

# **A CONSULTATION ON THE COMMON CORE OF SKILLS, KNOWLEDGE & UNDERSTANDING AND VALUES FOR THE CHILDREN'S WORKFORCE IN SCOTLAND**

## **INTRODUCTION**

**The Scottish Government is seeking views on the common core of skills, knowledge & understanding and values for all those working with children, young people and families. Once implemented the common core will support the development of more effective and integrated services which in turn will promote more flexible development and career progression for the workforce and will make communicating across organisational boundaries and cultures easier.**

# A Consultation on the Common Core of Skills, Knowledge & Understanding and Values for the Children's Workforce in Scotland



## RESPONDENT INFORMATION FORM

Please Note this form **must** be returned with your response to ensure that we handle your response appropriately

### 1. Name/Organisation

Organisation Name

Children in Scotland

Title Mr  Ms  Mrs  Miss  Dr  *Please tick as appropriate*

Surname

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### 3. Permissions - I am responding as...

Individual

*Please tick as appropriate*

Group/Organisation

(a) Do you agree to your response being made available to the public (in Scottish Government library and/or on the Scottish Government web site)?

*Please tick as appropriate*  Yes  No

(b) Where confidentiality is not requested, we will make your responses available to the public on the following basis

*Please tick ONE of the following boxes*

Yes, make my response, name and address all available

or

Yes, make my response available, but not my name and address

or

Yes, make my response and name available, but not my address

(c) The name and address of your organisation **will be** made available to the public (in the Scottish Government library and/or on the Scottish Government web site).

Are you content for your **response** to be made available?

*Please tick as appropriate*  Yes  No

(d) We will share your response internally with other Scottish Government policy teams who may be addressing the issues you discuss. They may wish to contact you again in the future, but we require your permission to do so. Are you content for Scottish Government to contact you again in relation to this consultation exercise?

*Please tick as appropriate*  Yes  No

## CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

### 1. **Workers need to intervene early, tackle inequalities and build the capacity of children, young people and families.**

**To what extent do you agree that the proposed common core equips our workers to do this?**

Children in Scotland unequivocally endorses the aspirations articulated above. We agree that the proposed common core covers some important elements of skills needed to work with children. We do not think, however, that it comprehensively addresses the range of skills required, nor does it indicate how the progress towards the above aspirations will be made. It would be perfectly possible to be possessed of, and to deploy, all the skills and knowledge set out in the consultation document without making any meaningful impact on inequalities.

The language used - 'early intervention' as opposed to 'early support', for example – suggests that the key role of the workforce is to identify and react to problems. Much more prominence should be given to the skills needed to deliver the inputs that are known to promote the best possible outcomes for children. There is now a wealth of research that clearly describes the experiences and support children need if they are to move positively through childhood to fulfilling adult lives.

Just how the common core contributes to building capacity is not clear. Very little of the 'knowledge and understanding' seems to reflect impact as opposed to process. Once again it would be eminently possible to 'tick all the boxes' without achieving any significant improvement in capacity, the possible exception being "work with young people and families to make their own decisions and form their own solutions", though 'work with' is rather unspecific in conveying what staff would actually do.

For many years, Children in Scotland has been an active and extensive contributor to discussions on the children's sector workforce. We have organised conferences and seminars, led study visits, published books, newsletters and articles and influenced the development of policy. We recently led 'Working it Out' – a two-year project funded by the Scottish Government that facilitated dialogue and debate on children's needs and the most effective workforce responses. Many of the key findings are highly pertinent to the current consultation.

Both 'Working it Out', and "Working for Inclusion" – a European Commission funded project that Children in Scotland concluded earlier this year – found that the configuration of the workforce was instrumental in affecting outcomes for children. Holistic knowledge of children in their family and community context, profound and thorough understanding of child development, capacity to form trusting and trusted relationships with children and their parents and carers, practice based on children's rights and their role in co-production of services, integrated systems for service

planning and delivery and a professional qualification were highly related to good outcomes and greater inclusion.

In particular, the social pedagogue qualification (the standard qualification for working with children and young people in a variety of settings in many European countries) was found to cover the range of skills and knowledge that enabled staff to achieve positive benefit for the children with whom they worked. Major progress has been made in recent years in adapting the existing European social pedagogue models so that it fits appropriately within the Scottish context. It is regrettable that this model is missing from the 'common core' consultation document.

**2. What specific comments do you have around the skills, knowledge & understanding associated with “sound observation, judgement and decision making?”**

We agree that knowledge of child development lies at the heart of effective practice. However, we believe that this knowledge should support staff in the primary task of providing (and supporting parents/carers in providing) what is known to optimise children's development. The approach seems 'deficit focused', with an emphasis on reaction to problems e.g. "noticing signs that concern you" and "what behaviours may be harmful to them". While it is clearly important to be able to identify and respond to problems, the underpinning principle informing work with children should be the positive promotion of children's happiness and wellbeing. Skills, knowledge and understanding should primarily align with this positive approach to working with children and their mothers/fathers/carers.

Understanding the child's experience and circumstances, the balance of risk and resilience factors, and how these are likely to affect outcomes for the child is both a key principle of GIRFEC and an essential component of the skill base of the workforce. Such contextual information has to sit alongside effective observation and skills in reacting well to problems.

**3. What specific comments do you have around the skills and knowledge associated with “appropriate and effective communication”?**

Communication with children and young people is a complex and sophisticated matter requiring complex and sophisticated skills. A whole range of imaginative methods and approaches are needed – play, art, games and computers can all be used creatively. The areas referred to in the document seem to relate more to 'official' and 'formal' communication such as formal reports – this again seems to reinforce the 'problem-focused' orientation of the document. This does not seem consistent with the child rights based approach it proposes or the positive, prevention approach we

advocate.

The section seems to view the child as a passive recipient of communication rather than an equal partner in two-way communications. There is no indication that valuing children's meaningful involvement in, and co-production of, the services they receive from the workforce is important. Again this does not seem consistent with 'promoting children's rights at every opportunity'.

At the heart of good communication is a respectful relationship based on trust. Knowledge of, and skills, in relationship building are key elements of the skill base that should not be ignored. These communications and relationship building skills are just as important with parents as with children themselves.

From more than a decade of operating Enquire – the Scottish Government funded national information and advice service on additional support for learning – we are also keenly aware of the importance of the children's workforce as a whole having a more than superficial understanding of ASL needs, issues and strategies. High on the list is the ability to communicate as appropriately and effectively with children (and parents) having additional support needs, as with any others.

Thus, the common core will be incomplete if it fails to directly and meaningfully address the diverse communication skills actually required by this workforce. Similarly, the ability of this workforce to meet the statutory obligations and deliver the results enshrined in Scotland's Additional Support for Learning Act will be seriously comprised if the communication side of doing so is not part of the common core.

#### **4. What specific comments do you have around the skills, knowledge & understanding associated with “effective partnership and multi-agency working?”**

Perhaps one of the key objectives in identifying 'common core skills' should be to minimise the prevalence of organisational barriers to working together. Better outcomes for children are achieved where there is integrated strategic planning and operational management. This was clearly evidenced in Children in Scotland's 'Working for Inclusion' project, which looked at outcomes for children across four European countries and examined organisational structures and pedagogical approaches in ten others. That said, it is clearly important that staff can work with colleagues from other disciplines and engage respectfully and inclusively with children and families. While we endorse the GIRFEC approach, we understand that narrow socialisation within individual disciplines can present a significant obstacle to GIRFEC's effective implementation across agencies. A common core – e.g. the Scottish pedagogue model – will make GIRFEC's aspirations far more likely to achieve in practice.

5. **What if anything is missing from the skills, knowledge & understanding or values?**

There are a number of areas that would productively be included in the common core that are not at present covered. Key among these are:

- Recognition of the complexity and subtlety of skills needed to work with mothers/fathers/carers, and an explicit commitment to upskilling across the whole workforce
- Inclusion of the whole workforce that interface with children – this would include those for whom work with children is not their sole area of activity, e.g. medical staff, staff who work in adult social services such as those who work with parents with drink, drug or mental health problems, librarians, workers in leisure centres and police officers
- Effective engagement with and support for parents and other significant adults in children’s lives, e.g. grandparents who provide regular care for their grandchildren
- Understanding the effect of the individual child’s experience, as well as general knowledge of child development
- Development of positive and trusting relationships with children, and how to listen well and respond to them in positive, developmentally appropriate ways
- Knowledge and understanding of the effects of the social and community context in which children and their families are located, such as the impact of poverty on family stress levels (and how the children’s workforce should translate that understanding into their own behaviour and communications)
- Understanding of the factors that increase the risk of poor outcomes and knowledge of strategies to prevent or minimise their impact
- Development of sound professional judgment that respects children’s rights and takes account of their individual needs and circumstances
- Capacity to plan and review one’s own interventions and awareness of self in interaction with children and their families.

**Implementation of the proposed Common Core**

6. Describe briefly how, your organisation, or your sector might implement the common core of skills, knowledge and values?

With notable exceptions, such as Enquire and Resolve: ASL, Children in Scotland is not a provider of direct services. Of course, we will, and indeed already do, ensure that our staff team has a good understanding of child

development and of the evidence that shows how good practice delivers best outcomes. We have a strong track record in supporting implementation of good practice and continuing professional development across the children's workforce in Scotland.

There are a number of issues that it would be prudent to consider in embarking on a process of implementation for an agreed common core. Several of these were identified in the course of our 'Working it Out' project and are set out below. We have outlined some of the mechanisms by which we could contribute to implementation in our response to the following question.

- The development of shared values and a common language across the children's sector workforce
- The development of the lead professional and managerial roles to support integrated working and collaboration across the sector
- A focus on improving the professional identity and status of those groups in the workforce that are currently undervalued
- The introduction of a simplified and more coherent qualifications framework
- Further exploration of the potential for using the European social pedagogy model in Scotland, e.g. the Scottish pedagogue model
- Introduction of a professional standard for working very broadly with children, young people, families and communities across settings
- Further exploration of the potential for the Childhood Practice Standard to be recognised by other groups in the workforce, beyond early years and play practitioners
- Encouragement of creative ways of maximising workforce capacity at local level
- Consideration of the potential for pilots between education providers and employers that explore their role in delivering ambitious reform of initial education and professional development
- Improvement of data quality and analysis on the size, scope and nature of the existing children's workforce
- Overcoming the sometimes entrenched nature of professional boundaries
- Specification of the nature of the gap between the skills needed to deliver key policy objectives and the current level of capacity and competence in the workforce.

### **Implementation of the proposed Common Core**

7. What opportunities are there in your organisation or service for the proposed common core to be implemented at the following 3 levels?
- Strategic management
  - Operational Management
  - Day to day working with children, young people and families

While Children in Scotland does not primarily provide direct services, we undertake policy development and research, organise numerous training events and produce publications related to children's services and issues. We would be happy to be involved in the following ways and have significant and respected experience and expertise in so doing:

- Direct support for organisations in developing a strategic approach to implementation – project management, plans, evaluation
- Advice on setting up and monitoring pilot projects
- Production of resource materials – guidance, research findings, practice advice – in a variety of formats
- Dissemination events – seminars, training courses
- Consultation and involvement – surveys, interviews, group discussions.

Through our frequent and regular communications with our membership, we reach the majority of the children's workforce in Scotland. Added to this is our specific and detailed knowledge of workforce issues. We are therefore ideally placed to assist with and support a comprehensive national approach to implementation. We urge, however, that the implementation process is underpinned by a realistic timescale and a sufficient level of investment.

8. What opportunities do you see for working collaboratively with other organisations/sectors to implement the common core?

Children in Scotland has worked in partnership with government at all levels, with voluntary organisations large and small, with colleagues in other European countries and with universities and colleges in supporting and promoting the best interests of children and young people. We have detailed knowledge of the children's workforce and substantial expertise in supporting its improvement. We see many opportunities for effective collaboration and have described above some ways in which we could contribute to the implementation process.

9. What challenges can you identify around implementing the common core, and how might these be overcome?

It is critical that the common core aligns with the various existing policy, regulatory and accreditation frameworks. Important among these are:

- Curriculum for Excellence
- GIRFEC

- Additional Support for Learning Act
- The three 'flagship' Concordat policies – Equally Well, Achieving our Potential, and, most importantly, the Early Years Framework
- Standards used by regulatory bodies such as SCSWIS and HMIE
- SSSC registration requirements
- Requirements of qualification-awarding bodies.

A current example of disconnection between registration requirements and skill sets is the intention of the SSSC to cease recognition of the degree course in social pedagogy as a registrable qualification for residential child care, despite the compelling evidence that such a course covers what would be generally regarded as the key areas of skill and knowledge for effective work with children.

Engaging the commitment of professional bodies and organisations representing staff, such as the GTC Scotland and relevant trade unions, will be critical if implementation is to be thorough and effective.

Without some clear enforcement authority, it is difficult to see how implementation can be ensured or delivered equitably across Scotland.