



eis

Scotland's largest
education trade union

Playing
for a brighter
future

**Quality, Equity, Happy Successful Learners
and Lifelong Social Good**



For Equity in Education

We need investment in the early years to provide the targeted support needed to combat the impact of poverty. With the gulf in attainment between the lowest income homes and those from the highest income homes continuing to grow, we need greater investment in order to give our most disadvantaged learners the start in education which they deserve.

For happy, successful learners

For happy, successful learners – We need investment in early years teaching and practitioner staffing; in professional learning; and of resources to fund the appropriate interventions, in order to properly address the wellbeing needs of all children; and to remove potential barriers to inclusive education.

For lifelong, social good

We need investment in early years to promote the holistic development of the child, in cognitive, social and emotional skills, which will then result in better outcomes for the individual throughout schooling; stronger employment and socio-economic outcomes; better physical and mental health in adulthood; and positive contributions to society.

Ultimately for Quality Early Years Education

We need investment in the provision of GTCS registered teachers in every nursery. Curriculum for Excellence provides the architecture to support children's learning and wellbeing in a continuous way across the early years and into early primary school settings but nursery teachers are central to the navigation of this route and the delivery of meaningful outcomes for children.

Playing for a brighter future

Early years education has for many years been synonymous with child led learning. When we think of early years, most of us picture happy children immersed in play - engaged in quality learning experiences. The curiosity, freedom and joy of exploring the world around them drives learning and promotes the holistic development of our youngest learners in an apparently seamless manner. And yet this recipe for engagement is not one commonly replicated as learners move on from early years.

With the intense focus on attainment data, Scottish National Standardised Assessments and national qualifications in recent years, this nurturing approach led by GTCS registered teachers has perhaps not been given the prominence in educational debate which it deserves. Yet as we reflect on the challenges of the pandemic and begin to look forward, it is clear that there is much to be learned from our colleagues in early years.

The publication of the OECD Study, 'Early Learning and Child Well-being' certainly points in that direction. Published in March 2020, shortly before the introduction of COVID-19 lockdown measures, the report serves as a timely reminder that we cannot

look at cognitive development or attainment in isolation. Its conclusions re-enforce the interdependence of cognitive growth with the development of social and emotional skills.

The study highlights that early intervention measures which seek to develop the holistic needs of the child and address the gaps resulting from poverty and socio-economic disadvantage, are crucial in the strive for equity and in improving outcomes in later life. But the report also sends a stark warning: 'Starting behind in the early years means staying behind – for individual children and for the education system as a whole.'

It is crucial, therefore that we use the results of this study to push for further investment in the provision of high-quality educational experiences for our youngest learners, with an appropriate level of teacher involvement in every nursery, and adequate resources to effect meaningful early intervention to break the cycle of child poverty.

**The message is clear:
Positive change begins
with early years education
but we need to invest now!**



Susan Quinn

Susan Quinn
Education Committee Convener

OECD Report

Early Learning and Child Well-being:

A Study of Five-year Olds In England, Estonia and the United States

In March 2020, the OECD published its report, 'Early Learning and Child Well-being: A Study of Five-Year Olds in England, Estonia and the United States'. This comparative study investigates the development of five-year old children across a range of early skills in the three participating countries and provides key data to assist in identifying factors which promote or detract from children's early learning.

For the first time, this study considers the relationship between early cognitive development and development in the wider contexts of social and emotional skills, such as empathy, trust and self-regulation. The findings, based on a sample of 7,000 five-year olds across the three participating countries, provide empirical evidence that children's learning is 'inter-related and mutually re-enforcing' and emphasises that investment in early years is crucial to enhancing educational and health and wellbeing outcomes in later life.



Key Findings

0 **Inter-dependency between cognitive development and social and emotional development**

– the study provides clear evidence that the development of children’s social and emotional skills is inextricably linked to their cognitive development.

0 **The Impact of socio-economic background on child development**

– children from higher socio-economic backgrounds had higher levels of skills development than children from lower socio-economic backgrounds across almost all learning domains in the study.

0 **Parental activities and engagement are pivotal in child development**

– regardless of socio-economic background, the study found the day-to-day activities which parents undertake with their children are highly correlated with children’s learning and development. This re-enforces the findings of the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (‘EPPE’) Study in 2004: ‘What parents do with their children is more important than who they are.’

0 **Gender differences** – in all three countries, girls had stronger emergent literacy and higher levels of social-emotional skills than boys. Girls were also shown to be better able to identify emotions in others, as a pre-cursor to empathy. In direct assessment of emergent numeracy, there was no discernible differences between girls and boys, although reports from parents and teachers place girls at higher levels in this area than boys.

0 **The positive impact of early childhood education and care**

– early childhood education and care was found to make a positive difference, in particular, to emergent literacy and numeracy skills.

0 **Investment in high quality early childhood education and care has positive benefits in later life**

– the study emphasises the importance of tailored, high quality interventions in the early years to bridge the gaps which may result from inequality and deprivation. It highlights the positive impact which such measures will have on the educational attainment of learners, continuing into further and higher education and more generally, on the health and wellbeing and contribution of individuals to society more generally.

Why Early Years Matters

The OECD Study considers the importance of early childhood education and the positive impact not only on individuals but for education systems and society as a whole.

Early Learning supports children's wellbeing and happiness

It is well-established that, through the play experiences and interactions with those around them, children learn about themselves and make sense of the world around them. They develop language and cognitive skills whilst the social environment of the early years setting provides opportunities for children to develop positive relationships with others, and allows them to explore an understanding of boundaries, problem-solving, self-regulation, negotiation and choice.

The OECD study highlights that children who develop this holistic set of skills are happier than children who do not have the opportunity to do so. These early skills influence their ability to make friends with other children and to strengthen a sense of belonging and engagement with adults around them. This provides the foundation for key life skills, required to build relationships in life.

The link between Early Years and positive outcomes in later life

The study outlines the importance of early childhood education and care not only on the holistic development of children at that stage but of the continuing benefits on educational and health and wellbeing outcomes in later life. It is well evidenced that children who experience supportive early learning environments develop rapidly, establishing a sound basis for ongoing learning and development, promoting success in school and beyond.

The study, using the results from its research, explores this correlation more fully and identifies the importance of early education and childcare to the education system as a whole and to society more generally. It makes clear links between the development of cognitive, social and emotional skills in the early years and better outcomes for the individual throughout schooling; stronger



“the early years setting provides opportunities for children to develop positive relationships with others”

“children who experience supportive early learning environments develop rapidly”

“the report makes clear links between the development of cognitive, social and emotional skills in the early years”



employment and socio-economic outcomes; better physical and mental health in adulthood; and positive contributions to society.

However, the report also sends a stark warning for governments:

‘The evidence is overwhelming. Starting behind means staying behind. When children’s early learning is not strong before they start school and continues to be weak in the first two years of school, the outlook for these children is bleak.’

It goes on,

‘The vast majority of children who have poor cognitive and social-emotional skills at the age of seven will not catch up with their peers who had a better start in their early years and will face poorer outcomes in schooling and later life.’

‘For many of these children, these poorer outcomes could have been averted if they had received tailored, high-quality interventions in their early years and in the first year or two of their schooling.’

The message from the OECD could not be clearer. To enable all children to thrive and to ensure equity of opportunity for all learners, early learning and childcare must:

- Adopt Early Intervention Strategies
- Support all parents as early educators of their children;
- Address the poverty-related achievement and attainment Gap

Early Intervention

‘The first five years of every child’s life are a period of great opportunity, but also one of risk. The cognitive and social-emotional skills that children develop in these early years have long-lasting impacts on their later outcomes throughout schooling and adulthood.’

The OECD study references the decades of longitudinal research which has demonstrated that early literacy and numeracy skills are strongly predictive of later cognitive and educational outcomes. The study recorded the differences in cognitive development between children in the highest socio-economic quartile and those in the lowest in the participating countries and the results were unequivocal.

Children from the most advantaged homes were found to have skills in emergent literacy and emergent numeracy around one year ahead of those children in the lower socio-economic quartile. The challenge for early years settings and indeed for schools, is that once these gaps exist, they become increasingly difficult to close.

The report makes it clear that the issue is not insurmountable and children can be supported through high quality, targeted early intervention. However, the timing of this support is key.

Without the necessary development of core foundation skills by the age of seven, the report states that children will struggle to progress at school and are more likely to have social and behavioural difficulties not only in adolescence but in later life. Appropriate high-quality early intervention is, therefore, central to positively influencing a child’s long-term ability to learn and to mitigating the impact of socio-economic disadvantage.

The study concludes that:

‘Strong early learning appears to act as a foundation that, once consolidated in early schooling, provides a protective and fertile base for greater skill development during the remainder of school years and into adolescence and adulthood.’





‘The window for positive early learning closes when children are around seven years old, due to a sharp decrease in brain malleability.’

The Pivotal Impact of Parental Engagement

The findings from OECD report re-enforce the strong body of evidence that as the first educators, parents and carers have a key role in the development of their child. The research demonstrated the high correlation between the day-to-day activities which parents undertake and the child's learning and development. The results align with the conclusions of the EPPE report which was published in 2004 and which concluded that 'what parents do with their children is more important than who they are'.

The study identified the following parental activities as having the most direct impact on child development:

- 0 Reading to the child almost every day
- 0 Ensuring that there are many children's books in the home
- 0 Engaging the child in back-and-forth conversation
- 0 Taking the child to special activities, such as dance, swimming or scouts
- 0 Being involved in the Early Learning and Childcare setting or school which the child attended

Although these results were found to apply regardless of socio-economic background and are a reminder of the positive impact which fostering rich home learning environments can have on interrupting the cycle of poverty, we must also be cognisant of the fact that fewer children from low socio-economic backgrounds will be able to attend special activities and may also have access to fewer books in the home.

We only have to look at the experience of the thousands of families in Scotland who are currently living in poverty, often unable to ensure that basic needs in relation to food, fuel and clothing are met, to fully understand that the costs of attending special activities may be prohibitive for low income families. In fact, the study acknowledges that in the participating countries, only 11% of children from low socio-economic backgrounds could attend special activities at least three times a week.

This underlines the impact of child poverty on educational outcomes and the importance of addressing the poverty-related achievement and attainment gap. With child poverty increasing, we cannot ignore the barriers that children from low income families face. The impact on children from larger families will be

“fewer children from low socio-economic backgrounds will be able to attend special activities and may also have access to fewer books in the home”



compounded and until these barriers are removed, the vital support which can be provided through participation in the key parental activities, identified in this study, will be denied to our most disadvantaged learners and the impact on their development opportunities perpetuated.

**“what parents do
with their children
is more important
than who they are”**



Poverty and Closing the Gap

The OECD study confirms what we know about the relationship between poverty and attainment. Children from advantaged socio-economic backgrounds had higher levels of skills development than children from disadvantaged socio-economic households across the key learning domains in the study. From the participating countries, Estonia, the country with the lowest levels of child poverty, saw the smallest differences in child development based on socio-economic status.

The findings of the study highlight the importance of inclusive education, with priority given to ensuring that

children and families living in poverty and deprivation, are given the necessary high-quality support in the early years to bridge the gap and ensure equity for all.

The results of the study pose a challenge for all countries. Inclusive education starts in the early years and unless we address the poverty-related achievement and attainment gap at that stage, then the gap widens and becomes more difficult to bridge in the school years ahead. The need for urgent action is even more pressing with the challenges which COVID-19 presents.

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What does the OECD Report mean for Early Learning and Childcare in Scotland?

The message from the OECD Report is clear:

- Investment in early learning and childcare is key to the success of educational policy;
- Measures should be adopted to ensure early and effective intervention in the early years;
- Initiatives should be put in place to address the impact of child poverty and the poverty related achievement and attainment gap; and
- Parental actions have a pivotal impact on child development.

At first blush, it might be thought that there is little for Scotland to learn from these findings. There would appear to be a significant alignment between Scottish Government policy and the key findings of the report.

The Scottish Government has stated its commitment to Early Learning and Childcare, aspiring 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.

With the extension of early learning and children to 1140 hours for all 3 and 4 years olds and vulnerable two-year olds; the investment in Family Learning Scotland to support parents by increasing their confidence in their own learning skills; and the increases in the ELC workforce, it might be thought that the essential components are in place to realise the policy ambition. However, the distinction must be drawn between policy and practice.



The Gap between Policy and Practice

Early Intervention

There is an extensive array of legislation and policies in place in Scotland which enable schools to develop plans and actions for inclusive education. Provisions of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 refer to the creation of a child's plan where the child has a wellbeing need and the only way to address that need is through targeted intervention. The GIRFEC ('Getting It Right for Every Child') approach allows a multi-agency plan to be developed in meeting the wellbeing needs of the child and in seeking to remove potential barriers to inclusive education.

Inter-agency and partnership working across the early years allows the team around the child, including teachers, early years practitioners, health visitors, speech and language therapists and parents to engage and identify individual support needs at an early juncture, and it may be thought that there is a clear process through which the targeted interventions referenced in the OECD Study can be actioned.

However, without the necessary investment in both teaching and early years staff, in professional learning and in the provision of adequate resources to fund the appropriate

interventions, the information garnered from these assessments cannot effectively impact on learning for all.

Inconsistent policy about employment of teachers in early years settings 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.

There is, therefore, a well-evidenced gap between theories of inclusion, the law and policy on children's rights, and the daily practice in our early years settings and schools. The gap stems from the significant under resourcing of provision to allow well-intentioned policies to be implemented effectively in practice¹.

Poverty

In Scotland, one in four children is affected by child poverty and information published in the Scottish Government publication, 'Equalities and Fairer Scotland Impact Assessment'² highlights that this is likely to be an even more pressing concern in the post-pandemic period. With the gulf in attainment between the children from the lowest income homes and those from the highest

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¹ Further information, including a list of recommendations to turn the promise of our ambitious legislation and policy into effective inclusive practice, can be found in the EIS publication, 'Additional Support for Learning in Scottish School Education: Exploring the Gap between Promise and Practice.'

² <https://www.gov.scot/publications/equality-fairer-scotland-impact-assessment-evidence-gathered-cotlands-route-map-through-out-crisis/>

income homes continuing to grow, greater investment is needed to ensure that the Scottish Government's policy ambition to close the poverty-related achievement and attainment gap can be realised. The OECD study makes a compelling case for greater investment in the early years to provide the targeted support needed to combat the impact of poverty. The Fairer Scotland Duty and the Child Poverty Act require local authorities to consider how they will seek to minimise socio-economic disadvantage in all aspects of their service provision, including Early Years, and must be properly funded by the Scottish Government to enable this.

Parental Activities

Whilst the results of the OCED study in relation to the impact which parental activities have on their children's development, irrespective of socio-economic background, are positive, we cannot ignore the barriers which poverty imposes against enabling families to engage in this manner. At a time when the number of children attending school hungry is on the increase and the distribution of food aid within the UK, including in Scotland, is commonplace, participation in the activities identified in the study may for some be seen

as a luxury which they quite simply cannot afford.

Given the positive links which these parental activities have with child development and long-term impacts into adulthood, however, we simply cannot ignore the importance of the OECD findings. Further investment in order to support poorer families is essential if Scotland is to ensure that all children have genuine equality of opportunity.

Investment In qualified teachers in early learning and childcare

In 2016, the EIS funded research by the Child's Curriculum Group into the contribution of qualified teachers in nursery education. The results, published in the document, 'Sustaining the Ambition: the contribution of GTCS Registered Teachers in Early Years', highlight 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.

A central tenet of the OECD research has been the importance of high-quality provision in the early learning and childcare setting. In Scotland, qualified teachers, registered with the

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GTCS, play a unique role in delivering this high-quality experience for our youngest learners and in acting as bridging professionals across the Early Level.

In recent years, however, the impact of austerity and severe financial pressures on local authorities, has seen the removal of teachers from many early years' settings, or a model of provision adopted, whereby teachers deliver the role on a peripatetic basis across a number of centres. It is plain that the diverse nature of the responsibilities of a nursery teacher are more difficult to fulfil if the teacher is serving in a peripatetic capacity or if they are solely responsible for planning the learning without the opportunity to experience any responsive teaching of children in the nursery setting. The result is that nationally, many pre-school children have no meaningful access to or engagement with a qualified teacher.

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 early years, contributing to the 'postcode lottery' that is likely to result in inequality of outcomes.

Whilst Curriculum for Excellence provides the architecture to support children's learning and wellbeing in a continuous way across the early years and into early primary school settings, it is axiomatic that nursery teachers are central to the navigation of this route and the delivery of meaningful outcomes for children.

Yet, since 2016, we have seen a 26% reduction in the number of GTCS registered teachers in Scotland's nurseries, whilst the number of children attending early years settings is scheduled to rise.

Unless this worrying trend in the decline in the numbers of qualified teachers in early years is reversed, then the high-quality interaction envisaged by the OECD and the policy ambitions of the Scottish Government will not be achieved.



“since 2010, we have seen a reduction of 52% in the number of GTCS registered teachers in Scotland’s nurseries”

The Unique Contribution of GTCS Registered Teachers to Early Years Education

GTCS registered teachers are uniquely placed in Scotland with the 3-18 Curriculum for Excellence to ensure that there is continuity of learning and of experience across all sectors of education and in the case of early years, across the Early Level.

The 2016 research concluded that early years teachers make many valuable contributions to young children's learning. 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' professional standards which require a commitment to social justice.

Curriculum Knowledge

Early years teachers are the specialists with knowledge of the curriculum and its application, not only in the early years setting but in the primary context

also. This places them in the unique position of being able to guide and support children seamlessly across the Early Level.

Understanding of Pedagogy

Add this to the strong understanding which teachers have of children's thinking and the place it has in their learning and development. Teachers use this on a daily basis to link theory to practice to inform next steps in learning, embracing common teaching approaches as part of a continuous curriculum for this level and acting as bridging professionals in easing the move from nursery to school.

Identification of Additional Support Needs

As is emphasised in the OECD Report, early identification of physical, emotional, learning or behavioural supports is key at this stage and can lead to better outcomes for the child. Early years teachers play a key role in identifying and supporting children who require additional support for learning, in co-ordinating this support with the relevant agencies and in contributing to the multi-disciplinary team around the child for GIRFEC purposes.

“Early years teachers play a key role in identifying and supporting children who require additional support for learning”

“Fostering richer home learning environments for children is a critical element in interrupting the cycle of poverty.”

“Children navigate many changes in their lives and the way in which the earliest are handled can have a considerable impact upon how they look forward to or cope with change in the future”



Supporting Transitions

There is also a plethora of research which highlights the importance of ensuring effective transitions in the early stages of life. Children navigate many changes in their lives and the way in which the earliest are handled can have a considerable impact upon how they look forward to or cope with change in the future. Early years teachers make a strong contribution to transitions. Teachers' understanding of child development, combined with their knowledge of each stage across the Early Level and later primary curriculum fosters an awareness of how best to prepare the children and their families for this journey.

Family and Community Engagement

Part of the nursery teacher's role is to form good, warm relationships with family members. Fostering richer home learning environments for children is a critical element in interrupting the cycle of poverty.

Leadership and Mentoring

Teachers in the nursery setting are leaders of the team, modelling good practice and performing a vital mentoring role.

Playing your part?

- **Raise awareness** of the findings in this report and the importance of providing early intervention and meaningful support to learners, particularly those affected by poverty and deprivation.
- **Work with** your local Early Years Network member to monitor the level of access which children, in early years settings in your authority, have to a GTCS registered teacher. Gather relevant data to inform your local campaign.
- **Campaign locally** to highlight the importance and value of qualified teachers in early years settings, both at EIS branch level and in your local community.
- **Make known** your support for statutory reform, to guarantee a minimum amount of contact between a child and a qualified nursery teacher to ensure meaningful interaction for all nursery children.
- **Contact your local Councillors** to discuss the policy within your local authority on Early Years education and 'access' to a GTCS registered teacher.
- **Write to your MSP** to find out their views on early years education and whether it features in their party's manifesto commitments for the 2021 Scottish Parliamentary elections.
- **Keep the** national EIS Early Years Network informed to influence EIS national campaigning and policy on Early Years.

'As teachers in Early Years, we are the link across the Early Level of the curriculum and have the underpinning knowledge to help smooth the transition between Nursery and Primary, supporting Early Years colleagues, as we strive to get it right for all our wee ones in Nursery.'

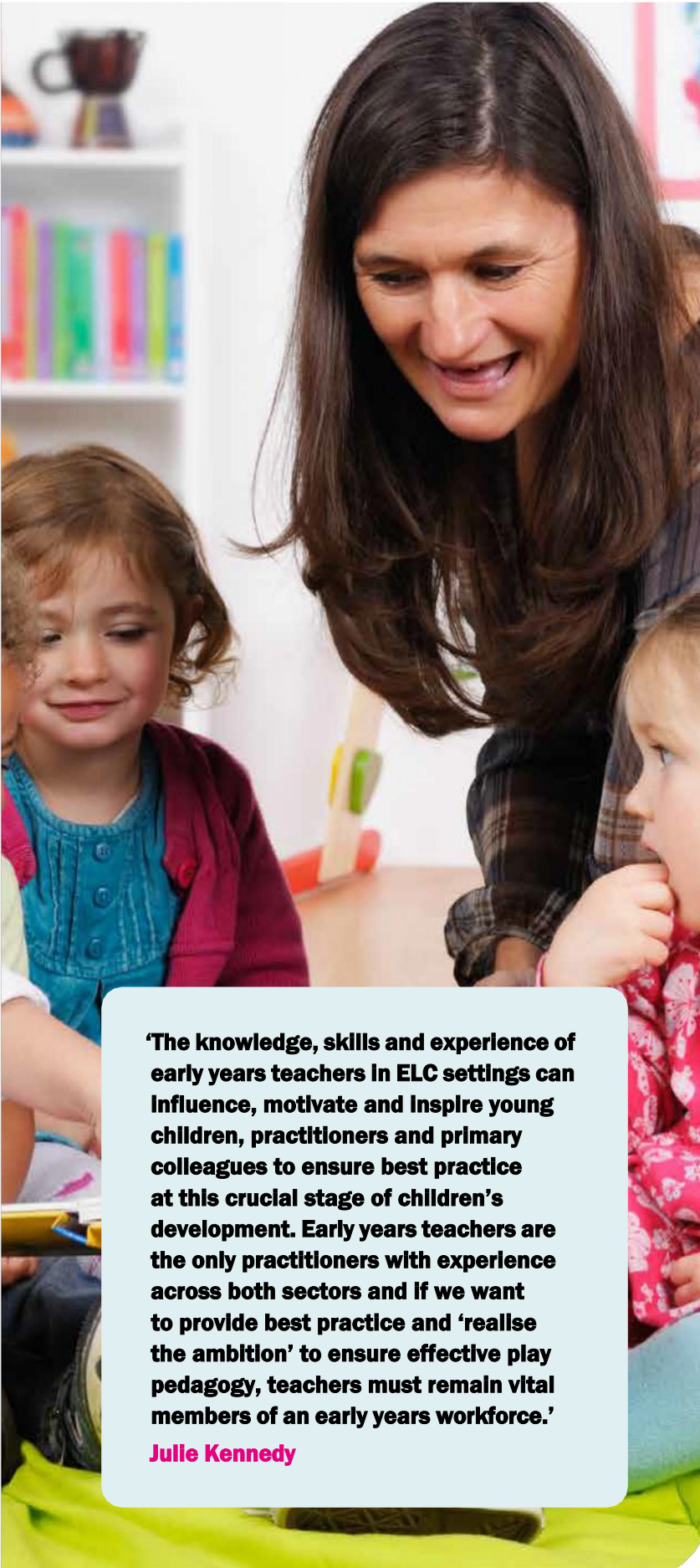
Paula Duffy

'I take inspiration from Jess Lair's quote – 'Children are not things to be moulded but are people to be unfolded.'

I love the nurturing, the supporting, the language, the creativity, the confidence, the shyness, the experimenting, the relationships, the openness and the developing. Quality Early Years Education is fundamental to all our lives and those that contribute to it are a special type of educator.'

Rebecca McCulloch





'The knowledge, skills and experience of early years teachers in ELC settings can influence, motivate and inspire young children, practitioners and primary colleagues to ensure best practice at this crucial stage of children's development. Early years teachers are the only practitioners with experience across both sectors and if we want to provide best practice and 'realise the ambition' to ensure effective play pedagogy, teachers must remain vital members of an early years workforce.'

Julie Kennedy



Laura Gilbertson

Early Years Network Convener

Across Scotland, the focus on a highly qualified workforce within Early Childhood Education is imperative towards ensuring access to high-quality educational experiences for our youngest learners. Through times of expansion, as has taken place with children's increased 1140 hours of entitlement, a diverse and highly skilled workforce should not only be an expectation for our children, but a right.

The role of the GTCS-registered teacher as part of this workforce, is crucial, recognition of which can be found direct from the government's Equity and Excellence Lead Role campaign. As a group, the passion and dedication of teachers in Early Childhood Education has continued to shine through across Local Authorities, despite reduced employment opportunities for Early Years Teachers.

As chair of the EIS's Early Years Network I am pleased to be part of the wider collegiate group of teachers across Scotland who advocate for investment in their role, seeking to deliver on a high-quality education which meets the needs of our youngest learners.

And finally...

As the rainbow was a symbol of hope and unity during the pandemic, so too is the commitment and passion of early years teachers for child-centred play pedagogy a beacon signalling the way to engage and support learners as we move forward.

Invest in early years so that our youngest learners can play their way to a brighter future!





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