



Executive Summary

‘Sustaining the Ambition’

The contribution of GTCS-registered teachers as part of the Early Learning and Childcare Workforce in Scotland.

An independent study undertaken by the Child's Curriculum Group and funded by the Educational Institute of Scotland.

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Introduction

This report is about young children and the hopes and ambitions Scotland has for them. Scottish Government policy aspires to make Scotland the best place in the world to grow up. Part of this ambition is to tackle child poverty in Scotland and narrow the gap that disadvantage brings to educational outcomes. At the same time as increasing the free entitlement to early learning and childcare (ELC) with the aim of this rising to 1,140 hours per year by 2020, there has been, over the last 10 years in Scotland, a 29% reduction in the numbers of GTCS-registered teachers employed in such services, but only a 4% drop in child numbers, which gives a ratio of 1 teacher to 84 children at this important stage. The numbers of GTCS-registered teachers in pre-school services face further reductions: if Scotland is to achieve its aspiration of changing child outcomes, no further attrition in teacher employment can be tolerated and serious consideration needs to be given to the future composition of the ELC workforce: a task that is underway following the Scottish Government's Response to the Independent Review of the Workforce (Siraj & Kingston, 2015).

The study and this report seek to provide an evidence base on the role of GTCS-registered teachers as part of the Early Learning and Childcare Workforce in Scotland. While the evidence places a premium upon maintaining a GTCS-registered teaching workforce and the part they will play in sustaining policy ambitions for early childhood, the Child's Curriculum Group respects and values the essential contributions of all practitioners in the ELC workforce.

Main Findings

1. Dedicated and specialist early childhood teachers provide added value when they are understood, respected and supported
2. The diversity of roles undertaken by the GTCS-registered nursery teacher includes, but goes well beyond traditional teaching roles
3. GTCS-registered teachers play a unique role as pedagogical leaders and 'bridging professionals' across the Early Level Curriculum for Excellence.
4. The commitment of the teaching profession to social justice, ethical encounters and combatting under-achievement brought about by social disadvantage, provide fundamental values for teaching graduates in Scotland.
5. Teachers themselves know they are a vital but undervalued resource, many such teachers experience a perceived lack of support in the roles they undertake
6. Robust evidence of the effectiveness of pre-school education and the actual impact of the highly qualified teacher within the sector has been hard to find in a Scottish context
7. In Scotland our aspiration is to have a workforce that is 'fit for purpose'. The agreed purpose must influence the composition of the early learning and childcare workforce.
8. Notions of teacher presence and teacher access are ill defined and inconsistent
9. Local authorities vary in their commitment to, and ways of, employing teachers
10. A growing demand is being placed on Primary Head Teachers and promoted Primary staff to meet 3-5 year old children's entitlement to teacher presence
11. Not all 3 and 4 year old children in funded Early Learning and Childcare settings currently have access to a teacher
12. A corollary of this is that not all Initial Teacher Education students do either: teacher training provides for the future - currently many students lack adequate placement ELC experience with specialist GTCS-teachers in the course of their training
13. The main route to specialism is through study for an early childhood specialist award at postgraduate level

The Big Issues

The big issues driving this enquiry all relate to the sustained gap in educational outcomes for and between children, which is often linked to child poverty and unequal circumstances, and include:

- The rescinding of Schools Scotland Code 56 (2002) and the resulting changes in the employment and deployment of teachers in the early learning and childcare workforce;
- A strong policy narrative in relation to early childhood, using terms such as ‘getting it right’, ‘best possible start in life’, ‘best place to grow up’ to promote the importance of these earliest years for long-term success;
- The planned expansion of ELC to 1,140 hours by 2020;
- The ambiguous interpretations of ‘teacher presence’ and ‘teacher access’;
- The continuing evidence of an ongoing inequality of outcome for many children;
- The opportunity that the curriculum Early Level 3-6 provides to support children’s wellbeing and learning in a continuous way;
- Building on the investment already made in early years and improving partnership working between sectors to ensure continuity of care and learning for children;
- Scotland’s investment in raising the qualifications of the Early Learning and Childcare Workforce;
- The lack of evidence in Scotland about the difference qualifications make to the long term educational and social outcomes for children and families and in what ways;

Aims, Objectives and Approach

The study aimed to investigate the strengths and contributions that GTCS-registered teachers make in local authority settings and services (including peripatetic staff, nursery schools, classes, partnership settings) by gathering key data about their current role, situation and activities, identifying the unique or added value they may provide and disseminating the findings within the sector and to policy makers. Evidence was gathered by:

1. Accessing publicly held current data on early years provision and staffing in Scotland
2. Mapping the perceptions held by early years GTCS-registered teachers of the roles they play and contributions they make in ELC through an audit questionnaire;
3. Focusing a literature review on key concepts such as relational agency, professional beliefs and practices; children’s experiences and the wider role of teachers with families, community and fellow professionals;
4. Holding a series of regional focus groups with GTCS-registered teachers to understand the part they play in early learning and childcare prior to school and into primary 1, and to identify the support and barriers they encounter in fulfilling their role.

From the data gathered, we aimed to provide evidence to inform the policy of local authorities and national government, to suggest new strategies and approaches, and to consider regional and/or national networks to support head teachers, specialist nursery teachers, ELC and schools across Scotland.

Summary of Findings

The full Audit Report brings together data from each of the four sources shown. Section 5 of the Audit Report addresses main findings in detail. The literature in the main report

illustrates the importance of a highly qualified workforce for early childhood in pre-school and the early stages of schooling. Statistics show that a single annual entry to school means some children by virtue of their date of birth benefit from the higher staffing ratios of pre-school for some months following their fifth birthday but during this time may not necessarily have access to a teacher, while others who enter school at a considerably younger age leave the adult:child ratios of pre-school behind but have full access to a teacher. Focus groups debated these issues and highlighted teacher contributions through seven themes of importance and significance to them:

- Knowledge and delivery of the curriculum and understanding its intentions and pedagogy.
- Leadership and vision.
- Specialist training and qualifications and whose benefit these are for.
- Working with parents and in the community with a particular emphasis on deprivation.
- Progressing learning through skills in the cycle of Observation, Assessment, Planning, Recording and Reporting.
- Supporting transitions, into nursery and out of it in to primary school.
- The nursery teacher as a mentor and trainer of others.

The audit survey findings report the role, responsibilities and contributions of GTCS-registered teachers working in early years settings. These teachers were found to make many valuable contributions to young children's learning, including support for early literacy, numeracy and health and well-being, in line with the experiences and outcomes of a Curriculum for Excellence. They also make many non-teaching contributions: working closely with parents and families, identifying and supporting children with additional support needs, co-ordinating with other agencies as part of GIRFEC (Getting it Right for Every Child, 2013), and taking on training, mentoring, leadership and management responsibilities for the nursery team.

In some local authorities, the nursery teacher's role is being reduced and in some cases, despite the Scottish Government requirement for nursery children to have 'access' to a GTCS-registered teacher, such teachers are no longer employed. Many respondents believe that recent and planned funding and staffing changes will be detrimental to the early years workforce and to the quality of education that children receive, now and in the future.

Summary Statistics for Early Learning and Childcare in Scotland show that currently there are 1,212 (FTE) GTCS-registered teachers across 2,449 pre-school centres in Scotland, providing early education and childcare to 101,463 (FTE) children (Sep 2014). In September 2005 figures showed there were 1,702 (FTE) GTCS-registered teachers across 2,761 pre-school centres providing early education and childcare to 105,810 (FTE) children. This equates to a 29% reduction in the number of GTCS-registered teachers employed in Early Learning and Childcare Centres over the last 10 years (from 2005), with the Pupil Teacher Ratio in Local Authority and Partner Provider pre-school centres increasing year on year from 62.2 (Sep 2005) to 83.7 (Sep 2014). 13.6% of Early Learning and Childcare Centres currently have no access to a teacher (Sep 2014) and 25.7% of 3, 4 & 5 year old pre-school children currently have no access to a teacher (Sep 2014). Of those children who do have access to a teacher, such access is under a non-regular or ad-hoc arrangement for 14.1% and a regular arrangement for 60.3%. Almost half of local authorities do not provide equal access to a teacher for all 3, 4 & 5 year old pre-school children in their authority. A similar number have no minimum standard for teacher time in pre-school centres and/or contact time with children in their authorities.

In view of the policy ambitions to increase the hours of entitlement for children while ensuring both quality and equity of provision, within the context of variable contractual arrangements among the Early Learning and Childcare Workforce, there are staffing challenges to be faced.

In December 2015 the most recent school and ELC Census figures were published (Summary statistics for schools in Scotland No. 6: 2015 Edition 9 December 2015).¹ These latest figures show that 1,038 teachers (FTE) were employed in the early education and childcare system of 2,492 settings which currently cater for 97,262 children. This represents a further reduction of teachers and an increase in the number of settings, which overall are catering for fewer children.

The Scottish Government have no minimum threshold setting for teacher input in pre-school centres in Scotland. This means that decisions about the amount of time teachers provide input and about teachers' role and responsibilities within pre-school centres is devolved to local authorities. Each individual authority has their own interpretation of what "access to a teacher" means and how this works in practice. They operate different guidelines and charging structures for the deployment of teachers to private partner providers, resulting in some partner providers choosing to have no teacher support. However, none of the 32 local authorities in Scotland have to date carried out an evaluation of the impact of teacher access or lack of teacher access on child outcomes.

The Contribution to Research, Policy and Practice

This study into the contribution of GTCS-registered teachers as part of the Early Learning and Childcare Workforce in Scotland provides a new evidence base about numbers of teachers, what they do, how they are employed, what they understand their contributions to be, how this benefits children, families and colleagues and how they are positioned to help close the gap in outcomes that exists for children in Scotland.

Conclusions

This study began with a concern about how we may do the best for all children in Scotland. We find that the skills, knowledge, values and attributes of GTCS-registered teachers provide an essential tool to achieve policy aspirations by making a difference for young children and their families. We conclude that:

- At a time when learning in the early years is recognised to be so critical, the numbers of GTCS-registered teachers in Early Learning and Childcare services is diminishing.
- Although their roles are fluctuating, changing and sometimes not well understood by others, specialist GTCS-registered nursery teachers are an essential part of leadership in the ELC workforce and bridge the early level of curriculum.

These are important messages for policy makers and for the enactment of policy in Local Authorities.

It has been argued that increased specialism or indeed a dedicated early years pathway in teacher education at undergraduate level would limit the career paths of teachers. We would suggest that one of the strengths of Scottish Initial Teacher Education is that it embraces both pre-school and primary education, so allowing teachers to move between both sectors:

¹ Available from <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0049/00490590.pdf>

this is particularly important in relation to the Early Level of Curriculum for Excellence. Our evidence suggests that the discussion of increased specialism should be re-visited, and at the very least...

- The models of teacher role should be expanded to reflect the new contributions some teachers are already making;
- Local Authorities and other employers should develop robust support systems in the light of the reported evidence that too solitary a role leads to a dip in commitment and confidence;
- GTCS should collaborate with Schools of Education to strengthen the early years component of teacher education, recruit positively for new postgraduate routes and address issues of teacher placement and the probationary year;
- Changes in the hours of entitlement for children bring staffing challenges and have highlighted the possible need to revisit the conditions of service of all ELC staff.
- With the small numbers of teachers employed in early years pre-school settings further attrition is not an option if policy objectives are to be achieved.