed to provide continuity of experience and to recognise where interaction, stimulation, extension of learning, a change of direction and responsive input are important. Curriculum for Excellence builds on Pre-birth to Three Guidance, is tightly linked to Getting it Right for Every Child and bridges sectors.

It is therefore important to acknowledge the 'bridging role' of professionals whose Initial Teacher Education equips them to lead this widened concept of learning in ELC with families and colleagues, and on into and through school.





Understanding of Pedagogy

The need for a relevant pedagogy during the early years is paramount. Pedagogy is distinct from, and goes beyond, knowledge of the curriculum: it is the way in which curriculum and learning and teaching approaches combine. It is how curriculum is put into practice.

Experienced nursery teachers have a strong understanding of children's thinking and the place it has in children's learning and development. They have the ability to reflect and build on evaluation of learning and development; to form relationships between theory and practice; and to use informed pedagogy.

This allows them to embrace common teaching approaches for children aged 3-6 years in the context of a continuous curriculum for this level and to engage in professional discourse with primary colleagues which also enhances teachers' understanding of themselves as 'bridging professionals'.

My role is to develop the team's understanding of how to make every opportunity to develop children's learning of key areas. (GTCS-registered nursery teacher)

Pedagogy is informed by understanding that children need room to explore, experiment, ponder and enquire. It means knowing when to 'go in' to support and further enrich the learning understood from observation to be taking place, and when to 'come out' again to give the child further time and space to continue their own enquiries. It is about understanding that children have serious business of their own, and respecting, facilitating and supporting that.

Teachers themselves highlight the range of expertise they hold and the way in which their experience uniquely allows them a bridging role in pedagogy, curriculum, planning for learning, child development, literacy, numeracy, wellbeing, in transitions and the application of experiences and outcomes, to provide continuity.

I use quite sophisticated systems to gather and analyse children's assessment data to enable us to target support to those children who need it most. My studies have enabled me to develop my knowledge of Early Years pedagogy and I have a wealth of knowledge I can share with other practitioners. My centre is a pioneer site for the Early Years Collaborative working on family engagement in early learning so we have a lot of experience and expertise in engaging parents in the life and work of the nursery and working with parents to plan the sort of events and programmes that they would like to be involved in.

(GTCS registered nursery teacher)

Teachers focusing on a play-based pedagogy have a sound knowledge of child development and understand and apply the connections between theory, policy and practice.

Progressing Learning

As part of the nursery team, the teacher's day will include playing a part in all the necessary tasks, but she or he will have a key role in keeping the learning rich, relevant and moving forward for each child. This has to be done through an in-depth knowledge of any current, external curriculum requirements and an understanding of what each child is

thinking about and wants to learn, not to tick a box, but for themselves.

In the early preschool stage, this is kept moving through a daily cycle of watching, listening and interacting which gives as full a picture as possible of each child's enquiries, struggles, interests, and skills. The results of these observations are analysed in order to make plans, little and large, long and short term, to take each child to where they need to be next. Much skill is required in making this analysis, for relevance is vital. Every class is a composite class, and each child has to be met as an individual.

The Curriculum for Excellence includes the goal to raise achievement overall, with literacy and numeracy being viewed as a vital part of that process. Government publications require nursery teachers to fulfil responsibilities including: curriculum development and implementation; using assessment information to plan learning; and facilitating focused learning experiences and opportunities for children. Teachers make a strong contribution to Early Years learning, including:

- applying knowledge of children's learning and development;
- observation and assessment;
- planning for learning; and
- supporting wellbeing.

There is an expectation on the nursery teacher to occupy an important role in beginning a curricular continuum through

THE WORK OF NURSERY TEACHERS WITH CHILDREN



the early years, from nursery into primary, and to support young children's health and wellbeing. When the teacher is able to make these contributions to children's learning within the Early Level, the effects are noticed and valued by primary school teachers.

In addition to these daily responsibilities for children's learning, teachers carry a range of responsibilities, for example:

- evaluation of their setting;
- sustaining quality;
- reporting to outside agencies such as the Care Inspectorate and as part of Getting It Right For Every Child;
- maintaining hygiene, and health and safety, and also modelling good practice for other staff and helping to lead the nursery team.

11 *In observing a small group of children at play, it is important to ask yourself which child is 'on fire' in pursuit of an interest and what that enquiry actually is. Are these boys pretending to be fishing off the pier wanting to know about the UK fishing industry, or trying to explore what it's like to be Jimmy's grandpa?* **11**
(Nursery class teacher)

Nursery teachers, as a result of their training and experience, are key in the early identification of additional support needs and in ensuring the appropriate interventions.

Key message



Additional Support Needs Specialism

Nursery teachers and staff work closely with parents and families. They also help to identify and support children with additional support needs – whether they require physical, emotional, learning, or behavioural support. This is important because early intervention can lead to better outcomes, which is why Early Years teachers often co-ordinate with other agencies as part of Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC, 2014).

There is sometimes a gap between parents' aspirations and their expectations of what will actually happen for their children. A high quality pre-school experience combined with a positive

home environment makes the most difference for children in the longer term (Taggart et al., 2015)⁽⁴⁾. The quality of provision and young children's learning, development and outcomes depend on the experience and educational qualifications of the adults who work with them and the ways in which they engage with child and family. Attention to children's socio-emotional and cognitive development go hand in hand.

Early Years teachers are strongly involved in collaborative practice. They are often part of the team around the child and work with a range of stakeholders to build positive relationships with parents and other professionals involved in the holistic development of the child. Children with additional support needs are often

first identified by the nursery teacher, and teachers frequently work with professionals in other settings, including health visitors, speech and language specialists, social workers, occupational therapists, and educational psychologists.

Some nursery teachers believe they are granted more respect by other professionals than other nursery staff are given, and perhaps as a result of their training, teachers feel more confident to speak up in inter-agency meetings.

The nursery teacher co-ordinates with other professionals and primary school staff to share information, ensure familiarity between staff and children, and provide reassurance for parents.

“ We use the GIRFEC headings to guide our conversations with parents and other professionals. We build up a picture of the child's physical and emotional environment and the people in the child's life. We ensure the child has opportunities to settle into the nursery or school environment through induction visits and a settling in period for the nursery. The children get to know the staff they will be working with before their official start. Parents are able to discuss any concerns they have and provide us with valuable information about their child's preferences and learning ability and a full range of issues which they see as important. ”

(Depute Head Teacher with responsibility for nursery)

(4) Taggart, B., Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Sammons, P., & Siraj, I. (2015). Effective pre-school, primary and secondary education project (EPPSE 3-16+): How pre-school influences children and young people's attainment and developmental outcomes over time. Department for Education Research Brief





Supporting Transitions

Nursery teachers can make a strong contribution to transitions, from home to nursery, between different activities across the day, and from nursery to primary school. Teachers' understanding of early learning and child development combined with their knowledge of each stage across the Early Level 3-6 and later primary curriculum fosters an awareness of how best to prepare children and their families for these important journeys.

The specialist training and qualifications undertaken by many Early Years teachers allows them to support children within the school, their families and the community, as they transition from home to nursery and from nursery to school. These transitions are made at a crucial stage

of development and a seamless, supportive environment facilitated by specially trained staff can provide a solid foundation for the child's continued learning journey.

11 *As a current P1 class teacher I work very closely with the nursery children, teacher and staff. From my perspective, the majority of children who come into P1 from an establishment which is led by a qualified teacher, these are the children who are 'ready to learn'.¹¹*

(Primary 1 teacher)

Transition into nursery

Today's children navigate many changes in their lives, and the way in which these earliest transitions are handled can have a considerable impact upon how they

look forward to, or cope with, change in the future. We also know that the more vulnerable a child is, the more transitions they will have to deal with. Research (eg Pianta et al, 2002⁽⁵⁾) has shown the important influence of a child's first teacher for later school success. Tailored responses and shared planning with families are needed to support children's wellbeing and self-confidence, and to identify starting points for each child.

11 *Staff who are fully aware of children as individuals, and families as having unique skills, needs and anxieties can make the transition smooth. Being willing to be flexible and see the situation from the children and families' point of view can make all the difference.¹¹*

(Nursery teacher in a free-standing nursery school)



In their formal and informal interactions with children's families, nursery teachers promote family engagement, a strong factor in improving outcomes for all children, and particularly for those who are impacted by poverty.

Key message

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Transition into primary school

Providing nursery children and their families the time to become familiar with the new setting can help smooth the transition to primary school. It can also be beneficial for nursery children to interact with primary school children before transition, both in the new classroom and outdoors. While these 'pastoral' transitions are important for children and families, the focus on learning and development is also central. What children can accomplish consistently 'dips' in a new setting: to sustain the gains and strengths developed in early childhood settings, some continuity of experience is therefore essential.

Curriculum for Excellence stated the desire that the nursery way of learning through doing should percolate into early primary, not only because it is effective and produces independence and self-reliance, but also because it is part of a smoother transition into a learning environment that is more recognisable.

4 *As nursery teachers we have a 'foot in both camps'. We know the capabilities and personalities of our nursery children and we know what is expected of them in Primary 1. Thus we are the best placed to bridge that gap and to ensure as smooth a transition as possible.* **7** (Nursery class teacher)

An understanding of transitions is important in daily practice, and it is particularly important because the impact of transitions on vulnerable children may place them at a further disadvantage.

4 *Providing children and their families with a positive transition at this stage is of paramount importance.* **7** (Primary 1 teacher)

Family and Community Engagement

Family engagement

It has been a long time since educators believed that learning begins in schools. Children come to these settings from a wide spectrum of experiences from their family life. There will be children who come with much prior learning, from a language-rich and experience-rich environment, and they are entitled to have that built on. Others come with much less, from family backgrounds of poverty and vulnerability, and with parents who are themselves in need of support, encouragement and structure.

A key difference between working in a nursery setting and teaching older children is the amount of time spent getting to know the children's parents and other family members. At drop-off and pick-up times, informal conversations between nursery staff and parents can build trusting relationships that can lead to insights about what might be negatively affecting a child's learning and development before it becomes an issue.

For a child to succeed, the family must have some success, too, so it is part of the teacher's, and of the nursery team's, role to form good, warm relationships with family members.

Promoting family engagement means working towards a team approach in which the teacher and the family take part, along with other relevant professionals. Fostering richer home

learning environments for children is a critical element in interrupting the cycle of poverty caused by lack of income. Family engagement in education can support more confident parenting and create new opportunities for children and parents to share time together. The teacher often works in educative ways with the parents through formal and informal interaction as well as fulfilling the teaching role with the child.

4 *The nurseries I work with act as a link for some families in accessing support services in the community.* **7** (Peripatetic pre-school principal teacher)

Working within local communities

There is a long and continuing tradition of shared work with the local community with teachers at the forefront. Some nurseries host workshops, training, and other events for parents and members of the community, and allow children to use the equipment outwith school hours. Some nurseries have started to host community events about raising confident children, delivered by members of staff, for parents in the local community to attend. Nurseries also work with different outreach agencies to integrate children with additional support needs into mainstream nursery.

4 *We provide value to the lives of parents of our children as a hub of community. Many go on to work and develop [their] own lives once children go to Nursery.* **7** (Depute Head Teacher with responsibility for nursery)



Leadership and Mentoring

Many nursery teachers provide leadership and mentoring for other staff in their setting; this is often considered an informal part of the role. Greater recognition is required that nursery teachers undertake mentoring, demonstrate best practice and provide leadership for and management of, the rest of the team. They deliver CPD and in-service training about specific topics for their nursery colleagues. They also mentor Initial Teacher Education (ITE) students, although it is increasingly difficult for universities to place their ITE students with a qualified nursery teacher, given the reduced numbers. The complexity of this role is recognised in programmes of study leading to postgraduate specialism in the Early Years.

The combined descriptions of the nursery teacher's role provided by 16 of 32 local authorities in Scotland include: demonstrating best practice; supporting staff planning; advising staff regarding the specific needs of children; modelling new approaches to adult-child interaction; ensuring consistency in the assessment of children's progress; ensuring the relevance and robustness of evidence used to underpin assessments; and supporting staff to deal effectively with children with additional needs.

Scottish Government statistics describe the nursery teacher's role as including the responsibility to: model effective practice; provide input on management and leadership, and support staff development and training.

In addition, nursery teachers play an important role in helping to manage staff, for example by organising and co-ordinating

team meetings. At times, this happens due to the Head Teacher or Depute Head Teacher not being present, or because the senior management team is based in a different location and the nursery teacher feels obliged to fulfil those management responsibilities on a day-to-day basis. Because of their Early Years experience along with knowledge of later learning in primary school, nursery teachers are well qualified to provide this guidance for the nursery team.

④ *In nursery you are working as part of a team and you are leading that team. As well as being responsible for the day to day management of the nursery team, the nursery teacher is responsible for driving forward nursery self evaluation and development. (...) I also think it is the nursery teacher's role to inspire and support nursery staff to improve their practice and to develop their ideas, so there is a considerable mentoring role there.* ④ (GTCS-registered early childhood teacher working in a primary school)

④ Nursery teaching requires a highly skilled professional. It requires someone who is able and willing to undertake... leadership responsibilities...(and), far more communication with other professionals working with children and families. ④ (GTCS-registered teacher)

Access to a teacher's skills and talents may be compromised by lack of clarity about their role and contributions. Nursery teachers take on many additional tasks and often have to comply with additional demands such as covering for class teacher absence in primary school (leaving their own class without a teacher contribution), dealing with budgetary issues, and with isolation (particularly

for peripatetic teachers). A felt lack of support, lack of understanding of what an experienced, trained teacher may offer, lack of investment in teacher skills, inadequate opportunities for further training in some areas and lack of understanding about the importance of relational agency, combine with challenging relationships and status confusions. A clear and positive definition of the Early Years teacher's role and acknowledgment of the leadership they undertake would allow greater benefit for children, staff teams and employers.

④ *The nursery teacher leads all aspects of the nursery provision, encompassing staff, the environment and pedagogy.* ④ (GTCS-registered teacher)

Teachers play a unique role as 'bridging professionals' across the Early Level Curriculum for Excellence in Scotland. Keeping qualified teachers in place where they can lead Early Years practice will raise the status of the sector, increase professionalism and improve quality and continuity. It will also help the different members of the early learning and childcare workforce to recognise and respect one another's strengths.





The unique role of qualified teachers in the nursery setting should be acknowledged and valued by all within Scottish Education.

The vital contribution of degree-qualified nursery teachers, particularly in addressing the early disadvantages created by poverty, evidenced by a range of sources, should be acknowledged at all levels and reflected in discussions with local authorities and school leaders which are focused on minimising the impact of poverty in education.

The work of nursery teachers with children, their families and other professionals makes their role uniquely complex, demanding and valuable.

Teachers, with their knowledge of CfE, combined with their understanding of child development and commitment to career long professional learning, are uniquely placed to support children's learning across the Early Level.

Specialist knowledge of pedagogy and how the curriculum, learning and teaching are combined, is a key asset which teachers bring to the Early Years workforce.

Nursery teachers are skilled in observing children's learning, analysing assessment evidence and tailoring learning to the needs of individuals and groups in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing.

Nursery teachers, as a result of their training and experience, are key in the early identification of additional support needs and in ensuring the appropriate interventions.

The nursery teacher's knowledge of early learning and child development, and of the Early and First Levels of CfE, facilitates seamless transition from home to nursery, and nursery to primary school, in line with CfE ambitions for a seamless 3-18 learner journey.

In their formal and informal interactions with children's families, nursery teachers promote family engagement, a strong factor in improving outcomes for all children, and particularly for those who are impacted by poverty.

The unique blend of nursery teachers' training, skills and experience, their contracted duties as teachers, and their positionality within the Early Years workforce, makes them natural leaders of learning and teaching among colleagues and Initial Teacher Education students.

Nursery teachers, alongside colleagues with other unique specialisms, are an essential element of the Early Years workforce as it makes its contribution to the pursuit of the Scottish Government's dual aims of excellence and equity for all learners within the 3-18 curricular framework.

A collegiate approach within Early Years education is crucial to its success in achieving positive outcomes for Scotland's early learners, and is key to the effectiveness of the relationship of the Early Years sector with the rest of the education system.

Meaningful teacher-child time is essential to children's learning and development and should be protected by statute in the interests of ensuring that all children can benefit from such high quality interaction in an equitable way.

Time and space should be created to facilitate meaningful professional dialogue and collaboration, and opportunities for shared professional learning, between nursery teachers and colleagues in the primary school setting. EIS members and representatives at local level should advocate for this. Working Time Agreements should incorporate time for such liaison.

Recommended further reading:

Executive Summary & Full Report:
www.eis.org.uk/sustainingtheambition

Relevant EIS publications:
www.eis.org.uk/earlyeducation



Larry Flanagan

Larry Flanagan
EIS General Secretary

Scotland's pre-5 provision is a hotch-potch set of arrangements which have developed through various governance programmes, local and national initiatives, and in the presence and absence of policy guidance and regulation. It's hard to imagine anyone planning a system fit for the 21st century using the current set-up as a good starting point. And yet that is where we are. So perhaps we need to step back and consider a bolder approach and ambition for our pre-5 services and work towards that goal.

Within such a vision a statutory entitlement to publicly funded and provided nursery education would be the singular priority of the EIS; giving genuine access for all children to that CfE 3-6 entitlement would strike at preventing an attainment gap forming, potentially a far more effective strategy than seeking to narrow it.

If Scotland is to be a world leader in addressing the impact of poverty, to match that ambition we need action to enhance the quality of nursery provision for all our early learners.

Nationally, the EIS will continue to campaign for a reversal of the erosion in nursery teacher numbers and for a statutory minimum amount of access to a qualified teacher, characterised by genuinely meaningful interaction, for all nursery children.

We will continue to lobby:

- For the creation of a legal entitlement to a child's right to nursery education
- To ensure that all children have high quality interaction with a GTCS registered teacher
- For ring fencing of resources for nursery education and pre-5 services.





SUSTAIN THE AMBITION

The Contribution of
GTCS - Registered Teachers
in Early Years

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