

CONSULTATION ON THE FUTURE STATUS OF THE GENERAL TEACHING COUNCIL FOR SCOTLAND

Children in Scotland is pleased to respond to the consultation on the future of the GTCS. We welcome in principle the intention to establish the General Teaching Council as a strong independent body. We believe, however, that this significant change provides an opportunity to review its composition and role. The context in which the new body will work has changed, and will continue to change, to reflect more integrated and holistic approaches to children's learning and well-being. For that reason there are a number of key messages we believe it is important to convey, though they fall outwith the scope of the response questionnaire.

1. The children's sector: the changing context

The children's sector workforce in Scotland includes quarter of a million people from a wide and diverse range of professions and establishments. The past two decades have seen an increased emphasis, both in terms of political direction and in research evidence, on the importance of developing stronger relationships, better understanding and more integrated working across this workforce. In 2001, the Scottish Executive produced its seminal long-term vision for children's services to be conceptualised as a 'single system' (*For Scotland's Children: Better integrated children's services*). This vision has been reinforced in many subsequent policy statements and action plans such as *Getting it Right for Every Child*, (Scottish Executive (2006)) and the *Better Health, Better Care Action Plan* (Scottish Government (2007)). A consistent theme throughout these documents has been the need to regard specific goals such as supporting learning, helping to improve health and making children safe, as responsibilities which are, in some cases, collective, and, in all cases, requiring much closer working across the sector.

Alongside the imperative of better collaboration in the children's sector has been a concurrent recognition of the importance and value of involving stakeholders and service users in the work of organisations. Parents are a significant, but not the main or only, stakeholder or user group for children's services. The involvement of children and young people themselves is paramount. Organisations such as the GTCS should establish effective means of achieving this, and indeed many similar bodies, such as the General Medical Council and the SSSC, have done so. It is important that mechanisms exist which encourage children and young people in general to participate in informing the direction of bodies which play such a crucial role in their lives. It is also, however, vital that attention is paid to involvement in relation to specific aspects of their identity and needs, such as children who need additional support for learning, children whose first language is not English and children who are looked after by local authorities.

2. Schools and colleges: the changing context

In schools and colleges, government initiatives such as the 'New Community Schools' programme have led to the development of the Curriculum for Excellence (2004). In the words of Scotland's Senior Chief Inspector of Education, Graham Donaldson, it "*recognises the very diverse group of staff who contribute to the development of the four capacities in children and young people because the sorts of learning laid out in the guidance takes place both within and beyond the classroom, within and beyond the school day and within and beyond the period of compulsory schooling.*" (*Working it out: developing the children's sector workforce* (Children in Scotland (2008))).

Teachers and schools are, of course, central to the effective implementation of the Curriculum for Excellence. The support of other groups is, however, also essential, in ways which require closer examination and consideration. In some cases better understanding of the roles and responsibilities of different professional groups is needed. Where children's capacities or family circumstances affect their education, for example, dialogue between teachers and social workers or health professionals can optimise the child's experience and outcomes. In others, improved practical collaboration is desirable. For workforce groups who work very closely alongside teachers – for example, classroom and learning support assistants – closer relationships may result in offering better continuity over a child's day and more effective learning. This is also important in relation to school age childcare or extra-curricular activities, where an integrated

approach can enhance the child's current experience and future outcomes.

There is increasing awareness of the importance of the early years in children's development, learning and well-being. At early stages, supportive interventions and responses to difficulties produce better and more sustainable results. The Scottish Government's Early Years Framework sets out a ten-year strategy for improving services for children under the age of three, and is seen as an important political priority. One of its key objectives is to improve educational attainment, particularly for children in more vulnerable circumstances. Early Years services could therefore be seen as integral to supporting children's learning. This raises the issue of whether the Early Years workforce could be included in the scope of a broader approach to registration.

As noted above, children and young people need to be seen as major stakeholders and users of schools and colleges. We are disappointed that there is no mention of this in this proposal.

3. Key points

In light of these contextual issues we would make the following points:

- a) The new Council should be able, now or in future, to extend its registration functions to groups other than teachers. In our view, this issue is most pressing in respect of classroom and learning support assistants. We also believe that there are other groups who could be considered. One such group is those working in school age childcare. The Scottish Out of School Care Network (SOSCN), one of Children in Scotland's member organisations, has indicated that this could significantly improve status of workers in these services. SOSCN has also highlighted a current anomaly which means that teachers who work in school age childcare do not require registration by the Scottish Social Services Council. The trend in those countries in which out of school care services are best established is for out of school care staff to spend part of their working time in schools. This underlines their educational contribution and again may be a valid reason for them to come within the scope of the GTCS.

A further group that might be considered is arts workers. An increasing number of arts workers undertake educational projects and activities within the school setting. Staff from other

children's services also regularly contribute to the activities of the school day. A recent study undertaken by Children in Scotland found, however, that only registered teachers are included in statistical data such as size of school workforce and pupil/teacher ratios. One of the main teaching unions has opened its membership to include a small number of music instructors and some arts and crafts tutors working in special schools. This could indicate that the teaching profession itself sees the value of becoming more inclusive.

- b) The new Council should be asked to address anomalies associated with registration, such as that noted by SOSCN above. It should also develop a transparent and effective system for reviewing the position of groups of workers as new roles develop, in cooperation with other relevant registration bodies.
- c) The composition of the Council should in our view reflect the broader approach to learning embodied by the Curriculum for Excellence. We would be happy to assist in nominating to the Council from this wider range of stakeholders.
- d) We would encourage a bolder approach to stakeholder and user representation on the new Council. We note that the General Medical Council will have an equal number of lay and medical members and that the trend in all professional associations is for more extensive lay and wider stakeholder involvement.

We would be happy to amplify any of the above points, and to respond to any enquiries. Please contact Marion Macleod, Senior Policy and Parliamentary Officer, on mmacleod@childreninscotland.org.uk, or 0131 222 2435.

Children in Scotland is Scotland's national agency for organisations and professionals working with and for children, young people and their families. It exists to identify and promote the interests of children and their families and to ensure that policies and services and other provisions are of the highest possible quality and are able to meet the needs of a diverse society. Children in Scotland represents more than 450 members, including 90% of Scottish Local Authorities, all major voluntary, statutory and private children's agencies, professional organisations, as well as many other smaller community groups and children's services. It is linked with similar agencies in other parts of the UK and Europe.

The work of Children in Scotland encompasses extensive information, policy, research and practice development programmes. The agency works closely with MSPs, the Scottish Government, local authorities and practitioners. services groups such as the Cross Party Parliamentary Group on Children and Young People (with YouthLink Scotland). In addition, Children in Scotland hosts Enquire - the national advice service for additional support for learning, and Resolve: ASL, Scotland's largest independent education mediation service.