

Graduate Early Years Practitioners in the Early Learning & Childcare Sector - Implications for the Teaching Profession and the EIS

Introduction

1. The Early Learning & Childcare sector is undergoing further expansion, having been identified as an important sector in extending the foundations that are begun at home for children's learning and development, and in building solidly on these foundations during children's pre-school years.
2. Furthermore, high quality early years education and childcare has been identified as a significant factor in addressing the poverty-related achievement and attainment gap, it being particularly advantageous to children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds.
3. Despite the first two years of children's experience of the 3-18 curriculum being within the pre-5 sector, the number of qualified GTCS registered Nursery Teachers continues to fall whilst there continues to be a rise in the number of graduate Early Years Practitioners – who are increasingly taking on Head of Centre roles.
4. This paper identifies the issues arising from these developments for the teaching profession and the EIS.

Terminology

- * Nursery Teachers are defined as GTCS registered teachers, with qualifications which entitle them to teach in the Primary and Nursery sectors.)
- * 'Graduate Early Years Practitioners' are defined as early years Practitioners with a BA Childhood Practice degree (the Scottish Government has previously referred to these as 'graduate practitioners').
- * Other Early Years Practitioners include Childhood Development Officers, Childcare Officers, Pre- School Assistants, Pupil Support Assistants, and Nursery Assistants. The use of terms used across the sector is variable; for example there is no single definition of 'Early Years Practitioners' in use.

Background

5. Historically, nursery schools, centres and classes, run by local authority education departments, offered almost exclusively part-time education to 3 and 4 year olds for the duration of the school year. They were staffed by degree or post graduate qualified teachers, and by

nursery nurses with a range of qualifications. Day care centres, also run by local authorities, offered part time or full-time care to children from 0 to 5 years of age - often for 50 weeks a year. These were staffed mainly by nursery nurses, similarly qualified staff and other Early Years Practitioners. Both types of establishment were funded and managed by the local authority but neither has ever been a universal service.

6. In 2002, The Scottish Government introduced 425 hours per year of funded pre-school 'learning' for all 3-4 year olds (and eligible 2 year olds). This was increased to 475 hours in 2007, and then increased to 600 hours in 2014. Funded pre-school hours for 3-4 year olds (and eligible 2 year olds) will increase again in August 2020, to 1140 hours.
7. For this programme of expansion, the Scottish Government has adopted a funding model that 'follows the child':

"One of the key principles of the Funding Follows the Child approach is to allow parents and carers to make their own choices about where their child accesses their funded hours¹."
8. Local authorities are responsible for the implementation and delivery of funded ELC to their local communities. They have flexibility to determine the most appropriate way to phase in the expanded entitlement in their local area as they build capacity, within the context of the 'Follows the Child' funding policy.
9. The EIS does not support the 'Funding Follows the Child' model. This demand-led model, poses significant risks of a two tier system in which the more affluent can purchase additional nursery provision while those who cannot afford it do not; of creating a service that is strongly dependent, in large part, on lower paid and unqualified staff; of even greater inequity than already exists with regards to children's access to a qualified teacher; of variability and lack of equivalence in the delivery of the 3-18 curriculum for early learners.
10. Currently, in addition to the public provision of early education and childcare, the private sector (which for this paper also includes pre-school provision provided by voluntary bodies) also delivers primarily childcare, with an element of early education. Private providers include private nurseries and childminders. Most private nurseries offer part-time or full-time care to children from 0 to 5 years of age, often for 52 weeks a year. Childminders have historically been associated with 'childcare', especially for 0-3 years of age - although many take children up to 5 years of age.

¹ Blueprint for 2020 – Scottish Government

11. Within this context, the Graduate Early Years Practitioner role is relatively new, yet large numbers are graduating from TEIs in Scotland with the associated qualification - essentially a teaching-based degree. The impact that this graduate cohort is having on the delivery of pre-school education in Scotland is growing.
12. Public sector Graduate Early Years Practitioners are employed by local authorities in the same way as teachers are, although their collective bargaining arrangements are outwith the SNCT and are covered by the public sector unions.

The EIS has a long-established practice of recruiting graduate education professionals (known as associated professionals) who are not teachers, to our membership. These include Chartered Librarians, Educational Psychologists and Instrumental Music Teachers. Indeed EIS-FELA also has members who are lecturers yet don't necessarily hold degrees, as well as members such as assessors, tutors and some others who carry out other roles which do not have responsibility for teaching college students.

Decreased Access to Teachers & Introduction of Graduate Early Years Practitioners

13. Nursery education in Scotland does not enjoy the fundamental statutory status afforded to primary and secondary education; provision remains discretionary and dependent on local authority policy.
14. This lack of status was compounded when the Scottish Executive in 2002 removed the statutory requirement to have teachers present in nursery education and thus 'gave local authorities greater flexibility in deploying teachers in pre-school centres'. Local authorities were now required to simply give pre-school children "access" to teachers. Several local authorities quickly interpreted this, without challenge from the then administration, as permission to redeploy teachers out of direct work with children in nursery classes or schools, into support roles within early years provision or indeed out of the sector entirely and into Primary settings.
15. Many local authorities displaced Nursery Teachers with various Early Years Practitioners in their nurseries and centres. The second step - for some authorities - was to appoint those with qualifications other than teaching (i.e. Graduate Early Years Practitioners) as heads of nurseries or pre-school centres. The EIS legally challenged this in 2012 based on such practice in Glasgow City Council, which, we argued, was leaving nursery schools without a qualified teacher. The challenge failed, with the judge recording:

"The decision as to what are 'adequate numbers of teachers in the schools under their management' is clearly a matter for the discretion of education authorities, having regard to the whole circumstances of each school...There is scope to utilise the services of peripatetic teachers."

16. Between 2009 and 2018², the number of Nursery Teachers has halved. Whilst many local authorities have maintained Nursery Teachers, especially as managers of pre-school 3-5 centres, many authorities have transferred Nursery Teachers outwith the regular early years classroom setting to peripatetic or targeted support roles, or to primary classes. Local Authorities cite the following reasons:
 - a) Higher salaries for teachers compared to Early Years Practitioners, enabling staffing cost savings to be made.
 - b) Maximum pupil contact hours for Teachers compared to more flexibility with Early Years Practitioners – up to 35 hours per week.
 - c) Fixed annual leave for Teachers compared with fewer holidays and more flexible annual leave arrangements, to suit the needs of the service, for Early Years Practitioners.
17. The ongoing displacement of Teachers by Early Years Practitioners within local authority pre-school centres and nurseries is despite clear research findings and HMIe evidence that the presence of Teachers has a positive impact on pedagogy and thereby on children's outcomes. This is recognised in Scottish Government Guidance (2009) to Local Authorities on 'Access to a Teacher for Pre-school Children' which states:

"There is a significant body of evidence to suggest that the presence of pre-school teachers has an impact on both the quality of pre-school centres and on child outcomes (social, behavioural and cognitive).

Nevertheless, the same guidance also states:

"The research evidence from studies undertaken in pre-school settings is not conclusive on the question of how much of a teacher's time is required to improve children's outcomes. There would, therefore, be no basis for setting a minimum threshold for what counts as access in terms of FTE."
18. The lack of a minimum staffing threshold for Teachers in public pre-school centres arguably accelerated the fall in the number of Nursery Teachers.

² In 2009 there were 1657 ELC Teachers, in 2019 there are 798

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/summary-statistics-schools-scotland-no-10-2019-edition/>

Current Staffing in the ELC Sector

19. The latest figures³ show 798 teachers employed in 2019 by local authorities in Scotland in the ELC sector – i.e. Nursery Teachers.
20. All workers (excluding teachers) working with children are registered with the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC). SSSC⁴ figures show that there are 11,480⁵ registered “care workers” employed by local authorities in Scotland to deliver childcare – 9460 of which are class 3 (i.e. EY&C Practitioners). There are 11,410 registered “care workers” privately employed in Scotland to deliver childcare – 9,520 of which are Class 3. Furthermore, there are 5,120 registered “care workers” employed by voluntary bodies in Scotland to deliver childcare – 3,500 of which are Class 3. (NB Some Class 3 practitioners may have a BA qualification, but it is Class 4 which is defined as managers i.e. where such a qualification would be required.)
21. There are currently 46,000 children receiving funded pre-school education in Scotland. There are currently 798 Nursery Teachers and 9460 Early Years and Childcare (Class 3) Practitioners employed in the ELC sector by local authorities. It is not known how many of these are graduates. There is an additional 13,000 Early Years and Childcare Practitioners employed in private nurseries (including voluntary bodies).

Early Learning & Childcare Sector – From Childcare to Learning

22. The Scottish Government has been upskilling the Early Years workforce, excluding teachers, for some time. It facilitated the development of new degrees in Childhood Practice and an expansion in other pre-school qualifications such as HNCs and HNDs to train increased numbers of Early Years Practitioners. These developments were supported by the EIS.
23. In recognition of what was articulated by the EIS and others as the need to ensure quality of provision rather than simply quantity of hours in the endeavour to address the poverty-related achievement and attainment gap, the Scottish Government in early 2017 announced a commitment to provide an additional teacher or ‘graduate practitioner’ to each nursery in a deprived area⁶. To date, it is not clear whether this policy has been realised or the extent to which teachers have been recruited for this purpose in comparison to Graduate Early Years Practitioners.

³ *ibid*

⁴ <https://data.sssc.uk.com/local-level-data/166-2016-detailed-workforce-information>

⁵ Class 2, Class 3 and Class 4. Class 2 are defined as support workers, Class 3 as ELC Practitioners and Class 4 as teachers or ELC managers.

⁶ <https://news.gov.scot/news/early-years-workforce-expansion>

24. The Scottish Government has published three principal aims⁷ for the ELC expansion to 1140 hours (in August 2020) as:
- "1. To improve children's development, particularly those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds, and to narrow the attainment gap between children from the most and least deprived areas in later years.*
 - 2. To enable more parents to have the opportunity to be in work, training or study – again, with a particular focus on benefitting parents in disadvantaged circumstances.*
 - 3. To increase family resilience through improved health and wellbeing of parents and children, with a particular focus on families in disadvantaged circumstances."*
25. The associated growth of the ELC sector and the drive to improve educational outcomes and enhance child development has featured an increase in the numbers of Early Years Practitioners, including Graduate Early Years Practitioners.
26. All TEIs in Scotland deliver BA Childhood Practice degrees, and there are currently 400 BA Childhood Practice students in Strathclyde University alone. The Scottish Government facilitated the creation of over 2,000 additional HNC places since 2017-18, and over 800 BA manager places. The Scottish Funding Council (SFC) was planning to facilitate around 2,000 additional college and university places on ELC courses in academic year 2019-20.⁸

Issues Arising for the Teaching Profession & Education Unions from the rise in the number of Graduate Early Years Practitioners

27. Academic research⁹ and HMIE's 2007 report: "Key Role of Staff in Providing Quality Pre-School Education" found that pre-school centres with qualified teachers perform better than those without, on staff/child interaction, meeting children's needs, leadership and providing support for children with additional support needs.
28. Clearly, there is a strong argument that the presence of teachers within pre-school centres for 3-5 year olds benefits children by having a positive pedagogical impact; non-graduate practitioners were better "pedagogues" when supervised by teachers. Whilst the EIS has long

⁷ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-study-early-learning-childcare-phase-1-report/pages/3/>

⁸ ELC Forum 12 Steps to Support Providers

⁹ In their analysis of the EPPE case studies, Melhuish et al (2002, 2003) found that teachers positively influenced the learning environment, as less qualified staff were better "pedagogues" when supervised by teachers. They also found that the highest quality early years centres have qualified teachers working alongside other well-qualified nursery staff - emphasising that pre-school settings benefit from having a range of professionals playing complementary roles. Siraj-Blatchford et al (2002) found that qualified staff, including teachers, challenged children more, used more sophisticated pedagogy, responded more positively to children and provided more developmentally appropriate activities".

supported the principle that 3-5 pre-school education is best delivered by Teachers, this does not reflect what is currently happening in many local authorities, nor does it take account of the relatively recent development in terms of the growing numbers of graduate Early Years Practitioners who have joined the ELC workforce and whose qualifications to a large extent, resemble those of Primary teachers in the extent to which they focus on child development and the pedagogy of early learning.

29. The independent 'Sustaining the Ambition' research¹⁰ that the EIS funded confirms the importance of maintaining a registered teacher workforce in all pre-school settings.
30. Recent staffing trends show that in many pre-school centres Nursery Teachers have been supplanted by Early Years Practitioners (both graduate and non-graduate) as the deliverers of pre-school education to 3-5 year olds. Where Nursery Teachers have been retained by local authorities, they are part of a team of education professionals that complement each other by planning, collaborating and delivering education to 3-5 year old children.
31. The teaching profession and the EIS has long-accepted the principle that pre-school education (in the public sector) is and should be delivered by teams of Nursery Teachers, Graduate Early Years Practitioners and other Early Years Practitioners, thereby acknowledging the significant role that Graduate Early Years Practitioners play in the education of 3-5 year old children.
32. Given the delivery model for ELC expansion, Graduate Early Years Practitioners will feature very strongly in introducing and embedding the Curriculum for Excellence for many (if not most) Scottish children in the future, albeit within staff teams that to varying degrees will include Nursery Teachers, particularly within public sector pre-school centres.
33. Graduate Early Years Practitioners, as previously stated, in some respects have comparable knowledge and skills to newly qualified Primary Teachers at the end of their degrees – but there is a marked divergence thereafter. Newly qualified teachers undertake a period of supported probation, and thereafter have a commitment and entitlement to career long professional learning and an obligation to undertake GTCS Professional Update. Graduate Early Years Practitioners do not seem to benefit from or be obliged to undertake such programmes. This divergence is not best conducive to team working with Teachers in pre-school centres.
34. With the growing numbers of Graduate Early Years Practitioners – some of whom are managing pre-school centres - it may only be a matter of time before this professional group are seen as the lead

¹⁰ <https://www.eis.org.uk/Content/images/education/Early%20Years/STA-Nursery%20Booklet.pdf>

group in pre-school education for 3-5 year olds, despite being effectively excluded from the teaching community and from the professional learning opportunities afforded to Teachers within the sector. Neither can this facilitate optimum collaboration with Teachers in pre-school settings.

35. A further issue is that Teachers' professional standards and professional learning are aligned by the GTCS and employers respectively to the aims and aspirations of the Curriculum for Excellence. It is not clear how the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) as the current registration and regulatory body for Early Years Practitioners and many other workers whose primary responsibilities relate to care, can effectively fulfil the same role for Graduate Early Years Practitioners. An opportunity exists for the EIS to positively influence the content of continuing professional learning.
36. As the number of Graduate Early Years Practitioners continues to grow, their voice is likely to become more critical in influencing pre-school education policy, and potentially education policy more widely, given the importance of early years education in terms of CfE, the poverty-related achievement and attainment gap, and upon young people's long-term outcomes generally.
37. Not only could this displace and undermine the voice of teachers, it could bring public service unions more firmly into the space that until recently was exclusively occupied by education/teacher unions. Such public service unions are becoming increasingly vocal in asserting themselves as 'education' unions, presenting themselves in such a way as to suggest parity with the EIS in this regard. Increasingly, representatives of such unions are included in stakeholder groups set up to consider various aspects of education policy, most markedly in relation to additional support needs, aside from early years education.
38. If, however, Graduate Early Years Practitioners were to be represented by an education union such as the EIS, as is the norm among many Education International (EI) affiliates, including our sister union the NEU, then the EIS would strengthen its profile as the biggest education union in Scotland, representing teachers and allied professionals in all sectors and at all career levels.
39. Indeed, the status of Graduate Early Years Practitioners as educationalists is likely to be enhanced by working with an education union. Furthermore, it would allow an education union such as the EIS to influence national ELC policy in an holistic manner – aligning the interests of Graduate Early Years Practitioners and Nursery Teachers and further galvanising the influence of the EIS on all aspects of education policy which impact on the 3-18 learner cohort.
40. Furthermore, in joining the EIS, Graduate Early Years Practitioners are likely to see teachers as non-hostile, indeed allied professionals, rather than competitors, as is currently the case to some extent. This would

strengthen the campaign to increase the number of GTCS registered qualified Teachers in Early Years.

41. It is also worth noting that the Institute is currently progressing an AGM resolution re a potential kindergarten stage for Scottish Education, which others are pushing for Scotland to adopt. Although policy is yet to be finalised in this area, clear benefits have been identified to such an approach but potential risks exist in terms of further opportunistic moves by local authorities to replace teachers with other less expensive graduates. There may be merit in considering future proofing the interests of the Institute. The Education Committee is about to conduct some further research in this area, in addition to the paper completed last year, to look at international staffing models and school start ages (4/5 is the minority and happens primarily in the UK and former British colonies).

Recommendations

The Institute:

1. Should continue to support the policy that pre-school 3-5 year olds should have statutorily guaranteed minimum access to Nursery Teachers who work as part of teams within publicly funded nurseries, alongside other professionals and practitioners, including Graduate Early Years Practitioners, to plan and deliver education to that cohort of early learners.
2. Should re-affirm its policy that no Nursery Teacher should be re-deployed against their will.
3. To agree, in principle, extending EIS membership to Graduate Early Years Practitioners qualified with BA Childhood Practice degrees who work in the public sector.