

THE EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTE OF SCOTLAND

Reduction in Educational Psychological Services

Report, April 2017

The 2016 AGM passed the following resolution:

"That this AGM instruct Council to investigate and report on the impact that the reduction in educational psychological services has had on children's access to the service."

The resolution was passed to Education Committee with input from Salaries. Education Committee at its meeting of June 2016 agreed to consult with both the Educational Psychologists' and ASN Networks in order to ascertain their views of the impact of the reduction in educational psychology services.

The Educational Psychologists' (E.P.) Network discussed the resolution at its meeting of 24 June 2016; and the ASN network discussed it at its meeting of 12 September 2016.

The E.P. Network could not offer any information on impact of children's access to the service. It observed that members' perspective is that the E.P. service is overstretched, under-staffed and over-worked, but that there is no evidence on the impact that has on access for children.

The ASN Network observed that:

- Some members perceive that the cuts have made no difference because children rarely saw educational psychologists anyway
- Their perception is that children's access to the service is perfunctory or non-existent; a 'bare minimum' model seems to be the norm
- There is wide variation in delivery across different authorities, e.g.
 - in some authorities (e.g. Argyll and Bute) educational psychologists can be used inappropriately e.g. for dyslexia diagnoses, where other services could better provide this, but in others (e.g. Scottish Borders) they are never used for diagnosis
 - some authorities (e.g. Falkirk) use E.P.s on a "consultative basis"
 - in one authority (East Renfrewshire) all children with additional support for learning needs are allocated an educational psychologist, and attend one review meeting per year plus additional meetings if needed
 - in some authorities (e.g. Aberdeen) the ASN teachers see a lot of the E.P.s and they are perceived to be very engaged and 'hands-on'
 - in some authorities (e.g. North Ayrshire) they appear to be mostly engaged with systems rather than child contact.

- Some areas are actively encouraging the training of teachers in programmes like 'Seasons for Growth', which perhaps blurs the lines regarding who is best placed to deliver therapeutic interventions, e.g. in Argyll and Bute the E.P. service pays for programmes on topics such as mindfulness, resilience etc., which teachers deliver.

The general consensus of the ASN network was that educational psychologists are used for support; to maintain systems; in GIRFEC processes; and, in some areas, in a diagnostic role; and that children's access to the service is highly variable and affected by more issues than purely the size of the service, including such factors as the authority's investment in teacher-led interventions, and its perception of the E.P. role.

The scope of Educational Psychology services

The reduction in educational psychology services is stark. The number of practicing E.P.s has fallen to 371 across Scotland in 2016. The number of educational psychologists working in schools dropped by 10% in the last ten years from 416 in 2007 to 371 in 2016.

At the same time, the number of pupils identified as having Additional Support Needs (ASN) increased. In 2016, 170,329 pupils (24.9% of all pupils) had additional support needs¹. The data held by the Scottish Government suggests that in 2016, 5.3% of pupils had social, emotional or behavioural difficulties and 2.1% had a learning disability. The number of young people treated for mental health conditions in Scotland has also risen in recent years (it rose by 30% from the quarter ending June 2014 compared to June 2016²), which is perhaps unsurprising, given that we now know that half of all diagnosable mental health problems start before the age of 14 and 75% by the age of 21.³

In addition to cuts in serving E.P.s, there has also been a decline in trainees. Applications to study educational psychology at universities in Scotland have fallen sharply in recent years. This could be attributed wholly or partly to the Scottish Government's 2012 decision to withdraw national funding (via bursaries) of trainee educational psychologists. Students of educational psychology now have to cover university tuition fees as well as living expenses.

It has been reported that before the bursary was removed, university courses in educational psychology at Dundee and Strathclyde attracted somewhere between 170 and 220 candidates. In 2016, they reportedly received 30 applications. In 2016, for the first time ever, they had to have a second recruitment phase, and

¹ <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/School-Education/TrendSpecialEducation>

² <https://stv.tv/news/politics/1366169-half-of-health-boards-missing-children-s-mental-health-targets/>

³ <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/statistics/mental-health-statistics-children-and-young-people>

eventually attracted 19 candidates for 24 places, but subsequently, two candidates dropped out because of a lack of funding. ⁴

This situation is not new. A 2013 report from the Scottish National Steering Group of Educational Psychologists said that nearly a quarter of E.P.s might retire in the next four years; that too few new trainees are being recruited; and that the Group had concerns that some councils could breach their statutory obligations on provision if the situation does not improve. The report indicated that nearly 25% of Scottish Educational Psychologists were eligible to retire by 2017.

In 2017, just twelve newly qualified educational psychologists are expected to join the profession in Scotland, which is around half the number needed annually to fill vacancies. In 2018, it is expected that just 17 educational psychologists will graduate. The Association of Scottish Principal Educational Psychologists (ASPEP) has said that the situation is so serious that training courses could fold because of a lack of demand. It has been reported that due to this decline in trainees, discussions are underway between Education Scotland and Directors of Education about the possibility of education psychology services in Scotland being removed from local council control and turned into a national service.⁵

The overall data on provision of practicing E.P.s is as follows:

Teacher census

2016

Table 5.3: Other centrally employed staff, 2007-2016

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016 ⁽¹⁾
Educational Psychologist ⁽¹⁾	416	413	418	401	390	411	407	405	370	371

The impact on children’s access to the service

It is perhaps a logical step to say that a reduction of 10% in the service has a consequent impact on children’s access to educational psychology.

There certainly appears to be some evidence of that. The Scottish National Steering Group report of 2013 reported that the withdrawal of national funding for training of E.P.s, cuts to overall council budgets and an increase in the number of pupils with ASN have combined to put delivery of services in schools and communities under significant pressure. The report claimed that a postcode lottery

⁴ http://www.heraldscotland.com/News/14776302.Criss_over_educational_psychology_in_Scotland/?ref=rss

⁵ <https://www.tes.com/news/school-news/breaking-news/shortage-educational-psychologists-means-service-could-be-taken-out>

exists and that people in some areas have less access to educational psychologists, potentially putting them at risk.

The Association of Scottish Principal Educational Psychologists (ASPEP) is on record as saying that "a number of local authorities have been unable to employ a sufficient number of educational psychologists, and, unless national steps are taken to secure the workforce supply, then we are likely to see looked after children and those with additional support needs lose out on the core services that they need."

There also appears to be variation in how children access the service. It was noted during a March 2017 evidence session in the Scottish Parliament on ASN, that educational psychologists' role can vary, e.g. in whether they are used for expert assessment of additional needs. Professor Riddell (University of Edinburgh) said, "Some people might be effective at arguing for an expert assessment to be done by a psychologist, but many parents get an assessment from the class teacher", and a parent spoke of her experience, saying, "We have recently requested additional assessments for my youngest foster son...there was resistance from the educational psychologists in his own local authority and in the local authority in which he is now placed. They said that they did not want to do the assessments."

Teachers speaking at the same evidence session referred to the declining E.P. service in nursery, saying, "nursery staff no longer have the same access to psychologists or other resources if they want to get help with a child's speech and language" and "the pastoral care team and people who are involved in speech and language therapy see an educational psychologist once a month for two hours, if they are lucky."

ASPEP has recommended that the Scottish government should provide clear guidance to local authorities about the number of educational psychologists required per head of population to safeguard an effective level of service for children and young people. However, the Scottish Government's position is that it is up to each local authority to identify and meet this demand, with central government's role being to monitor the delivery of this support through the National Scottish Steering Group for Educational Psychologists.

Wider mental health services issues

New research on health boards' mixed delivery in terms of meeting the waiting time target (18 weeks) for treating children with mental health issues seem to suggest that there are systemic issues in Scotland re: children's access to mental health/psychological support services, which go beyond cuts to the educational psychology service.

Health boards are expected to ensure that 90% of people are seen within 18 weeks, but 2016 statistics showed seven of Scotland's 14 health boards failed to make the target, and in some areas only around a fifth to two fifths of children were seen within 18 weeks, e.g. in Shetland the figure was 22.7%, in Forth Valley it was 28% and in Grampian it was 41%.

The Scottish Government announced in 2016 that it will increase spending on mental health provision by £150m over the next five years, and it recently

published a new Scottish Government Mental Health Strategy⁶. The strategy is fairly thin on educational psychology issues. It states:

"Making sure that children and young people are included, engaged and involved in their education is fundamental to achievement and attainment in school. That means ensuring that schools provide a positive culture for all students' social, emotional and mental wellbeing, and that appropriate pastoral care and access to educational psychologists is available. The school environment can then help children to feel secure, resilient, confident, supported, and ready to learn."

However, there are no specific commitments in relation to educational psychology.

The Scottish Children's Services Coalition has called for more action on children's mental health, on the basis of the fact that half of all diagnosable mental health problems start before the age of 14 and 75% by the age of 21, and saying, "as such, it is vitally important that we radically improve mental health services and increase investment in these, with an overall aim of ensuring that children and young people get the help they need, when they need it. We need to look at preventing such problems arising in the first place and intervene early to ensure that these young people are able to realise their full potential."

It has been pointed out by EIS members that there are a wide range of factors which can impact on children's access to educational psychology services, including local priorities and investment in teacher-led programmes. It may also be the case that some children are having their needs met through other means, e.g. universal services, such as G.P.s or school nurses, or that they are being diverted to specialist services. (The Scottish Government announced in 2016 that it has doubled the number of psychologists working in children and adolescent mental health services, so these new posts may have taken on some of the caseload previously dealt with by E.P.s).

Conclusion and recommendations

It is evident that there has been a significant reduction in the educational psychology service, with further reductions likely in future, as the number of trainees falls, austerity budgeting continues and council budgets keep shrinking, and as practicing E.P.s retire or leave the profession for other reasons. At the same time, the number of children who may demonstrate a need for the service is increasing steadily.

What remains unclear is what the impact of the reduced service is on children. There is conflicting evidence about children's access to the service, and widespread variation across different authorities. However, with the number of children identified as having additional support for learning needs increasing, it is clear that the role of educational psychology remains a vital one.

In that light, it is recommended that the EIS:

⁶ <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2017/03/1750>

- Continue to raise concerns about cuts to educational psychology services, both nationally and through local level dialogue at LNCTs
- Seek to influence the implementation of the new Scottish Government mental health strategy, raising issues pertaining to the importance of equitable access to educational psychology services
- Seek clarity about the roles and responsibilities of Educational Psychologists, to enable members working with children with additional support needs to better understand what services E.P.s can provide
- Continue to monitor data on this issue, primarily through the teacher census, and raise with the E.P. and ASN networks on an ongoing basis.