



**General Teaching Council for Scotland:
Professional Standards and Professional Code Consultation**

20 December 2019

About us

Giving all children in Scotland an equal chance to flourish is at the heart of everything we do.

By bringing together a network of people working with and for children, alongside children and young people themselves, we offer a broad, balanced and independent voice, create solutions, provide support and develop positive change across all areas affecting children in Scotland.

We do this by listening, gathering evidence, and applying and sharing our learning, while always working to uphold children's rights. Our range of knowledge and expertise means we can provide trusted support on issues as diverse as the people we work with and the varied lives of children and families in Scotland.

Children in Scotland is pleased to respond to the General Teaching Council for Scotland's (GTCS) consultation on the refreshed Professional Standards and new Professional Code and to be able to contribute to the ongoing development of key documents in supporting teachers across Scotland. Given the role of the documents in setting benchmarks for Scottish teachers, they form a key component of the quality of education received by children and young people nationally.

Our response will focus on how these documents will support teachers to work with children and young people. It will also focus on how children and young people can have an ongoing engagement with the Code and Standards to participate in the review processes of their teachers.

From January 2018 – April 2018 Children in Scotland worked with 591 children and young people from across Scotland to find out what they think makes a good teacher¹. Our report for the GTCS has been used to inform the refreshed Professional Standards. This response will assess the extent to which we believe these views have been reflected in the new documents.

¹ <http://www.gtcs.org.uk/web/files/the-standards/Children-In-Scotland-Review-of-Professional-Standards.pdf>

We have also recently been commissioned by GTCS to engage with children and young people as part of the current public consultation. We are pleased that children and young people have been included in this review process, as we advocated in our previous work with the GTCS². We will submit the report based on this work in January 2020.

Children in Scotland conducts a range of other policy and project work in relation to education. We have recently helped deliver the Scottish Learner Panel with the Children's Parliament, Scottish Youth Parliament and Young Scot. Our Wellbeing Resource for teachers³, produced in partnership with the Scottish Government, was published in August 2019. We have also contributed to a range of recent calls for evidence by the Scottish Parliament's Education and Skills Committee. Where relevant, this response also draws from this wider insight with regards to children and young people's views and experiences of education in Scotland.

General comments

As we have highlighted in our introduction, Children in Scotland is currently working with GTCS to engage children and young people in the discussions about the refreshed Professional Standards for Teaching and the new Professional Code.

In 2018 this work explored what children and young people believed made a good teacher. Data was gathered through direct work, a resource booklet and a survey. Our work highlighted four key research themes;

- Nurturing
- Rights Respecting
- Professional Skills and Knowledge
- Positivity and Energy

We believe these four areas are effective as a way of looking at key aspects of a good teacher and highlight the central priorities from the perspective of children and young people themselves. We will use these four headings as a method of assessing the Professional Standards and Professional Code in terms of how well they are reflected within them.

Our 2018 report highlighted that children and young people have high expectations from teachers and feel they need to demonstrate a breadth of skills and knowledge.

Overall, we believe the findings from this work are well reflected within the proposed refreshed Professional Standards and Professional Code. We see clear links between the findings and both the Values and Commitments contained within the Professional Code. There are also obvious links across the wider suite of documents that make up the Professional Standards.

However, it is worth highlighting that in some areas the link between the views of children and young people as articulated in our report and the draft Standards and Code could be slightly clearer. Children in Scotland believes that the refreshed Standards and new Code could be strengthened by making direct reference to the views of children and young people within our report from 2018. It is our view that this

² <http://www.gtcs.org.uk/web/files/the-standards/Children-In-Scotland-Review-of-Professional-Standards.pdf>

³ https://childreninscotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/201902_GIRFEC-Toolkit_11Note.pdf

would lend weight to the Standards and Code as teachers would be able to see where these interact directly with what children and young people want from a teacher in practice.

Nurturing

We are particularly pleased to see Nurturing Relationships contained within section 3.2.2 of the Full Standards for Registration. We are also encouraged to see many of the key words used to describe a nurturing teacher from our work with children and young people used within the Values and Commitments. This includes caring, compassion, fairness and kindness. In particular we were pleased to see reference made to the need for teachers to care about the wellbeing and development of children and young people.

*'If a teacher is kind it travels across the class and puts everyone in a good mood.'*⁴

This gives us confidence that GTCS has reflected on/responded to the views of children and young people within the refreshed Standards.

Rights Respecting

The concept of rights respecting teachers within our 2018 report included showing respect individually to pupils but also ideas like equality and equity, getting to know pupils as individuals, respecting individual boundaries, how to support individual learning needs and also recognition of the UNCRC.

We believe aspects of this are covered well within the Professional Standards and Code. We are pleased to see direct reference to the UNCRC both in the values section of the Code and also within the Full Standards for Registration (in particular section 3.1.5 on Partnerships for Learning) and the UNCRC recognised in Career Long Professional Learning. The Standards and Code move on from rights as purely related to Pupil Voice and now take into account wider processes such as evaluating lessons.

We believe that the need for a range of learning environments is well covered within the Professional Standards and Code. This is included in sections 2.3.1 on Pedagogical Theories and Professional Practice and several sections on 3.1 on Teaching and Learning including 3.1.1, 3.1.2, 3.1.3, 3.1.4 and 3.1.5 of the Full Standards for Registration. We believe that having a range of opportunities and options for children and young people is essential to ensure all learners are able to succeed. We are pleased to see the weight this is given within the Standards and Code.

We are also encouraged to see the importance of relationships with pupils emphasised within sections 3.1.2 and 3.2.2 of the Full Standards for Registration and within the Values. However, at present we believe the aspects we have highlighted above focus on engaging with the pupil and their life and needs but does not highlight the need for a relationship where teachers see pupils as their equal and also talk about their lives to a certain extent. In particular we are concerned that the use of 'Professional Relationships' within the Values could be misconstrued in this

⁴ <http://www.gtcs.org.uk/web/files/the-standards/Children-In-Scotland-Review-of-Professional-Standards.pdf>

regard; it would be of value to fully explore what ‘professional’ means in this context and be explicit that this can include telling children about your own life.

‘If a teacher respects me I want to do well and show I deserve respect.’⁵

This would be in keeping with the views of children and young people as articulated to Children in Scotland in 2018.

We are also pleased to see the need to provide extra support for learners who need it contained within the Values. Children and young people shared with us that this is an essential aspect of a ‘good teacher’ in their view and experience.

‘Makes you feel more confident when you’re getting the help you need.’⁶

Professional Skills and Knowledge

The Professional Skills and Knowledge theme of our work included the basics of professionalism such as politeness, smiling but also ensuring that teachers listened to children and young people in their class, explaining things understandably, providing one to one learning opportunities and involving pupils in decisions about learning goals.

We believe that aspects of this are covered in the Professional Standards and Professional Code but also that the GTCS could strengthen the Standards and Code across some aspects of this. Sections 3.2 on Classroom Management of the Full Standards for Registration articulates clearly the importance of welcoming classroom environments and that teachers must be organised and prepared.

As we have touched on previously in this response, the Professional Standards and Code also cover the need for a range of learning opportunities. However, it may also be of value to explicitly mention the need for different methods of taking forward the same piece of work that suit each child or young person.

‘A good teacher uses different examples so the children can understand better. [They use] different resources [books, videos, pictures] or create posters to help understand.’⁷

Sections on involving pupils in decisions about their learning such as 3.1.5 could also make specific reference to involving children in setting their own learning goals. Given we have mentioned this in response to the rights respecting theme, it may be worth the GTCS giving further thought to the structure of this section and laying out clearly the sorts of activities pupils can and should be involved in, in line with our suggestions here and in our 2018 report.

Positivity and Energy

Children and young people clearly articulated to us that a good teacher should be enthusiastic and make it exciting to learn. They will use creative approaches and real-life examples to make it engaging and relevant. We believe these concepts are well reflected in the Professional Standards, including within a range of sections of the Full Standards for Registration such as 2.3.1, 3.1.1, 3.1.2, 3.1.3 and 3.2.1.

⁵ <http://www.gtcs.org.uk/web/files/the-standards/Children-In-Scotland-Review-of-Professional-Standards.pdf>

⁶ <http://www.gtcs.org.uk/web/files/the-standards/Children-In-Scotland-Review-of-Professional-Standards.pdf>

⁷ <http://www.gtcs.org.uk/web/files/the-standards/Children-In-Scotland-Review-of-Professional-Standards.pdf>

*'I think a good teacher is enthusiastic and creative – they make it exciting to learn.'*⁸

This is also well reflected within the Values section of the Professional Code. The Values highlight the need for using social and real-world issues to expand on learning.

However, we would also refer back to our previous comment in relation to the rights respecting theme about mutual two-way relationships. For teachers to feel comfortable telling funny stories or anecdotes they must be willing to relinquish some of the hierarchical aspect of the relationship and view pupils more as their equal.

*'Engaging teachers are the best, so teachers who share stories and can joke about things often make the classroom environment less stressful and more productive.'*⁹

1. The new introductory document clearly sets out the purpose of the refreshed Professional Standards and the Professional Code.

Children in Scotland believes that the new introductory document sets out the purpose of the refreshed Standards and new Code for professionals.

We have concerns about how clear and accessible the document would be for other stakeholders including children, young people and parents because of the language used. It is worth highlighting here that we believe the lack of accessibility for children, young people and families will have a large knock-on effect on how the documents can be used. We will discuss the language used through the Professional Standards and Professional Code in greater depth in response to Q5.

Children in Scotland is also concerned that children and young people are not mentioned within the range of images/infographics included within the introductory document. While we appreciate the Professional Standards and Professional Code are ultimately aimed at teachers, we believe not including children and young people at the centre of the images means they miss highlighting visually the purpose of the teaching profession. We would encourage the GTCS to reconsider the infographics to demonstrate how the various aspects link to the outcomes and experiences of children and young people themselves.

2. The refreshed Professional Standards and the Professional Code set out clearly what it means to be a teacher in Scotland.

Children in Scotland believes that the Standards and Code are helpful in setting out what it means to be a teacher in Scotland. We see it as an ambitious view of what it means to be a teacher as they provide an illustration of the breadth of the role - the skills, knowledge, values and commitments involved in doing the job well and its importance in shaping the lives of the children and young people teachers work with.

It is clear that children and young people have high expectations for teachers and the teaching profession and we believe that the Professional Standards and Code demonstrate and reflect this.

⁸ <http://www.gtcs.org.uk/web/files/the-standards/Children-In-Scotland-Review-of-Professional-Standards.pdf>

⁹ <http://www.gtcs.org.uk/web/files/the-standards/Children-In-Scotland-Review-of-Professional-Standards.pdf>

However, as we have touched on in the general comments section of this response we believe the Standards and Code could be made clearer by including the views of children and young people within the documents to provide context. Our report on the views of children and young people in 2018 provides a range of quotes and examples which could be used to strengthen these aspects of the refreshed documents¹⁰. Use of quotes would bring the document to life and exemplify the impact that teachers can and do have. They would show how the broad themes and educational theory within the Standards and Code relate to day to day teaching and ensure they are cognisant of the needs and views of children and young people.

3. The Professional Standards inspire public confidence of the teaching profession?

N/A

4. The Professional Code inspires public confidence of the teaching profession?

N/A

5. Feedback from the national conversation suggested that the language used in the Professional Standards was 'too complicated' and 'ambiguous'. This has been addressed and the language in the refreshed Professional Standards and the Professional Code is appropriate, accessible and easy to understand.

The Scottish Government will bring forward a Bill to fully incorporate the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) before the end of the current parliamentary session. Article 12 of the UNCRC articulates that children and young people have the right to be involved in decisions that affect them¹¹. We believe this extends to involvement in discussions and decisions about school and teacher improvement. It is therefore essential that the GTCS and the wider teaching profession are prepared for this and the Professional Standards and Code are prepared in such a way as to support children to engage with them and ensure their rights under the UNCRC are met.

The Professional Standards and Professional Code clearly lay out what children, young people and parents can expect from a teacher in Scotland. The Introductory Document acknowledges this key role and identifies that:

*"The Professional Standards and the Professional Code set the benchmark for the behaviours, qualities, knowledge and capabilities expected of all teachers."*¹²

Therefore, it is essential that children, young people and families are able to engage with these documents to support them to have a clear understanding of what they can and should expect from their teachers. Communicating the Professional Standards and Professional Code in a more accessible manner would support this aim.

¹⁰ <http://www.gtcs.org.uk/web/files/the-standards/Children-In-Scotland-Review-of-Professional-Standards.pdf>

¹¹ <https://downloads.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/unicef-convention-rights-child-uncrc.pdf?ga=2.239399171.1210192357.1576600183-289933329.1497964764>

¹² <http://www.gtcs.org.uk/web/FILES/the-standards/Draft-Introduction-to-Standards-Code.pdf>

Children in Scotland is concerned by the language used within the Professional Standards and Professional Code. While we are aware this language is likely to be accessible and understandable for teachers, we believe it should be made more accessible for children, young people, families and other stakeholders.

In our report in 2018 we advocate for children and young people being involved in the ongoing review of their teachers and believe the Professional Standards and Professional Code are central to this. It is logical that they will be used to assess/reflect on teacher performance and learning and used to plan for ongoing professional development. Processes should be put in place to find out the views of children and young people relating to their teachers and this should feed into annual reviews and other discussions about teacher and school improvement.

However, for them to be meaningfully involved in these processes the language and content of the documents will need to be made more accessible. Accessibility for children and young people and parents means better accessibility for all. This could include the presentation of the content such as use of better use of images, colour-coding, differently spaced layout, numbering of sections/boxes etc.

It is our view that the Values and Commitments are the ideal place for involving children and young people in discussions about teacher performance. In our experience they are understood by children and are broad enough to allow all pupils to engage with. However, this will only be possible with changes to make these more accessible. An example from the Values and Commitments will illustrate this point:

Value – “Bringing social and world issues into learning environments to engage learnings and enhance learning and achievement”¹³

Commitment – “Promoting and demonstrating inclusive practices to support the needs and abilities of all learners, and managing my assumptions, biases and personal beliefs, as well as challenging those of others, to ensure professionalism.”¹⁴

The language contained in the value and commitment highlighted above is not accessible for children, young people or parents. It demonstrates an issue running through both of the two sections of the Code and highlights the need to reconsider the language used throughout.

Children in Scotland is also concerned that that Values and Commitments are not clearly defined as concepts and that this is reflected by language used in both. In some areas we feel there is crossover between the two sections of the Professional Code and there could be a clear distinction between the two. Conceptually there is a similarity between the statements contained in both and we are concerned this makes it unclear for teachers about what they relate to and how to put them into practice. We believe that the Values could be short words/phrases and the Commitments could be made clearer by making each statement into an explicit practical application of a Value.

The issues identified relating to the accessibility of language within the Professional Standards and Professional Code is reinforced by early evidence from our current

¹³ <http://www.gtcs.org.uk/web/FILES/the-standards/Draft-Professional-Code.pdf>

¹⁴ <http://www.gtcs.org.uk/web/FILES/the-standards/Draft-Professional-Code.pdf>

work with children and young people, feeding into the refresh of the Professional Standards and Code. This will be explored in greater detail in our report to be published in January 2020.

6. The refreshed Professional Standards and Professional Code are aligned with current thinking in Scottish education around teacher professionalism. See 'GTCS Position Paper: Teacher Professionalism and Professional Learning in Scotland'

N/A

7. The inter-relationship between the refreshed Professional Standards and Professional Code is clear.

Children in Scotland believes that the relationship between the Professional Standards and Professional Code is clear. We understand the link between the two and feel this should support teachers to use both documents, including as part of the ongoing annual review of teachers. We believe the Values and Commitments could/should be used as a way for teachers to identify areas they wish to improve on with the Standards then used to drill down into specific areas of focus within this. GTCS should consider what additional documentation it can provide to support this, relating to ITE and CLPL.

8. The inter-relationship between the refreshed Professional Standards and Professional Code is coherent.

Please see our response to Q7.

9. The refreshed Professional Standards and Professional Code clarify the importance of professional values which are at the heart of teachers as professionals.

Our 2018 work with the GTCS specifically focused on the Values aspect of the Professional Standards. Ultimately, Children in Scotland sees the Values as central to the Standards and Code as a whole as they shape the key principles that underpin both.

We believe that the importance of the Values is well articulated within the refreshed Professional Standards and Code. As we have touched on previously within this response, we believe the Values reflect our work with children and young people, and we see clear links across the key headlines of the values and our work carried out in 2018. While the words Integrity, Trust and Respect and Social Justice were not used by children in our work, we believe that as top-line statements they reflect key aspects of the discussions.

We also believe the views of children and young people are reflected across the Values themselves. The values as articulated reflect the skills, knowledge and understanding that children and young people articulated to us. We have considered how well the Values reflect our work in 2018 in the general comments section of our response. In general, we believe that our work in 2018 is well reflected within the Values and we are confident the GTCS has considered how this can be included.

The GTCS should consider how it can strengthen the language of specific Values. For example, we believe that "Listening to and including learners in decisions that affect them" could be more robust and encourage teachers to act upon the views of children and young people. This could read as "Listening to and including learners in decisions that affect them and acting on their views", reflecting best participative practice and avoiding tokenism.

This Value could also be clarified by exemplifying what sort of decisions this includes; at present it does not make clear what sort of decisions it refers to. Children in Scotland believes that children and young people should be included in decisions about their own learning, the classroom environment and also about the life of the wider school community.

As we articulated previously in this response, we believe that the language of the Values could be made more accessible and the relationship between the Values and the Commitments clarified (we feel there is too much similarity/crossover at present). Given the central role of the Values within the work of teachers we believe it is essential that children and young people are able to understand them so they can understand whether their teachers are meeting these in children's everyday experience.

10. The refreshed Professional Standards and the Professional Code clarify the importance of professional commitment which is at the heart of teachers as professionals.

Participants in our previous work clearly identified that teachers should be interested in supporting change and have the skills and knowledge to do their job to a high standard. This was reflected within the key research theme: Professional Skills and Knowledge.

Given the importance placed on this by children and the fact that the GTCS wishes to include this within the Introductory Document we believe that slightly more emphasis could be placed on this section.

However, we believe the Professional Code makes the importance of professional commitment clear. The table laying out the 12 commitments is helpful and articulates the range of practices required by teachers to do their job well and support Scotland's young people. We are also pleased that the 12 commitments also reflect the views of children and young people as contained within our 2018 report.

It is worth highlighting that for these statements some context and clarity might support teachers to understand how these relate to their practice. Different teachers may read these commitments in different ways and as such we believe that direct reference to the views of children and young people may support the commitments. One key area where we believe this may be helpful is around commitment 11:

"Engaging in professional relationships with learners that respect professional boundaries"¹⁵

¹⁵ <http://www.gtcs.org.uk/web/FILES/the-standards/Draft-Professional-Code.pdf>

Children and young people were clear that they felt a positive relationship with their teacher involved and knowing more about their lives such as likes, dislikes and hobbies, and teachers asking pupils about what is happening outside of school. However, we are concerned that on current reading and without context commitment 11 will not be taken in this way. We believe context from the 2018 report would support teachers to understand what pupils want in this area of relationships and to navigate what can be a complex part of working with children and young people.

*'It is important to care about pupils' lives outside of school.'*¹⁶

11. The refreshed Professional Standards provide a framework that supports professional learning as well as high-quality PRD.

Children in Scotland believes that the Professional Standards provide a clear framework for professional learning, laying out the expectation for teachers with regards to Professional Learning and PRD. We are also supportive of a range of the content within the Standards; we are pleased to see that it encourages teachers to engage critically with the content of their course and understand its wider context. In 2018 we heard from children and young people that they wanted teachers to be able to link learning to the real world and we are pleased to see this within the Standards.

We believe the Standards articulate an ambitious vision of what is expected of teachers with regard to Professional Learning and PRD, and that it is important to have this view for teachers in this area. However, it is worth highlighting here that if teachers are to be fully supported to engage in ongoing professional development, they also require less contact time and more opportunities to access training and learning opportunities. Through our wide-ranging work we are concerned that at present the Standards provide a framework that may be unrealistic for teachers to achieve within the current context.

Also, we believe GTCS could make the inter-relationship between the three Standards documents clearer. There could be an explanation at the start of each document as to how and when teachers could use these documents in relation to each other. For example, is it a linear pathway?

12. The refreshed Professional Standards provide a framework that promotes professional learning as well as high-quality PRD.

See response to Q11.

13. The refreshed Professional Standards inspire career aspirations.

N/A

14. The refreshed Professional Standards support career aspirations.

N/A

15. The refreshed Professional Standards and Professional Code support teacher leadership at all levels.

¹⁶ <http://www.gtcs.org.uk/web/files/the-standards/Children-In-Scotland-Review-of-Professional-Standards.pdf>

We believe that the refreshed Professional Standards and Professional Code clearly place the teacher in a central role within the school community and within the learning of all their pupils. As we have stated throughout this response, we believe that the Professional Standards and Professional Code present an ambitious view for teachers and this extends to their leadership role.

However, Children in Scotland also believes that more emphasis could be placed on the role of teachers to support leadership by children and young people of their own learning. In our 2018 report for the GTCS children and young people were clear that they wanted an opportunity to take forward their learning in a way that suits them. Children in Scotland believes greater weight could be given to this within the Standards to emphasise its importance.

*'If I make a mistake they explain what I did wrong and help me to understand for next time.'*¹⁷

Our Leaders of Learning project laid out a model to support schools to create an environment where children and young people are leaders of their own learning¹⁸. We would encourage the GTCS to consider how the findings can be used to support teachers in this area.

We would also encourage the GTCS to give further thought to how it can support leadership throughout a teacher's career through this suite of documents. Children in Scotland believes all teachers should be leaders within their own context; this involves taking ownership of their own work, development and also aspects of the school. It is worth highlighting here that this will also support the wider aims of empowerment within the standards.

At present the Standards feel as if they consider leadership in a traditional, hierarchical sense where teachers assume leadership after a period of time and by gaining a promoted post. It feels as if teachers are encouraged to progress 'through' the Standards and eventually move into the Standards of Leadership and Management. This linear pathway contributes to a sense of hierarchy between the documents and the feeling that leadership is specifically something for staff in management roles as opposed to something for all teachers. It would be of value to reconsider how leadership can be encouraged across the whole suite of documents.

16. The refreshed Professional Standards and Professional Code inspire teacher leadership at all levels.

Please see our response to Q15.

17. The refreshed Professional Standards and Professional Code support empowerment at all levels.

Please see our response to Q15.

18. The refreshed Professional Standards and Professional Code inspire empowerment at all levels.

¹⁷ <http://www.gtcs.org.uk/web/files/the-standards/Children-In-Scotland-Review-of-Professional-Standards.pdf>

¹⁸ <https://childreninscotland.org.uk/leaders-of-learning-2013-16/>

Please see our response to Q15.

19. I think I would use the refreshed Professional Standards to

Children in Scotland is not able to respond to this question as we are not the intended user of the Professional Standards. However, we would take this opportunity to reiterate our view that the Professional Standards should be used as part of ongoing review and development processes, with children and young people at the heart of these processes.

20. I think I would use the Professional Code to

Please see our response to Q19.

21. Are there any support or guidance materials that would help you better understand and engage with the Professional Standards and Professional Code?

N/A