

INSPIRING WORLD-CLASS
TEACHING PROFESSIONALISM



GTC Scotland's Contribution to the National Discussion on the Future Vision for Scottish Education

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Letter Introduction

Dear Professor Campbell and Professor Harris

GTC Scotland's Contribution to the National Discussion on the Future Vision for Scottish Education

This letter summarises the General Teaching Council for Scotland's (GTC Scotland) contribution to the Scottish Government and COSLA's national discussion focused on developing the future vision for Scottish education as recommended by the Putting the Learner at the Centre Report.

GTC Scotland

GTC Scotland has a unique role in Scottish education. We are the teaching profession's independent registration and regulation body. We were established to ensure standards for the teaching profession in Scotland. We work to maintain and enhance trust in teaching. This is a complex space as we work to advance standards as well as ensure they are maintained.

Our role is to register and regulate teachers and college lecturers. We do this by keeping a public register and setting and regulating the standards for entering and remaining in the teaching profession.

We ensure standards are maintained by asking teachers and college lecturers to confirm their commitment to learning, and the principle that standards are improved by encouraging ongoing learning. We also investigate serious concerns about teachers and college lecturers. We know doing this contributes to improving the quality of learning and teaching and helps protect the public.

Registering and regulating the teaching profession gives us insight which in turn allows us to advise the education system. We use our voice to speak up for high standards. High standards help instil trust in the profession and advance the status of the teaching profession.

GTC Scotland is governed by our Council which is comprised of 37 members and is reflective of the breadth of the Scottish education system. We are independent from government and receive no funding for our core roles of registration and regulation. This work is funded by the fees teachers and college lecturers pay. Our role is set out in law.

Our Contribution to the National Discussion

As the National Discussion survey questions did not provide a framework for the content of our feedback given our unique role and focus on the teaching profession, please accept the content of this letter as feedback from GTC Scotland to inform the development of a future vision for Scottish education. In addition to the key points noted here, as you know GTC Scotland also hosted an event with the teaching profession with yourselves, and the feedback gathered has been directly shared through the survey.

Our feedback is organised into three themes:

- i) every learner and the whole education system,
- ii) system coherence, and

iii) trust teachers and trust teaching.

Finally, we offer some reflections on the teaching profession's engagement with this work.

Every Learner and the Whole Education System

Every Learner

A future vision for Scottish education needs to start from the position of consideration of every learner and the whole education system that exists to support their learning. Too often the term ‘the system’ is used without a definition of what this means. Our experience is that it is narrowly used to refer to school education, with an assumption at times that this only means local authority mainstream provision. We understand the education system to span early learning and childcare, primary education, secondary education, community education, tertiary education and additional support needs education in all its forms from mainstream provision, special schools, independent education provision through to residential care and secure contexts. The system also includes the partners, agencies and bodies that support, challenge and scrutinise the work of the education system.

This complex system should be integrated and effective integration requires clarity and cohesion. It also needs to be understood that the education system does not exist in a vacuum but within the context of society as a whole. It is noted that, within the current system, value can be placed on elements of the system depending on what assumptions have been made about what is included or not and without overt clarity about what education is for and whose purposes it serves: why the system itself exists. Our contention is the system exists for individual learners and learning: it must deeply know and understand what individual learners need and recognise that these needs are not uniform. They are not and will not all be the same and will not stand still.

Every learner is unique, and this uniqueness needs to be valued. The system vision needs to be designed with every learner in mind from the outset, recognising and valuing their uniqueness. This means that educational planning should be inclusive of every learner and all their characteristics and all their needs: their whole self. This is essential in any vision which is holistic and aims to ensure everyone in Scotland can live their best lives in community with others, with a deep love of learning and the knowledge, skills and attributes they need to flourish.

Value across the system

It is evident that certain elements of the system currently receive greater emphasis than others. The attention on the senior phase of secondary education, and particularly national qualification outcomes, provides an example of how thinking and, therefore, practice in other areas of the system can become skewed because focus is lost on meeting the needs of every learner and the whole system. A priority focus on outcomes has consequences. It can create a tick box, audit culture. A focus on specific outcomes, such as national qualifications, defines what happens across the whole system.

Every part of the system has a unique but complementary role and needs to be valued. This starts from a deep understanding and clarity of our common purpose and what each part’s roles and responsibilities are, and are not, in driving to achieve that purpose. Assumptions about these roles and responsibilities need to be surfaced and addressed to enable the system as a whole to be effective.

Clarity of purpose in a complex system

The education system is complex. Whilst this complexity needs to be embraced, there are examples where the system has been rendered unnecessarily complicated resulting in duplication of effort, lack of clarity and difficulties clearly communicating to society what the options are or what we are trying to achieve. Together we should stop seeking simple solutions to complex issues and also recognise that complexity need not always be complicated. There is a need to ensure policy expectations are coherent, joined up and support a shared vision. Our policy intentions providing our clarity of purpose need to be long-term, with effective long-term support and resourcing to achieve them. We need to measure the right things in order to assess how well our actions, underpinned by clear, consistent and persistent policy are delivering for learners. This policy needs to be developed in the right way at the outset, by the right people who have the right expertise and who will support and lead its enactment to ensure its success in practice. The development of policy that impacts on teaching needs to be led by teachers. This is reflected in the professional commitment embedded within teachers' professional standards, 'the professional commitment of teachers in Scotland is to lead learning through: developing deep knowledge of learning and teaching; critically examining how our teaching impacts on learners; and using evidence collaboratively to inform teacher judgement and next steps for learners'.

Along with clarity of purpose, roles and responsibilities within the system need to be defined clearly and shared widely, so that all stakeholders have clarity about where to go or who to talk to about the issues relating to the system that affect them. Within those roles and responsibilities, trust and autonomy are important, taking place within a system-wide culture that is open and transparent.

Understanding the system's achievements better

Our system needs a more mature and clear understanding of our use of data. This includes clarity about the use of the term 'variation' and how this relates to, for example, the work of teachers in seeking to get things right by developing bespoke solutions for their learners and their community. Variation is often perceived to be bad or wrong. This is not the case, particularly within a system that promotes and supports individual growth, diversity and social justice.

What we can measure becomes what we value so the weight we give to data needs careful planning and robust analysis – data needs to be useful and tell us something meaningful focused on what we value. The focus needs to be on analysis – what is the data telling us, not only the data itself. We need a valued assessment system that focuses on what learners feel, think and understand about their learning, across all parts of our system. This means assessing what could help them develop as individuals and what teachers can do to support that development rather than emphasising what they appear to have achieved. Prioritisation of formative and diagnostic assessment as a means of thoroughly understanding learners' needs is essential. This requires teachers to be trusted and to have the time and space they need to do their work well, develop their teaching further and have the opportunity for deep reflection about what they do and how they do it.

Our people

Investing in leadership is essential to our system's success. Using the phrase 'the system' really means focusing on our people and in turn that means recognising that wellbeing and learning go together. This happens when the whole learner is considered and how the system as a whole aims to ensure everyone in Scotland can live their best lives in

community with others, with a deep love of learning and the knowledge, skills and attributes they need to flourish. Leaders who deeply understand, connect, and are together aligned with this core aim are vital for the wellbeing of the system as a whole.

System Coherence

Alignment with education reform

It is necessary to start connecting change in one area of our system to consequences in another. This requires us to stop thinking in policy and practice silos and to work together to place more focus on what our purpose is and how we all align to it. A complex system needs clarity of purpose, to understand how well it is achieving its purpose and where there are issues to address.

Given this National Discussion is taking place in the context of education reform of central national education bodies, there is an opportunity to ensure the system develops a more coherent and aligned system of support and challenge for the teaching profession and their employers that centres on a shared, common purpose. There is, in our view, a need to ensure the roles of each body are clear, the expectations for the sharing of information across and between partners in the system clearly articulated and the checks and balances in place in the system to ensure all happens as it should.

While partnership is essential, the terms of reference guiding partnership work require attention, in order to create explicit and equitable frameworks for meaningful and impactful shared engagement. This all requires to be underpinned by clear policy and appropriate governance, in some cases legislation and support for policy enactment. In addition, these clear and transparent arrangements need to be enhanced by effective relationship building across organisations and the development of collaborative and creative solutions. This process should be mirrored with the teaching profession.

Inspection and regulation

By way of example, we offer the context of child protection and safeguarding in Scottish education. We have raised issues about understanding of roles and information sharing practices in various fora since before 2017 and continue to do so in order to seek clarity about how the system works together in this fundamental area. We believe that enhanced information sharing, and a strengthened national governance framework requires to be in place to ensure roles in child protection and safeguarding in the education context are transparent, understood and enacted and that information is therefore shared at the right time with those that need it, enabling every part of the system to play its part effectively.

We understand that an independent review of inspection, regulation and scrutiny of social care is underway, as well as a review of inspection in the early years of education. There is a need to ensure that the role of inspection across the whole system is clear. This includes clarity on the differences between inspection and regulation and where responsibilities for both lie. The theory underpinning inspection in education settings needs to be clear as does the theory of regulation.

What role will the new national bodies have, if any, for example, in ensuring that education service providers, employers of teachers, do what is expected of them in the context of child protection and safeguarding? The system of child protection and safeguarding works on trust, trust that key players do what is required of them and follow guidance, including to enable others to perform their legal role. Whilst we know most employers of teachers diligently undertake their roles in relation to this work, we also know from experience that sometimes things have gone wrong.

There also needs to be greater synergy across inspection approaches. This is an example of where change in one area needs more explicitly connected to practice in another area. GTC Scotland has clarity of purpose as a professional regulator. This role is focused on individuals. We contend that system regulation has a more confused and complicated set of responsibilities in Scottish education.

Effective system regulation

A further example leading to our calls for what we have termed in the past more effective system regulation is ensuring that teachers are employed and deployed in a way that aligns with their skills and abilities. That is, in situations of system flexibility, teachers are being deployed in a way that aligns with their professional registration (and therefore qualification). Teacher registration in Scotland matters, teacher qualifications matter. These are integral to ensuring trusted teaching.

A further area requiring coherence is teacher recruitment and retention. Clarity about who ensures, for example, that the employers of teachers are effectively meeting their obligations under the Equality Act is an area that requires greater focus. To put it directly, who ensures that the employers of teachers act as good employers and who addresses situations where this has been deemed to not be the case? Taking the case of ensuring the teaching profession is reflective of the diverse communities we serve for instance, our view is that further checks and balances are required even in contexts where legislation exists such as the Equality Act.

Policy creation and enactment

We have mentioned the need for greater policy coherence: this needs to include a greater understanding and focus on ensuring that teachers have time and space to inform and consider changing policy requirements and how they will enact these in their contexts. The writing of a new policy is not the work; the support for understanding and enactment is. Whilst this National Discussion needs to lead to the establishment of clear and transparent policy underpinned by a clarity of purpose, the system is a complex web of enactment. This needs to be recognised and valued. The system needs to be engaged in policy creation, not merely recipients of it. Teacher professionalism is directly tied to professional education and learning. Policy enactment requires professional learning. Therefore, creating time and space in teachers' working lives for this is essential to meaningful change. Some time and space can be created by reducing policy volume. That is, there needs to be less policy, that is more coherently considered, that involves teachers in its development and properly plans support for enactment and embedding. The teaching profession's professional standards should underpin this process.

Trust teachers and trust teaching

Trusted teaching

An effective education system is trusted. This starts with a recognition of trusted teaching. Nearly everyone has experienced teaching, not everyone can teach. Teaching is a profession rooted in understanding about pedagogy. The profession needs improved support to help further develop this expertise.

We have high standards for Scotland's teaching profession for a reason. A new vision for education needs pride in our high standards and checks and balances to ensure system flexibility does not dilute these. Being a registered teacher brings collective identity and belonging to a profession. Not everyone who calls themselves a teacher is one, being a registered teacher means something.

Professional standards

Professional standards are embedded for Scotland's teaching profession, and this should be the case for other professionals in our system. Over almost a decade of Professional Update, the scheme by which GTC Scotland meets our legal obligations to ensure a reaccreditation scheme for teachers and for individuals to demonstrate their ongoing commitment to learning in advancing their professionalism, we have gathered a consistent theme from teachers – they need time and space to reflect, think about their learning, the impact it has had, plan what to do next and fulfil their plan. They need space to ensure their pedagogy is responsive and to discuss their ethical dilemmas, to develop their professional judgement and therefore to further enhance trust. This work is relational and should be grounded in an ethics of care. As we have said previously, our system is our people.

Teacher education and ongoing learning

Each teacher's education and learning journey, like each learner's, is unique and should be prioritised. This should not be interpreted as referring to an individual teacher's career journey but to the education pathway (comprising both policy-driven and optional elements) and learning development plan a teacher sets out for themselves. Teachers' reflective practice and autonomy in relation to their professional learning needs must be supported. This is not a call for a one size fits all model of teacher education and learning, rather it is a call for a professional education route for teachers post initial teacher education that provides a coherent path of opportunities for ongoing education. By doing this well, space and time would be created for self-directed learning that follows interests and responds to needs. These together provide the framework for continued development of critical thinking and deepening professionalism – a core of evidence-informed, high-quality education complemented by ongoing learning, reflection, research and enquiry. Teachers need access to coherent and consistent programmes and opportunities where difference of thinking is valued and that recognise that teaching is complex work – complex intellectual and relational work in a complex system.

Trust teachers

A future vision needs to speak up for and trust teachers, in recognition of our mature profession, and give policy about teaching back to our profession with the appropriate space and time to think and teach with impact. The system needs to allow for disciplined innovation and to start focusing on what works in which context for which learners. It

requires recognition that teachers are not merely policy implementers; they create, enact and leverage policy in their settings for their learners and communities. Teachers are curriculum makers. The potential of the profession to do this needs to be unlocked. The professional and social capital they bring to their work is integral to successful and effective teaching and learning and, through this, positive outcomes for learners.

Early career teachers

Education, professional development and learning for the teaching profession across the system needs to be rooted in Professional Standards and these should be centrally embedded across policy and development work. The framework for support and learning for early career teachers particularly needs to be enhanced. Almost twenty years since the introduction of the Teacher Induction Scheme we wish to ask the system to come together to consider whether the current route to teacher preparedness through Initial Teacher Education, probation and early career continues to represent the best path to becoming a teacher. Focus is required on this area because we know the early career stage matters – the blueprint for a teacher’s entire career is formed and founded at this stage so we must ensure it is a rich and positive experience.

Teacher educators

We also call on the system to consider what requirements we ask of our educators of teachers. It is insufficient to ask teacher educators to share and perpetuate their own professional experiences and learning, given the period of rapid social change and uncertainty in which we find ourselves. The significance of initial teacher education in Scotland being situated in higher education institutions lies in the potential for teacher educators to draw on new and higher learning, grounded in the immediacy of timely research and scholarship, supported by professional expertise in practice. In some places, these are clear features of practice. In other places, for a range of reasons, these features of practice are less visible. Attention to this aspect of teacher education has the potential to enhance teacher quality with significant benefits for learners.

The teacher education journey

There is a need to plan and undertake robust and ongoing national research about the teacher education journey including a focus on what we know about how teachers learn and how the system values and supports this.

The Teaching Profession’s Engagement in the National Discussion

There are concerns about how teachers can engage fully with this call for views about the future vision for Scottish education. Whilst there have been references to this being a once in a lifetime opportunity to shape our education system, no dedicated time and space has been provided for teachers to participate. Whilst many organisations, groups and individuals have endeavoured to provide opportunities for this space to be created, this issue is also set in the current post Covid-19 context and exacerbated by the impact of resourcing issues.

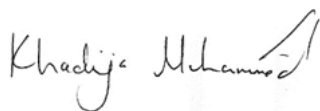
In short, the reality for the teaching profession is that the impact of the global pandemic will continue to influence their world for some time to come and current and new significant challenges will continue to be presented by the fiscal issues impacting on all elements of the system. These concerns are not limited to their impact on participation in the important

National Discussion but extend to considerations of how any change and involvement in change planning will take place and over which period. Change to education needs to impact at the individual teaching context. This needs to be led by the teaching profession supported by a system that actively builds coherence and is clear about what success looks like and how that is shown.

It is our belief that a future vision for Scottish education needs to be holistic, aiming to ensure everyone in Scotland can live their best lives in community with others, with a deep love of learning and the knowledge, skills and attributes they need to flourish. This applies to learners, and this equally applies to the teaching profession. It requires to be set in the context of a lifelong consideration of education and learning needs and recognition that we all exist in a world of unprecedented crises and geopolitical issues. This needs deep and thoughtful reflection, planning and action.

Our system is complex, in places overly complicated, but there is no doubt that complexity needs clarity, coherence, and critical thinking and it needs active involvement of those who engage at the heart of this complexity – the teaching profession. Scottish education needs a refreshed clarity of purpose that deeply recognises that together our people are the system, and that education is about forming people. Trusting the teaching profession is critical to our collective success.

Yours sincerely,



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Inspiring world-class teaching professionalism

GTC Scotland

Comhairle Choitcheann Teagaisg na h-Alba

The General Teaching Council for Scotland is the independent professional body which maintains and enhances teaching standards and promotes and regulates the teaching profession in Scotland. We strive to be a world leader in professional education issues.

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