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*The Early Years team (left to right): Linda Lauchlan, Annette Burns, Jean Carwood-Edwards, Avril Robertson, Jane Stirling*

## Dear Colleagues

Thank you very much for the positive feedback we received to the new-look *Early Years Matters* last autumn. We are delighted that the fresh design has gone down so well, and that the new mix of articles – reflecting a strong emphasis on multi-agency partnerships – has been so enthusiastically received.

We hope that this new issue will continue to provide a useful platform for sharing ideas, opinions and good practice, and we are delighted to include a strong contribution from the new Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, Michael Russell. Mr Russell makes it very clear in his article that the Scottish Government fully understands the importance of the early years in positively influencing future generations and his commitment to our work is heartening for all practitioners.

There is also a strong theme to this issue and it is one of translating the Early Years Framework into practice – in other words 'Putting the vision into action'. There are many examples of this in the magazine and, if you have additional suggestions, we'd love to hear from you. And do remember, you can also post comments on the online version of the magazine (www.LTScotland.org.uk/earlyyears).

Best wishes

Jean Carwood-Edwards

**JEAN CARWOOD-EDWARDS**
**EARLY YEARS TEAM LEADER**

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# WHAT'S KEEPING US BUSY?

Discover what the LTS Early Years Team has been up to...

Planning the first ever International Early Years Glow Summit in collaboration with six other countries

Working with Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People

Working with the multi-agency National Under Threes Advisory Group (NUTAG) to revise the Birth to 3 National Guidance and create a new 'Pre Birth to Three' DVD resource to support implementation of the revised guidance and the Early Years Framework

Working collaboratively with national bodies and agencies including Scottish Government, HMIE, Care Commission, SQA, further and higher education, Scottish Social Services Council, Scottish Childminding Association and many others

Supporting and developing the National Early Years Glow Group

Working with practitioners who are building the National Assessment Resource

Contributing to national Early Years qualification developments

Supporting practitioners to become more research-engaged to improve evidence-based practice

Working with practitioners and partners towards implementing *Curriculum for Excellence*

Highlighting updated news, information, research and examples of good practice on Early Years Online – see www.LTScotland.org.uk/earlyyears

Working towards a shared agenda with Scotland's colleges and universities

Supporting and co-ordinating National Networks

Supporting practitioners through events and online content

Supporting the creation of a Gaelic version of the *Curriculum for Excellence* Early Level DVD

**Planning the LTS Saturday Conference: Creativity and Innovation in The Early Years**

# Working together – across all settings

Partnerships

**Irene Audain from SOSCN explains the outcomes of its recent Working Together conference**

With around 33,000 children across Scotland benefiting from out-of-school care (OSC) services, the sector has a key role to play in the wider education, health and wellbeing of our young people.

The theme of the 2009 annual national conference of the Scottish Out of School Care Network (SOSCN), 'Working Together', therefore looked at the many benefits that can spring from close partnerships between schools and OSC providers.

Irene Audain, Chief Executive of SOSCN, explains. "The key theme of the conference was the fact that schools and out-of-school care services are serving the same children, families and communities," she says.

"We acknowledge that many teachers have led the way in providing extra-curricular activities for their pupils and many schools have provided a wealth of out-of-hours learning programmes.

"Similarly, *Curriculum for Excellence* acknowledges that a child's learning experiences are not confined to the classroom and encourages opportunities for children to use all of their senses and participate in active hands-on learning experiences – an approach that is already a feature of much of out-of-school care. So there is an excellent opportunity for primary staff and professionally qualified and experienced staff in out-of-school care to work together."

During the conference, discussions and presentations looked at how SOSCN and schools could work together to meet a number of practical challenges and provide better services for the children in their care.

**The key theme of the conference was the fact that schools and out of school care services are serving the same children, families and communities**

Two innovative OSC-school partnerships were highlighted, in Drumlanrig, Hawick, and Trinity, Edinburgh, to demonstrate how co-operation can help create better facilities, opportunities and learning environments for young people.

Drumlanrig Primary School and Drumlanrig Out-of-School Care explained how they had collaborated to provide a space for OSC in the school grounds, and shared information and training opportunities for practitioners. Meanwhile, Trinity OSC described the benefits of developing a partnership approach to supporting children in their area, including the sharing of both indoor and outdoor space.

Irene comments: "Both presentations showed that by working together in a spirit of mutual respect and collaboration, and demonstrating a 'can-do' attitude towards breaking down barriers, schools and out-of-school care, together, are giving children opportunities to develop all of their capacities and providing support to parents and the community."

The Scottish Out of School Care Network is keen to hear from headteachers and schools already working closely with OSC services to support children and families both in and out of school. SOSCN also welcomes enquiries for more information about OSC and how schools and OSC services can work together to deliver *Curriculum for Excellence*.

**MORE INFORMATION:**

**For more information, see www.soscn.org or contact info@soscn.org**

# Building your Curriculum for Early Years

George Smuga, Professional Adviser for the Scottish Government, gives an update on *Curriculum for Excellence*

One of the six entitlements within *Building the Curriculum 3* is for every child and young person to develop skills for life and skills for work, with a continuing focus on literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing.

*Building the Curriculum 4* picks up and expands on that entitlement. It sets out the skills for life, learning and work within the context of *Curriculum for Excellence* and shows how they are embedded in the experiences and outcomes, and senior phase. It then advises practitioners how to look for evidence of progression in those skills, and how these can be developed and applied across a young person's learning, and in different contexts.

One thing we strongly want to emphasise is that vocational learning and work-based skills are not limited to secondary education. These vital skills are built up and developed over the course of our young people's education, and the foundation stones for these are laid at pre-school and primary.

To support practitioners and help them understand how to implement BtC4, the Scottish Government will be providing case studies and exemplification of good practice, and there are also plans for a number of seminars and practical sessions scheduled for March.

The focus of *Building the Curriculum 5*, which was launched on 20 January, is the Framework for Assessment.

In September, the then Cabinet Secretary Fiona Hyslop set out an overall strategy for assessment that became known as the 'Strategic vision and key principles'. This serves as a useful signpost for pre-school settings, schools and local authorities as to the main principles, and future direction of assessment.

**One thing we strongly want to emphasise is that vocational learning and work-based skills are not limited to secondary education**

A key principle is that assessment be based on practitioners' professional judgement. For pre-school and primary that will not be a radical departure. However, to help practitioners check their assessments against the National Standards, there will be a lot of work undertaken to build up confidence in standards and expectations, as well as the capacity for educational settings to moderate across authorities.

It is expected that the transition from the 3–5 and 5–14 Curriculum Frameworks into *Curriculum for Excellence* levels will be gradual and not a sudden leap. However, the expectation is that practitioners will endeavour to implement the new curriculum from 2010.

# Early Education and Childcare – Qualifications update

SQA

**Louise Gaddi, SQA Qualifications Manager, explains the current review of early years qualifications**

In keeping with the Scottish Government's vision to promote a single integrated qualification framework that reflects the Standard for Childhood Practice, SQA has recently reviewed a number of early years qualifications.

The PDA in Childhood Practice has been revised in alignment with the HND in Childhood Practice. It now contains a mandatory section, which complies with the Standard for Childhood Practice through the addition of two new units – Developing Professional Childhood Practice, and Integrated Working and Collaborative Practice. The optional section of the qualification has also been modified, to provide candidates with greater choice and flexibility.

The new HND in Childhood Practice incorporates a number of SQA qualifications, including the HNC in Early Education and Childcare, SVQ CCLD level 3, SVQ 3 Playwork and the PDA in Childhood Practice at SCQF level 8. On completion of the HND Childhood Practice, candidates will have 240 SCQF credits at SCQF levels 7 and 8, which they can use towards an SCQF level 9 qualification. Learning and teaching packs for this course are currently in the final stages of development, and will be available in spring 2010.

The review of the HNC in Early Education and Childcare has been postponed until September 2010 to incorporate the findings of research currently being undertaken by the Scottish Government.

**MORE INFORMATION:**
**For more information, please contact Louise Gaddi at Louise.Gaddi@sqa.org.uk**

## LTS Early Years Online

### PARENT TOOLKIT NOW AVAILABLE

A new toolkit to support practitioners in relaying the benefits of *Curriculum for Excellence* to parents and carers is now available.

The toolkit is designed to help practitioners answer parents' questions about how the new curriculum will affect their child and his or her education. It is accompanied with instructions explaining how to exploit each of its features, and thought-provoking, reflective questions, to help practitioners make the most of the resource.

It also includes a number of 'added extras' for both practitioners and parents, including a quick reference guide and video case studies.

Toolkit materials can now be downloaded from the LTS website, and a number of supporting printed resources will also be produced.

**To view a trailer for the Parent Toolkit, visit http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/video/p/video_tcm4575287.asp**

## Thanks

**Thanks to the children of Queen Street Nursery School, Falkirk, for their paintings on p9 and p19.**

# Healthy approach to active play

Care Commission

**A recent Care Commission report endorses the positive impact of early years services across Scotland. It's encouraging news, says Ronnie Hill**

Encouraging children to lead healthy and active lives is a key aim of the Early Years Framework. A recently-published report from the Care Commission which found that the vast majority of early years services are providing a high standard of well-supervised active play has therefore been warmly welcomed.

The report, based on inspections carried out over 2007–8, found that 84% of services successfully met the National Care Standards relating to active play, with just 328 of the 2,088 services assessed receiving recommendations.

Director of Children's Services Regulation Ronnie Hill said the report showed early years services were on the right track. "These results are extremely encouraging," he says. "They show that the sector can hold its head up and say it is providing a good basis for active play for our children, and it should be confident about moving forward from a good basis."

For the purposes of the report, 'active play' comprised physical activity that requires children to use energy and increases heart rate.

**The sector can hold its head up and say it is providing a good basis for active play for our children**

Over the inspection year, Care Commission officers assessed registered services according to a number of criteria, including the availability of active play, provision for children who need additional support, the quality of staff and child involvement in active play opportunities, and the involvement of parents in the development of active play.

The report found that "most settings are providing good quality, appropriate active play opportunities for the children, indoors and outdoors" and that they "advise parents to dress their children appropriately for outdoor play, and consult children, parents and carers about how they are developing active play".

Only a very small number of settings gave cause for concern about the quality of resources or equipment (88 recommendations, or 4.2%), or opportunities for active play (77 recommendations, or 3.7%), or opportunities for further CPD for staff (140 recommendations, or 6.7%). Just six recommendations (0.3%) were made to services regarding the involvement of children with additional support needs.

Ronnie said the report highlighted the approach of most early years services to offsetting risk management with the rights of children to enjoy an active education.

"I think it's very appropriate that the report has come out at a time when there is a lot of debate around the issue of opportunities for young people versus risk.This shows that early years services appear to be managing that balance well, providing children with good opportunities and not taking a wholly risk-averse approach."

**MORE INFORMATION:**
**For more information, see www.carecommission.com.**

# Scottish Social Services Council launches online career tools

Social services

## New web tools to help career planning

The Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) has launched two new interactive online career pathway tools to help social service employers and workers find out about career routes and qualifications in the sector.

These easy-to-use guides pull together information for current and potential workers in lots of services including early years and child care, social work, social care and housing support.

The Early Years and Child Care and Care and Support Services tools give up-to-date information on routes into the social services sector and what direction you can take for current workers. It also has details on job roles, service types and qualifications.

As well as providing information, the Early Years and Child Care tool has an interactive career pathway section and, by answering a few questions, it will help you plan your next steps in your career.

You can see both tools on the SSSC website (www.sssc.uk.com) under social service workforce planning.

**MORE INFORMATION:**
**For more information on the Early Years and Child Care tool, contact Nina Roberts at nina.roberts@sssc.uk.com and for the Care and Support Services tool, Keith Quinn at keith.quinn@sssc.uk.com**

# Get Cracking with SSSC registration requirements

May 2010 deadline

In 2010, all managers and practitioners in day care or children services must apply to register with the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC)

Managers must apply for registration by May 2010 and practitioners must apply by September 2010.

Regulation of the children's and young people's workforce recognises the vital jobs it does on a daily basis. The workers responsible for children attending nursery, playgroup or after school care now need to be qualified and registered with the SSSC so that parents and carers will feel more confident in their ability to look after, educate and care for the children.

The SSSC has sent out a special edition newsletter to all 4,100 day care of children services throughout Scotland to give more information on required registration and the process of registering with them.

New 'Get Cracking!' posters and postcards will also be dropping through their letterboxes along with the newsletter to all services, local authorities and the Scottish Social Service Learning Networks. As there is a requirement for registrants to gain qualifications, the SSSC has also produced a wall planner for larger services and training providers to plan their workforce training requirements. And, for those who have concerns about funding, the SSSC has a funding for training guide available on its website: www.sssc.uk.com

Some workers may be registered with bodies like the General Teaching Council for Scotland but those who are not must register with the SSSC. For those registering with the SSSC, applications must be received by the dates above, and those not registering with the SSSC must notify the SSSC of their circumstances.

**MORE INFORMATION:**
**For more information on the SSSC's Get Cracking! campaign, visit www.sssc.uk.com or telephone 0845 60 30 891. Application packs are available by sending an email to: registration@sssc.uk.com**

# MAKING EARLY YEARS A PRIORITY

The New Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning stresses the Scottish Government's commitment to the early years

I welcome this opportunity to contribute to *Early Years Matters* to emphasise this Government's and my personal commitment to the early years agenda. The arguments for investment in the early years are well researched. The message is clear: if we want to tackle the inequalities in Scotland and break intergenerational cycles of poverty, poor health and poor attainment, we need to begin in the early years.

The outcomes we need to achieve are clear. We want our children to have the best start in life and to be ready to succeed. We want to see young people who are successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens. We want to improve the life chances for our children. To deliver this, we need to develop seamless working across the Scottish Government and closer partnership working between local delivery partners – health, local government, police, and voluntary and private sectors.

The heart of implementation of our Early Years Framework is at local level, through Community Planning Partnerships. The transformational changes we are seeking to effect through the Framework will only be possible with fundamental change to cultures of planning and working within services, in line with the child-centred and multi-agency principles of Getting It Right For Every Child.

One of the biggest challenges is to align resources to support prevention and early intervention, while continuing to support those who need our support now – an even greater challenge in the face of current and future pressures on public spending. There are, however, powerful economic reasons for doing so. Economists have calculated between a 3:1 and 7:1 return per pound invested in the early years up to age 21. Some studies have followed their subjects beyond the age of 21 and calculate a return of 17:1 later in life.

> **We want parents and practitioners to see the importance of play and to have high-quality play opportunities in every community**

Of course times are tough and hard budget decisions need to be made, but successful delivery of the Framework is dependent on having a range of services to support children and families, particularly those who are facing difficulties. Sometimes if services close, the loss of support and expertise can be permanent. Consequently we need to remember the "invest now to save later" argument to which I referred earlier.

For our part, the Scottish Government has developed a parenting campaign on the importance of the first three years of life. *Play Talk Read* supports parenting skills and promotes the value of parenting by encouraging parents to play, talk and read to their children every day to give them the best start in life.

We have developed a £4m national fund aimed at improving opportunities for play for children across Scotland. Together with Play Scotland, the Care Commission, the Police and other partners, we are leading a debate on balancing the benefits of play against risk. We want parents and practitioners to see the importance of play and to have high-quality play opportunities in every community.

As part of the National Conversation, we have engaged with the UK Government to make our case for a single, accessible and progressive system of supporting parents with the costs of childcare, appropriate to the needs of the people of Scotland.

We have successfully delivered an extra eight million hours of pre-school education since 2007 and are working in partnership with councils to consider and agree possible ways to further expand the entitlement to pre-school education – although I recognise the need for realism due to financial pressures.

We have a clear vision of what we want to achieve in the early years – a healthy pregnancy to give a healthy start in life; good positive parenting that promotes attachment; a recognition of the importance of play in terms of a child's development; ensuring that when parents and children need support and services, they are delivered in an integrated, child centred way by a well-trained and well-supported workforce.

I look forward to working with you and other delivery partners on achieving this vision.

# YOUR ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO THE NATIONAL ASSESSMENT RESOURCE (NAR)

The National Assessment Resource will be a valuable tool for teachers, practitioners and local authorities. Norman Emerson and Myra Young from Learning and Teaching Scotland provide a user's guide

**WITH SCHOOLS** and centres firmly on the way to using the new curriculum, it is now time to consider assessment and how our current processes are likely to change.

In order to reflect the aims of *Curriculum for Excellence*, it is essential that we adapt our assessment processes to look more closely at how we develop children's learning. In reflecting the aims of *Curriculum for Excellence*, progress in children's learning is now defined in terms of how much children know and how well they know it. This approach will promote greater breadth and depth of learning, including a greater focus on the secure development of children's skills and knowledge.

At present, the only areas formally assessed as part of the 5–14 curriculum are reading, writing and maths. Since *Curriculum for Excellence* is increasingly concerned with charting children's skills across the curriculum, there is now a need for practitioners to be able to assess children in all areas, through a more holistic view of the child and their skills.

In order to achieve this, a new resource has been created to support practitioners in adopting a new approach when assessing children's learning.

The National Assessment Resource (NAR), due to be launched in the autumn, has been created to support local authorities and practitioners in amending their current approaches to assessment.

"The resource will try to combine assessment support resources for practitioners," says Norman Emerson, Head of Area Advisers at Learning and Teaching Scotland.

The method of assessments now being encouraged is a far cry from the pencil and paper-based methods familiar to teachers in primary or secondary schools.

"We want to move away from the previous 5–14 item bank notion, to something more dynamic that is in keeping with the aims of *Curriculum for Excellence*," says Norman.

Rather than a limited range of tests which teachers use within the traditional 5–14 levels, the NAR will contain a range of high-quality assessment guidance, resources and illustrations of learner performance.

"The NAR will include a number of exemplars to support practitioners, including videos, which focus on learning taking place," says Norman. "This will be backed up by video footage from practitioners, discussing how they have gone through a process of assessment with a child offering practical advice based on their experience."

## Accessibility

It is important, however, that any assessment material comes in a form that is easily accessible. Practitioners should use their expertise to pinpoint where the learning is taking place in order to find the right kind of materials for the purpose.

"The NAR will include resources that easily communicate learning," says Norman. "A lengthy video would not do a great deal to support practitioners, but a short video that focuses on the child's learning and the progress they have made, could work as a

good reference point for other practitioners. Early years establishments often capture learning through video material, so we are hoping there will be a rich range of exemplars available."

## A different type of learning

"*Curriculum for Excellence* encourages a variety of approaches to learning," explains Myra Young, Education Manager at Learning and Teaching Scotland. "The new curriculum focuses a great deal more on active learning, and how this helps to develop skills. To

**NAR will include a number of exemplars to support practitioners, including videos, which focus on learning taking place**

support all of this, we need an assessment system that gauges children's learning and progress in a way that captures their full range of skills.

To promote this, there needs to be a broad range of evidence, and the NAR will provide guidance."

The NAR will therefore contain a range of resources across all curriculum areas that will support teachers and will also recognise the need to support early years practitioners in their assessment processes.

One of the main features of the NAR is its flexibility, and the way it enables practitioners to contribute.

## Creativity

"What we have always known is that practitioners are incredibly creative," says Myra. "They often see a resource, and know almost instantly how they can adapt it to suit their learners' needs."

The NAR affords practitioners the opportunity to download a resource, amend it, and then upload the new version. "If practitioners take advantage of this service, there will be a large professional community all sharing high-quality resources," she adds.

## Gathering evidence

Through making good use of the NAR service, practitioners will be able to see learning success stories, where staff have clearly documented, evidence-based learning. "It would be very helpful for practitioners to upload PDFs of pupils' work, with practitioner comments on how the learning could be taken forward," says Myra. "It is very important they act upon the evidence they gather. The evidence tells them a great deal about what the child has learned, so they should be using this information when planning next steps."

**Practitioners are encouraged to upload PDFs of children's work**

## NAR User Glow Group?

To help support Learning and Teaching Scotland in putting this resource together, a NAR User Glow Group has been established to help ensure the usability of the resource.

The group comprises practitioners from across 3–18 years, who have an influence over the content of the resource. Myra explains: "We wanted practitioners to help mould a resource that was fit for purpose.

"Practitioners from all areas have been involved from the beginning of the project, so we are very confident the NAR is rich in high-quality, practical resources."

Learning and Teaching Scotland is relying on feedback on the NAR to help it progress in the future. "The continued success of this resource will rely on the honest feedback of practitioners in order for it to develop," says Myra. "In assessment, we have always encouraged feedback, and tried to respond to any feedback in a positive way. For the NAR to develop, this will again need to be the case."

The NAR will help to support the whole assessment process. Myra adds: "Assessment starts at the planning stage, through identifying what you want children to learn or develop, and then devising activities based on the *Curriculum for Excellence* experiences and outcomes.

"Following on from that, it is important to obtain responses from learners and evaluate their learning in light of those responses."

## Sharing good practice

This approach to assessment works hand in hand with encouraging staff to engage in dialogue with each other so that they can develop shared expectations and standards in terms of children's achievements. "By encouraging people to network and come together we can create a wonderful resource," says Norman.

### MORE INFORMATION?

The NAR will be launched at the Scottish Learning Festival in September 2010. For more information, please visit the *Curriculum for Excellence* website, where more details will be posted in due course.

# FROM CUT-OUTS TO CREATIVITY

## Sarah Jones reveals her personal journey to creative thinking in the early years

**WHEN I** was training to be a teacher, I remember cutting out the card templates for 30 children to make gingerbread men. I set each component out in a small dish so that the children could build their own gingerbread man; at least I called it their own work.

Each child would place the eyes and buttons in a different place and their cutting skills would add individuality to the shape of the man. I proudly displayed the 30 gingerbread men and congratulated myself on allowing the children to be 'creative'.

For years, my practice followed this pattern of endless preparation. It was quite therapeutic sitting with my colleagues cutting out hundreds of spots to put on the teapot template we were using for Mother's Day cards!

But today there are no signs of templates in our classrooms. Children are now developing their own creativity.

### How has this change happened?

My journey to creativity in the classroom began by setting up the environments to allow creativity to thrive. My team of early years teachers developed areas of learning with resources known as 'Continuous Provision'. This means that children have more choice and are encouraged to make their own decisions.

We have learned though that often, the fewer resources you offer children, the more imaginatively and creatively they use the materials. We looked at how specific materials supported and developed children's learning. Circular and linear materials encouraged children to layer and work with pattern and symmetry. A challenge for teachers has been to stop suggesting ideas to the children, such as: 'Why don't you make a spider?' We have let the children explore the possibilities that the materials can offer. We developed ways of supporting children with their creative ideas through careful questioning.

We start with the creative possibilities when planning. Previously we would have started with the activity that the practitioner had thought of and perhaps would have used a template for easy completion, so no one would fail. We plan for 'possible' skills and not 'product' outcome. We now use possibility planning for every area of learning. We reflect daily on the learning observed and we also reflect on the interests of the children.

We also use provocations or an 'invitation'. These invite the child to explore and create. We may offer a selection of different shades of paint or have a range of natural materials for the children to use and explore.

The children are becoming increasingly independent and are able to shape their own learning. They are becoming more creative learners.

We have also moved away from creating 'wall displays'. Previously we would have created the images for the display and the children would have painted or collaged them. Our walls look wonderfully colourful! Children's work is displayed when completed so they can see we value it. Children often revisit their work and are so proud of what they create.

Careful choices of materials, invitations and possibility thinking have encouraged our children to be really creative learners.

I am glad the fox tossed the Gingerbread Man into the air with a flick of his nose and ate him all up – I do think it was the best possible end to 'template man!' ●

**Sarah Jones**

**Sarah Jones has taught for 29 years in inner city schools in Birmingham.**

**She has job shared, with the same person, for 19 years, and they share the role of Assistant Head of Nursery, Reception and Year 1. Her individual roles include Creative Co-ordinator for the Creative Partnership initiative 'Change School' and she is a Lead Practitioner for Birmingham LA.**

# TAKING IT FURTHER

We take a look at an innovative new postgraduate qualification that puts the Early Years Framework at the heart of primary and pre-school education

**THE EARLY YEARS** Framework presents a new set of priorities for those all-important years from pre-birth to 8, promoting a coherent and holistic approach that is based around the individual needs of every child and his or her family.

To meet the demands of this new emphasis, a postgraduate certificate in Early Years Education is this year being piloted by the University of Aberdeen, in partnership with four local authorities and the Scottish Government.

Its aim is to give already qualified teachers greater confidence in working with children in the early years and provide practitioners with a greater depth of expertise right across the early years age bracket. The course uses a blend of online activities and materials, taught input, collaborative group work and hands-on practice. And one of the most striking features is that, for the first time, pre-school and primary teachers will be required to carry out practice in a 0–3 setting.

Catriona McDonald, Programme Director at the University of Aberdeen, explains how the Early Years Framework has inspired and informed the course's approach and content.

"The course really ties in with the Early Years Framework. The BEd course that we teach follows the principles of the Scottish Teachers for a New Era project (STNE), and that's really about looking not just at the child within the four walls of the classroom, but also at all the external, family and social influences on the child," she says.

"When the Early Years Framework came out, it took that a step further by saying we need to look not just at 0–3, but also pregnancy and the influences on the children before they're actually born.

"That's really what we're trying to do with this course. It's about making teachers much more aware of all the influences that are coming to bear on children once they are in the more formal classroom situation and the impact this has on how they learn and develop."

Myra Pearson, Head of the School of Education at the university, agrees. "It's about

**It's about making teachers much more aware of all the influences that are coming to bear on children once they are in the more formal classroom situation**

giving teachers that wider perspective, joining up the pieces so that you have a coherent environment from pre-birth onwards that actually influences and affects our children," she says.

The specialisation is delivered in the form of an online course, which requires students to combine theory with practice, and use online facilities to share feedback and ideas with their peers. To help the process, the students are split into 'action learning sets', which work across the different local authorities, thereby enabling teachers from across the country to discuss their practice.

There are also whole days set aside for taught input throughout the duration of the course, and, in addition to under-3 practice, students will also have to carry out practice in both 3–5 settings, and Primary 1 to 3.

"The fact that this programme is collaborative is very important, because although there are activities that teachers do as individuals, they then work together co-operatively, first in small groups, and then in larger groups," says Myra.

"And to do that we've been able to use some of the facilities of Glow and other technologies to facilitate the online sessions. That enables, for example, someone from Dundee and someone from the north of Aberdeenshire to be engaged together in a way that wouldn't normally be possible."

Because part of the course's aim is to widen the experience of early years teachers, there are also plans to create links and exchange programmes with other European countries. And, as of next year, the course will include a comparison of the compulsory curricula for pre-school and primary education in Sweden and Scotland.

Interest levels in the course have been extremely high, with the pilot year over-subscribed and a keen interest from practitioners in being involved next year.

"We've been so impressed by the total commitment of our teachers working with us on this, they've been just superb," Myra says. "The work they're doing, how they reflect on the work they do in the classroom, and looking with fresh eyes at how they can provide an even better experience for the children, has been fantastic."

Catriona adds: "I think there's definitely been a gap, and the comments that we're getting from the students on the course are to the effect that they were not aware of all these environmental influences, and that for the first time they're really having their eyes opened in terms of what they can do to support development and learning."

## New Primary Initial Teacher Education Course

**The Stirling Institute of Education, at the University of Stirling, has launched a new primary initial teacher education course that gives an opportunity to specialise in early years education, writes Dr Christine Stephen from the Institute.**

**Students on this BA course in Professional Education (Primary) with specialism in the early years will be able to teach children in pre-school settings and throughout the primary school years. The Stirling Institute of Education offers students an innovative mix of lectures and seminars about research, theory and everyday classroom experiences, and carefully structured opportunities to develop practical teaching skills.**

**A key feature of the early years specialism is its focus on developing the inter-professional understandings necessary for effective education for young children. In addition to core topics in education (for example, about teaching literacy and numeracy and managing behaviour), students take classes in psychology, social work and family health.**

**These classes allow them to learn about child development from the perspective of psychology, to understand how social workers engage with families, and to explore issues regarding family health and development.**

**The specialism looks at learning and development from birth to 8 years old and equips teachers to work with other professionals and parents. This broad education will ensure that students are well prepared to be teachers in the 21st century – able to meet the demands of working with *Curriculum for Excellence* and delivering the Early Years Framework.**

# BOUNCING BACK

## We take a look at how a ground-breaking project is helping prepare Scotland's children for life's challenges

**EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE** has long been recognised by psychologists as an important quality, while *Curriculum for Excellence's* health and wellbeing outcomes have identified the development of coping skills as vital to mental and emotional wellbeing for children and young people. A programme to help build emotional resilience, confidence and 'inner strength' in young children has therefore been warmly embraced, with Perth and Kinross last year supporting its introduction into 17 primary schools.

The Bounce Back! programme was developed in Australia in 2003 by Dr Toni Noble and Dr Helen McGrath. Based on psychological and educational theory, and widely used in Australian schools, the programme is cross-curricular and contains activities for a broad range of *Curriculum for Excellence* subject areas, including literacy and English, expressive arts and sciences.

"It's known that resilience protects against depression and anxiety, and that lack of resilience can impact on young people making poor choices in their teenage years, for example in terms of alcohol and drug use," explains Sarah Axford, Educational Psychologist with Perth and Kinross.

"Developing this quality of inner strength and the ability to recover when things are difficult is also very helpful for being successful in school and, more generally, for getting the most out of life. So we were interested in looking at ways of promoting resilience in schools."

The programme aims to teach positive thinking and coping skills to children, whilst showing practitioners how to provide a supportive learning environment and sense of 'connectedness' and belonging among pupils. It is intended to be a whole-school and long-term programme with themes – such as learning to talk to other people about worries, viewing problems in perspective, and not personalising and internalising negative experiences – revisited and reinforced through the primary years.

The name 'Bounce Back!' is an acronym consisting of statements that illustrate attitudes and strategies for coping with unhappiness or anxiety, and are designed to be easily memorised by young children.

Sarah says the impact of the programme could be particularly important for the very early years, with research suggesting that younger brains are more receptive to 'emotional training'. "One of the principles behind the programme is 'the earlier the better'," she says. "It really is better to encourage resilience as soon as you can – research shows that our thinking style can be well-established by the age of 12. The view of the authors was that you can and should teach this from the moment pupils start school. And although their programme was written for age 5+, we've found that if a school has a nursery attached, early years practitioners often come along to our training, and find they can use the Bounce Back ideas and materials in pre-school too."

**Practitioners have found that they can use the Bounce Back ideas and materials in pre-school too**

The Educational Psychology Service is currently researching the programme in 17 schools in Perth and Kinross, to assess its effectiveness, and in summer 2010 the results of this study will be available.

"It's very much a whole-school programme," emphasises Sarah. "Our view is that resilience is relevant for everybody, and we can begin equipping our children to deal with all the challenges they're going to face in life from a very young age."

# INSPIRATIONAL LEARNING, PRACTICAL ADVICE

## Excellent reviews for 'Curriculum for Excellence – Supporting the Early Level' resource. Find out more…

**LAST YEAR,** the new Early Years *'Curriculum for Excellence* – Supporting the Early Level' multimedia resource was launched to help pre-school and primary practitioners deliver *Curriculum for Excellence* across the early level.

The resource includes a DVD, booklet and interactive CD-ROM. It contains film clips, links and reflective questions to encourage practitioners to take a fresh look at their learning and teaching, and also offers further CPD opportunities on each of the 10 elements within implementation.

Kathy Morrison, Quality Improvement Officer at West Dunbartonshire Council, explains how the resource has enhanced and informed the local authority's CPD programme. "We invited each of our nurseries and partnership nurseries to nominate a representative to attend a series of learning days centred on *Curriculum for Excellence*. We had our first in November, the second in January, and there are more planned for the end of February, March and April.

Within the workshops, the DVD is the basis for all the CPD in relation to *Curriculum for Excellence*, and the training sessions are being structured around the 10 implementation elements. At our January day, for example, we focused on the theme of 'learning and teaching'. We had a series of presentations and workshops in the morning, followed in the afternoon by several workshops using the DVD as our main discussion point.

I think the resource is excellent especially as the filming and the research is right up to date! The resource shows you the best practice from across Scotland, and that is hugely inspirational as it gives you something to aim for.

The fact that it is structured around the 10 elements and broken down into manageable sections also means it's really accessible to all practitioners.

Each section along with the film footage can be used as the basis for either self-reflective tasks or group learning. In West Dunbartonshire, for example, we are very keen on using co-operative learning techniques, and each of the implementation sections supports this way of working and enables excellent group discussions. The reflective questions – which are really very good, are structured to make you think about what you do, and why you do it!

However, I think the best thing about the DVD is that it shows what practitioners actually do, what the curriculum means, and how they can best deliver it. It is a very hands-on practical resource and greatly complements the large *Curriculum for Excellence* folder. In a way, it demystifies and clarifies everything practitioners need to know about *Curriculum for Excellence*.

What this resource does is show practitioners how areas of their practice already fit perfectly with the principles of *Curriculum for Excellence*, but it also encourages them to reflect and self-evaluate and that process can only help improve practice." ●

## What the practitioners say…

"This is a very good resource. I find it very helpful listening to other people's ideas and hearing about their vision. There is a great source of information within the resource showing different levels of staff skills."

***Michelle Mullan, Early Education and Childcare Officer, Kilbowie Early Education and Childcare Centre***

"Fabulous resource to use with staff – really helps to encourage reflection and self-evaluation."

***Liz Rowan, Head of Centre, Linnvale Early Education and Childcare Centre***

"Very informative resource, it makes you want to take the ideas back to nursery and implement them."

***Janice Kerrigan, Practitioner 3-5, Sunflower Private Nursery***

"Excellent resource to use for staff training. Some of the clips are inspirational and very motivating!"

***Jillian Hart, Manager – Children's Hour Private Nursery***

# TRANSITIONS: TAKING THE NEXT STEP

With pre-school into primary transitions being identified as a key government priority, now is the time to revise our transition approaches in line with *Curriculum for Excellence*

**THE TRANSITION** from pre-school to primary school has long been recognised as a critical time of change for children, parents and practitioners alike. The introduction of the early level has inspired many to re-examine the challenges, to develop innovative approaches and to capitalise on new opportunities during transitions.

## TAG – supporting practitioners

In response to the introduction of *Curriculum for Excellence* and the need for a re-examination of transitions, Learning and Teaching Scotland established a pre-school into primary Transitions Advisory Group (TAG). This representative group is comprised of early years professionals from varied backgrounds who share an understanding of the impact that transitions can have on a child's future progress, wellbeing and development.

TAG member Professor Aline-Wendy Dunlop from the Department of Childhood and Primary Studies at the University of Strathclyde explains the importance of effective transitions. "Transitions are a dynamic time and if you have change, you have opportunities. If transitions are supported well, children can learn to cope with change in a positive way, which is a very important skill for life. They can be involved in meaningful and challenging learning experiences, create new positive identities, develop socially and emotionally, and form strong relationships, and families can be meaningfully involved."

Linda Lauchlan, from Learning and Teaching Scotland's Early Years Team and chair of TAG, explains the group's purpose. "The main aim was to examine the current

**Janie Wallace from Fox Covert Nursery – see overleaf**

challenges and priorities to support effective transitions from pre-school into primary. We worked to identify key messages to support colleagues in enhancing their transition approaches. The group's work was also essential for the development of the popular *Curriculum for Excellence* 'Supporting the Early Level' resource, distributed to all pre-school and primary settings in September."

## In practice: Park Drive Nursery & St Mary's

"It's trying to ensure that we see learning as a continuum, and are sharing what learning is going on," says Anne Govan, Depute Head of Park Grove Nursery in Bannockburn. "Pathways to Numeracy has been a gateway to that."

Park Grove Nursery, adjacent to St Mary's Primary, is one establishment that has been highlighted as demonstrating effective practice through partnership working, thanks to a project aimed at improving numeracy in the early years.

"The project was involved in looking at ways to ensure that there was continuity and progression in maths between pre-school and P1," says Marjorie Kellas, P1 teacher at St Mary's. "This involved staff visits to the nursery and P1 to observe how both settings were approaching maths teaching. It was really interesting to see the opportunities that were created through active learning."

Since this project was based around partnership working, Anne feels it has really helped to establish links with other members of staff.

"The Pathways to Numeracy project has allowed us to further develop partnership links," she says. "It has opened the door to us working with another P1 teacher with the ongoing view of developing numeracy."

As part of the initiative, groups of children accessed maths sessions in both pre-school and P1. The readiness and ability of each establishment to facilitate this demonstrates their understanding of the importance of continuity and progression in children's learning.

"By introducing specific numeracy skills in the nursery, children felt more confident both using and extending these skills in P1," says Anne. "If the project hadn't gone ahead, I don't think the children's numeracy skills would have developed quite as much. The children can identify what they have learned, and they are talking about the skills they have gained, which is really great to see."

Part of the secret to the programme's success is its sole focus on numeracy.

"By targeting one specific area, we have been able to look at how links have been made," Anne says. "It has worked so well as it has been a joint effort, with everyone striving for the same goals."

Marjorie adds: "Good practice has been shared and a great deal of knowledge has been gained. Partnership working allows us to give and receive feedback on our teaching practices, which encourages us to reflect."

**For more information see: www.LTScotland.org.uk/numeracy**

## Key messages

The group agreed that *Curriculum for Excellence* has provided a real focus on transitions and has raised expectations.

"As the early level spans pre-school and primary, there is a much greater emphasis on continuity and progression," says Linda. "Practitioners are working together to develop a shared understanding and complementary active learning and teaching approaches across pre-school and primary settings."

TAG member Kevin Kelman, who is a Quality Development Officer from Stirling Council, agrees. "It's now much more of a continuum of experiences for the child. It's going to be hard work and we need to keep focusing on the child's perspective, but it's exciting to see the great changes that are happening."

## Meeting the challenges head on

Yet while *Curriculum for Excellence* has undoubtedly had a positive effect on pre-school into primary transitions, there are still continuing challenges to face.

The most significant of these lies in how pre-school and primary settings ensure that they have meaningful progression and continuity of learning into Primary 1.

TAG suggests that relationships and communication are key. "Relationships and practitioner collaboration are key to successful transitions," says Professor Dunlop. "Practitioners should have an excellent understanding of the experiences the child has had in the past, and will have in the future, and should work towards clear aims and roles during the transitions process."

**This is a time of change for parents as well as for children, so it is crucial to have parents and families involved throughout**

Key messages from TAG suggest that a dedicated transitions co-ordinator in every setting may promote co-operation. Technology should be used innovatively to overcome potential practical barriers, such as making time to meet, through the use of Glow, email, digital photography and video conferencing.

Also, leaders play a vital role in valuing this process by facilitating the time and scope to get to know the children and build relationships between practitioners, children and families.

Children are typically very actively involved in play and learning in pre-school environments. Where such approaches are sustained into primary school and further developed there, is better continuity for children, for learning and in terms of familiarity and confidence. This makes for more effective transitions.

Communication across pre-school and primary to develop a shared understanding of active approaches is also important. Supporting parents and children in their expectations of a more active approach in primary is vital in building strong, supportive relationships.

"Successful schools involve parents. Where they are involved in transitions, the children's move to school is well supported," says Professor Dunlop. "This is a time of change for parents as well as for children, so it is crucial to have parents and families involved throughout."

This builds on the co-operative approaches shared by parents and early educators in pre-school and lays the foundation for positive longer term parent-teacher relationships that are in the best interests of the child. ●

### MORE INFORMATION?

For more information on transitions, the early level resource can be found online at www.LTScotland.org.uk/earlyyears and the key messages from TAG will be published online soon.

# In practice: Fox Covert Nursery

At Fox Covert Nursery, Edinburgh, staff have focused their efforts on refining their transition process, with a view to creating a shared vision between practitioners across the pre-school and primary sectors.

"We work in partnership with schools, children, parents and staff to establish a shared understanding," says Janie Wallace, Lead Practitioner at Fox Covert Nursery. "If we weren't able to work in partnership with our parents and schools, our transition programme wouldn't be so successful."

Primary transition at Fox Covert Nursery is a carefully planned process, not a one-off event. The nursery staff focus on the experience for the child and parent through familiarisation and communication and also, crucially, on ensuring progression and continuity for the child during the transition.

"We are lucky to be on the same campus as the primary so we can take the children over into the P1 classroom once a week for 45 minutes," says Janie. "This enables the children to familiarise themselves with the general school environment, whilst giving us a chance to educate the children on their new surroundings and collaborate with the primary staff. This ensures that when the children start in August they already know where to hang up their coats, and where the toilets are. For some children this is very daunting, so facilitating this once a week over a period of time helps to eradicate any fears children may have about starting school."

This introduction to the school environment doesn't stop there. The nursery staff also ensure that the school is part of the children's routine by making use of the school library, gym hall and story sacks.

"It's all about supporting the children to make links," says Janie. "By helping the children to experience the wider environment of the school, we are familiarising them with their surroundings, which helps to take away the fear of the unknown."

Another key to the success of the transitions at Fox Covert Nursery lies in the information they pass on to the P1 teacher. Janie writes transition reports on each child, and goes through this information with the class teacher. This is supported by the inclusion of a Personal Learning Planning (PLP) folder specific to each child.

"The PLP is a document cherished by the children and practitioners. It contains lots of information which will help the teacher to get an all-round view of the child," Janie says. "It includes carefully chosen photographs and samples of work, whilst outlining the child's prior knowledge and achievement. The PLPs are created with the children and they therefore recognise their own achievements and what they can do with their learning. The whole transitions process really helps to provide meaningful learning experiences for the child and a great opportunity to develop strong relationships with parents, colleagues and with the children themselves."

She adds: "Transitions are now the responsibility of all practitioners. If we don't do this effectively, we won't be able to support our children to become the independent learners they need to be."

**Effective work in transitions is all about helping the children to make links to their new environment**

# RESEARCH IN PRACTICE

## Studies show that investment in the early years leads to positive future outcomes for children and society

**INCREASING** amounts of research show that what happens between pre-birth and 3 years of age has a massive impact on the kind of people our children grow up to be. LTS Early Years Team Leader Jean Carwood-Edwards explains.

"We have more and more scientific evidence to show that what children experience during those years has a very powerful impact on children's learning, resilience, and their sense of confidence and of being valued," she says.

"Our children deserve the very best start in life and it is wonderful that the Scottish Government promote this as an important priority in their forward-looking Early Years Framework."

### Brain development in early years

One striking area of research that highlights the significance of environmental influences in the early years focuses on the intellectual and emotional development of children who have suffered neglect.

Studies have shown that children exposed to unpredictable and sustained stress and neglect in the first two to three years of their life, frequently do not develop the same cognitive abilities as children who have been brought up in a secure, caring and stable environment. They may also lack the ability to empathise and respond to kindness, making them poorly adapted for social interaction.

One possible reason for this is that chronic stress stimulates regions of the brain linked to anxiety and fear responses, at the expense of other areas.

Furthermore, if a child receives no emotional stimulation in the form of affection or social interaction from caregivers, the areas of the brain responsible for processing such stimuli may fail to develop adequately.

However, perhaps the most startling indication yet of the potentially devastating consequences of negative early years experiences on children is in the physical condition of the brain.

In one study, CT scans of children who have suffered severe sensory-deprivation neglect show that, by the age of 3, their brains are significantly smaller than that of healthy 3-year-olds.

Jean comments: "It is a very powerful image, and if that doesn't make the strongest argument for investing in the early years, then I don't know what would."

### Growing Up in Scotland

The Growing Up in Scotland (GUS) study, which began in 2005 and follows almost 8,000 young children annually, has also provided vital research which can inform best policy and practice in the early years.

In particular, research into the impact of children's early experiences on later cognitive development, published in March last year, highlighted the importance of offering a variety of activities to young children.

GUS found that: 'Children who regularly take part in a wide range of activities, and whose parents rate activities as very important, have higher cognitive ability scores at the age of 34 months than children who experience fewer activities and whose parents attach less importance to them.'

"What this research shows is that talking to children, reading with them and doing different activities with them, has a huge impact on motivating them and helping them to learn effectively," Jean comments.

"So again, here is concrete, rigorous research that not only justifies the importance of the quality of early years experiences, but also helps practitioners to provide the highest standard of provision possible for our young children and their families." (see www.crfr.ac.uk/gus/gus_latest_news4.htm)

"We need to capture what the evidence tells us about the nature of effective practice"
EARLY YEARS FRAMEWORK

### Best practice, better value

Within the Early Years Framework, we learn

**Children who regularly take part in a wide range of activities, and whose parents rate activities as very important, have higher cognitive ability scores**

about David's real-life story. Born in one of the most deprived areas of the country, to a drug-dependant mother, David was re-housed eight times before the age of 9, four times because of domestic abuse.

By 14, he was truanting from school on a regular basis and becoming involved in gang activity. By 15, he had committed a series of offences, including culpable homicide, culminating in his being sentenced to seven years in prison.

"One of the critical aims of the Early Years Framework is to support children like David, and to stop that cycle of despair and violence," says Jean.

There is further research that shows how spending money in the early years has a significantly greater impact than spending money later on in life.

Nobel prize winning economist Professor James Heckman illustrated the value in investing earlier rather than later, in his Heckman Curve, which showed that a dollar spent on early childhood education gives more effective results, and therefore is a better 'economic return' than money invested later in life.

Jean comments: "What the Heckman Curve shows is that it really is a case of invest early and reap the rewards later."

## Glow – bringing life to research

Sharing the growing body of early years research with early years practitioners, in an accessible form to improve and promote evidence-based practice, is a key role of Learning and Teaching Scotland.

And a fundamental medium for this support is Glow, the intranet service for practitioners across Scotland. Through Glow, practitioners can not only access information and resources, but can also benefit from the Glow Meet video conferencing tool, which allows people to interact using video, audio and a shared whiteboard space for developing debate and discussion.

"Glow lifts the geographical and financial barriers to ensuring that research becomes practice," says Jane Stirling, LTS Early Years Development Officer.

"Just recently we organised a Research into Practice National Glow Meet where many members of the early years community logged in and listened to some presentations around current research messages.

"After lots of interesting live-chat, many of the participants said that they were now much more enthusiastic about making research real in their everyday work with children and families."

**» MORE INFORMATION?**

LTS is developing a series of future Early Years Glow meet Sessions as part of the Glowing Thursdays Programme. To find out more, visit the Glow Scotland website.

# KEY ROLE FOR CHILDMINDERS

## How are childminders helping to implement the Early Years Framework? Early Years Matters explores their important role

**ASK LIZ STEWART** what her job description is, and she laughs. "You are teacher, role model, cook, domestic, accountant, nurse, trainer, adviser – it's a pretty full-on job!"

Liz is the Convenor of the Scottish Childminding Association (SCMA), and one of 5,929 registered childminders caring for children across Scotland.

Like many working in the sector, she believes childminders are ideally placed to deliver the 10 elements of transformational change that underpin the Early Years Framework.

The Care Commission would seem to agree, with childminding services showing the largest proportion of any service category achieving grades 5 or 6 for every theme in the Care Commission's 2008 inspection results.

So how are childminders helping to implement the framework, and how is the sector moving forward?

According to Maxine Bingham, registered childminder and SCMA trainer, one of the greatest strengths of childminders is the close relationship they foster with parents and families, which enables them to develop a deep understanding of a child and family's needs.

"I have lots of contact with the families of the children I look after, and that's so important," says Maxine. "Every morning and evening, the parents are encouraged to have a chat about all the different aspects of their child's day.

"It's really great when parents can celebrate the child's achievements, and feel included, and that idea of involving parents is really central to how we work."

### Lower ratio of carers

The lower ratio of carers to children – a maximum of six children to every adult, or three of pre-school age – also gives a wide scope for tailoring care to the needs of the child and family, and involving parents.

Furthermore, the close individual attention childminders can dedicate can also be helpful in identifying any gaps in a child's development. As an illustration, Liz provides the example of a young boy she had in her care, who seemed unresponsive to the usual stimuli.

She shared her concerns with his mum and gently suggested visiting a speech therapist. After some time the child was diagnosed with autism.

She adds: "It is really hard to tell a parent when there are concerns about their child's development, but the important thing is that the child and parent receive the relevant support as soon as possible."

Childminders can also play an important role in child protection, identifying children at risk, and encouraging children to talk about anything that has made them unhappy.

### Greater recognition, higher standards

For both Liz and Maxine, the Early Years Framework is a welcome step that confirms the relevance and validity of the childminder's role – and importantly points the way towards continued high standards.

They also believe an increased recognition of the importance of childminders is leading to a greater focus on CPD opportunities, for example tailored training from the SCMA, such as the 'Scheme of Excellence', which sits on the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework.

"I don't think the new framework has necessarily presented new challenges to childminders, but I do feel it has helped to focus our minds on just how much we are able to support families in their day-to-day work," explains Maxine.

"Prospective childminders are now much more aware of the sector and the quality expected from a registered childminder.

"Luckily, SCMA is always on hand to provide us with the support and information we need to continue to provide a quality childcare service." ●

**» MORE INFORMATION?**

You can find out more about becoming or finding a childminder by calling the SCMA Helpline on 01786 449063 (Monday to Friday, 10 am – 4 pm) or by visiting the website: www.childminding.org

# FAMILY NURSE PARTNERSHIPS

"The largest influences on children in the early years are their parents"

EARLY YEARS FRAMEWORK

## A new early intervention initiative that aims to help new, young mums is being piloted in Edinburgh

**THERE IS** good evidence that the outcomes for both children and adults are strongly influenced by factors in pregnancy and the first years of life, and that early intervention is the key to breaking the cycle of multiple problems associated with deprivation and improving life chances.

A new Family Nurse Partnership (FNP) early intervention programme, that aims to support first-time teenage mothers, is therefore being piloted in Scotland. The pilot programme is a nurse-delivered, intensive, home-based intervention that is initiated in pregnancy. It aims to improve pregnancy outcomes, child health and development, getting ready for school, achievement and parent self-sufficiency.

It has been tested in almost 50 sites in England over the last three years, with almost one third of all English Primary Care Trusts and local authorities now providing an FNP service. And the initiative has now been introduced in Edinburgh, thanks to funding from the Scottish Government. Education and training support will also be provided by colleagues within the Department of Health, who are kindly supporting Scotland's first FNP site through a consultancy agreement with Scottish Government.

The programme is based on the theories of human ecology, attachment and self-efficacy, and originates from 30 years of development and three large trials by Professor David Olds and his team at the University of Colorado USA.

Consistent results have demonstrated numerous advantages, including improvements in women's antenatal health; fewer subsequent pregnancies and greater intervals between births; reduction in children's injuries; an increase in fathers' involvement; reductions in welfare dependency; and reduced substance-use initiation.

Research indicates that the best outcomes are achieved in teenagers aged 19 and under, and the licensed programme therefore began enrolling clients from this age group, who are expecting their first baby and resident in the city of Edinburgh, on 25 January 2010. The programme will also support fathers towards becoming more confident parents.

It will be delivered by a six-strong city-wide team (pictured in the group above) of specially trained family nurses, along with a family nurse supervisor and psychologist, based in Craigmillar. The team comes with a wide range of experience in midwifery, community nursing and health visiting. In particular, all have previous experience of working with hard-to-reach, hard-to-engage clients.

All pregnant teenagers aged 19 and under, having their first baby and living in Edinburgh are entitled to receive the programme, and those choosing not to enrol will be offered the universal service health visiting programme.

A system for referring eligible teenagers onto the programme has now been established, and the team welcome any queries relating to the referral process or any other issues regarding the programme. ●

**» MORE INFORMATION?**

Please contact FNP administrator Lucy Wiltshire on 0131 659 4735.

"The period between pregnancy and 3 years is increasingly seen as a critical period in shaping children's life chances"

EARLY YEARS FRAMEWORK

# BREAKING THE VICIOUS CYCLE

How an early intervention project is leading the way in improving parent-child relationships

"IT'S THE BEST job in the world, helping parents fall in love with their children." This is how Robin Balbernie, Clinical Lead of Infant Mental Health on the Secure Start service in Gloucestershire, describes his role.

The initiative aims to help vulnerable and over-stressed parents who may have difficulties in developing positive relationships with their children by identifying at-risk families before problems develop.

The service began within Surestart and was subsequently brought in by a cluster of children's centres before being commissioned by the local Primary Care Trust. "The new multidisciplinary team is developing skills in specialist infant mental health work, while staying closely linked

with the local authority's children's centres to offer a broad range of practical, emotional and clinical support," Robin explains.

"The work with the families is mainly done within the home – except where this is too dangerous – and there is a lot of joint work with staff from the children's centres, for example running a Mellow Babies group."

He adds: "It's about picking up on vulnerability, rather than disaster."

## Assessing risk

The service takes referrals on the basis of risk rather than symptom, using a comprehensive risk factor checklist to allow professionals to assess the level of support required for each family. Major risk factors include a history of drug addiction, violence or maltreatment, while the medical and mental health history of parents and socio-economic factors are also taken into account.

However, Robin stresses that, while there are some sections of the population considered to be particularly at risk, the causes of problems can be wide-ranging, and stretch across all social groups.

"There can be lots of reasons as to why the parent-child relationship might be under strain," he says. "Some are things inherent to the baby, that any parent would find difficult to cope with – for example, a premature baby who is very reactive, or a child with a difficult temperament.

"There are also many parents struggling against things such as racial intolerance or poverty, who can therefore find parenting difficult."

He adds: "People with socio-economic troubles do account for a large proportion of the families we help, because poverty amplifies and adds to all of the risk factors. But there is also absolutely no reason why someone of high economic status isn't going to have problems with their baby."

While most referrals come from midwives, children's centres, health visitors or the social work department, families who consider themselves to be vulnerable can also self-refer.

At the heart of the programme is the recognition that adults who suffered adverse experiences in their own upbringing are more likely to bring those negative influences into their relationship with their own children. Or, as Robin puts it, "you bring to your parenting the way you were parented".

Secure Start therefore hopes to break the vicious circle of unhappy childhoods by helping new mothers and fathers to be more confident and see parenthood in a positive light.

## Intervention as prevention

The underlying principle of Secure Start is the belief that pre-emptive intervention is more effective than remedial action, and Robin points out that there is significant research to support the theory that early intervention in child welfare can help to prevent developmental problems in the future.

"The research shows that, because of the way the brain is actually growing in those early years, relationships and events will have a bigger impact than they would later on – in terms of both altering brain structure, and in determining the way you take for granted what will happen in life. That's all pre-verbal. So if we can intervene early, it really will help."

The team works with families and their children from pregnancy through to age 2, which Robin describes as "the most crucial" stage in the parent-child relationship", although if a family has been referred before this age, support may continue. And it incorporates a range of different strategies to encourage and support the development of a healthy caregiver-child relationship.

These include filming parents playing with their child and playing it back to emphasise strengths and help parents build on that. "Alternatively we may also use a psychotherapy approach to identify any conflict or anxieties that may be influencing the current situation. Or we might just be supportive in general, by providing emotional support," Robin says. "Community family workers are our liaison point and help get families into the centre – we couldn't work without them."

Crucial to the success of the initiative is that the professionals working on the programme retain an open mind and avoid forming opinions based on preconceptions.

"It is vital to remain non-judgemental," says Robin. "Practitioners should look for strengths in each case and build upon these, rather than focus on the negatives. You should never think you could do any better yourself if you were in the same situation." ●

## The importance of relationships

**It is essential that all practitioners working with children, across all levels, be aware of the importance of relationships and attachment.**

**Babies and young children learn positively and begin to make sense of the world through warm and accepting relationships. Therefore, the importance of ensuring children are welcomed into a safe, secure, loving and familiar environment cannot be overestimated.**

**Young children need warm, flexible environments, and to spend time with people who both appreciate them and give them time and attention.**

**Relationships play a significant role in actively promoting the development of young children's brains. We know, for example, that babies are predisposed to seek out the shape of the human face from the moment they are born! They are also predisposed to be sociable, and depend on the attachment of a significant person who will understand their needs. We are aware that infants have the best life chances when attached to adults who are sensitive, responsive and consistent caregivers for some time, especially during the period from birth to aged 2. Beyond this, children begin to use attachment figures as a secure base to explore from and return to. This also helps the child to develop their feelings, thoughts and expectations in respect of future relationships.**

**Consequently it is essential that all practitioners working with very young children show genuine interest, delight and enthusiasm when they are in their company and genuinely recognise the value of fostering good relationsips with the children and their families.**

**Annette Burns, Early Years Team**

# NEW HNC TOOLKIT GOES ONLINE

## HNC Early Education and Childcare – new online toolkit unveiled

**AN ONLINE** toolkit has been developed to help embed *Curriculum for Excellence* within the HNC in Early Education and Childcare.

A very informative, interactive resource, which is hosted on Scotland's Colleges website, has been designed to help support students and staff working in early years settings and those who deliver the HNC programme. It will serve as a very helpful bank of support materials and useful web links.

Christine Mathers, Subject Mentor for Care at Scotland's Colleges, explains: "It's really about trying to provide all those involved with up-to-date information on *Curriculum for Excellence*.

"That means embedding it in the approaches to delivery of the HNC, and helping ensure that students are well-informed and able to assist with its implementation in their work with children in the various settings."

The online resources have been collated by a team of specialist staff from Forth Valley College and Perth College. However, it is hoped that the toolkit will develop organically, eventually allowing practitioners to share resources and ideas within and across local authority areas.

"The idea wasn't to develop a new range of resources, but to try and bring together as much as possible of what exists already and present it in an easily accessible online format," Christine explains.

"The hope is that, as staff in the 43 colleges across Scotland begin to get to grips with and use what's there already, they will add either resources that they have developed themselves or links they've found useful."

# BUILDING POSITIVE PARTNERSHIPS

## Gail Fertacz, Associate Principal at Forth Valley College, explains how partnership working is helping Scotland's colleges meet the challenges of a changing workforce

**ENSURING THE** right number of workers have the relevant skills to meet the needs of the care and early education sectors has always been a challenge, and never more so than at this time. An increase in qualification requirements has led to the continued growth of the already popular subject areas of health care, social care and early education, and this, combined with the growth constraints that many colleges face, presents a challenge for our colleges.

Scotland's Colleges have played a key role in tackling these issues and the Care Strategy Steering Group was established to lead on these developments.

Its members represent a broad range of partners and stakeholders, including the Scottish Government, Skills for Health, SQA, employers, college representatives and a number of other bodies. It aims to build on the established links between the college and early years, health and social care sectors, and ensure that Scotland has flexible, accessible education resources to meet the needs of the range of services, including those in remote and rural areas.

In order to fully engage with colleges, employers and other partners, three operational groups – Early Education and Childhood Practice, Health and Social Services – were established to feed into the Strategy Group. These meet on a quarterly basis and provide a forum for representatives of Scotland's Colleges to share information and good practice and discuss future developments with key external stakeholders, so as to assist in forward planning and curriculum developments. Their ultimate aim is to provide a proactive approach to meeting employer and learner needs in early education and childhood practice.

Membership of these groups has now been extended to all 43 of Scotland's colleges, and some colleges based in more remote

"To provide the quality of services we want for children and families, we must invest in the workforce delivering these services"

EARLY YEARS FRAMEWORK

"Further guidance and support materials on *Curriculum for Excellence* are becoming available all the time, so it's very important that the site is flexible and has the potential to grow."

The toolkit is structured like Scotland's new curriculum, with the four capacities at its heart. "The interactive centre of the circle in the diagram links with the four capacities of *Curriculum for Excellence*," Christine explains.

"So if someone clicks, for example, on 'successful learners', that brings up the list of HNC units covered. A user can then select the units or outcomes they're currently working on with students, and dip in to see the resources that have been identified."

"The HNC is very much an integrated programme," Christine says. "When people are delivering it, they're very often running two or three of these units together, and the same resource is really meeting more than one objective."

**» MORE INFORMATION?**

To see the online toolkit visit: www.scotlandscolleges.ac.uk/curriculum/hn-developments/hnc-early-education-and-childcare.html

**The Strategy Group meet on a quarterly basis to discuss developments**

and rural settings are also exploiting video conferencing to engage in the discussions.

While the Early Education and Childhood Practice Operational Group is still fairly new, its engagement with external agencies is already beginning to develop and a meeting which took place at end of January 2010 included input from Learning and Teaching Scotland, focusing on *Curriculum for Excellence*.

The group represents an ideal forum to disseminate good practice and 'lessons learned', and to look to the future with regards to a changing workforce and new qualifications. It is important that the group engages with the workforce and employers as fully as possible and the format of future meetings will reflect a commitment to developing that engagement further.

**» MORE INFORMATION?**

For more information, contact: Gail Fertacz, Chair of Early Education and Childhood Practice Operational Group/Associate Principal, Forth Valley College gail.fertacz@forthvalley.ac.uk

## HNC and Curriculum for Excellence

Morag Sutherland, Senior Lecturer at Langside College, Glasgow, explains how responsive planning is helping prepare students for bringing *Curriculum for Excellence* to life

**The responsive planning task is the third of eight tasks that the students have to complete as part of the workplace unit of the HNC in Early Education and Childcare, and it's all about looking at the needs and interests of the children, and designing activities around that.**

**As a first step, therefore, the students are encouraged to carry out mindmaps with the children to establish their interests, and use these to devise potential learning activities.**

**They then link these ideas to the *Curriculum for Excellence* experiences and outcomes – for example within maths, social studies, science, and so on – identifying potential activities for children. From this, the students then draw up a Potential Lines of Development Chart.**

**After consulting with the children, the students then select one of those activities from the chart to begin the responsive planning task. Once the activity has been completed, the students respond to the children's interests and devise a follow-up activity.**

**Once completed, an Actual Lines of Development chart is drawn up and the students complete an evaluation based on the similarities and differences between the two charts.**

# YOGA AND MASSAGE FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

## An initiative from East Dunbartonshire Council is promoting health and wellbeing for very young learners through yoga, massage and sign language

**AT THE** Bishopbriggs Childcare Centre, near Glasgow, children are having the opportunity to take part in a new initiative that is, quite literally, 'hands on'. Harmony Hands is an innovative programme combining massage, yoga and pre-verbal signing, all specially adapted for babies and children under the age of 3.

Launched in September, the activities are part of a wider initiative at Bishopbriggs to encourage a greater awareness in children about the importance of looking after their bodies, and to extend *Curriculum for Excellence* health and wellbeing outcomes for very young children.

"For us this is really a great way of focusing on health from the very early stages," explains Centre Director Patricia Bradley. "The idea is that children are considering the choices they make, the food they eat, and how they exercise their bodies. We were already promoting *Curriculum for Excellence* health and wellbeing approaches for 3–5-year-olds with our 'Fit Kids' sports programme and by encouraging healthy eating, so we thought: 'How can we promote health and wellbeing approaches and principles for our younger children?'"

Children aged between 12 weeks and 2 years now enjoy classes in massage and yoga, while baby sign classes begin at 5 months. The yoga classes are led by trained specialist Amy Ku Redler of the British Wheel of Yoga Foundation and the Traditional Thai Yoga Massage Association. She aims to help support the transition from babyhood to young child and promote strength, flexibility, balance and muscle development, while also improving sleep patterns.

Meanwhile massage classes for babies and children aged under 3, help to enhance the immune system, improve circulation and soothe anxiety, and are taught by the Centre's own trained practitioners, Laura Beaton and Pauline Scott. Parents are invited to attend classes, in keeping with the emphasis in the Early Years Framework on engaging with and empowering families, and Patricia says the team has been delighted with the feedback.

"What has really struck us, particularly with the massage, is just how calm the children are," she says. "It's wonderful to see how the 2-year-old children enjoy the experience. They are encouraged to relax in a softly lit and scented area. When their half-hour session has ended, they don't want to get up! We've really made an impact on the children's experiences with this one-to-one, hands-on approach."

Another important part of the programme is the baby sign classes, which empower very young children to express their needs with their hands before they can verbalise their thoughts and wishes. Staff incorporate the signing into their daily routine as often as possible.

"I suppose it's about meeting the children's needs in partnership with them as they are letting us know how they feel about something. Although staff are always vigilant and attentive to children's needs, the children, through signing, can also tell us that they have a wet nappy, they are thirsty or want something to eat, and that reduces frustration and boosts their self-confidence – as they are being understood and responded to," Patricia explains.

The launch was attended by the Minister for Children and Early Years Adam Ingram and East Dunbartonshire Council Provost Eric Gotts, illustrating a recognition of the initiative's relevance to Scotland's *Curriculum for Excellence*. "By promoting wellbeing for all of our children, we aim to have happy, confident children who are aware of the importance of health and wellbeing principles and practices from an early age," says Patricia. ●

**"Parents are given appropriate support ... to develop the skills needed to provide a nurturing and stimulating home environment free from conflict"**

EARLY YEARS FRAMEWORK

The Scottish Learning Festival 2010

22-23 September 2010
SECC ▸ GLASGOW

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# Learning and Teaching Scotland Early Years Conference

## 'PRE-BIRTH TO THREE – POSITIVE OUTCOMES FOR SCOTLAND'S CHILDREN AND FAMILIES'

The Conference will take place on May 19, 2010

To ensure a fair representation across the country, it has been decided that LTS will invite local authorities and key agencies to nominate participants. On this occasion, therefore, there will be no direct application process to Learning and Teaching Scotland.

Further information will be available in due course on Learning and Teaching Scotland's Early Years Website.

www.ltscotland.org.uk/earlyyears

# Creativity and Innovation in the Early Years

## An Early Years Curriculum for Excellence Saturday Conference

**Date:**
**24 April 2010**

**Venue:**
**Glasgow Hilton Hotel**

**Further information:**
**www.ltscotland.org.uk/earlyyears/index.asp**

Come along and find out how Curriculum for Excellence offers limitless scope for creativity and innovation. This is a unique opportunity, not to be missed, to engage with first-class speakers who are experts in their field.

### Speakers:

**Play and the 3Cs: Creativity, Communication and Collaboration**
Professor Iram Siraj-Blatchford
(Professor of Early Childhood Education)

**Early Years – Creativity and Innovation from the BBC**
Sara Harkins (Head of Cbeebies) & Nick Simmons
(Head of Learning & New Media, BBC Scotland)

**Innovation in Early Years Education**
Dr Stephen Breslin (Chief Executive of Futurelab)