

Article

A Small Country with Big Ambitions: Does This Include the Gifted?

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Abstract: Scotland is a small country with an education system whose roots lie within an inclusive and egalitarian approach to the education of young people. Subsequent legislation, policies, and curriculum frameworks have been influenced by this, and also by the international move toward equitable, inclusive, and quality lifelong learning for all. Supporting those who are highly able/gifted and talented against such a backdrop offers both opportunities and challenges. In this qualitative study, the Global Principles for Professional Learning in Gifted Education are used to interrogate recent key legislation; the current curriculum framework, Curriculum for Excellence, and the National Framework for Inclusion; to ascertain the extent to which this inclusive approach, on paper, affords in-class and school-based support for gifted and talented/highly able learners. The results indicate that the legislative and policy frameworks coalesce with the Global Principles. While legislation does not change practice, it does influence and shape practice, and so can be used as a springboard for developing dynamic, culturally appropriate opportunities for Scotland's gifted young people.

Keywords: inclusion; professional standards; policies

1. Introduction

The World Council for Gifted and Talented Children [1] recently identified ten principles which aimed to “provide guidance when decisions concerning education are being considered by local, regional, state/provincial, or national entities” [1]. A committee of 24 educators from 19 countries was formed, and met to share practice, legislation, and experiences in gifted education from around the world. They used this as a basis for the production of a document that was “intended to be a tool to create positive change on behalf of gifted education” [1]. One of the authors of this paper was a member of the committee. The ten principles map out guidance for decision makers, educators, and teachers relative to high-quality outcomes in professional learning in gifted education. Using the principles as a benchmark, this paper explores whether the existing Scottish legislation, curriculum, and teacher professional standards coalesce with the key components identified within the global principles, so that teachers in Scottish schools could, in theory, provide excellent education for gifted young people.

Scotland has a cautious relationship with gifted education. Scotland is one of four nations that make up the United Kingdom (UK). With a population of 5.53 million [2], it is comparable in size to other European countries, such as Finland, Sweden, and Denmark [3]. Geographically, Scotland comprises heavily populated urban areas, along with sparsely populated rural and island landscapes. The Poverty and Income Inequality in Scotland 2019–2020 report [4] estimated that 21% of working-age adults were living in relative poverty after housing costs in 2019–2022, and that 24% of children were living in relative poverty after housing costs during the same period. Although Scotland is part of the UK, it has always had a separate education system and concomitant legislation to those of its neighbours. It claims a proud tradition of valuing education, and has a particular commitment to providing a socially just and inclusive education system [5]. Against this



Citation: Sutherland, M.; Reid, C. A Small Country with Big Ambitions: Does This Include the Gifted? *Educ. Sci.* **2023**, *13*, 832. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci13080832>

Academic Editors: Kirsi Tirri and Valerie Margrain

Received: 31 May 2023

Revised: 26 July 2023

Accepted: 8 August 2023

Published: 16 August 2023



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backdrop, we will examine how the policy and curriculum landscapes in Scotland allow teachers to address challenges and opportunities in identifying and supporting gifted students in school settings. Questions arise as to whether gifted education, often seen to perpetuate privilege, can be compatible with social justice and inclusion [6].

Before delving into the current situation in Scotland, it is important to give a brief outline of the historical development of education in the country. As Alexander [7] (p. 5) says, “No educational policy or practice can be properly understood except by reference to the web of inherited ideas and values, habits and customs, institutions and world views, that make one country distinct from another”. This is perhaps even more important given the contentious nature of gifted education (see, for example, Smith and Campbell [8], Borland [9], Worrell and Dixson [10]). There is a recognition within the field of gifted education that “. . . education for the gifted is interwoven with a country’s philosophical and political views, its cultural history, and its economic base” [11] (p. 288). For example, in the wider cultural and educational context in Scotland, giftedness is a term that has never sat comfortably within the inclusive approach to education. Indeed, it is generally not common terminology in education in Scotland, where the term “highly able” is more commonly used [12]. However, as will be demonstrated later in this paper, highly able learners are considered as part of the additional support need provision within Scottish education [13]. It is recognized that, like other learners with additional support needs, highly able learners may require temporary or lasting additional provision, in order to develop their potential. Ainscow [14] argues that “every learner matters and matters equally” (p. 124), and that this is a hallmark of inclusive education. Scotland’s past is intertwined with the particularities of modern practice. It is important, therefore, to understand the past, in order to understand the present, and discuss the future.

A Brief Historical Perspective

Egalitarianism has long been at the heart of Scottish culture and education. The historical, philosophical, and political narratives which underpin this grounding principle are firmly rooted in the belief that education is a right for all [15]. As far back as 1496, the Estates of Scotland approved the first education act and, by 1560, following the publication of the First Book of Discipline, there was aspiration to have a teacher (schoolmaster) in every parish, and a college in larger towns [16]. The tradition of providing education for all was not without its issues, and Humes [17] (pp. 233–234) notes that “by the mid-nineteenth century the old parish system of provision was no longer able to cope with the problems thrown up by industrialization, urbanization and rapid population expansion”. As a result, state intervention was deemed necessary and, in 1872, compulsory universal primary education was established for children aged 5–13, with secondary education following suit in 1945 [18] (pp. 1, 23). As early as 1826, Scottish universities were engaged with widening the participation of economically disadvantaged students, aiming to produce professional men whose work in Scotland and beyond would drive national prosperity [19].

Comprehensive education became the norm in the 1970s. The support for comprehensive education continued and, in the national debate about education that took place in the year 2000, there was overwhelming support for comprehensive education [20]. In 2022, a National Discussion on Education [21] took place, and the results of this will be published soon. Public events related to the most recent National Discussion were attended by the authors of this paper, and the conversations that took place suggest that the provision of high-quality education for all has remained an important goal for Scotland.

It can be seen that Scotland has a long tradition of valuing universal state education, and it could be argued that it has served the country well, including the gifted and talented. A number of Nobel prize recipients hail from Scotland—for example, Sir William Ramsay (chemist); Sir Alexander Fleming (biologist and pharmacologist), Sir John Boyd Orr (scientist and authority on nutrition)—with one of the most recent, Professor McMillan, being awarded the Nobel prize for chemistry in 2021. It was widely reported at the time that he praised the “brilliant” education he had received, saying “I am one of those people

who's incredibly lucky to have come through that system" [22]. Hayward [5] (p. 39) argues that a "commitment to community and the right of every child to be part of that respect for education and for teachers; and a desire for social justice" lie at the heart of contemporary Scottish education. Legislation (see, for example, refs. [23–25]) and the curriculum framework [26] would seem to support this claim. However, as indicated earlier in this paper, a focus on equity and social justice could well serve to disadvantage the gifted and talented, when gifted education is considered to serve upper-middle-class learners [27,28]. Gallagher [27] (p. 32) suggests that the tensions between excellence and equity in education systems "have often been in a serious struggle for scarce resources. . . . Because the problems of equity have greater immediacy than does the long-term enhancement of excellence, this struggle has often been won by equity". However, the perceived value of the gifted label to high-status parents is still a significant issue for some education systems. Dixson [29] describes how the social value and prestige of the gifted label still lead to the distortion of attempts toward gifted education in the US, citing a 2019 study by Grissom, Redding, and Bleiberg, which illustrated both a considerable over-representation of the most affluent in GATE programs, and the resource expenditure which affluent families deployed in order to bring this about. Scottish education must grapple with the complex challenge of excellence without elitism. One aspect particular to Scotland that could serve the gifted well, while considering the excellence and equity conundrum, was the reconceptualization of special educational needs that took place in the early 2000s. Scotland moved from a deficit-driven special education model to one that considered a range of factors that could lead to a young person requiring additional support for learning, with being gifted included as a factor [15]. The result in this shift in thinking was a new Act that placed a duty on Education Authorities to identify, and provide for, those deemed as requiring additional support [24]. This change in legislation took Scotland further down the inclusive pathway that it was pursuing, and offered an opportunity for Scotland to address the excellence and equity issue for gifted young people. Nevertheless, the implementation of this Act has been the subject of debate, with a recent review [30] making key recommendations for the future. Among other things, it recommends that teachers understand "their role in the identification of additional support needs and the need to adapt their teaching to meet the needs of children and young people" [31]. Within the discourse in Scotland, there is space and opportunity to ensure that the gifted are considered part of the move toward a more just and equitable education system.

2. Materials and Methods

A qualitative methodological approach was employed in this study, namely deductive coding [32]. To answer our research question—can existing Scottish legislation, curriculum and teacher professional standards support teachers in Scottish schools to provide excellent education for gifted young people?—it was necessary to select and analyze the key legislation and documentation that guide teachers in Scottish schools. The documentation included:

- Legislation
- Curriculum for Excellence (CFE) [33]
- The National Framework for Inclusion (NFI) [34]
- General Teaching Council of Scotland (GTCS) Professional Standards [35]

All documents included in the study are open access; they are publicly and freely available to educators and parents on the Scottish Government and GTCS websites. The legislation was selected due to its salience for gifted education. The researchers reviewed key legislation from the year 2000 to the present. The following Acts were selected, as they have driven forward the inclusive education agenda in Scotland:

- Standards in Scotland's Schools, etc. Act (2000) [23]
- Additional Support for Learning Act (2004, 2009) [24,36]
- The Children and Young People Scotland Act (2014) [25]
- Education Act—Education (Scotland) Act (2016) [37]

Key curricular documents were also identified. Although Scotland does not have a national curriculum enshrined in law, curriculum guidance is available in the form of Curriculum for Excellence, in particular the ‘refreshed narrative’ [33]. This guidance is built on values and principles [26], and was designed to offer a “seamless curricular experience for pupils aged 3–18” [15]. Curriculum for Excellence is well embedded in Scottish schools, and so was selected for inclusion in the study. The National Framework for Inclusion was incorporated because it picks up on the change in the legislation for the (Additional Support for Learning (Scotland)) Act, which was broadened to include highly able learners [15,38]. Finally, the GTCS Professional Standards were selected, as they are an integral part of teacher professionalism, and act as a “benchmark for professional competency” [35].

Using the 10 principles as our pre-determined codes, we interrogated the documentation, legislation, and frameworks in Scotland. In this way, the authors sought to examine the key components that guide practice in schools in Scotland, to see whether, in principle, the legislative and curricular frameworks, when used appropriately, can support gifted young people. The 10 principles are:

(1) tiered content, (2) evidence-based, (3) holistic, (4) broad, (5) equitable, (6) comprehensive, (7) integral, (8) ongoing, (9) sustainable, and (10) empowering.

Taking inspiration from the work of Jolly and Robins [39], the researchers independently coded the materials, using the principles. A deductive coding approach was deployed, using the 10 principles as codes. Where the description and language used in the documentation and frameworks addressed the principle/s, they were included for review. The researchers then met to discuss the coding noting agreements/disagreements, thus helping to establish trustworthiness in the process [40]. A summary table of results was then used to form the basis of the Results section of the paper (see summary in Table 1, below).

Table 1. Global Principles and Scottish legislative, curricular, and teacher education context.

Global Principles	Legislation	CfE	NFI/GTCS
1 tiered content		X	X
2 evidence-based	X	X	X
3 holistic	X	X	X
4 broad	X	X	X
5 equitable	X	X	X
6 comprehensive	X	X	X
7 integral	X	X	X
8 ongoing	X	X	X
9 sustainable	X	X	X
10 empowering	X	X	X

Notes: X indicates the Global principle is discernable in the document

3. Results

The overall Scottish legislation, curriculum guidance, National Framework for Inclusion, and teacher standards allow for the development of appropriate practices and support, as identified by the Global Principles (see summary in Table 1, below).

The above table includes: Legislation—Schools Act (2000)—Standards in Scotland’s Schools, etc. Act (2000) [23]; ASN Act (2004, 2009)—Additional Support for Learning Act (2004, 2009) [24,36]; Childrens Act (2014)—The Children and Young People Scotland Act (2014) [25]; Education Act—Education (Scotland) Act (2016) [37]; CfE—Curriculum for Excellence (CFE) [32]; NIF/GTC—The National Framework for Inclusion (NFI) [33]; General Teaching Council of Scotland (GTCS) Professional Standards [34].

The results are presented in three sections. Section 3.1 focuses on aspects of Scottish legislation that pertain to HAL. It examines to what extent this legislation supports the

education of HAL, in accordance with the Ten Principles [1]. Section 3.2 explores the Scottish Curriculum for Excellence [26,38], and the opportunities it offers for curriculum development and pedagogy, to meet the needs of HAL, in accordance with the Global Principles. Section 3.3 examines the professional standards for teachers in Scotland, highlighting the importance of career-long professional development in developing pedagogies and educational organization to meet the needs of gifted learners, in accordance with the Global Principles.

3.1. Scottish Legislation

Gifted education in Scotland is supported by an increasingly rights-based legislative approach to education. Scottish ASN legislation is deeply rooted in a rights-based model of education, which affirms the rights of gifted pupils to appropriate education [15]. MacAllister [41] (p. 520) describes the Additional Support Act [24] as a “landmark moment” in extending human rights to children, so that those who required additional support to develop their talents and abilities to their full potential must be provided with that support. Subsequent amendments to the Act continue to explicitly mention those ‘who are particularly able or talented’ [25,36,37]. The Acts also granted stronger powers to children’s voices, so that a child older than 12 who was judged competent could independently assert their right to additional support provision [42]. Archard [43] suggests that age-based tests can be arbitrary, and should be supplanted by competence tests. This idea has obvious salience for gifted young people, who may achieve a sophisticated and nuanced understanding of their own educational needs significantly earlier than might be expected. However, this does also invite the question of who should set these competence tests, what competencies should be valued, and whether a test which measures intellectual understanding might give a false appearance of competence in a very young gifted learner, whose ability to intellectualize outstrips their emotional development or social understanding. Valuing children’s voices requires educators to not only listen when competent highly able children claim their right to additional support for learning, but also to engage reflectively with what competence means for this unique group of young learners, and to adapt their teaching and curriculum in light of this reflection.

The examination of key Scottish legislation on Additional Support Needs (Additional Support for Learning (Scotland) Act (2004, 2009) [24,36], Education (Scotland) Act (2016) [37], Standards in Scotland’s Schools etc. Act (2000) [23], and The Children and Young People Scotland Act (2014) [25] indicated that Principles 2–10 could be supported by the Scottish legislation. Principle 3—Holistic is well supported by the Child’s Plan approach outlined in The Children and Young People Scotland Act (2014) [25], which requires teachers to consider a range of wellbeing concerns when engaging in educational planning. For gifted children, these could include difficulty relating to same-age peers, frustration and boredom during class, the need for academic challenge, and emotional sensitivity. There is a notable depth of support for Principle 5—Equitable, particularly with regard to equitable education for pupils who have experienced socio-economic deprivation. In the Scottish context, socio-economic deprivation and child poverty [44] are a long-term governmental focus, and are perceived as a significant equity issue. While, in some contexts, references to low income or socio-economic deprivation can be understood as ‘deracialised terminology’ [45] (p. 82), this is not the case in Scotland. Scotland’s historically low racial diversity [46] means that high rates of persistent child poverty [44] are not generally understood in terms of race. Principle 7—Integral is also notably well supported through the requirement in the Standards in Scotland’s Schools, etc. Act (2000) that “education is directed to the development of the personality, talents and mental and physical abilities of the child or young person to their fullest potential” [24] (Section 2). This commitment requires equitable opportunities for talent development for all students, including the highly able, and initial teacher education and CPD opportunities, which support that development. Principle 10—Empowering is, importantly, supported by the legislative emphasis on young people’s developing capacity and rights to “make, communicate and

understand decisions and their implications" [36] (Section F13). Children's educational agency is not determined by age and stage, but instead by capacity.

3.2. Curriculum for Excellence

In their recent review, the OECD described Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) as a common philosophy, from which schools had the freedom to develop their own curriculum, to help students to develop the "knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to thrive in the 21st century" [47] (p. 3). The common philosophy is that of the four capacities: confident individuals, effective contributors, successful learners, and responsible citizens. Although critiqued as a 'mantra' of Scottish education, rather than a curriculum rationale [48] (p. 351), the four capacities remain central to the 'refreshed' CfE [33]. The curriculum is currently divided into a Broad General Education (BGE) phase and a Senior Phase, with the BGE divided into four Levels, with associated Experiences and Outcomes, and the Senior Phase characterized by opportunities to study for qualifications such as Nationals, Highers, and Advanced Highers.

Even from its earliest incarnations, CfE was identified as having the potential to support the education of gifted pupils. Sutherland [49] (p. 204) noted that "in the hands of an experienced and knowledgeable pedagogue", CfE's flexibility and scope for local interpretation had the potential to allow for effective gifted education. The "continuous process" of translating curricular aims into an effective pedagogy leaves considerable scope, too, for teacher development, to lead to a reflective, responsive classroom practice. For example, Principle 3—Holistic meshes successfully with the CfE Four Capacities: confident individuals, effective contributors, successful learners, and responsible citizens. Promoting confident individuals could lead teachers to recognize the maturity, sophistication, and knowledge that often characterize gifted learners. The promotion of effective contributors could encourage teachers to actively teach the skills necessary for working with others, thus supporting highly able learners in overcoming barriers to successful working with same-age or cognitive peers. The Capacity of successful learners stresses the importance of teacher responsiveness to the pace and challenge required for all pupils to learn in class, including the most able. Teachers could incorporate resources and practices from gifted education to support such responsiveness. The responsible citizens Capacity allows for engagement with challenging and controversial social issues, while taking into consideration the potential emotional impacts, which are significant for understanding and responding to the potential sensitivities of gifted learners. Principle 4—Broad is also potentially well supported by the CfE emphasis on cross-curricular and interdisciplinary learning, which could lead to a focus on the development and deployment of deep disciplinary learning that are necessary to support meaningful interdisciplinary working [50]. Helpfully, although the levels within CfE are grouped around age and stage, it notes from the first to fourth level that some learners might achieve these "earlier or later for some", thus acknowledging different rates of learning [51]. It is concerning, however, that Early Level notes that some might achieve the goals later than their chronological age, but there is no consideration given to young learners having the potential to meet these earlier. The importance of ensuring an appropriate level of challenge for young learners is well documented in the gifted literature [52–56]. This omission has the potential to see young gifted children overlooked in the early stages of their educational career.

3.3. Teacher Education, Teaching Standards, and The National Framework for Inclusion

The teaching profession in Scotland is an all-graduate profession and, since 2011 [57], has been moving toward Master-level. There is a desire within Scotland that teachers should continue to develop and hone their skills across their career. In 2001, teachers were expected to undertake 35 h continuing professional development (CPD) per year, following the publication of *A Teaching Profession for the 21st Century* [58]. As part of this drive for professional development and a raising of standards, the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) developed a suite of standards that spanned each stage of the

career trajectory. The GTCS is an independent body, whose remit is to set and monitor the professional standards of teachers. The initial version of the standards included Provisional Standards for those in Initial Teacher Education (ITE); the Standard for Full Registration, a benchmark for those undertaking their induction year; the Standard for Headship; and the Standard for Chartered Teachers. These standards were revisited and “refreshed and restructured” in 2021 [35]. The purposes of the professional standards are:

- to create a shared language for teaching professionals
- as a benchmark for professional competency (Standard for Provisional Registration and Standard for Full Registration)
- to develop and enhance professionalism
- to support career-long professional growth
- to provide a framework for Initial Teacher Education, probation, and leadership pathways and professional learning programs
- support for self-evaluation and reflection for teachers in, and aspiring to, formal leadership roles, and contribution to dialogue about leadership and management
- to inform the process of recruitment and selection
- to ensure and enhance public trust and confidence in the teaching profession [35]

However, translating standards into practice can present challenges to schools, teachers, and school leaders. In acknowledgement of this, and of the challenges facing teachers as they work with diverse groups of learners, a Working Group was established by the Scottish Teacher Education Committee. The Working Group was originally set up to address issues related to the learning of young people with dyslexia, but this was felt to be too restrictive, and did not reflect the shift that had taken place with the Additional Support for Learning (Scotland) Act (2004) [24], as mentioned previously. Instead, the Working Group suggested that the shift in provision through the Act would be better addressed through the development of a National Framework for Inclusion (NFI) [34]. The Working Group comprised teacher educators from across all the Initial Teacher Education (ITE) institutions in Scotland [38]. Working in this institutionally collaborative way was unique, and allowed a range of expertise to contribute to the work. Crucially, there were contributions from an expert in high ability [15]. The approach adopted by the NFI was one that used a series of questions related to inclusion and inclusive pedagogy. The questions were differentiated across the career path trajectory, and reflected the stages of development and responsibility across the span of a career. This approach was selected as it was deemed to offer schools, teachers, and managers/leaders the opportunity to contextualize the questions, and make them culturally and pedagogically relevant to their situation [38]. Building on the work of the GTCS, and acknowledging the updating of the standards, the National Framework for Inclusion (NFI) was revised to reflect the changes in the standards, with the third version being published in August 2021 [34].

As we have argued, Scottish legislation and policy rarely mention gifted and talented/highly able learners explicitly. But neither do they mention, explicitly, any other specific group of learners. Scotland is not alone in this, as studies conducted in Australia [39] and Italy, for example [59], demonstrate. The exclusion of labels was seen as important within the NFI, as it allowed teachers to focus on learning, teaching, and pedagogy rather than on categories and labels [60]. In relation to high-ability/gifted and talented in Scotland, the term gifted is acknowledged within the literature as being problematic [61,62], particularly in countries, such as Scotland, that believe themselves to be egalitarian [63]. Given the absence of identified groups of learners within the Scottish documentation, and given the problematic nature of the terminology, it could be argued that, in fact, a more flexible approach that has its roots in inclusive pedagogy [64] offers teachers opportunities to consider and support gifted/highly able learners, or those learners who are twice exceptional in a more contextualized way. Indeed, the inclusion of labels could have led to the exclusion of the gifted and talented/highly able, as research suggests that the gifted and talented/highly able are unlikely to be considered when a deficit view of support is applied [65]. Although policy has moved away from an ‘individual deficit’ focus [66],

approaches to Additional Support for Learning which focus on individual deficits do persist in Scottish education [65]. The Morgan Report on Additional Support for Learning in Scotland [30] noted that even the language of additional support perpetuates a focus on deficits, which stigmatizes young people, and could exclude the gifted.

The NFI is linked to the three broad areas covered by the Standards:

1. Being a Teacher in Scotland
2. Professional Knowledge and Understanding
3. Professional Learning

These three areas are underpinned by interdependent themes:

1. Being a Teacher in Scotland: Professional Values, Professional Commitment and Standard for Full Registration
2. Professional Knowledge and Understanding: Curriculum and Pedagogy, Professional Responsibilities
3. Professional Learning: Curriculum and Pedagogy, The Learning Context, Professional Learning

The questions in the NFI document were framed around these themes.

For the purposes of this paper, a sample of the questions within the document was selected from across the broad areas. Questions were also selected from each stage of professional development: student teachers (ST), all teachers (AT), and experienced teachers (ET). Where questions apply to all three categories, there are different criteria for each stage:

1. Standard for Probationer Registration: Student teachers have knowledge and understanding of. . .
2. Standard for Full Registration: Teachers have an in-depth knowledge and understanding of. . .
3. Continuous Lifelong Professional Learning: Experienced Teachers have an enhanced and critically informed knowledge and understanding of. . .

In this way, there is understanding that there should be continual professional development across the trajectory of a career. The questions were then linked to the 10 Global Principles [1], and consideration was given to what this might look like in practice. Just as with curricular documents and legislation, the NFI consistently aligns with the 10 Global Principles. For example, Principle 2—Evidence-Based is well supported through the emphasis on understanding theoretical approaches to pedagogy and learning, which supports the development of theory-informed classroom practice which can support the learning of all students, including the most able. Principle 7—Integral is also particularly applicable to ensuring that highly able learners are discussed in authority, school, and departmental meetings, and that they are included in policies and plans. The NFI offers scope for Scottish teachers to engage deeply and productively with education for the most able.

4. Discussion

Looking across the legislation and documentation presented above, it can be seen that a key stakeholder in the support of gifted learners consists of the teacher, and their mediation of the curriculum and legislation in order to appropriately challenge the gifted learner. Indeed, it was in recognition of the importance of the teacher that the WCGTC Global Principles for Gifted Education [1] were developed. The Scottish Additional Support for Learning legislation, national curriculum guidelines, and standards for Scotland's teacher registration offer tremendous scope for effective gifted education, as Sutherland and Stack [15] have argued. However, to meaningfully support gifted children and gifted education in practice, rights-based legislation must overcome what Riddell and Carmichael describe as “professional resistance” [42] (p. 489). Resistance to rights-based additional support needs is often the focus for parents of gifted children in discussion with the authors of this paper. Teachers must therefore be supported to embrace gifted pupils' voices, as part of effective educational provision. The construction of the teacher standards allows for

continuous learning across the trajectory of a career, and so teacher education can offer a route toward teacher acceptance—and celebration—of rights-based gifted education.

CfE's curricular flexibility and emphasis on the local interpretation of national philosophy has the potential to both benefit and inhibit gifted learners in the classroom. They could benefit from the non-linear approach to learning, but be disadvantaged by those who fail to utilize the flexibility on offer. Since its inception, the implementation of CfE has been criticized for offering insufficient time and support to teachers, who were left to make sense of the new curriculum [67]. Hedge and MacKenzie [68] argue that teachers require education and support in order to become interpreters of the curriculum. When they receive such support, CfE offers scope for significant pace and challenge to be embedded for all, and particularly the gifted. A thorny issue remains: how and when are teachers introduced to such support, and how can this be done to include all?

The WCGTC Global Principles [1] offer a framework for developing support for teachers. As argued elsewhere in this paper, the context and culture have to be considered within in any educational development, and so linking the principles to already established frameworks becomes important. In a Scottish context, The NFI "proposes... minimum expectations of student teachers and fully registered teachers, and proposes an aspirational framework for more advanced teachers, including teacher educators" [34] (p. 6). The framework is also grounded in Scotland's inclusive approach to education and, as such, it does not highlight specific groups of learners but, instead, asks questions that allow managers, teachers, teacher educators, and students to interrogate the standards, and think about what this means in practice. However, the questions in the framework offer opportunities to consider the pedagogical, social, and emotional needs of gifted and talented/highly able learners, as well as the needs of other identified groups. The issues that arise for experienced professionals differ to those of the other two groups, and the questions reflect the depth of understanding that is required at each level, and so can be used to tailor the content of any professional learning activity. The NFI offers schools the opportunity to analyze and audit their practices and policies and, crucially, allows schools to do this while considering how it supports all learners. Professional learning materials that support the development of children's rights were produced by the Scottish Government in 2023 [33]. Within the training sessions, article 29—Education must develop every child's personality, talents and abilities to the full [69]—was cited. As we have seen in previous sections, this description was picked up in subsequent legislation in Scotland. Thinking about the development of talents and abilities for all, including the gifted and talented/highly able, is consistent with the legislation and international protocols.

The drawback to an open-ended approach is that those using the framework must look at the questions through the lens of the gifted and talented/highly able in order to utilize the framework in a way that supports this group, but teachers report feeling unsure of how to best support gifted and talented/highly able learners [70,71].

5. Conclusions

Overall, there is potential for alignment between the 10 Global Principles and the legislation, curriculum, and inclusion frameworks in use in Scottish education. This suggests that, on paper, Scotland has a strong basis from which to build inclusive and appropriate educational opportunities for gifted and talented/highly able learners. However, the implementation of policies and legislation is acknowledged as problematic, with different interpretations being applied by different stakeholders [72,73]. Plucker et al. [74] (p. 210) argue that policies "serves as the framework and social context in which all other educational activities take place". Policy is therefore driven by wider societal issues and contexts and, as they go on to point out in the article, "because there are always perceived needs, policy makers (and communities at large) make value judgments all the time about whether a perceived need does or does not need to be addressed" [74]. A current and overriding concern for Scottish education is the growing attainment gap between those in the poorest areas and those from more affluent areas. Scotland is not alone in being concerned about this

gap. However, perhaps less spoken about in Scotland and further afield are the excellence gaps that exist within the gifted and talented/highly able community [75]. If Scotland is to pursue the excellence and equity agenda, it cannot ignore highly able learners in its pursuit. Scotland's career-long professional learning trajectory, as discussed above, serves as a platform for embedding in classroom practice the ideas contained within the global principles for gifted education.

A review of the implementation of the Additional Support for Learning (Scotland) Act took place in 2020 [76]. The independent review elicited the views of stakeholders across the educational community. The recommendations found that the "implementation of Additional Support for Learning legislation is over-dependent on committed individuals, is fragmented, inconsistent and is not ensuring that all children and young people who need additional support are being supported to flourish and fulfil their potential" [76]. While this could be seen as a damning indictment of the approach Scotland has taken, the report makes clear that the intentions of the principles, policies, and guidance are sound. "The challenge is in translating that intention into thousands of individual responses for individual children and young people facing different learning barriers in different family, home, community, nursery, school and college situations" [76]. In contributing to the report, the frontline staff were clear about the things that would support them:

- Values-driven leadership
- An open and robust culture of communication, support, and challenge underpinned by trust, respect, and positive relationships
- Resource alignment, including time for communication and planning processes
- Methodology for the delivery of knowledge learning and practice development, which incorporates time for coaching, mentoring, reflection, and embedding into practice [66].

This report is shaping the development of practice and support for those who require additional support for learning, and it is through its development that we see the potential for gifted children to be recognized and supported. It is encouraging that the report is congruent with some of the 10 Global Principles for professional learning in gifted education, in particular 5—equitable, 8—ongoing, 9—sustainable, and 10—empowerment. As the Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities develop an action plan in response to this report, it is worth noting that highly able learners do appear as part of the Professional Learning Framework [77], through which teachers are guided to resources to build in-depth progression into the curriculum. In addition, authors of this paper have been invited to contribute to a number of Government-led initiatives and reviews. These include the Additional Support for Learning Network, chaired by the Scottish Government, The National Discussion, and the Independent Review of National Qualifications and Assessment, with specific reference being made to highly able learners in the final reports of both the National Discussion and the Review of Assessment. In addition, we were asked to invite parents of gifted young people to attend specially formed parents' meetings on the Review of Assessment, as it was recognized that these voices were missing from the discourse. These contributions may seem like small steps. Advocating for gifted education outside of these recognized channels within a country such as Scotland is unlikely to prove effective in getting this group of learners recognized and supported. Thus, we have argued that the national legislation and frameworks could be used as a springboard for developing dynamic, culturally appropriate opportunities for Scotland's gifted young people. Educating teachers about the gifted is not just a nice idea, but a moral imperative. Effective teacher education about the gifted, as outlined in the global principles, is required by the inclusive principles that are driving the wider educational context in Scotland. The seeds of development for highly able learners are there, but it remains to be seen whether they flourish and blossom, or whether school environments prove to be stony ground.

Author Contributions: M.S. and C.R. contributed equally to the writing and analysis. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: All the documentation is open access.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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