

Scottish Government submission of 11 August 2023

PE2037/A: Improve literacy attainment through research-informed reading instruction

I am aware that the petitioner of the above petition previously submitted Petition No PE1668, which also called on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to:

- *Provide national guidance, support, and professional learning for teachers in research-informed reading instruction, specifically systematic synthetic phonics*
- *To ensure teacher training institutions train new teachers in research-informed reading instruction, specifically systematic synthetic phonics.*

The Scottish Government's approach to improving literacy is being taken forward as part of the "National Response to Improving Literacy" which is referenced within the [National Improvement Framework 2023](#) publication. The National Response to Improving Literacy partnership board is overseeing the development of a series of recommendations aimed at enhancing teachers' professional learning in literacy and improving further the learning experiences of children and young people.

The skill of decoding is foundational to learning to read and it is important that systematic phonics approaches are used in Scotland's schools to support young children to develop this skill. Education Scotland and local education authorities continue to work with educators at all levels of the system to share understanding of research-informed approaches to Early Reading, to enhance teachers' access to research-informed support and to facilitate professional learning in order to improve early reading pedagogies.

Guidance

The petitioner may be interested to know that Education Scotland already has work underway on a range of new resources relating to early reading.

These are designed to promote teachers' understanding of early reading as a complex interplay of skills and background factors. Part of this will outline how systematic phonics approaches, including SSP, form one

aspect of an overall pedagogy for early reading. In line with other items of guidance relating to Scotland's curriculum, the resources are being developed within a broader context which seeks to empower schools to adapt their approach to meet the needs of individual learners. In creating the guidance, Education Scotland officials are consulting a range of stakeholders with an interest in early reading in order to use their feedback to inform the development process.

Initial Teacher Education

In relation to initial teacher education (ITE), the petition asks that the Scottish Government "ensure teacher training institutions train new teachers in research-informed reading instruction, specifically systematic synthetic phonics".

Initial Teacher Education is the foundation of a teacher's professional learning journey where they will focus on developing an enquiring and collaborative approach to allow them to grow as professionals. It is the responsibility of the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) to accredit all ITE programmes against the Standard for Provisional Registration (SfPR). Under this role, the GTCS aims to ensure that ITE programmes support student teachers to develop their knowledge, understanding and practice and to ensure that student teachers are exposed to a range of pedagogies to teach literacy and reading instruction.

The SfPR highlights the need to have knowledge and understanding of pedagogical theories and how to apply educational research into practice, with student teachers expected to engage critically with research to challenge and inform professional practice. Importantly, the SfPR is not prescriptive or directive in nature.

A [Self-evaluation framework for Initial Teacher Education](#) designed to support universities to demonstrate the quality of their existing ITE provision and to identify areas for improvement has been developed in partnership between Education Scotland, the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) and the Scottish Council of Deans of Education (SCDE). One of its aims is to ensure students are supported to develop a detailed understanding of their professional responsibilities in relation to literacy. Literacy was a theme of the Framework in 2022 where universities shared good practice and challenges in developing understanding of concepts, skills and purpose of literacy amongst student teachers. A recent research report ([MQuITE](#)) led by SCDE and

GTCS shows that ITE graduates are highly confident in their literacy knowledge and skills.

It is important that Scottish Ministers respect the independence of individual ITE institutions and do not prescribe the detailed content of courses. Whilst mindful of the distinct roles and independence of ITE institutions, I have asked officials to write to the Chair of the Scottish Council of Deans of Education to request an update on the current provision of ITE in relation to teacher skills and confidence to support children's reading in primary schools.

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