

June 2024

Learning Reps News

Edinburgh Local Association

Promoting health and wellbeing of self, colleagues and the children and young people in my care.

(1.1 Professional Values, Social Justice, The Standard for Career Long professional Learning, GTC Scotland)

As teachers in Scotland if we look at our own Standards for Career Long Professional Learning, it explicitly states that our own wellbeing should be at the heart of our professional learning.



As we move into June, I am sure that we are all beginning to look forward to the end of term. The moment when that bell rings to signal the summer holidays have finally arrived! But it strikes me that we need to get better at looking after and prioritising our own wellbeing year-round and not relying on our time away from work to recharge our batteries.

Nationally, the Stand Up for Quality Education Campaign has sought to address some of the key issues teachers face in the workplace. Locally in Edinburgh, we are looking to do our bit to support members in the local association.

Within Edinburgh, we been working in partnership with Education Support. Education Support are the only UK Charity dedicated to supporting the mental health and wellbeing of teachers and school staff.

Sinead McBrearty (Managing Director of Education Support) recently spoke to delegates at the EIS AGM in Dundee. Sinead spoke about the importance of having a true work life balance. Sinead posed asked the question "*How can I do this job and stay well?*" This is a question with no easy answer.

In my role as EIS learning rep, I had the pleasure of catching up with Faye McGuinness, Director of Programmes for Education Support. Hopefully, this will give you more of an insight into who Education are and what they can potentially do for you and your colleagues in the workplace.

1. Faye, can I first start by thanking you for taking the time to speak to me on behalf of Education Support. Some of our members may not be aware that the EIS in Edinburgh and Education Support have been begun recently begun working together with the goal of helping better support the mental health and wellbeing of our members in Edinburgh. I was wondering if you could explain to our members who are Education Support are and what you do?

Founded in 1877, Education Support is a UK charity with a mission to improve the mental health and wellbeing of the education workforce. We were set up by teachers, for teachers, and we're here for everybody working within education, across all four nations of the United Kingdom. We believe that better wellbeing leads to better education.

We provide high quality, evidence-led, support across the sector. We offer support at three levels:

- Individual – We work with individuals to prioritise their own mental health and wellbeing. We support education staff to make positive change where possible, as workplace and system change take time.
- Workplace – Plenty of evidence indicates that cultures in schools and colleges have a real impact on staff experience, their wellbeing and effectiveness. By helping leaders create great cultures, we increase the number of workplaces where staff thrive.
- The whole system – individual educators and workplaces exist in a wider system that is facing many challenges. We are working to influence sector stakeholders and the government to create the conditions that support good staff wellbeing across education. Our research activity helps us build evidence around key challenges of national importance, such as staff retention in schools.

2. Can I now ask a little bit about your own background and your role with Education Support?

Absolutely! Most of my career has been working within the third sector. Over the past ten years the focus of my work has been on workplace wellbeing, supporting individuals at work to prioritise their own mental health and wellbeing as well as working with employers across the public, private and third sector to cultivate cultures that put staff wellbeing at their heart.

Prior to joining Education Support my role was Head of Workplace Wellbeing Programmes at the mental health charity Mind, where I led on the development of Workplace Wellbeing programmes including the Mentally Healthy Universities Programme, the Our Frontline campaign, which supported frontline workers during the Covid-19 pandemic, and the Mental Health at Work website. I also led on the development of the national Mental Health at Work Commitment.

As Director of Programmes at Education Support, I hold oversight for the programmes we deliver to support the education workforce. This involves developing new programmes where we identify a need for support, ensuring existing programmes are delivered to a high quality and being responsible for delivering the best impact for our beneficiaries. I also spend a lot of time talking to individuals, and schools, about how best to support staff mental health.

3. Nationally the EIS is running the 'Stand Up for Quality Education' campaign with the aim of trying to significantly improve teachers' working conditions, health and safety in the workplace. As a union through our members have identified that workload, ASN and pupil behaviour are the issues of greatest concern to our members. These are obviously issues that cannot be solved overnight. From your own experience and perspective is there anything we

as teachers can do on perhaps a shorter-term basis that would perhaps help with our own health and wellbeing?

We know there are many challenges facing the education sector and we recognise that everything can't be fixed at the individual level. However, we also believe that individuals can take steps to understand, and prioritise, their own wellbeing. I'd recommend three things as a starting point:

- Find space to pause, discuss and reflect on the emotional impact of your work. Reflective conversations can be a powerful tool to support our mental health and wellbeing, but education staff often cite being too busy to make space for these. We have developed some free e-learning, which provides a range of techniques to support personal and peer reflective practice. This is a great starting place!
- Make space for rest and re-charge. Rest is a supply of fuel and not only does it support our wellbeing, it also increases our enjoyment in tasks, deepens learning and unlocks fresh ideas. A simple tool is the 30-3-30 approach. Consider things you can do to re-charge that take 30 seconds, things that you can do in 3 minutes, and things that might take 30 minutes or longer. Try and incorporate these into your every day.
- Identify your boundaries. Boundaries serve many purposes, all of which result in helping people to give their best, in a mentally healthy way but we know that for many education staff it can feel hard. We've developed this guide on setting boundaries, which may help.

4. In Edinburgh our employer offers all employees access to PAM assist wellbeing support service. This is a service offered to all employees across all sectors in the council. Can I ask what makes the support Education Support can offer teachers and those in education different?

We know that there are many Employee Assistance Programmes that offer wellbeing support to employees, across a range of sectors. In terms of Education Support's Employee Assistance Programme:

- We provide a service tailored for educators and designed with the education sector in mind, not a generic service. We understand the challenges of working in education are unique, so are able to respond to this challenges specifically.
- Our experience of delivering EAPs, and of supporting educators for nearly 150 years, allows us to develop a service that provides proactive and reactive support. We provide EAP Plus to support staff to improve their mental health and wellbeing as well giving the access to in the moment support when needed.
- We will work closely with customers to launch the EAP service, drive awareness for staff and provide resources to make sure they get the most out of the service. It's important to us that customers are supported to promote our EAP to their staff regularly, so that those who need it can reach out in their moment of need.

5. How do people go about accessing your resources and support and does it cost anything to access these resources and services?

Firstly, I'd recommend everyone take a look at our website: www.educationsupport.org.uk. Here you'll find many free resources that can support individuals wanting to make improvements to their own wellbeing and resources for leaders/wellbeing leads wanting to understand more about how to cultivate a mentally healthy work culture in their school.

You'll also find information about our Helpline and the financial support that we offer, which are free to access. Our Helpline number is 08000 562 561. It's open 24hrs a day, 365 days a year. Anybody that calls will speak to a qualified counsellor.

There is also information on the website about our Employee Assistance Programme.

For anybody wanted to keep up with Education Support's latest mental health and wellbeing resources, events and news they can sign up to our newsletter.

6. Personally, in my experience I have found that as teachers we don't ask for help until we feel that our mental health has hit a 'crisis point' so to speak. Is there anything we can do to perhaps stop things from getting to that point?

Our confidential Helpline is available for anybody needing in the moment support. Teachers and education staff can call us to talk through all kinds of concerns including managing difficult feelings or situations, so I'd recommend this for anybody that is struggling.

As highlighted above, having space to reflect and process the personal impact of emotionally difficult aspects of their work can be invaluable for education staff. We offer 1:1 professional supervision to leaders providing them with a space to think and reflect, to discuss who they are, how they are, what's going on for them at work and their wellbeing. Research suggests that supervision is making a meaningful difference to the wellbeing of school leaders. This is currently funded by the Department for Education in England and Welsh Government in Wales. We hope to be able to offer this support in Scotland in the future.

Lastly, but importantly, focus on the building blocks of good wellbeing to help you maintain a healthy mind during times of stress and challenge. We know that things like exercise, eating well and sleeping are good for mental wellbeing. The benefits that come with all three are powerful and, combined, can also help ease symptoms of mental illness. In some cases, they can even prevent disorders from developing.

I'd encourage all staff to consider their own building blocks by asking themselves the question: 'how can I do this job and stay well'?

7. Faye, thank you for taking the time to answer these questions. I appreciate there are no easy answers. Lastly, I was wondering if there was anything you wanted to say to EIS members in Edinburgh?

We are really pleased to be working in partnership with EIS in Edinburgh to increase awareness of the importance of staff wellbeing and exploring what more we at Education Support can do to support the sector. Thank you for all that you are doing to support education staff in Edinburgh, and we look forward to continuing working with you all. If there is one thing you can do today, please share our Helpline poster with your colleagues. We want every member of staff to know that they are not alone

If you to you require any more information on Education Support, please visit their website which is full of free resources:

<https://www.educationsupport.org.uk/>

What else can we do for you?

The role of the learning rep is to support and advise our members in all aspects of their professional learning, including supporting members with advice on their PRD's and professional update.

We are always happy to support members and offer advice where we can. Please do not hesitate to get in touch we will always try to get back to you as soon as possible.

Best wishes
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[Learning for Sustainability - The General Teaching Council for Scotland \(gtcs.org.uk\)](https://www.gtcs.org.uk)

[Professional Review and Development - The General Teaching Council for Scotland \(gtcs.org.uk\)](https://www.gtcs.org.uk)

[Exploring Learning for Sustainability in the GTCS Standards – Scottish Educational Journal \(sej.org.uk\)](https://www.sej.org.uk)