

EARLY YEARS MATTERS



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CURRICULUM FOR EXCELLENCE... THE EARLY YEARS FRAMEWORK // ISSUE 19 // SPRING 2011

Shared Understanding of the Importance of the Early Years

**Pre-Birth to Three:
The Way Forward**



**Creating a New
Executive Agency
for Scotland**



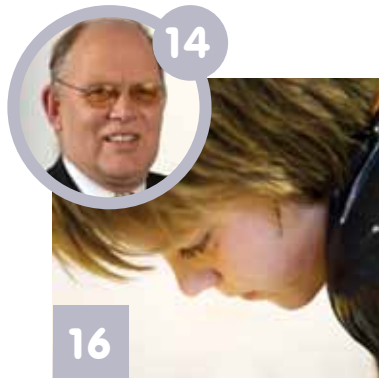
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Dear colleagues

This new issue of *Early Years Matters* comes at a hugely significant time for Learning and Teaching Scotland (LTS). Following careful consideration, Ministers have decided to establish a new executive agency, initially bringing together HM Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) and LTS.

The new organisation is to have a key role in Scottish education – leading and supporting the implementation of *Curriculum for Excellence* and providing a single point of contact for the range of support services currently offered. Read more about this on page 03.

As always, this current edition of the magazine reflects a strong emphasis on multi-agency partnerships and we hope this issue will continue to provide a useful platform for sharing ideas, opinions and good practice.

We have a compelling mix of content in this issue, including details of the launch of the new and eagerly awaited national guidance and multimedia resource, **Pre-Birth to Three: Positive Outcomes for Scotland's Children and Families**. We have included some personal views about how this resource will be used to support practitioners.

Reflecting our commitment to reliable and relevant early years research, there's an update on the most recent findings from **The Growing Up in Scotland Study** on page 08.

As staff take their next steps towards full engagement with *Curriculum for Excellence*, we are sure they will find the article on the **Literacy Action Plan** particularly helpful. There is a wealth of opportunities and challenges exist for practitioners who have a responsibility to develop and promote literacy across learning.

Many thanks to the numerous contributors who have helped with these informative articles. We hope that you find *Early Years Matters* a genuinely useful and interesting read. However, we're always looking for ways to improve, so please do not hesitate to get in touch with any suggestions or indeed post comments on the online version of the magazine (www.LTScotland.org.uk/earlyyears).

We look forward to hearing from you!

JANE STIRLING AND AVRIL ROBERTSON
EARLY YEARS TEAM LEADERS

CREATING A NEW EXECUTIVE AGENCY FOR SCOTLAND



The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, Michael Russell, has announced the creation of a new agency from 1 July this year.

It will initially bring together HM Inspectorate of Education (HMIE), Learning and Teaching Scotland (LTS) and potentially some elements currently within core Scottish Government. This exciting development will ensure that the best possible national-level systems are in place to support practitioners, pre-school centres, schools, colleges, local authorities and others as we move forward with *Curriculum for Excellence*.

As a key national body, it will support quality and improvement in Scottish education by:

- leading and supporting the implementation of *Curriculum for Excellence*;
- increasing the capacity for self-evaluation and self-improvement amongst education providers and practitioners;
- promoting high quality professional learning and leadership;
- identifying and stimulating innovation, sharing successful approaches widely with others;
- providing independent external evaluations of the quality of educational provision at individual provider, local authority and partners, and national levels;

- supporting the development and implementation of policy at National Level.

In February 2011, the Cabinet Secretary agreed the remit and purpose statement for the new agency which will help to shape the more detailed work to be carried out between now and 1 July 2011, when the new agency will be operational.

The remit and purpose statement is available from www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Education/Schools/Latest/SEQIAremit

The views of stakeholders of the existing organisations are being sought as part of the creation of the new agency. A small number of meetings have already taken place and more will be set for the future. ●

Supporting and co-ordinating national networks

Supporting practitioners to implement the national Pre-Birth to Three guidance and multimedia resource

Highlighting updated news, information research and examples of good practice on Early Years Online

Contributing to national early years qualification developments

Working with Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People

Supporting the implementation of the Scottish Government Literacy Action Plan

Organising the Conference for Further Education Lecturers: Embedding the new national Pre-Birth to Three guidance

Supporting the Digital Childhoods knowledge exchange programme

Planning the Early Years Saturday Conference
7 May 2011



Supporting and developing the National Early Years Glow Group

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

Partnership working with Scotland's Colleges and Universities towards developing a shared agenda

Supporting practitioners in the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence

EARLY YEARS TEAM UPDATE

Working collaboratively with national bodies and agencies including Scottish Government, HMIE, Care Commission, SQA, Scottish Social Services Council, NHS Health Scotland, Scottish Childminding Association and many other key partners



WINNING SCOTLAND FOUNDATION

Sport inspires people and it is through sport that the Winning Scotland Foundation aims to develop the children and young people of Scotland.

THE Foundation is an independent, business-led charity with a multi-disciplinary team and a passion for sport. Sport has the power to give children and young people the skills they need to develop their true potential. The vision of the Foundation is a nation where sport is commonly recognised and used to develop all children and young people to be winners in life. We believe that through collaboration with business, education and sport, we can set children and young people on a path to self-fulfilment, and help them to recognise that what's important is

not how good they are now but how good they want to become – in sport and in life. Our definition of winning is success through sustained effort.

Research (such as Inchley et al, 2008²) that points to a dramatic drop in the number of Scottish 11–16-year-olds, particularly girls, engaging in physical activity over the last five years is both alarming and disappointing. It is the goal of the Foundation to help reverse this trend by working collaboratively to trial and innovate programmes that encourage children and young people in Scotland to stay in sport longer – at every level along the player pathway, from grassroots to elite.

The Foundation's core programmes include Champions in Schools, where Scotland's top athletes deliver workshops on nutrition, activity, achievement and attitude to school children; Positive Coaching Scotland, a visionary cultural change programme which teaches respect, encouraging effort and building confidence as the

key principles underlying all youth sport; and Work Out For Sport, which aims to place professionally qualified business people into sporting organisations as volunteers.

The Foundation recognises that the early years are a critical time in the lifelong learning of children and young people and it is passionate about the need to effectively engage with the key influencers in a young person's life. It is currently undertaking an exercise to explore the area of physical activity in the early years with the goal of identifying opportunities to work in collaboration to support national developments.

FOOTNOTE

² Inchley, J, Kirby, J and Currie, C (2008), *Physical Activity in School Children (PASS) Project: Physical activity among adolescents in Scotland: Final Report of the PASS Study*, Edinburgh: Child and Adolescent Health Research Unit, The University of Edinburgh.

SSSC: CREATING A BRIGHTER FUTURE FOR OUR CHILDREN

Over 870 managers and practitioners in daycare of children services have enrolled on the BA Childhood Practice degree programme since it launched in 2009.

THE BA Childhood Practice award is one of a new generation of work-based degrees which builds on vocational qualifications and is currently offered by seven of Scotland's universities.

The Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) in partnership with universities, practitioners, employers and the Scottish Government has reported a huge success in attracting this number of entrants to the Childhood Practice award. This degree level qualification gives professional recognition to people working in the early years sector.

One student from the University of the Highlands and Islands commented recently:

'The BACP level 9 course is very worthwhile, beneficial and extremely relevant to all childcare workers. The course enhances professional development, which has a positive impact on improving service quality and children's learning experiences.'

MORE INFORMATION

Visit the Childhood Practice pages on the SSSC website: www.sssc.uk.com to find out more about the award.





HMIE: CHANGE AND OPPORTUNITIES

By Kate Cherry, HM Assistant Chief Inspector

This year heralds changes which will affect the early years sector, including the two new bodies being formed, Scottish Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland (SCSWIS) and Scottish Education Quality and Improvement Agency (SEQIA).

WE have been working closely with the Care Commission to ensure a smooth transition with inspections in the initial period of SCSWIS. Our integrated inspection programme for pre-school centres will be carried out in the same way until the end of June. We will collaborate with SCSWIS in planning our future inspection programmes in a proportionate way for centres and schools. HMIE inspections will continue to build very clearly from the centre's or school's own self-evaluation.

Over the last few months, meeting and supporting colleagues in the implementation of *Curriculum for Excellence* has been very rewarding. The interest across Scotland, from Dumfries and Galloway to Shetland, to learn more and share ideas is clear. It also shows the value of engaging directly with headteachers, managers and practitioners. Themes in early education which have been most popular include active learning, literacy and numeracy, assessment, moderation and self-evaluation.

Transition is also an area colleagues are working on to raise the understanding across sectors for children aged 3–6 years and beyond. Questions posed by heads, managers and practitioners raised some challenging issues such as 'How do we engage meaningfully with a wide range of pre-school centres feeding into our primary school?' and, equally, 'How can we liaise with a large number of primaries where children in one nursery transfer?' The issue is not new but does highlight raised expectations

for assessing and sharing children's progress. There is merit in working and training professionally together across sectors, and that includes nursery classes working closely with primary classes in schools.

HMIE has shared with centres and schools related characteristics for successful implementation of *Curriculum for Excellence*. These include:

- Staff are working with increasing confidence with the experiences and outcomes and know how to use these in taking a coherent approach to learning, teaching and assessment
- Good quality support for CPD
- Effective arrangements to assess and track progress
- Good leadership at all levels with a vision for the outcomes of change.

We have developed a wide range of resources to support *Curriculum for Excellence* so check the HMIE and LTS website links for materials to use in your own settings. ●

MORE INFORMATION

www.LTScotland.org.uk/
www.hmie.gov.uk/

“ HMIE inspections will continue to build very clearly from the centre's or school's own self-evaluation. ”



NEW FROM GROWING UP IN SCOTLAND: HEALTH IN THE EARLY YEARS

Growing Up in Scotland (GUS) is the longitudinal research study following the lives of thousands of children and their families from birth through to the teenage years.

THE 8,000 children originally recruited to take part in the study have now started primary school. A new group of 6,000 babies born this year will be recruited soon to take part in GUS during 2011. Information from this new 'cohort' will help us to find out whether the lives of young children in Scotland are improving.

A new research briefing from GUS brings together findings from the first four years of the study on the topics of child health and development, health inequalities and maternal mental health. The briefing is aimed at health visitors/public health nurses but will be of interest to other early years professionals.

Key findings include:

- Parents are reporting stronger social networks of family and friends engaging in more activities with their children (such as reading stories and singing nursery rhymes) and are also more open to seeking and using help and support when they need it.

- Younger mothers are less likely than older mothers to attend antenatal classes and more likely to be wary of interference from professionals and of being judged by others.
- Children living in low income households and/or in areas of deprivation were more likely to experience the risk factors for poor health. These include maternal smoking during pregnancy, not being breastfed, a poor diet and having a mother with a long-term health problem or disability.
- In terms of early health outcomes, behavioural and communication difficulties showed much starker inequalities than physical problems such as poor general health.
- For children living in disadvantaged circumstances, having a good 'home learning environment' is associated with the avoidance of poor health outcomes.
- Almost one-third of mothers had experienced poor mental health at some point during the first four years of their child's life.

NEW NETWORK FOR ALL EARLY YEARS STAFF

Launch of new NHS Health Scotland website for early years.

THE new Maternal and Early Years website was launched by NHS Health Scotland in autumn 2010.

It is the first website of its kind in Scotland that provides accessible evidence-based information for early years professionals, across all sectors, to support the development of a common understanding of health improvement in the early years. It offers staff a dedicated space to share learning and best practice.

The website has four sections, Pregnancy, 0–3 years, 3–5 years and 5–8 years, which contain a wealth of knowledge and information from every aspect of the early years community, including reports, policy documents and tools for best practice. This makes it a valuable resource for anyone

with an interest in maternal and early years health.

Professionals can keep updated on early years issues by signing up via the website to join the Early Years Network. Members receive monthly e-bulletins highlighting new evidence, training and events in the early years as well as having the opportunity to take part in consultations to inform national initiatives. They can also participate in professional development activities such as action learning sets or attend the annual National Early Years Conference. ●

MORE INFORMATION

Please visit the website at www.maternal-and-early-years.org.uk or for further information contact **Laura Martin** at laura.martin3@nhs.net.

- Mothers living in low income households, those living in areas of deprivation and those reporting low levels of support from their partner, family or the local community were more likely to experience periods of poor mental health.
- Children whose mothers were emotionally well had better social, emotional and behavioural development than those whose mothers had mental health problems, while children whose mothers had short spells of feeling anxious or depressed had better development than those whose mothers had repeated mental health problems over some time. ●

MORE INFORMATION

To download a copy of the report, please see:

www.crfr.ac.uk/gus/
GUSforHealthVisitors.pdf

For more information about GUS, please visit:

www.growingupinScotland.org.uk



STARCATCHERS



Using the expressive arts in early years courses within further education colleges

STARCATCHERS is a groundbreaking project which supports artists to work creatively with children aged 0–4 years. Since October 2009 there have been four Starcatchers Artist Residencies taking place around Scotland. Working in partnership with local arts centres and the communities surrounding them, the Starcatchers artists have been developing and creating new performances for this age group.

Linked to this, Starcatchers has been piloting professional development opportunities for practitioners. These pilots have taken the form of one-off workshops that focused on specific themes or ideas, network events and the development of a programme for HNC Early Education and Childcare students.

The programme for HNC Early Education and Childcare students has been designed and run in partnership with Platform, a venue for the arts in Glasgow, and John Wheatley College, Glasgow, with the aim of enabling students to feel confident not just in how they can use the expressive arts in their practice but, more importantly, about why they should. The students are supported in their understanding of the vital role that creativity and imagination play in the development of the children they are working with.

The pilot of this course used a mixture of lectures, workshops, performances and placement projects to meet the following objectives:

- Increase student knowledge and understanding of the potential uses of the expressive arts in early education childcare.
- Increase the confidence of the students in leading expressive arts activity.
- Strengthen the students' appreciation of performance as a stimulus for early years activities.

Tutors used an active learning approach for course delivery and were able to build the students' confidence to explore creativity with very young children rather than imposing ideas upon them. The emphasis throughout was to enable students to be expressive and nurture their own creativity.

First Light – See

Students attended a performance of *First Light*, by Starcatchers Artist in Residence, Matt Addicott. This was followed by a group workshop during which students were asked to plan nursery activity relating to the themes, material and content of the performance.

Wee Days In – Do

Students were asked to organise a trip for their placement nurseries to see a performance at Platform's Early Years Theatre Festival, 'Wee Days In'. They were then encouraged to use the performance experience as a stimulus for creative activity in their nursery settings.

Workshop sessions – Support

Students were offered introductory workshops in three expressive art forms:

- **Dance and Movement**
This session looked at simple ways to incorporate movement and physical expression in nursery activities.
- **Visual Art**
This workshop encouraged students to think about creativity with no boundaries.
- **Drama**
A workshop looked at ways to develop characters, using simple personal questions as a starting point and then expanding out.

The students and staff were involved in evaluating the pilot programme and Starcatchers has used the feedback to inform the development of subsequent programmes for 2011.

Some of the students and the project staff will share their experiences of this project at the Starcatchers International Symposium which will be held on 22–23 March 2011 at the MacRobert Arts Centre, Stirling University.

MORE INFORMATION

Further information can be found at www.starcatchers.org.uk



“ By continually improving our own practice we’ll better support the students themselves and the training and development of a qualified and competent early years workforce. ”

ALL MAPPED OUT

Staff at Langside College, Glasgow, have embarked on a new mapping exercise to help ensure their approaches complement *Curriculum for Excellence* and eventually the *Pre-Birth to Three* national guidance. Morag Sutherland, Senior Lecturer, explains.

WE’VE been preparing for *Curriculum for Excellence* for some time now, embedding it both in our own teaching and in that of our students. But at the start of the academic year we formalised this commitment even further by embarking on a mapping exercise looking at how well each of the four

capacities is reflected in the different units that we teach.

‘Planning activities, assessments, presentations, group work – we’re looking at each and every area, and how they all fit together. That done, we’ll then identify any action areas and work on those as a priority.’ The benefits, says Morag, will be twofold. ‘Many of our students are still within the 3–18 age range for

Curriculum for Excellence themselves, so we need to ensure our teaching supports them in each of the four capacities. Then there’s their role in planning and developing learning experiences – whether they are working with under-threes or with older nursery children, during their placements. ●



NEW EARLY YEARS MENTORING PROGRAMME

by Lorna McNicoll, University of Edinburgh

Advanced Mentoring Courses at the University of Edinburgh.

MENTORING has been in evidence for centuries, and in the past few decades, aided by research, technology and globalisation, the importance of mentoring in many walks of life has been widely acknowledged. Today large corporations and educational settings alike recognise the benefits to their employees, and to their organisations, of having effective mentoring schemes in place.

With that in mind, and taking into account the *Standard for Childhood Practice (2007)*, the University of Edinburgh (UoE) developed a pilot course entitled *Advanced Mentoring Course in Childhood Practice*. This

was a Continuing Professional Development (CPD) course initially tailored for a small group of learners working in the early years and childcare sector.

The pilot course was commissioned by the *Coalition of Childcare Umbrella Organisations (CCUO)* and funded by the Scottish Government.

The course was delivered at the equivalent of Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) level 10. Future courses are planned and some adaptations will be made to structure, content and delivery methods. These changes may include:

- **Course Structure and design.** The original blended learning pilot course may be split into two distinct, but linked, courses – one concentrating on developing organisational mentoring schemes, and one designed to

develop individual mentoring skills. This has not been confirmed as yet, but discussions are ongoing and we hope to have the courses up and running this year.

- **Course Content.** The pilot provided the learners with key theoretical approaches to organisational structures, learning styles, management and leadership, and mentoring. New course/s content will develop the original pilot to include additional learning opportunities specific to individual mentoring skills.
- **Communication / Learner support / tutoring / feedback.** Future deliveries will state specifically what the level of learner support will be, and greater emphasis will be placed on the role of communication between the tutor and the learners within a blended learning environment. Feedback will be given to individual and group tasks, and submissions.

MORE INFORMATION

If you are interested in finding out more about the courses that are being planned please contact:

Lorna McNicoll
Director, BA Childhood Practice

E-mail: lorna.mcnicoll@ed.ac.uk
Tel: 0131 650 4801

JOIN THE DEBATE: DIGITAL CHILDHOODS

2011 will see a series of events on the theme of *Digital Childhoods*, co-ordinated by researchers at the Universities of Strathclyde and Stirling.

Increasing domestic use of digital technologies means that 21st-century children are growing up in homes radically different from those just a decade before. Their technological experiences, in play, learning, communication and work, will have significant implications for their future lives.

Academics, educationalists, practitioners, industry specialists and policy makers are being invited to consider whether digital technologies have changed the nature of childhood, and what the advantages or disadvantages are likely to be.

The programme consists of three strands:

1. *Childhoods and Parenting* focuses on the place of new technologies in the experiences of young children at home and in early years settings, and ways in which parents understand and support or limit these.

Dates: 24–25 March
Venue: Scottish Universities' Insight Institute, James Weir Building, 75 Montrose Street, Glasgow G1 1XJ

2. *Playing and Learning* looks at the kinds of play and learning promoted by technological toys and games, and the implications for the early years curriculum.

Dates: 12–13 May
Venue: Macrobert, University of Stirling, FK9 4LA

3. *Creating and Communicating* considers whether technologies help to develop young children's creativity and their communication skills, with a particular focus on their potential to support children with additional communication needs.

Dates: 16–17 June
Venue: Scottish Universities' Insight Institute, James Weir Building, 75 Montrose Street, Glasgow G1 1XJ

Events associated with each strand will take place over two days and will include presentations, demonstrations, workshops and debates. The aim is to raise awareness of the findings from recent research in this field and to generate debate about future developments.

These events are sponsored by the Scottish Universities' Insight Institute and will include inputs from the *Toys and Technology* research team at the Stirling Institute of Education, the Early Years team at Learning and Teaching Scotland, CBeebies, the London Knowledge Lab at the Institute of Education and FutureLab.



MORE INFORMATION

If you wish to take part in any of these sessions more information can be found at:

www.scottishinsight.ac.uk/Programmes/Currentprogrammes/DigitalChildhoods.aspx



MESSAGE FROM ADAM INGRAM MSP

Minister for Children and Early Years



It is now just over two years since the Scottish Government and COSLA published our joint vision for transformational change in Scotland, *The Early Years Framework*.

MUCH has been achieved in these past two years to deliver the aims of the Framework, which is reflected in our recently published document, *Early Years Framework: Progress So Far*. As that report sets out, there have been a number of important developments at national level in recent months.

- In December 2010, LTS published national guidance materials, *Pre-Birth to Three: Positive Outcomes for Scotland's Children and Families*, which were developed by LTS in partnership with the Scottish Government and a multi-agency steering group. I am sure these will be a well-used and hugely beneficial resource for practitioners.
- A number of other valuable resources for early years practitioners have recently been published by the Scottish Government's Child and Maternal Health team: *A Refreshed Framework for Maternity Care in Scotland*; *Reducing Antenatal Health Inequalities: Outcome Focused Evidence into Action Guidance*; *Improving Maternal and Infant Nutrition: A Framework for Action*; *A New Look at Hall 4 – The Early Years – Good Health for Every Child and The Universal Pathway – what everyone needs to know*.
- The Scottish Government recently published a set of suggested indicators to assist practitioners in measuring progress against delivery of the key aims of the framework.
- We also rolled out the second phase of our Play Talk Read social marketing campaign, aimed at informing parents of the benefits of playing, talking and reading with their babies from an early age.

In addition to these practical resources, the Scottish Government has published research, using Scottish data, which shows the potential cost

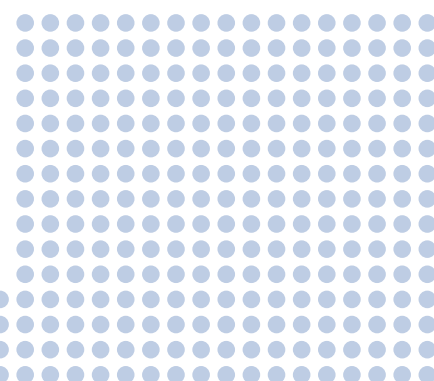
to the public sector of not intervening early to support disadvantaged children. This research related to the fiscal costs of not shifting to an early intervention approach, but where destructive cycles of poverty, health inequalities and low attainment are perpetuated in vulnerable families, there is also a high cost to society in broader terms.

I know that there is a great deal of excellent work going on around the early years in many areas, and that significant progress is being made towards the implementation of *Getting it right for every child* principles across sectors delivering services to children.

Given the financial pressures we all face, keeping the commitment to early years and early intervention on track and maintaining high quality early years services will be a key priority for 2011. I very much welcome Professor Deacon's recently published report, highlighting the need for prioritisation of the early years across all walks of life and its emphasis on creating a bias for action to accelerate the aims of our Early Years Framework. We will give all the proposals our full and careful consideration. I believe it is essential that, in these difficult economic times, this commitment continues to be demonstrated through investment in key services for young children and their families, in order to give all Scotland's children the bright future they deserve. ●

MORE INFORMATION

[www.scotland.gov.uk/
Publications/Recent](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/Recent)



PRE-BIRTH TO THREE NATIONAL GUIDANCE

THE WAY FORWARD

by Avril Robertson, Early Years Team, Learning and Teaching Scotland

New national guidance from Learning and Teaching Scotland to improve outcomes for children and families

On 8 December 2010, the new national guidance and multimedia resource, *Pre-Birth to Three: Positive Outcomes for Scotland's Children and Families*, was launched. It has been designed to support all adults who work with and on behalf of Scotland's youngest children.

This exciting and eagerly anticipated resource, which includes the guidance, DVD, accompanying CD and poster, has been created by the Early Years team at Learning and Teaching Scotland (LTS) in collaboration with Scottish Government, colleagues from early years practice, local authorities, regulatory bodies, colleges, universities and NHS Health Scotland.

The new national *Pre-Birth to Three* guidance makes reference to current research to support improved evidence-based practice and is brought to life by the accompanying DVD resource, which uses film clips from early years settings across Scotland to highlight good practice in providing best starts and positive outcomes for our youngest children.

Informed by the latest developments in neuroscience, this new national guidance

recognises the importance of pregnancy and the first years of life in influencing children's future development and outcomes. This recognition of the importance of brain development pre-birth and in children's earliest years, supports early years staff in their practice and is a unique approach for Scotland.

Supporting the Scottish Government's 10-year vision to improve the lives of children and families, the resource supports the principles and values of key Scottish Government policy, such as the *Early Years Framework*, *Equally Well*, *Achieving our Potential*, *Getting it right for every child* and *Curriculum for Excellence*.

Although *Curriculum for Excellence* is designed for children aged 3–18 years, the *Pre-Birth to Three* guidance complements this continuum of learning and supports transition by emphasising that critical learning has already taken place before a child is 3 and the experiences of children from pre-birth to 3 can influence the rest of their lives. ●

MORE INFORMATION

Find the full interactive version of the resource online at:

www.LTScotland.org.uk/earlyyears/prebirthtothree/index





PRE-BIRTH TO THREE POSITIVELY RECEIVED

We drop in on two early years practitioners at Midlothian Sure Start Centres to find out how the new *Pre-Birth to Three* national guidance and multimedia resource is helping them.

WINTER 2010 saw the launch of the much anticipated *Pre-Birth to Three: Positive Outcomes for Scotland's Children and Families* and accompanying DVD, CD and poster – and already the new national guidance is becoming an established part of the team amongst early years settings.

For Diane Janczyk, Family Play Worker at Midlothian Sure Start's Hand in Hand family support centre, the guidance has become a well-thumbed working tool. 'I dip in and out of different sections depending on what I'm doing in the playroom and find the research boxes really useful for those times when I want to research a subject more thoroughly, as does the CD.'

New learning

One area that Diane and her Hand in Hand colleagues have been delving into more deeply is literacy and numeracy. 'The booklet highlights that any activity offering literacy and numeracy in the playroom can make a huge difference to a child's development.'

'It also made me aware of the Scottish Government Literacy Action Plan and Play, Talk, Read campaign, both of which I then researched more fully and shared with colleagues so that we can explain to parents the value of something as simple as reading their child a bedtime story.'

The revised content of the new guidance is also proving a hit with Bright Start Centre Co-ordinator Janine Williamson and her colleagues. 'The emphasis on pre-birth helps bring the subject into the mainstream and shows how relevant factors such as attachment pre-birth and brain development really are. A lot of the parents we support become pregnant again so while we help with their existing family we can also help ensure the new baby has the best start by supporting the mother throughout pregnancy.'

Best practice at work

Ask about the highlight of the DVD and the answer is unanimous: seeing best practice at work. Says Janine, 'It's great to see a variety of settings across the different sectors – there's such a broad spectrum of needs and approaches.'

Adds Diane, whose team was filmed as part of the DVD, 'Not every practitioner has the opportunity to go to conferences and listen to professionals, so the DVD effectively brings the professionals to the practitioner.'

Involving parents

The poster meanwhile, is proving useful at raising awareness amongst parents of the importance of the pre-birth to three years. Explains Diane, 'I think for many parents they see early years settings as a stepping stone to going on to nursery, whereas the poster helps reiterate the importance of these early years.'

'Not only can they see all the areas that we are looking at in the playroom, but it also helps show where they can help their child's development – for example, by simply talking, reading a story or singing a song.' ●



CARE AND LEARNING ALLIANCE

THE Care and Learning Alliance (CALA) offers childcare and learning support services for children 0–16 and their families.

CALA promotes a one-door approach to a broad range of childcare and family support services. The publishing of the new National *Pre-Birth to Three* guidance couldn't have come at a more appropriate time for those of us working with children and families in the North of Scotland. Planning is under way to investigate how to make best use of this valuable resource and maximise the impact on the thinking and understanding of the workforce, parents and the services we offer to our youngest children.

Building on the strong partnership working that already exists in

Highland, a steering group comprising representatives from CALA, Highland Council, NHS Highland and Highland & Moray Accredited Training Services (HiMATS) will meet to progress our plans. By using the *Pre-Birth to Three* national guidance and the accompanying multimedia resource across the breadth of childhood practice and health services we aim to maximise opportunities to support learning and reflective practice.

Our initial thoughts focus on developing appropriate workshops, full day courses and, in the longer term, linking the guidance into accredited modules, all helping to develop strong continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities for staff and volunteers across our workforce.

By tailoring the content, there are opportunities for using the materials to help build parents' self-esteem and increase understanding of the crucial role they have in their young children's development from that critical pre-birth stage onwards. Working closely with colleagues in health will be an essential requirement to maximise opportunities with new parents.

Across the broad range of services that CALA offers, the *Pre-Birth to Three* guidance will underpin good practice in direct family support, parent and toddler services and daycare provision. It also supports staff working with young children to develop a greater understanding of child development. ●

ANN BRADY

Chief Executive,
Care and Learning Alliance



A VISION FOR SCOTLAND: LITERACY IN THE EARLY YEARS

By Hilary Bombart, Literacy Team, Learning and Teaching Scotland

In December 2009 the Literacy Commission published *A Vision for Scotland*.

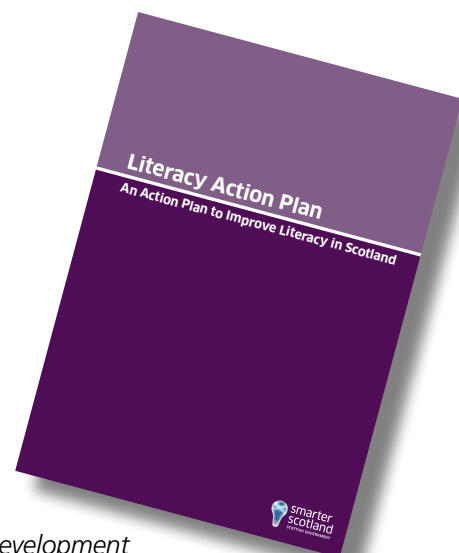
This report contains recommendations that it believes will address the low levels of literacy that can still be found in Scotland today.

In response to these recommendations, the Scottish Government has published a *Literacy Action Plan* outlining the steps needed to improve literacy in Scotland.

[www.scotland.gov.uk/
Publications/2010/10/27084039/0](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2010/10/27084039/0)

Both the Literacy Commission report and the action plan recognise the importance of literacy development in the early years.

'Literacy development starts from birth. Early years settings and schools develop children and young people's basic and advanced literacy skills and in adulthood the ongoing



development of literacy skills helps to advance personal achievements, employment prospects and participation in society.'

Scottish Government Literacy Action Plan 2010, p 3

The Vision

The aim of the literacy action plan is to raise standards of literacy for all from early years through to adulthood. The main focus will be to encourage better co-ordination and partnership working in order to improve the life chances of those with the lowest levels of literacy. From the Scottish Government to local authorities and key partners, action will be taken which reflects the needs of the individual.

Although approximately 3.6% of the Scottish population has very limited capabilities, this is closely linked to socio-economic status. Therefore, a further ambition is to break the link between poor literacy levels and deprivation, and to improve the skills of those who are vulnerable.

What it means for early years practitioners

Literacy development starts from birth. Early years settings develop the skills which lead to more advanced literacy skills such as critical thinking, analysis and evaluation.

The action plan recognises that in the very early years the home learning environment for children from birth to 3 years old has a significant impact on cognitive and language development.

Therefore, the action plan sets out key strategies within the early years to support parents and practitioners.

The key strategies are:

- To work with partners who are implementing *Getting it right for every child* and the *Early Years Framework* to ensure that the development of literacy skills features in their work.
- To strengthen connections with health partnerships, promoting the importance of literacy to parents.
- To encourage reading for enjoyment by targeting vulnerable families in the second year of the Play Talk Read campaign.
- To promote the benefits of high quality play which builds on early literacy and numeracy skills.
- To identify and share good practice around literacy in the early years and encourage practitioners to develop new and innovative approaches.
- Early years practitioners will use *Curriculum for Excellence* as the basis for supporting a child's development of their early literacy skills.
- To ensure transitions are effective and focus on shared approaches to learning and teaching and assessment.
- To work with Scottish Qualifications Authority and Scotland's Colleges to ensure qualifications for early years practitioners continue to have a focus on literacy skills.
- To continue to pilot the Family Nursing Partnership, which facilitates literacy development in the early years through its focus on family health and wellbeing.
- To work with adult literacy and numeracy partners to ensure that parents with their own literacy difficulties can access support.
- To encourage proven teaching methods such as synthetic phonics and paired reading.

To support the implementation of the key strategies the Early Years team in Learning and Teaching Scotland has planned an Early Years Saturday Conference in May (please refer to the back page of this magazine) with the theme of developing literacy in the early years. ●

MORE INFORMATION

More information about this event and a booking form can be found at:
www.LTScotland.org.uk/earlyyears/cpd/saturdayconference.asp

DIALOGUE FOR CHANGE

By Professor Susan Deacon



July 2010 saw Professor Susan Deacon take up the challenge of stimulating dialogue and suggesting practical change for improving children's early years. Eight months on and those suggestions have now been published. We caught up with Professor Deacon on the eve of her report going to press to find out what was involved.

'Investing in children's early years is an area that has seen a huge amount of commitment and effort over recent years,' explains Professor Deacon, 'but there's still more to be done – much more. The question is how do we make an even bigger difference at a time when we have less public money to spend?

My remit has been to take a fresh look at the area and engage with as wide a range of people as possible to see where we could improve our efforts.'

No small task but one that has proven as liberating as it has challenging. 'The very fact that this wasn't a conventional consultation exercise has enabled me to include audiences that might otherwise have been left out of the debate. Just as importantly, it encouraged people to be more candid about their views than perhaps they might otherwise have been.'

To elicit these views Professor Deacon engaged in a combination of activities including initial scoping meetings; conferences, seminars and events; in-depth small group meetings and discussions; one to one meetings, exchanges and contributions; and facilitated dialogue groups. All of which were carried out across a cross-section of groups with influence and interest – not just policymakers and professionals but children, young people and parents too.

Changing society

'Several widely-shared concerns emerged. For example, over-reliance on professionals and public services compared with parental responsibility, the prevalence of swearing and violence in everyday life, and the role of a child's home life in their future educational attainment. Big complex cultural issues, but issues that I fundamentally believe we need to address.

'Society has changed. The public spending landscape has changed. Similarly we've got to find new ways of people working better together.'

It is, says Professor Deacon, her overarching hope for the report. 'It has been said a million times before but we're still not doing it. We're still sitting in too many silos and having too many parallel conversations, whereas we need to be sharing our ideas and pooling our resources – not just because of public spending cuts but because it's the right thing to do.'

A national priority

This need to work smarter isn't exclusive to professionals and public services. 'We all need to think about the way we are living our lives and where we can do better for Scotland's children – in our own homes and in the community. After all, this is our future workforce we're talking about, our future society, so it's in everyone's interest. It's a national priority.' ●

MORE INFORMATION

Professor Susan Deacon's full report is available to read at www.scotland.gov.uk

WEE BLETHER, BIG VOICE



**Tam
Baillie**

**Scotland's
Commissioner
for Children
and Young
People**

The team behind the national consultation exercise *A Right Blether* are to pilot its younger sibling *A Wee Blether* amongst Scotland's 3–5-year-olds.

SINCE March 2010 Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People has been encouraging children and young people throughout the country to have *A Right Blether* and share their views – views that will directly influence the Commissioner's operational plans 2011–2015 and also help inform local and national government.

Now, the team behind the consultation exercise is piloting a new initiative, *A Wee Blether*, amongst the nation's 3–5-year-olds.

'*A Wee Blether* is really an extension of our preparedness to listen to the voice and views of children and young people,' explains Tam Baillie, Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People. 'We want to find out what's important to our three to five year olds.'

With the new, younger age groups come new challenges. 'Although we're sticking with the same celebratory theme that underpins *A Right Blether*, we've had to think carefully about the best ways to engage and interact with 3–5-year-olds,' says Tam. 'A steering group of early years professionals,

including representatives from HMIE and Learning and Teaching Scotland, has been working hard on the issue and two main approaches have emerged.

'The first approach is for children to give a pictorial or other expressive representation of a day in their life; the second is for children to create 'a wee book about me' where they'll be given a small blank book and asked to fill it with the things that best represent them.'

Both approaches are to be piloted at four early years centres throughout March. We have picked a variety of settings to help ensure we get meaningful feedback on what works about the new approaches and what could be improved further.

'Thereafter, we'll be busy refining the materials and ensuring we get as wide a sign-up as possible ahead of launching *A Wee Blether* as far and wide as we can in autumn.'

Initial response from the early years sector has been encouraging. Says Tam, 'The idea of stimulating a conversation and creative responses from this age group has, I think, really captured the imagination of the many people who work in early years, because they know exactly how expressive our 3–5-year-olds can be.'

MORE INFORMATION

To find out more about the work of Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People visit www.sccyp.org.uk



“ The sharing of your class is the hardest thing for any teacher to become accustomed to. It’s not something that happens overnight. It takes time – time to implement and time to see the benefits ”

WITH its own nursery class, Lawthorn Primary School in Irvine, Ayrshire, has always had an active interest in ensuring a smooth transition from pre-school to primary. But in recent years, the school has gone one step further, adopting best practice from its nursery into its Primary 1 setting – with tangible results.

Headteacher Betty McKendrick explains, ‘Walk into any nursery and you’ll see children actively engaged in their learning from the minute they walk in the door to the minute they leave. Walk into a Primary 1 classroom, however, and you’re likely to find one group of children having direct interaction with the teacher while the others are not as actively engaged as they could be.’

For Betty and her Primary 1 staff, the difference between the two approaches was too great. ‘Being from a nursery background myself I’d long wanted to introduce more nursery best practice to the classroom, and the advent of *Curriculum for Excellence* presented the perfect incentive.’

Watching and learning

From Easter to Summer 2009, the Primary 1 staff spent time in the school’s nursery class observing its more free-flowing approach to learning. But whilst the teachers were full of praise for the nursery staff, they weren’t without their reservations.

‘The most obvious reservation was the difference in ratio of staff to children,’ recalls Betty. ‘My job was to convince them that it wouldn’t matter because the children would be so engaged in their work and their learning that the teachers would be free to observe or interact with the children they wanted to.’

It demanded, concedes Betty, a massive shift in mindset amongst her staff. ‘The sharing of your class is the hardest thing for any teacher to become accustomed to. It’s not something that happens overnight. It takes time – time to implement and time to see the benefits.’

Engaged from the word go

One year on and the benefits are evident for all to see. What was previously three open plan classrooms with a seat and desk for every child and a small shared area is now one



ACTIVELY ENGAGED

How one Ayrshire primary school has been adopting best practice from its nursery class to more actively engage Primary 1 pupils.

large shared area where learning is free-flowing – from the word go. 'The school doors open at 8.45 am and children have until 9 am to self-register before getting stuck into their chosen activities. So straight away they are busy and not waiting for the teacher to tell them what to do.

'Is it noisy? Yes. Can it be messy? Yes – but learning is messy and the children tidy away their things at the end of each day, which is an important life skill in itself. What we don't get, however, are disciplinary issues because the children are actively engaged at all times.'

Greater interaction

The teachers meanwhile are enjoying the greater interaction with the children. Says Betty, 'We have three teachers and two classroom assistants working with 75 children. Each teacher has responsibility for groups of children – not necessarily from their own registration class – in language and maths, and at any given time can work with or observe these groups or individuals, safe in the knowledge that all the other children are actively engaged.'

'It is really good practice as everyone is looking out for the children yet seeing different things. After school the team meet to share their observations and assessments, which helps towards planning the following week.'

It's not only staff that are seeing the benefits. 'Many parents have commented on how much work the children get through and how much their child is enjoying school – which is hugely important.'

'It also makes financial sense. Instead of resourcing three classrooms separately we're sharing resources which, in these days of austerity, can only be a good thing.'

The next transition

Betty has already turned her attention to the transition to Primary 2 and 3. 'We've introduced self-registering to both Primary 2 and 3, after which the children can get involved in activities until the teacher is ready to work with them in groups or as a class. And whilst there's still one chair and desk to every child, we're gradually introducing more shared areas.'

“ My job was to convince them that it wouldn't matter because the children would be so engaged in their work and their learning that the teachers would be free to observe or interact with the children they wanted to ”



Welcome to the Early Years Group Homepage

This is a communal area for practitioners, parents and children. You can browse the different pages within this area or choose to visit the staff, parents or children's section.

Staff

Parents

Children

WHAT'S NEW ON ?

by Trisha Boyd, Early Years Team, Learning and Teaching Scotland

Glow is the world's first national intranet for education, developed exclusively for Scotland's educational community.

T is transforming the way the curriculum is delivered in Scotland.

What Glow provides:

- A trusted and safe environment for pupils, practitioners and parents
- A space to create personalised programmes of work and share thinking and Curriculum resources
- A variety of online tools to enhance learning experiences
- Virtual learning to share information and take part in learning activities
- Tools to enable you to communicate and collaborate across the network
- Communities of practice that offer practitioners rich opportunities to share and collaborate

- Innovation in learning and teaching approaches by engaging and immersing children and young people in powerful and relevant learning experiences
- Motivation and support for individualised learning, personalisation and choice.

The Early Years Glow Group is a well established national group with separate sections for staff, parents and children.

The staff pages contain regular news updates and a range of resources including:

- clip art for educational use
- useful web links to educational websites
- information about available continuing professional development.

There are also opportunities to take part in active discussion forums and share resources with early years colleagues.

The parents' pages provide a link to the Parentzone website and opportunities to start discussions, ask questions and find a range of useful documents.

The pages for children have links to interactive websites and a small selection of games for children to engage with. There are plans to include the newly developed Strathclyde Fire and Rescue Early Level Fire Safety Resource.

We would also welcome suggested links to further high quality interactive websites suitable for children working at the early level.

Following the launch of the new *Pre-Birth to Three* national guidance and multimedia resource, we have developed a Pre-Birth to Three section which links directly with the online resource located on the Learning and Teaching Scotland website.

We have previously held a number of successful Glow Meets to highlight and discuss a variety of topical issues. To ensure these are successful it is important that the issues discussed are relevant to Glow users so we would welcome suggested topics for further Glow Meet sessions. Please add any suggestions you may have to the staff discussion forum or the online version of *Early Years Matters* and keep 'Glowing'.



FROM A TINY SEED...

A LEARNING COMMUNITY GROWS

An exhibition of Children's Learning in Angus Council

ANGUS Council's pre-school practitioners, children and parents got together to celebrate children's learning linked to the well documented approach of Reggio Emilia in northern Italy, where there is a heavy emphasis in the early years on creativity. Using the Reggio approach, children are encouraged to think and work collaboratively, and parents are actively involved in the learning. Angus Council organised an exhibition which was held in Brechin City Hall at the beginning of November 2010. This exhibition celebrated seven years of using a pedagogical documentation approach to early learning in the authority. The launch of the exhibition included a keynote address by Liz Greig, an early years educational consultant, who, over the years, has

worked closely with Angus Council in the delivery of continuing professional development (CPD) based on this approach. This successful evening was attended by staff and many visitors. Parents and children also attended during the two subsequent days of the exhibition.

As the initial pilot started seven years ago, it was considered an appropriate time to take stock of current progress in terms of using this approach, and the exhibition provided a good opportunity to bring staff and settings together. It was also felt that an audit was important in deciding how to move forward.

Initially the documentation approach was used to support Assessment is for Learning strategies, but through time and as the curriculum has changed, the approach

is increasingly seen as a meaningful way to support and implement *Curriculum for Excellence*. The exhibition showed that this approach dovetails with the philosophy of *Curriculum for Excellence*, which recognises each child as a competent learner and important citizen with worthwhile theories and ideas to offer. It was also a way for staff to share their practice with others, an opportunity that proved to be most successful.

The exhibition is now being used to plan future CPD and some exhibits are going to Aberdeen University, where students will benefit from the examples of good work carried out in Angus. ●



St Bernadette's Primary School in Glasgow took part in the 'Don't Start Me!' project.

CREATIVITY PORTAL: A COLLABORATIVE ENVIRONMENT

The new Creativity Portal website was launched at the Scottish Learning Festival (SLF) 2010 and already teachers and early years practitioners can search for opportunities and inspiration from more than 50 national and local creative organisations.

There are many inspiring Glow Groups and a range of articles and links, in other words a one-stop-shop for practitioners' creative needs.

The Creativity Portal, developed by Learning and Teaching Scotland in partnership with Creative Scotland, brings Scotland's cultural resources and education closer together to support the delivery of *Curriculum for Excellence*.

The Creativity Portal offers a menu of education opportunities from the cultural sector and for the first time allows all teachers and early years practitioners to browse through courses, shows and experiences offered by the national companies, national collections, and arts and creative organisations across Scotland, all in the one place.

The website is an invaluable and constantly updated resource for creative teaching and learning across all levels and stages.

It contains:

- inspiring quotes and videos on creativity
- links to valuable articles and support
- latest news and special offers from creative organisations
- case studies of creative projects delivered in partnership with schools and cultural organisations
- links to Glow Groups and Glow Cookbooks with a focus on creativity in learning.

Early Years practitioners can find information on organisations such as Catherine Wheels, Imagineate, Drake Music and Wee Stories and case studies of particular relevance to their specialism, for example:

- Big Hairy Hamish (The Monster Who Cared) tells how Scottish Opera worked with 27 primary schools to introduce children from pre-school to P4 to the importance of recycling.
- Ditty and Gaer Boxes – a case study on the Shetland dialect resources for nursery and early primary developed in partnership by the Creative Links Team, schools, artists and the voluntary organisation Shetland Forwards.
- Look! – a project over several months, in which P1 pupils worked with the Pier Arts Centre in Orkney to research and curate their own exhibition and organise a preview evening for their parents.

Practitioners can also view the projects as they develop. For example, TAG Theatre Company is working in partnership with Strathclyde Police and 20 Glasgow primary schools on 'Don't Start Me!', a project for P3 and P4 children which explores where crime and violence begins. Whilst most of the Creativity Portal is accessible to anyone online it is fully integrated with Glow and to get the most from the resource practitioners will want to have their Glow login handy! ●

MORE INFORMATION

To find out more visit the Creativity Portal from the Glow National site, at www.creativityportal.org.uk, or contact

Stephen Bullock, Glow Development Officer for the Creativity Portal – s.bullock@LTScotland.org.uk

WE CAN DO THAT: OUR COMMUNITY PROJECT IN SHETLAND

Early years staff in Shetland promote community partnership by organising a creative arts event.

It was one of those moments around a cup of coffee. As early years central support staff in Shetland, we were aware that many of our pre-school groups had just enjoyed performances of 'The Undersea World of Bubble McBea' by Scottish Opera. We were thrilled with the impact of the experience but were aware of the cost and logistics of bringing a company up to perform for groups all over Shetland for a week.

Then somebody said, 'We can do that!' and before the coffee had gone cold we had a list of talented folk from music, storytelling, creative arts, dialect, education and beyond, living in Shetland, who we thought would be up for it!

Our Cultural Co-ordinator was able to identify funding through the Youth Music Initiative. Once that was established the project took shape.

There was agreement that it should be in Shetland dialect, to support initiatives like our 'Ditty Box', which is a box full of traditional nursery rhymes, in dialect, with teacher notes and supporting activities.

We discussed several storylines, but our writer came up with the concept of linking the central theme with a local Croft Trail. 'Bobby and da Burland Pearls' followed. Illustrated beautifully by a local artist and printed by Shetland Litho, it stands on its own as an example of a good children's book and can be purchased by both parents and schools.

The Drama Co-ordinator translated the book into action and the Dialect Co-ordinator worked on lyrics, while a musician wrote the simple melodies.

A pack was developed which included the book, theme planning with links to the early level experiences and outcomes, songs, music on a CD, and activities. This was distributed to all pre-school centres with an invitation to attend any one of the performances during a week in June. Children then learned the songs and came to a performance that engaged them in the world and animals of the croft.

Twenty-two out of thirty pre-school centres attended, 633 children in total, with 138 parents and pre-school staff. The evaluations were fantastic.

The project was not cheap, even though all of the actors were volunteers. However, in terms of rich and stimulating experiences, it continues to engage children in the book and the trail as well as having possibilities for development throughout the curriculum across Shetland. ●

MORE INFORMATION

For more information about this initiative please contact

Christine Geldard at: chris.geldard@shetland.gov.uk



OUTDOOR LEARNING IN ARCTIC NORWAY

JOYCE GILBERT, P1/2 TEACHER, ARNGASK PRIMARY SCHOOL, PERTH AND KINROSS

Above the Arctic Circle in December it is dark for much of the day and the temperature rarely rises above zero degrees.

HOWEVER, at 8 am the sound of voices and bright flashes from reflective clothing indicate that the first children are arriving at the Medas Farm Kindergarten near Fauske. The ground is covered in sheet ice, but unlike most Scottish children, unless there is significant wind chill, these pupils will be outside for a large part of the time.

Medas is owned and run by Jostein Hunstan and his wife Anita, who originally farmed in the area but found that it was hard to make a living.

I was one of 15 Scottish delegates from Learning and Teaching Scotland's Scottish Continuing International Professional Development (SCIPD) group who were in Norway to investigate excellent and innovative educational practice, with the aim of applying aspects of what we have learned to improve practice in Scottish schools and early years settings.

After returning from a SCIPD visit, participants report to LTS and to their own colleagues, as well as sharing their new knowledge with other practitioners through local and national dissemination, such as at the Scottish Learning Festival and through Glow.

We watched as a very purposeful group of 4–6-year-olds made their way down to the barn where a variety of animals were waiting to be fed. It is the same routine each day but there is always something new to learn. The children say good morning to the chickens, sheep, cows and ponies and organise the distribution of food.

By being given responsibility to care for the animals and plants, the children are immersed in the natural cycles of the farm throughout the year. In the summer they also take regular trips to forage for wild berries and mushrooms, while in winter they learn ice fishing and ptarmigan hunting. The latter involves dispatching any injured ptarmigan before plucking, gutting, cooking and eventually eating them. However, the knowledge and skills learned through these experiences are not just about developing physical self-sufficiency. Through first-hand outdoor experiences, the children are encouraged to learn about, care for and respect the environment. As a result, unlike many Scottish youngsters, these Norwegian pupils already know where their food comes from and are developing a sense of belonging, empathy for others and a close personal connection to the natural world.

Jostein takes us to visit the 'hytte' in the adjacent forest – a very basic shelter with a wood-burning stove and a covered fire pit area. This provides opportunities for the children to cook and to keep warm without having to be taken indoors. There are no fences but the group

are assured that children quickly learn the boundaries and know how far they can venture. Reflective clothing means that the children are easy to spot even in the depths of winter when it is dark for most of the day in this part of Norway.

Perhaps the most striking contrast to Scotland is the fact that around 50% of the staff at Medas are men of all ages, who are attracted to the job because of the very practical outdoor element. Watching the interactions between the male staff and the young children in their care, I am left in no doubt that the gender balance alone profoundly alters the way that learning is approached.

There appears to be very little direction and explanation from adults. Instead, Norwegian staff appear to adopt a quiet, strong, non-invasive adult presence which allows the children to direct their own play, use their imagination, create fantasies and take risks without actually being in danger. On closer inspection, there is also something deeper and more subtle happening which seems to be about sharing and learning across the generations. This was to be a recurring theme at all the centres we visited and I was left feeling that if we want to foster independence, creativity and resilience in Scottish children, as practitioners we need to capture the essence of this very special real-world learning. ●



Photograph provided courtesy of Anita and Jostein Hunstad, Medås Farm Kindergarten.



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- **Sue Palmer:** Author and leading UK Literacy expert
- **Debi Gliori:** Scottish author and illustrator of children's books

