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The launch of the Early Years Framework in Scotland in 2008 introduced a series of wide reaching initiatives to improve outcomes for children. As part of this objective Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) in Scotland mirrors European policy trends which support the professionalisation of those who work in ECEC. Key to this has been the implementation of many of the recommendations made by Starting Strong II. In this article we consider the repositioning of the Early Years (EY) sector in Scotland and, drawing on empirical research, discuss the experiences of a group of EY leaders who are required to register with the Scottish Social Services Council. The group reported changes to their professional status, in relation to self, peers and fellow professionals, including colleagues from the compulsory education sector. Participants articulated a strong sense that their professional identity was being re-written to meet these new and challenging expectations. However issues of parity, particularly in relation to teachers, and in connection to pay and conditions, were reported and concern expressed over the value placed on the contribution of EY to children's education which will result in difficulty of recruitment and retention of high quality staff required to deliver this service

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Professionalisation through academicisation

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Valuing and developing the early years sector in Scotland

Introduction

The early years (EY) sector has traditionally been undervalued and dismissed as 'only looking after weans' (Mooney and McCafferty, 2005: 223) but a focus in recent times on early intervention and improved outcomes for children has resulted in the professionalisation of this workforce. In Scotland, the government's commitment to improving outcomes for children was articulated in the Early Years Framework (Scottish Government, 2008a). Improving the leadership capability of managers of early years establishments was seen as central to this. Consequently, all managers of such establishments are required to attain the Childhood Practice Award which demonstrates attainment of the Standard for Childhood Practice (QAA, 2007:online). This can be achieved through a variety of options which have been accredited by Scottish Social Services (SSSC): a Professional Development Award (PDA), a practice based degree or postgraduate diploma. This focus on and interest in, the professional development of the leaders and managers as key to achieving the government's ambitions for early years is not unique to Scotland and reflects a general repositioning of ECEC in European policy trends

towards an investment in early years, in part through the professionalisation of those who lead and manage the provision (Honeyball, 2011). The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) recommends that all governments should support and regulate ECEC programmes (OECD, 2006) as ECEC services are viewed as being fundamental to providing children with a strong start in life which will have lifelong benefits and not just seen as preparation for compulsory schooling (OECD, 2012). This has implications for those involved in leading and delivering this provision. *Starting Strong III* highlights that ‘(t)he training and education of ECEC staff affects the quality of services and outcomes primarily through the knowledge, skills and competencies that are transmitted and encouraged by practitioners’ (OECD, 2012:145).

There is some variance across the United Kingdom in the approaches to credentialing for the early years sector, as indicated in Figure 1:

Table 1: Regulation and curriculum across the UK:

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Country	Inspection	Care standards	Regulatory body	Curriculum	Qualifications for Managers
Scotland	Care Inspectorate	National care standards – early education and childcare up to the age of 16 (Scottish Government, 2005)	Scottish Social Service Council	Scotland: <i>Curriculum for Excellence</i> (Education Scotland, online)	L9 (SCQF ¹) Ordinary degree level

¹ SCQF (2003) - Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework –see <http://re-cpd.gladserv.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/03/the-national-qualifications-frameworks.pdf>

England	Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted)	The Day Care and Child Minding (National Standards) (England) Regulations (Ofsted, 2005)	Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted)	<i>Statutory Framework for the Early years Foundation Stage</i> (DfES, 2012)	Level 5 ² award (NQF) Ordinary degree level
Wales	Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW)	National minimum standards for regulated child care (Welsh Government, 2012) and for the inspection of Foundation Phase Providers.	Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales	<i>Foundation Phase: Framework for Children's Learning for 3 to 7-year-olds in Wales</i> (Dept for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills, 2008)	Level 5 award (NQF) Ordinary degree level
Northern Ireland	Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts	Day care settings minimum standards (Dept for Health, Social Services and Public Safety, 2012)	Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts	<i>Curriculum Guidance For Pre-School Education</i> (Dept for Education (NI), 2006)	Level 5 award (NQF) Ordinary degree level

In Scotland the commitment to this agenda has been firmly set through first, the Early Years Framework (Scottish Government, 2008a) a ground breaking document which has arguably changed the provision of ECEC in Scotland; second, the introduction of the *Curriculum for Excellence* (Education Scotland, online) which has established a continuous 3-18 curriculum (*ibid*) and incorporates early years as part of this; and third, the Standard for Childhood Practice (QAA, 2007) which established professional standards for those leading and managing the ECEC sector. This is part of a systems wide approach to educational change and improvement in Scotland and an emphasis on career- long professional learning (CLPL) and leadership development in the *Teaching Scotland's Future* report (2011).

² NQF (2004)– Nation Qualification Framework. Comparison between SCQF and NQF can be found at <http://re-cpd.gladserv.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/03/the-national-qualifications-frameworks.pdf>

Professionalism, professionalisation and early childhood education

The Scottish Government (2007, online) acknowledges that in ECEC, '(t)he term "professional"... (is) a unique core of knowledge, skills, values and commitments that focuses on children and young people's care, learning and development.' Through this, together with the drive to develop the workforce through the acquisition of a degree level qualification, and the traditional understandings of care and socialisation of children in early years settings, it could be argued that a new profession is emerging which blends together traditionally associated professional attributes, skills, qualities and qualifications. However, as Reed and Callan (2011:8) suggest, this raises 'critical questions about how the work is understood and what values are considered important' as the ECEC is reconstructed as a professional workforce. Hoyles (2001) and Bond and Bond (1994) highlight that the term 'professional' is a sociological concept that has many interpretations. It has been suggested that the terms 'profession' and 'professional' are often overused and are interchangeable in relation to many occupations (Hoyles, 2001). Further, Hoyles (2001) claims that there is a lack of precise criteria which distinguishes those who claim professional status from other occupations. However there is a general acceptance of *credentialism*, where specific occupational qualifications promote the acquisition of credentials thus reinforcing learning and upgrading the skills of the workforce (Labaree, 1997:65). Thus conditions of service, qualification and social status, all relate to the perception of who and what is a professional. For Eraut, it extends beyond this to encompass professional accountabilities (Eraut, 1994) and Helsby (1996:138) relates professionalism 'to expertise – the knowledge, skill, competence or character of a highly trained individual, as opposed to one of amateur status or capability.' In addition to these qualities, standards of behaviour and control over aspects of work, in terms of agency and autonomy denote professionalism (*ibid*).

The focus on higher qualifications and professionalisation of the ECEC services seeks to cultivate a workforce that has a greater understanding of child development and service leadership directing and safeguarding the development and progression of young children (Musgrave, 2010). The initiative to reposition the early years sector is still at an early stage, but the result of the investment and focus on staff qualifications by the Scottish Government, indicates that there has been a positive impact on the level of qualifications held by the early years workforce. In 2007 only 3% of the early years workforce in managerial positions possessed the current requirement for a degree level childhood qualification. However inspection

figures published more recently in *Making the Difference* (Education Scotland, 2012:10) show an increase across all provision.

Table 2: CPA qualifications held by staff from 336 centres inspected:

Type of provision	Percentage of centres with a member of staff holding a CPA
Local Authority	27%
Private	28%
Voluntary	13%

While such a rise is only to be expected, given that the CPA is a compulsory requirement, the report notes some positive findings that ‘(t)he BA Childhood Practice Award is beginning to show a positive impact on children’s learning in the early years’ (Education Scotland, 2012: 13). This claim supports previous research such as ‘Effective Provision of Pre-school Education’ (Sylva *et al.*, 2004) which found that ‘children made more progress in pre-school centres where staff had higher qualifications, particularly if the manager was highly qualified’ (Sylva *et al.*, 2004:iv). With the implementation of the *Children and Young People’s (Scotland) Act 2014*, from August 2014, (bringing an increase of free nursery hours from 475 hours a year to 600 hours for all 3 and 4 years old children and an increase in places for vulnerable 2 year olds), the investment and successful professionalisation of early years is not only a positive move but a requirement to deliver effective provision for children.

Whilst the professionalisation of early years services is widely discussed in positive terms it is important to note that there are some who express concerns. The Nutbrown Review (2012: 8) which focuses on the introduction of Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) in England cautions against being too complacent and accepting that increased qualifications and a move towards professionalisation will solve the tension in the pre-5 sector. The report highlights that there remains a lack of parity between early years workers and those who hold Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). Nutbrown does, however, acknowledge that EYPS has contributed to improvements in ECEC but suggests that further work is still required. Brock (2006) examines the focus on the professionalisation of ECEC and she argues that work with young children is more than meeting externally imposed quantifiable Standards. Further, she claims that being an early years

professional should not just be about gaining qualifications, rather moral purpose and commitment to praxis, where the ability to demonstrate ‘attitudes and values, ideology and beliefs, having a code of ethics, autonomy to interpret the best for children and families, commitment, enjoyment and passion for working with children’ (Brock, 2006:2) are qualities that every early years practitioner should display, not just those leading and managing the service. Osgood (2006, 2009) also voices concerns about the imposing of Standards and she claims that setting fixed standards could result in increasing control and regulation by government. Osgood (2006) argues that potentially rigid standards could diminish not only the professional autonomy that early years workers seek, but it could arguably lead to a diminished conceptualisation of what it means to work in the early years sector. Further, she cautions that this could create ‘a situation whereby individuals increasingly judge and limit themselves to a normalised and conformist construction of professionalism’ (Osgood 2006: 9). Thus an agenda more concerned with accountability and performativity is created where both staff and children have to demonstrate impact and improvement through imposed measures and bureaucracy in order to justify economic investment. Caution is then advised by some in relation to an overemphasis on professionalisation which could lead to a hierarchical and stratified service (Davis *et al.*, 2014) and could result in loss of moral purpose and valuable praxis being exhibited by this workforce. This, in addition to the imminent expansion of early years provision with the introduction of the *Children and Young People (Scotland) Act*, 2014, and the benefits and concerns discussed above, have been the impetus for the empirical research reported here. The significance of this has been noted by Education Scotland in its 2012 *Making the Difference* Report:

(t)he commitment of staff to undertaking additional qualifications while in work cannot be underestimated. It is essential that this positive start to helping young children learn, fulfils its potential, and is built upon and improves future achievement
(Education Scotland, 2012:14).

Development of academic programmes

Provision of programmes that enable early years workers to attain the Standard for Childhood Practice is generally located within higher education institutions (HEIs) and research on models of professional learning and effective approaches to work based learning have shaped programme design. The range and level of existing qualifications of early years workers and the diversity of the early years establishments presented particular challenges in the initial phase of development. Early years workers have been found to have ‘a wide and varied set of qualifications, from extensive practical experience without formal qualifications to those with

vocational qualifications’ (Menmuir, 2001; Menmuir and Hughes, 2004). The provision of ECEC can include nurseries, pre-5 centres child-care centres and other care services, family day care and programmes. Such variety in provision, qualification and professional experience has been seen to foster a perception that ECEC is a relatively low status type of work (*ibid*).

In designing a professional learning programme capable of delivering the mandatory requirements, yet meeting the needs of returning adult learners with varying qualifications and experience, a rich body of research on work-based learning programmes was available to draw upon. Practice-based programmes such as the Chartered Teacher Programme and the Scottish Qualification for Headship provided models and approaches (Reeves et al, 2010; Co-author & Reeves, 2007). Reeves and Forde in particular (2005; 2004; 2001) have looked closely at the pedagogies of professional learning and enhanced practice, and through their research identify four interrelated processes that support professional growth and transformation of practice. These include:

Reflection on/in practice: where through professional learning, practitioners are curious about and critically explore practice.

Experiential learning: learning through structured activities to question, try out and enhance practice.

Cognitive development: developing ideas to challenge assumptions and deepen understanding of practice.

Collaborative learning: learning with and through others to enhance practice.

They suggest that professional learning should provide opportunities for all forms of learning and while the combination of processes may vary it is the integration and interaction of all processes over the piece that has been found to be transformative.



Figure 1: Model of professional learning (based on Reeves and Forde, 2004)

This model illustrates the design principles of the learning experience for the BA in Childhood Practice at the University of Glasgow.³ The model places the learner at the centre where autonomous learning is adopted by experienced professionals to bring about change and improvements to practice (Reeves and Fox, 2008). Participants on the programme initially reflect on their practice using the Standard for Childhood Practice (QAA, 2007) as part of the self-evaluation process. From this, learning goals are identified, and linked to the programme's outcomes, as a means for mapping out the components of the professional learning to be undertaken during the course of study. As part of the programme students are required to undertake professional learning tasks related to specific areas of practice for example: leadership approaches used, project management, critique and application of framework documents, policies and legislation. From the courses undertaken students are then able to reflect and apply new knowledge to their practice (Forde, 2011). Collaborative working through professional dialogue with others; fellow students, their colleagues and university staff, supports improvements to practice through the sharing of ideas and experiences thus bringing about changes to practice which positively impact on the learning experience (Reeves and Fox, 2008).

Research on the introduction of mandatory qualifications for leaders of early years establishment in Scotland is limited and the research reported here represents one of the first attempts to capture the impact of this. The study sought to investigate how a group of early years practitioners viewed the introduction of the Standard for Childhood Practice (QAA, 2007). This group formed part of the first tranche of practitioners to undertake the qualification and so their experiences offer an early insight into the impact and implications of this national strategy for workforce development.

Research purpose and methodology

The purpose of this research was to capture the opinions of one small group of eight early years practitioners' views about the changes which have taken place in Scotland. From this group two discussion groups were formed and used as a method to obtain 'first-hand knowledge of the subject under investigation' (Burrell and Morgan, 1979:6) and offered a means of generating qualitative data which encouraged the participants to share their views and perceptions.

³ Other universities and colleges delivering a CPA may adopt different approaches.

The methodology chosen required the identification of a suitable paradigm, at the levels of ontology, epistemology and axiology, as suggested by Burrell and Morgan (1979) and Oates (2006). Situating the study within a suitable paradigmatic framework allows assumptions to be articulated about the project and bring to consciousness the assumptions and principles of the researchers (Weaver and Olson, 2006). Ontologically this project assumed that the practitioners' reality would not be fixed and that their individual experiences, and the meanings they attached to these, would determine 'truths' for them. Accordingly, and epistemologically, through interactions and discussions, knowledge could be constructed which would illuminate the participants' perceptions of the impact of the Standard of Childhood Practice (QAA, 2007) on their professional status. Therefore multiple perspectives would produce numerous truths (Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Schultz and Hatch, 1996). From these understandings, the project locates in an interpretative paradigm, which acknowledges that the explanations and analysis given by the participants, and by the researchers, are based in particular situations and come from individual experiences and perceptions (Putman, 1983; Schutz and Luckmann, 1983). Thus, this project represents issues, opinions, and observations and experience of the early years practitioners and neither seeks, nor claims representativeness or generalisability.

In addition, following Cole (2006:26) the project was 'concerned about uncovering knowledge about how people feel and think in the circumstances in which they find themselves' rather than in 'making judgements about whether those thoughts and feelings are valid.' It is important to note that the aim of this research was to consider how early years practitioners perceived the impact of the Standard for Childhood Practice (QAA, 2007) on their professional position and practice.

The research group and protocols

Following ethical approval for the study, an invitation to participate was issued digitally to course participants (approximately 60 students) in their first year of study on the BA Childhood Practice programme at the University of Glasgow. Following, Holloway and Wheeler (2010:127) who suggest that as a discussion group purpose is to examine a specific topic where those in the group have 'similar roles and experiences' and should be of a size to allow all participants a voice, the first eight participants who responded were selected. None of the participants were being taught by the researchers and it was clarified through both discussion and detailing of the ethical approval process that any involvement would be considered separately from their role as students. At the first session (DG1), it was explained that a

transcript of the recordings, along with notes indicating the codes and themes identified, would be sent by email to each participant. It was acknowledged that each participant would be given a numerical identifier and in keeping with a data-driven approach, the participants could, if they wished, suggest new topics for discussion or contest any of the assumptions. Hence the next iteration was based upon the themes from the previous discussion and, as suggested by Hsieh and Shannon (2005), the participants could raise any issues. The attempt to engage the participants in the construction of the themes and explanations was to allow the information gathered to be plausible, realistic and believable to them (Guba and Lincoln, 2005; Silverman, 2006). It also provided an opportunity for the participants to reconsider their previous contributions and it demonstrated our commitment to them being valued in the research process (Kezar and Dee, 2011). Following Groundwater-Smith and Mockler (2007), in the interest of being ethical the participants could challenge and respond to the data collected and analysed. Whilst no additional topics were suggested, some participants did clarify previous contributions. Being sensitive to the power relationships that existed helped to ensure an ethical response to the research process. This approach to practitioner research, in which individuals are encouraged to participate in the questioning of the data, according to Groundwater-Smith and Mockler's (2007), makes it more credible and valid than had the researcher forced and controlled the discourse.

Data Analysis

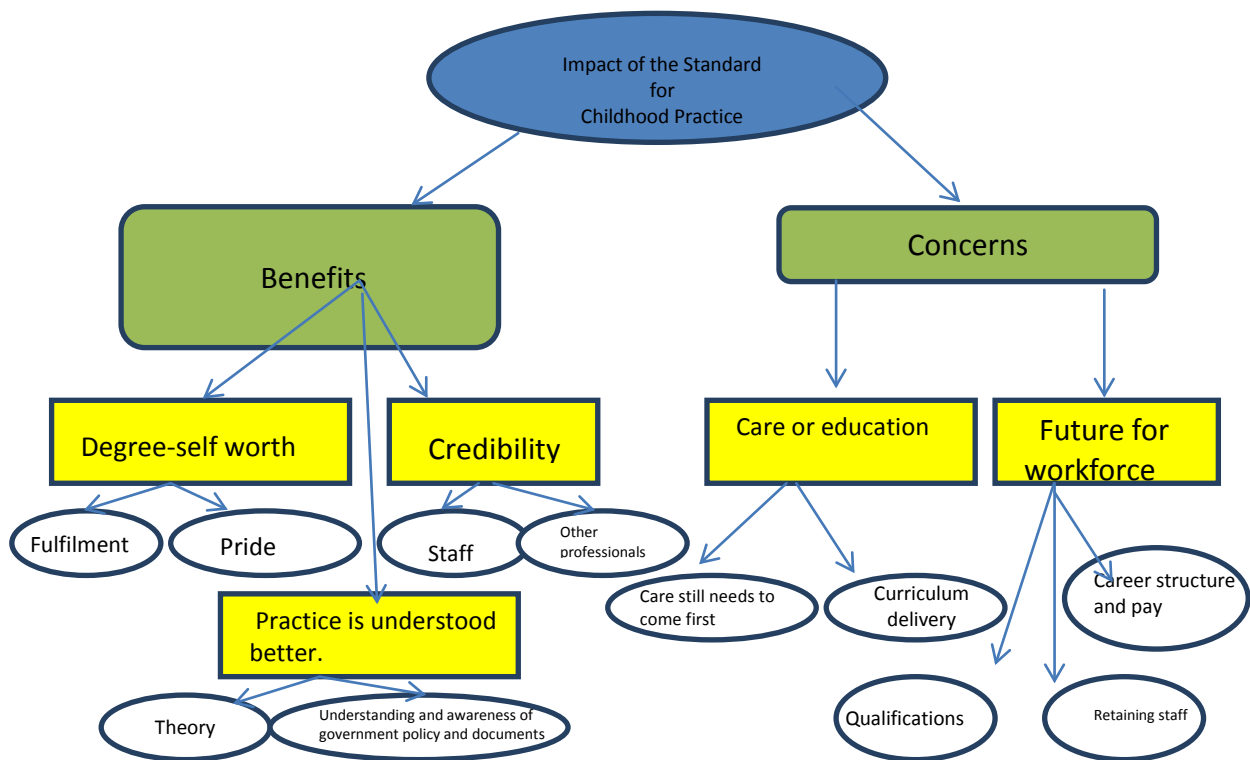
Thematic analysis, which is an approach described by Braun and Clarke (2006), was used to examine the discussion group data using both internal—the data—and external—literature and theory—sources to support the process. The analysis took place after each discussion session was completed, thus the analysis was in two parts, after the first DG and then after the second DG. The process was inductive, with explanations shifting from explicit interpretation of what was said to broader generalisations (Hollinshead, 1996; Denzin and Lincoln, 2005) and, by its nature, it was open-ended and tentative: we were not seeking nor expecting definitive 'answers'. This allowed themes to be generated by data and guided the presentation of the themes (Figure 4). Theory also underpinned the examination and explanations of what was said and gave direction to the identification of codes, categories and themes of transcripts. Braun and Clarke (2006:89) suggest that 'engagement with the literature can enhance your analysis', allowing researchers to be more perceptive and cognisant in the examination of the data.

Providing the participants with a copy of the transcript before the second session follows recommendations by Corden and Sainsbury (2006: 98), who suggest that the examination of the

data and involvement of the participants helps to ‘clarify the links between data, interpretation and conclusions.’ The second discussion session (DG2) was based on these initial findings and gave time and scope for individuals to discuss their perception and knowledge (Morse and Richards, 2002). The findings which below, uses quotes to identify individual voices, and vignettes, to present multiple voices, and together provide a platform to identify participants’ responses to introduction of Standard for Childhood Practice (QAA, 2007) and their views of the changes to their practice or professional status.

The Findings

Figure 2: The findings



As indicated in Figure 4 the participants reported recognised benefits directly resulting from the requirement for them to meet the Standard for Childhood Practice (QAA, 2007) and felt that their credibility and self-worth, along with their knowledge had improved. However, the future development of the profession, where the role of care needs to be recognised and the general future of the workforce, were seen as issues requiring attention. Analysis and discussion of these is provided below, using edited vignettes to illustrate the various issues discussed. These are a

helpful reporting and analytical device, capturing not only the nature of the conversation but also the scaffolding of the discussion amongst participants.

Vignette 1: DG 1: Participants view themselves as being professional.

- P6 *EY is moving up the ladder maybe not as quickly as I would like it but definitely in terms of professionalism and I think the fact of the whole registration thing... I feel people see us as having a professional job.*
- P3 *I had a conversation with some of the staff the other day and we were talking about SSSC registration and somebody had said 'but that it just a paper exercise... why are you doing that?' And I actually found myself saying to them...*
- P4 *justifying*
- P3 *Yes and I was saying the government is trying to raise the status of the EY profession with the degree and (voices of agreement)...I just feel that we are now seen as having knowledge and being professional.*

As illustrated above the participants indicate that the introduction of the mandatory degree qualification provides an opportunity to gain an additional qualification and for their professional role to be recognised. Their comments resonate with the belief that professionalisation can be achieved through the improvement of staff qualifications as it is ‘one of the key indicators of the quality of childcare’ (CWDC, 2008a cited Osgood, 2009: 745). There is evidence that engagement with Higher Education not only helps to develop practitioners’ professional knowledge but can result in the development of self-esteem and self-confidence (*ibid*). Further, the participants indicated that undertaking a degree gives them the confidence to challenge and justify their professional views and understanding of practice, not only with their own staff but, with those from other professional sectors. There are indicators that issues remain regarding the comparative professional status of teachers and early years workers, where the participants view teachers as having more societal credibility and better pay and conditions, which according to Aubrey *et al.*, (2012) has in the past resulted in the workforce feeling demoralised. However, the participants acknowledge that introduction of the SCP (QAA, 2007) and other common policy initiatives including Curriculum for Excellence (Education Scotland, online) and Getting it Right for Every Child (Scottish Government, 2008b) have helped to support an increased level of articulation, understanding and recognition among the sectors working with children. This has, they claim, given them the confidence to enter into ongoing practice debates with other professionals who are involved with children:

Vignette 2: DG1: Participants feel more confident.

- P4 *Now I would say that doing the degree it has given me more confidence to challenge other people that I would never have challenged before*
- P2 *I would do that now too. But I think you think that...you know you've been qualified a long time but you do get kind of fed up with people saying to you. you know that you are just a nursery nurse and that you don't have that level of qualification to take children forward and that is quite annoying but obviously when you think about it doing the degree we are raising the standard of*

One participant referred to SCP document as her 'bible' (DG1, P2) which along with further confirmation from the group shows the value attributed to the guidance it offers. Additionally, they view it as tangible evidence that the job they are doing is complex and of a similar standard to what is required from teachers to meet the Standards for Registration with the General Teaching Council (GTCS, 2012).

Vignette 3: DG2: Participants feel they need to have a set of Standards.

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| <p>P3 <i>you wouldn't say to a teacher.....that you don't have get to degree but you are good with children so there you go, there's a classroom!</i></p> <p>P3 <i>teachers have got to have a degree so why shouldn't we? It says...about how hard it is to do the job we do.....</i></p> |
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Another area which received positive attention from the group of practitioners, was the value placed upon theory and how it could be used by the participants to support and illustrate their choices of professional practice:

Vignette 4: DG1: Theory underpins and supports professional practice.

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|--|
| <p>P2 <i>I think the knowledge has given us confidence...if you don't have the knowledge you can't challenge.</i></p> <p>P5 <i>The BA has definitely widened our knowledge and I think that the theory behind everything we do as leaders and managers, I think it really strengthens your belief in yourself...I feel more confident. I can enter a discussion with staff, I feel now I've got the tools and the skills to back up what I am saying. I can refer to either literature or policies, or research and projects that have happened abroad, and things like that so for me it has definitely given me the confidence and it's made me think about things I do.</i></p> |
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These comments also are reflected by McGillivray (2008) who argues that the professionalisation of early years practitioners will result in the fostering of new confidence. Further, she claims that it will lead to clear articulation of practice based on reflection and reflexivity which creates opportunities for practitioners to listen and respond to each other. This consequently could result in a reconstruction of practice informed by theory (*ibid*). From this some practices can be reaffirmed and validated whilst others can be reconsidered and reconstructed based on practitioners' knowledge, beliefs and values (Reeves, 2010). According to Sachs (2003) this can encourage a transformative contribution to learning and development through the creation of communities of practice, which are actively encouraged in the CPA. Thus those who lead and support other early years staff will help others to develop and improve their practice. This will result in the overall quality of EY provision improving and where staffs all learns to 'take responsibility for leading and managing play, care and learning' (Farrelly, 2010:8).

Through the discussions participants articulated changes not not only to their practice but how they perceive their role. These findings are more widely reflected in Education Scotland's (2012) research '*Making the difference*' which noted that staff feel more confident and motivated. However, as can be seen from Figure 4, the participants highlight some concerns which they believe still need to be addressed.

Concerns expressed

The introduction of *Curriculum for Excellence* (CfE) (Education Scotland, online) as a 3-18 continuous curriculum requires in effect that the first two years is delivered by early years practitioners.. This move towards a continuous curriculum appears to raise some concern about

the direction in which early years provision may be moving and the focus on literacy and maths at this stage of development:

Vignette 5: DG1: Care is necessary

P4 Curriculum for Excellence ...the first thing you should address is health and wellbeing for the children you know so that'scare
P6 I think there's too much onfocusing on the literacy and the numeracy...
P5 ...we need to work together to get children's self-esteem up, for them to feel confident.....we shouldn't be doing sounds and adding...that's for school....our job is education and care
P1 Yes, we can't have one without the other in early years...they dovetail...

The participants' reporting of a focus on literacy and numeracy, during transition, illustrates that often the care dimension of children's progress is viewed as less importance. The practitioners do however appear to recognise and value the role of care in the experiences they offer the children and they endorse it as being essential to successful learning

Vignette 6: DG2: Care for socialisation

P2 if they don't have the care...
P3 first.. then they'll not learn
P4 if they are running about then they're not listening....they need to learn how to behave and be able to play with other children....if they can't then they are not going to listen...so they don't learn...and we do that with them..
P7 because it isn't always given at home...so we've got to do that...it lets them feel secure...and then once they feel cared for they can be ready for learning maths and reading at school..

In addition to concerns about the value placed on care as part of the socialisation process, the participants articulated their belief that care is a prerequisite for learning and is an important part of a child's development. As indicated by Dahlberg and Moss (2005), care can be understood as interactive and social practices which help the child to develop necessary social skills.

Unfortunately care is often seen as being inferior to education and often 'embodied in the different professional statuses of core practitioners' (Laere *et al* : 2012:535). Further Laere *et al* (*ibid*) claim that formal education is often viewed as real 'learning', which is seen as more important and worthwhile, whilst care is a supplementary contribution to children's development. It is clear however that these practitioners value care and believe that it is essential

for children's well-being. For participant P8, in particular, a return to a focus on care might help to address the perceived general decline in children's behaviour:

Dg2 P8 *Maybe if we were allowed to do more care...like we used to... then maybe the wee children will be better behaved and able to learn better...it's so important.*

In addition, the participants expressed some unease about not being formally trained to *teach* pre-maths and early literacy skills. Whilst the participants felt that the BA in Childhood Practice and their vocational qualifications⁴ provides them with valuable knowledge, practice and learning which prepares them for many aspects of their practice, they indicate an interest in more training which would support the delivery of curriculum.

Vignette 7: DG2: Need for EYW to be given training to deliver the curriculum.

P2 *Because we don't have the basics when we are looking at the curriculum because I know I have had to go to my teacher and ask for her advice and for skills for some of the language ...for the ways we present to children because we don't have that knowledge*
P4 *that goes back to what we were saying earlier on if you expect a leader to be at a certain level then need CDOs too have the floor level... need the right training different skills*
P2 *but we haven't been taught howI mean I like the support of the teacher but I have come...and I mean I have friends who are teachers...that their bug bear is unteaching them things that we've taught them ...and it's not that we are doing a rubbish job but it's because we don't know because we haven't been given that training...*
P8 *You know we've the same curriculum as the schools so why are they not giving us the same training because we need it....if we've to do the same curriculum and do it justice it needs to be followed through...with the right help...*

This raises the question of whether in the future staff should have to undertake CLPL in relation to approaches to effective teaching and learning. Participants suggested that this would enable staff to be more fully equipped to deliver the curriculum requirements with confidence. It is clear from the comments that the participants want to do the job properly and that they would like the training support to achieve this. It also has potential implications for the future content of the Childhood Practice Award and whether it should include aspects of effective teaching and learning to support the delivery of curriculum changes? The participants' views in relation to this are expressed succinctly in the following comment:

⁴ SVQ (Scottish Vocational Qualifications – level 2,3, and 4) or HNC//HND

DG2P4 *How can we tackle children's literacy and numeracy attainment when we've not got the basic skills as practitioners...especially if you are leading that provision so...I totally agree it is one thing completing this degree.. but this is something that I've actually thought about...I would really have loved to... I mean I think it has been fabulous and I have really enjoyed it...but I would have liked something to do with effective teaching and learning. I don't want to be a teacher or do their degree but to learn those actual practical skills would have me....I totally agree that we need to be taught this.*

However, whilst there are expressions of interest in training to effectively deliver the curriculum there is unanimous agreement that they do not have to be teachers to develop the skills. Rather, there was a consensus that it should be part of their training and the general views expressed were that it should be part of their degree. For those delivering the degree and for the SSSC, which accredits the award, this raises the question of whether the curriculum and content of the degree programmes require further revision. This could include a compulsory effective teaching and learning component which allows these skills to be assessed and developed by those leading and managing early years provision.

The final concern expressed by the participants related to the future of the workforce. There was a general feeling that pay and working conditions for early years workers should be on a par with their other education counterparts.

Vignette 8 DG2: Pay and conditions.

P7 *If we have to do the degree to be professionals...then if they want to us to improve then they've got to improve our pay and....*
P3 *there has to be an incentive ...especially for those who want to stay on the floor and have got to deliver the curriculum*
P4 *there's got to be something ...there should be something. More of a scale....a structure especially for CDOs*
P5 *well I suppose it is there for teachers so...*
P1 *we need the same... we need to be recognised for what we do...especially now that we have got to have a degree.*

Cooke and Lawton (2008:6) observe 'higher qualifications often do not equate to extra pay, responsibility or professional development.' Despite attaining the CPA, the developments and changes to the delivery of early years provision, there remains a split between the two sectors of compulsory and non-compulsory education, in terms of both pay and status (Nutbrown, 2012). Currently, the Scottish Government's focus is on those who already hold leadership positions and the need for them to gain the required qualifications in order that they are able to register

with SSSC at a leader/manager level (SSSC, online). However, the participants perceive that in the longer term there needs to be a coherent career plan for the workforce. Indeed, the participants raise the question of whether the added responsibilities and the increased complexity of their role will eventually lead to it being necessary for all those entering the ECEC field to be qualified to degree standard. There are precedents for this requirement in professions like primary teaching and nursing where previous generations were not required to be qualified to degree standard (Hevey *et al.*, 2007). Hevey *et al.*, (2007:105) make the point that the phased introduction of higher level qualifications for other professions achieved the aim of ensuring degree level practitioners and they question why there is a need for this initiative to be imposed with a comparatively short schedule for the introduction of the transformation:

(I)n the UK the requirements for Nursing and Teaching progressed from a Certificate (level four) to a Diploma (level five) and eventually to a Degree (level six) qualification over a period of some twenty years.⁵

Currently in Scotland there is much debate about the removal of teachers from many nurseries and the replacement of Headteachers in nurseries with Heads of Centres as cost saving measures (Heads of Centre, for example receive comparatively less pay than Headteachers).

Related to issues of pay parity is a concern is that those who do attain a degree qualification may consider using this as a stepping stone into teacher training (Hevey *et al.*, 2007), where their professionalism and skills may be more readily recognised and where they will receive financial rewards and a more coherent career structure. Whilst the degree qualification is a move to acknowledge the professionalism of leaders in the early years in terms of the work they do in improving experiences for children, there is an obvious need to address pay, and career progression. In the research reported here none of the participants articulated any desire to enter teacher education but no claim can be made that their position is reflected across all those undertaking the CPA. However, the growing professionalisation of this sector requires coherent career pathways which would recognise and encourage staff to be aspirational in their professional development but provide the added benefit of career prospects for those who wish to remain ‘on the floor.’⁶

The participants caution that without a career strategy for early years practitioners there is a danger that the profession will not attract quality staff to deliver this complex service. The focus

⁵ Note these are English qualification levels. For a comparison across the UK please see <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Documents/Qualsboundaries09.pdf>

⁶ ‘On the floor’ is a colloquial expression which relates to unpromoted practitioners who work in early years playrooms.

of concern is that current career guidance advice from the secondary school sector fails to recognise what is required of those who enter this sector and its value is diminished by its traditional association with 'non-academic female pupils':

Vignette 9 DG1: Future for staff in EY

Researcher :*Why do you think you weren't or other people didn't perceive you as professional?*

P4 *...in secondary schools its even now.... the teachers are still saying ' well you know what if you are not very academic you can go into either hairdressing or*

Multiple Voices - childcare

P3 *it's the hair and care brigade they call us ...like you don't have qualifications you go towards either being a hairdresser or working with children*

P7 *I think there's ignorance as well. I don't think high school teachers especially...if they came into nursery and actually seen what was expected of the practitioners it might change their view*

P3 *If we don't get the right students in then....well if children who are good go into teaching because they've got the grades...and we can lose some staff to teaching because they've got a degree now...how can early years get and keep staff?*

These concerns demonstrate that while there has been much progress made in professionalising this sector there remain wider issues that need to be addressed. A key issue is that unless those advising and supporting the career direction of young people consider factors such as suitability, qualifications and interests of young people and the complexity of delivering early childhood and early care, then the early years sector may find it difficult to recruit and retain suitable staff. The repositioning of the early years sector needs to be more widely acknowledged by those in other areas of education, especially the secondary sector, in order that a future sustainable workforce is secured.

Conclusion

The importance of ECEC is increasingly valued and recognised in setting the foundations for life-long learning and education. As highlighted by the participants in the research reported in this article, and by Gestwicki and Bertrand (2011), the nursery is often the first environment beyond the home where children are institutionally socialised. This first assimilation into society is important for creating well-being, supports children's socialisation and learning. In Scotland there has been considerable progress towards strengthening this, through the Early Years Framework (Scottish Government, 2008a) and the introduction of degree level qualification for those who lead and manage ECEC services. Part of this strategy has been to recognise the professional status of early years leaders (Scottish Executive, 2004) and arguably,

one result of this has been a sense from early years practitioners that their professional identity has been re-written and re-constructed to meet these new and challenging changes.

It does however remain to be seen if the status of those in the early years sector will be fully recognised as being comparable to other professions. According to a special review *Early Childhood Education and Care: Developing a fully integrated early years system* (Children in Scotland, 2011) it was found that the three levels of support workers, practitioner and leader/manager, lack a national pay scale or career pathway equivalent to their teacher or other professional counterparts. Davis *et al.*, (2014:32) call for this to be addressed, and suggest that whilst there is a need to invest in those leading and managing early years services there is also a need to develop ‘knowledge and practice.....across all levels of staff.’ In addition, whilst those who work for local authorities are remunerated better than those who work in the private /voluntary sector who are lower paid and have less stable conditions of employment, there is a need for ‘improve(d) pay scales and employment conditions for early years workers in line with their qualifications and experience, so they become a recognised part of the professional workforce serving children’ (Children in Scotland, 2011:19). It would then seem pertinent in order to maintain the progress and motivation of this workforce, that pay and conditions of service are addressed to avoid perpetuation of the belief, by some, that the younger child requires less qualified and quality staff to be ‘lookin’ after the weans’ (Mooney and McCafferty, 2005: 223).

Finally, some future consideration and restructuring of the Standard for Childhood Practice (QAA, 2007) and the CPA may help address some of these issues reported by the participants in this research and whether the content of the qualification should incorporate a specific focus on pedagogical practices to support the delivery of curriculum as well as the leadership components. EarlyYears is a recognised part of the education workforce that supports and leads the delivery of a continuous curriculum from 3-18 (Education Scotland, online) and this, should be reflected in the training received by all those involved. It may be that, in addition to supporting staff in their leadership of learning, an early years pedagogy component to the CPA may bring multiple benefits, as it would not only strengthen the case for equal pay and conditions to those in compulsory education, but it may help to secure the workforce by attracting young people into and remaining in a profession that is held in high esteem.

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