

Response to Education and Skills Committee's call for views regarding 'Teacher workforce planning for Scotland's schools' – April 2017

CEL CIS (Centre for excellence for looked after children in Scotland), based at the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow, works to secure lasting improvements in the wellbeing of Scotland's children living in and on the edges of care. We partner with leaders, managers and practitioners within Scotland's children's services, to break down barriers in attitudes and understanding, and build ways of working with vulnerable children and families which are founded on evidence of what works to identify and address their needs.

Teachers can play a critical role in improving the wellbeing of 'looked after' and other educationally disadvantaged children. By providing stable, consistent, nurturing relationships for a child, well-trained and supported teachers can, and often do, represent the difference between a positive, successful educational experience, and one marked by exclusion and low attainment. As Scotland's [Getting it Right for Every Child](#) framework has acknowledged, teachers, and schools more generally, are ideally placed to identify children's needs, and coordinate the support required to meet them. If Scotland is to close the attainment gap across its communities, or address the wider wellbeing issues affecting children and young people, its teachers must be equipped to provide evidence-based and child-developmentally aware practice. That will, in itself, be delivered through robust workforce planning, based on a clear assessment of the characteristics of teachers (personal and professional) which encourage children's engagement in education, and the structures needed to support and continuously improve the workforce.

We therefore welcome this opportunity to submit our views regarding teacher workforce planning for Scotland's schools. In the Scottish Government's pursuit of 'Excellence and Equity' in Scottish education, we strongly encourage reform that would strengthen the ability of teachers and schools to support looked after children, improving attendance, attainment, and lives over the long-term.

Context

As of July 2016, there were 15,317 looked after children in Scotland.¹ These children are individuals who have a range of needs, strengths and vulnerabilities. They live in a variety of circumstances including foster care, residential care, kinship care, and at home with one or both of their birth parents. Although each of their stories is unique, all children who are 'looked after' have experienced some difficulty in their lives. Indeed, a significant number have experienced multiple, serious adversities,

including abuse and neglect. The backgrounds of many feature socio-economic disadvantage, and restricted educational opportunities.² Educational outcome indicators show that the gap between looked after children's attainment and achievement, with that of all children, remains unacceptably large.³

What are the main challenges in relation to teacher recruitment and retention? Are there patterns or key reasons why some trainee teachers do not complete courses or do not choose to go into teaching having qualified?

Simply put, challenges to the recruitment and retention of teachers are (a) the number of students who do not complete their qualifying courses; (b) the number of those who complete their course but decide against pursuing a career in teaching; (c) the number of those who do pursue a teaching career failing to remain in the profession. Unfortunately, while the Department for Education in England makes data publicly available on these variables, the picture is unclear in Scotland. The regular publication of national data relating to teacher recruitment and retention would aid wider understanding of any particular systemic or thematic issues which are impacting on workforce numbers.⁴

In addition to the absence of adequate data, we are concerned that the initial training, and ongoing coaching, of teachers does not adequately prepare individuals for (or adequately support them with) the demands of the job. Teaching is already a highly skilled profession, but while the importance of well-planned lessons and delivering an integrated curriculum are not to be dismissed, we have concerns that teacher training can be overly focussed on process and bureaucracy. In particular, we are concerned that, with limited time available for initial training and ongoing professional development, this is at the expense of preparing and supporting teachers for the realities of a classroom of children. Educational attainment is strongly correlated with a teacher's skills, including how to adapt and modify their approach in response to the varied needs and learning styles of different children.⁵ These skills require both an intrinsic and technical understanding of how to engage with children, children who may have complex needs and volatile lives. And some of whom, such as many looked after children, will have experienced trauma which shapes their engagement and interaction with the world, including school. A teacher must be able to connect with the majority of such children, and utilise their skills to nurture the child's learning.

Insights from the growing literature on 'implementation' (making change happen) in education reveal that current approaches often limit the potential for progress and positive change. But, at the same time, we are increasingly clear about the systems and approaches which help secure successful change. This begins with the careful selection of well-defined approaches (to, for example, managing children's behaviour), which are teachable, learnable, doable, and readily assessable. Within schools, this means that we must clearly articulate what teachers are expected to do in their day-to-day practice, and that this 'ask' must be facilitated by the systems around them, and supported by ongoing high-quality coaching and feedback.⁶

In considering how this articulation could be formulated on ground, it is useful to consider seminal research by Hattie, published in 2008. This convincingly

demonstrated that it is the attributes of teachers that make the greatest difference to the learning and achievement of children in schools.⁷ Factors relating to structure (for example, class size), use of technology, program content, and student attributes all have some impact on learner achievement, but nothing makes as big a difference to children's learning as their teachers. Hattie's research emphasises the power of teacher's collective expertise and summarises the six most important attributes of teachers which have the greatest impact on student's achievement as

- Teachers working together as **evaluators of impact** (a commitment to understanding and developing one's own impact on learners)
- Making **'success criteria' explicit** for each learner (setting goals and providing feedback in each situation so learning is continuous)
- Using **errors as opportunities to learn** (acknowledging and celebrating mistakes as key to learning)
- Commitment of teachers to **receiving feedback** (viewing assessments in school as supporting teachers to understand their own needs)
- **Balancing 'surface' learning and 'deep' learning** (so learners can become familiar with ideas, and then focus on applying them)
- The 'Goldilocks Principle' of challenges (ensuring **learning opportunities are not too hard or too easy for individual learners**)

Rather than a highly-condensed programme, during which practice assessments are viewed as inherently stressful, and receiving feedback is associated with worry, fear and anxiety, teacher training should enable and encourage the development of these attributes on an ongoing and supportive basis. Hattie notes that teachers, like any professional, are not experts immediately upon qualifying. There is a wealth of expertise within the profession however, and teachers should be supported throughout their careers to learn from one another, and develop and share expertise. The 2014 report of the Sutton Trust, ['What makes great teaching'](#), summarises research evidence that supports this, by suggesting that formative assessment and continuous feedback for teachers are critical for sustaining quality.⁸

What are the factors that influence whether teaching is considered an attractive profession compared to other professions by those that might consider a career in teaching?

Where uncertainty exists (in both the perception and experience) regarding whether teachers have access to adequate support, the profession is at risk of continuing to be a less attractive option than alternatives. Access to the right support, at the right time, from the right source is imperative to the (at times overwhelming) experience of teachers. Support for teachers is known to be a critical factor in securing positive educational outcomes for looked after children.⁹ The current capacity of the system to deliver such support is limited, which undoubtedly has an impact on the decision of practitioners to join the workforce, and on learners themselves. (By 'support' for teachers, we are referring to both the support which individual teachers should draw on for reflection and personal/professional development, and the support represented by teaching assistants, educational psychologists, school pastoral staff, etc.)

What is the impact of teacher shortages in certain parts of Scotland or in specific disciplines?

Education staff are now more involved in child's planning in its widest sense. This is a strength of policy and legislation including [Getting it Right for Every Child](#) and the [Children and Young People \(Scotland\) Act 2014](#). Where shortages demand re-deployment of teachers who have been working at the central level back into the classroom, there can be a gap in terms of their previous experience, and current practice, and therefore an impact on learners and other staff. There could be a particular impact on children who are vulnerable and who have complex needs and circumstances.

The experience of traumatic life events can have a significant impact on children's emotional, social and cognitive development.¹⁰ The presence of consistent, reliable adults who know the individual child, their developmental needs and how they communicate need, is vital to the educational experience and outcomes for looked after children.¹¹ Where staff turnover is high, or practitioners are regularly being re-deployed to cover shortages, there is a risk that key relationships for looked after children will be disrupted. Robust planning for transitions must be in place where this risk exists for looked after children.

What factors influence teachers when deciding whether or not to apply for promotion to senior management/headteacher level?

We welcome the recent announcement by the Scottish Government in relation to the [Excellence in Headship programme](#). This programme has the potential to equip head teachers with the leadership skills which are crucial in improving educational outcomes and experiences for looked after children. Investment which enhances the knowledge, skills and abilities of head teachers to translate research and policy into a practice context, and support teaching staff to do so, may encourage teachers to apply for promotion.

We understand from members of the CELCIS Education Forum that the roles of senior managers and Head Teachers often include both 'education' related leadership alongside 'business management'. Key functions of the role of Head Teachers and senior managers are in leadership around the curriculum, promoting a sound value base and inclusive ethos, and modelling effective learning and teaching practices to classroom teachers. Time spent managing business aspects of school life can detract from the capacity of Head Teacher's and Senior Managers to perform their most crucial tasks and add burden to an already complex and challenging workload, thus impacting on the educational experiences of both teachers and children.

We know that attending particularly to six key areas within schools can improve outcomes for looked after children:

- Commitment to the role of [Designated Manager](#)
- Planning for education
- Engagement with parents and carers
- Promoting an inclusive education

- Supporting teachers
- Ensuring teachers and other staff have an understanding of attachment and resilience

This is complex work. The context in which Head Teachers and senior managers work must be enabling; providing capacity to implement and sustain systems change and promote the use of evidence in practice. Current systems do not provide the adequate structures to enable this, thus impacting upon Head Teacher's and senior manager's ability to focus on their crucial and unique role which in turn impacts upon the outcomes and experiences of looked after children.

Thank you for providing us with this opportunity to respond. We hope the feedback is helpful. We would be happy to discuss any aspect in further detail.

CELCIS Contact:

Linda O'Neill
 Education Lead
 Linda.o-neill@strath.ac.uk
 0141 444 8556

-
- 1 Scottish Government (2017). [Children's Social Work Statistics Scotland 2015/16](#). Edinburgh: Scottish Government.
 - 2 SWIA (2006) Extraordinary Lives: Creating a positive future for looked after children in Scotland Edinburgh: Social Work Inspection Agency.
 - 3 Scottish Government (2016) [Education Outcomes for Looked After Children 2014/15](#), Edinburgh: Scottish Government
 - 4 House of Commons (2017). [Recruitment and retention of teachers; fifth report of session 2016-17](#). London: House of Commons
 - 5 Hattie, J. (2011). [Visible Learning for Teachers: Maximizing Impact on Learning](#). New York, NY: Routledge.
 - 6 Fixsen, D. L., Naoom, S. F., Blase, K. A., Friedman, R. M. & Wallace, F. (2005). Implementation Research: A Synthesis of the Literature. Tampa, FL: University of South Florida, Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute, The National Implementation Research Network (FMHI Publication #231).
 - 7 Hattie, J (2008) Visible learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement. Oxon: Routledge
 - 8 Coe, R., Aloisi, C., Higgins, S. & Elliot Major, L. (2014) [What makes great teaching? Review of the underpinning research](#), Sutton Tryst.
 - 9 CELCIS (2015) [Looked After and Learning: Improving the learner journey of looked after children](#), Glasgow: University of Strathclyde
 - 10 Furnival, J. (2014) Trauma sensitive practice with children in care, IRISS
 - 11 Furnival, J. (2011) Attachment-informed practice with looked after children and young people. IRISS