



Response from the General Teaching Council for Scotland to Petition PE1409

The General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) welcomes the opportunity to respond to this petition which raises important matters for teacher education.

The following response deals with the specific questions directed to the GTCS.

- **What are your views on the issues raised in the petition and in the Committee's subsequent discussion?**

The wording of the petition relates to staff being, 'fully trained to provide the right additional support for children and young people with learning disabilities and/or autistic spectrum disorders'.

While this is a worthwhile aim the question must be raised of whether it is ever achievable. To have every teacher in Scotland 'fully trained' to deal with every additional support need and every learning disability and/or autistic spectrum disorder may quite simply be impossible to achieve.

What, much more realistically, is achievable is to have every teacher with sufficient knowledge and skill to deal with the most commonly found additional support needs and learning disabilities and for them also to have the appropriate degree of professionalism to know how to seek out specialised information and specialised support when necessary.

The current Guidelines for Initial Teacher Education Courses in Scotland (December 2006) state that:

The overall aim of programmes of initial teacher education is to prepare student teachers to become competent, thoughtful, reflective and innovative practitioners, who are committed to providing high quality teaching and learning for all pupils. Programmes must ensure that student teachers meet the requirements of the Standard for Initial Teacher Education.

Please note the reference to 'all pupils' so there already is a clear expectation that Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programmes will prepare new teachers to work successfully with pupils with additional support needs and learning disabilities.

This expectation continues in the Standard for Initial Teacher Education (SITE) (December 2006) which sets (paragraph 3.1) as one of the Core professional interests for teachers:

'Promoting the learning of those pupils who encounter barriers to learning, including those who are in need of additional support in particular areas of the curriculum; and those with emotional and behavioural difficulties'.

SITE is divided up into three sections (Profession Knowledge and Understanding, Professional Skills and Abilities and Professional Values and Personal Commitment) and there is specific mention within each area of additional support requirements.

Professional Knowledge and Understanding

1.1.2 Acquire the knowledge and understanding to fulfil their responsibilities in respect of cross-curricular themes including citizenship, creativity, enterprising attitudes, literacy and numeracy; personal, social and health education; and ICT, as appropriate to the sector and stage of education.

By/...

By the end of the programme of initial teacher education, student teachers will:

Have knowledge and understanding of, for example, sustainable development, equal opportunities, additional support needs, citizenship, international education, education for work, enterprise.

Professional Skills and Abilities

2.1.4 Set expectations and a pace of work which make appropriate demands on all pupils.

By the end of the programme of initial teacher education, student teachers will:

Demonstrate that they have high but realistic expectations of pupils and match tasks and rates of work to the needs of all pupils, including those with additional support needs, and ensure that the more able pupils are effectively challenged.

Demonstrate the ability to identify and respond appropriately to pupils with difficulties in, or barriers to, learning and recognise when to seek further advice in relation to their additional support needs.

Professional Values and Personal Commitment

3.1 Value and demonstrate a commitment to social justice, inclusion and protecting and caring for children.

By the end of the programme of initial teacher education, student teachers will:

Demonstrate respect for the rights of all children and young people without discrimination as defined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1991, the Children (Scotland) Act 1995, the Standards in Scotland's Schools Act etc 2000 and the Additional Support for Learning Act 2004.

The Standard for Full Registration (SFR) which new teachers have to meet in their probation period and thereafter maintain throughout their careers as fully registered teachers has similar but more demanding versions of these same statements.

Of course having things stated in Guidelines and Standards is no guarantee that all will be well with actual practice and hence the GTCS will continue to give emphasis to these areas and to encourage students and teachers to ensure that they develop appropriate professional practice to meet the needs of their pupils.

It should be noted that the GTCS runs a system of Professional Recognition and Professional Registration for teachers who develop expertise in different educational areas with Additional Support Needs being one such specifically identified area. Professional Recognition simply celebrates expertise in the area while Profession Registration ensures that the teacher is fully registered to teach in the area. Details of this system can be found on the GTCS website at: <http://www.gtcs.org.uk/professional-development/professional-recognition.aspx>

The GTCS also regularly undertakes, commissions or funds educational research and has recently published research and advice on questions of disabilities within the teaching population.

In conclusion to this section, the GTCS does recognise that often, as the petition states, 'learning support assistants receive only basic training' and would certainly concur with the sentiment of raising the status and quality of such training.

- **From the perspective of your organisation, what work is planned or underway to ensure that all new teachers are confident in their abilities to firstly identify and then secondly address additional support needs (especially dyslexia and autistic spectrum disorders)?**

The/...

The timing of the Petition is apposite as Scottish teacher education works towards responding to the recommendations of *Teaching Scotland's Future* (2011) and the GTCS moves towards its new independent status from April of this year.

Teaching Scotland's Future contains important recommendations for Scottish teacher education but it does leave some circles to be squared. Rightly, it does not attempt to specify in its entirety what new teachers need to know but it does identify 'core' aspects for initial teacher education including:

'Supporting learners, including the latest legislative and research-based advice on meeting the needs of all learners including those with additional support needs such as dyslexia or autism'

and goes on to make the following specific recommendation:

Recommendation 14

The professional component in programmes of initial teacher education should address more directly areas where teachers experience greatest difficulty and where we know that Scottish education needs to improve. That will require a radical reappraisal of present courses and of the guidelines provided by GTCS.

This is being done through the work of the National Partnership Group and through the review of the Professional Standards currently being carried out by the GTCS. Both processes will clearly reflect on the matters raised by the Petition and endeavour to address them positively.

However, as has been noted above, many of the required elements to address additional support needs and learning disabilities are already in place but, as can be seen in *Teaching Scotland's Future*, students regularly express a lack of confidence in dealing with such issues. This is perhaps not surprising given their complexity and that while students will have dealt with such matters in theoretical terms, this will only be translated into confident delivery when there have been opportunities to put theory into practice with specific pupils. Academic learning is of course necessary but it must then be tempered in actual practice in actual educational settings with actual pupils – it is only through this process that confident expertise can be built up.

Teaching Scotland's Future also stresses the need for closer partnership working between the universities and their associated local authorities and schools. The GTCS concurs with this point and through its accreditation mechanisms for initial teacher education programmes will endeavour to encourage such closer partnerships as it is through them that student teachers and probationer teachers will best be given opportunities to develop their knowledge, skills and, very importantly, confidence in dealing with additional support needs and learning disabilities.

However, it must be stressed once again that even then it is unlikely that every individual teacher will be an expert on every possible area of additional support needs and learning disabilities but, as has been stated above, what should quite rightly be expected is that every teacher will have sufficient knowledge and skill to deal with the most commonly found additional support needs and learning disabilities and the appropriate degree of professionalism to know how to seek out specialised information and specialised support when necessary.

Teaching Scotland's Future, the review of the teacher education standards, GTCS independence and enhanced ITE partnership working will not provide a panacea for every issue in the teaching of pupils with learning disabilities and/or autistic spectrum disorders in Scottish schools but they will help endeavour to build on existing good practice and to enhance provision.