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Dear Sue Webber MSP

Scottish Universities Inclusion Group, on behalf of Scottish Council of Deans of Education, response to The Scottish Parliament, Education Children and Young People Committee request for evidence for ASL Inquiry (March 2024)

As a subgroup of the [Scottish Council of Deans of Education](#), the Scottish Universities Inclusion Group have prepared this response to the request for information about how inclusive education practices are covered in initial teacher education (ITE) courses in Scotland in order to prepare new teachers to support the diverse needs of children in the classroom.

We note that, while the approaches fostered on our ITE programmes lay the foundations for a teacher's career, it is equally important to recognise that qualified teachers require to be supported by appropriate levels of resourcing and opportunities for career-long professional learning, such as Master's study, in order to meet the diverse needs of all learners.

Outlined below are some key areas of work relevant to this area which demonstrate the continued focus, development and review of inclusive practices through Initial Teacher Education.

The Scottish Universities Inclusion Group

The Scottish Universities Inclusion Group (SUIG) is a subgroup of the Scottish Council of Deans of Education (SCDE). In existence since 2007, the purpose of the group is to support a coherent national approach to inclusion within teacher education. It has representation from all 11 Scottish universities that offer ITE courses. This includes specialists in inclusive education and course leaders. Details of work of SUIG can be found on the main [SCDE](#) webpage (under *Our Work*).

The National Framework for Inclusion (3rd edition)

With support from the Scottish Government, the Scottish Universities Inclusion Group designed and published the National Framework for Inclusion which provides a tool for teachers at all stages of their career to reflect on their inclusive practice, in the context of the GTCS Professional Standards for Registration (3rd edition published 2024 and hosted on our behalf by the GTCS <https://www.gtcs.org.uk/professional-standards/national-framework-for-inclusion/>). To support

colleagues in using the Framework in their teaching, a five-step reflective cycle of how the Framework questions might be used has been developed (available via the link above). Additionally, a companion resource has been written 'Working with the National Framework for Inclusion: a guide for teacher educators' and is freely available via the link above.

Across our ITE institutions, the Framework is used within our programmes to encourage students to engage in reflective discussions and activities to support their learning and development regarding inclusive pedagogies and practice. Examples of this are included in Appendix 1. Members of SUIG led a workshop at the Scottish Educational Research Association Conference in November 2022 introducing the revised Framework and discussing ways of working with it in ITE.

[Our approach to inclusion](#)

We are pleased by the holistic inclusive nature of the request. This aligns with our concerns that reports of the work of Schools of Education that focus on specific curricular content within ITE programmes, relating to different categories of children (which we have been asked to provide in the past), fail to capture the embedded ways of working that support the inclusion of all children. We outline here the inclusive pedagogical approach (Florian and Spratt, 2013) which underpins the National Framework for Inclusion and is intrinsic to teacher education across Scotland. This aligns with the GTCS Professional Standards, through which inclusive pedagogies and practice are embedded across all aspects of the Standards. To receive GTCS accreditation, each university's course, while unique to their particular context, must align with the Professional Standards and prepare its students to graduate with eligibility to meet the Standard for Provisional Registration and move into their probationer year. Without a core underpinning of inclusive pedagogies and practice being evidenced in accreditation application paperwork and through the accreditation events, universities would not receive accreditation to teach these courses.

[The Inclusive Pedagogical Approach](#)

The inclusive pedagogical approach starts with an expectation that teachers will encounter a wide diversity between children and young people in every classroom. The challenge faced by teachers is how to adopt pedagogical approaches that foster the inclusion of all children in the life and learning of the classroom in ways that do not stigmatise or mark any learners out as different. Rather than asking teachers to categorise children into groups, and provide something additional or different for some children, we ask teachers to consider how to extend what is available to everybody, so that all children can participate on equal terms. Difficulties faced by children are viewed as opportunities for teaching, rather than deficits in children. This encourages teachers to adapt their approaches to be able to include whoever is in their class, rather than viewing any difficulties in learning as reasons for treating children differently.

The ways of working that encourage participation of all children permeate all aspects of school life, and therefore are addressed in many contexts in ITE provision. For example, if discussing assessment, learning theories, classroom management, or any other aspect of teaching and learning, we would emphasise the consideration of diversity within that context. Similarly, in curricular areas, such as numeracy, history or science, we ask students to consider how to teach these subjects in ways that ensure that everybody can participate.

What we describe here goes beyond developing knowledge about specific categories of children who may be at risk of discrimination or who may have specific difficulties in learning; it is a whole way of thinking about teachers' responsibilities for all children that infuses all of their work. Whilst we do not deny that some groups of children may share common challenges that teachers should be aware of, we believe that all children have much in common and that we must respond to these differences in a supportive and inclusive manner. We would argue that, unless schools and teachers foster the type of approach we advocate here, no amount of knowledge about different categories of children will be sufficient to provide a welcoming and supportive school environment for those children.

We are seeing teacher educators who model inclusive pedagogy in their own teaching, and who surface this in their discussions of what an inclusive classroom would look and feel like. Hence, we would argue that a good grounding in the theoretical concept of inclusive pedagogy and its practical applications is needed for teachers to be prepared to respond positively to the wide diversity of children that they will all encounter throughout their career.

National ITE Autism materials

We are working together to implement the recently published national initial teacher education materials for Autism across all 11 providers' programmes. This involves taking common core materials which were developed by a working group led by the National Autism Implementation Team (NAIT) and supported by the Scottish Government and Education Scotland, personalising these and using them to enhance the teaching which already focuses on autism and neurodiversity in our programmes.

SUIG Research Project: Mapping Inclusive Pedagogical Approaches across Scotland's ITE programmes

Between 2018 and 2020, the Scottish Universities Inclusion Group undertook an unfunded research project which mapped the ways in which the different ITE providers prepare new teachers to develop their inclusive pedagogical approaches. Findings from this study show that, in addition to specific teaching inputs that focus on inclusion, inclusive pedagogy is evident in the ways lecturers work with students. We have reported on this research at conferences and are seeking publication of our work in a peer-reviewed journal. Please see Appendix 2 for examples of the maps created. We would welcome funding to update and extend this research.

With best wishes

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Appendix 1: Examples of the National Framework for Inclusion being used in ITE programmes

University A

When designing a tutorial about children’s rights, building on a broader discussion about children and childhood are configured in society generally and within the Scottish education system specifically, the following three questions from the NFI 3rd edition (for student teachers) supported the development of the tutorial:

- Do I know and understand the principles of the UNCRC and their interconnected nature?;
- What does it mean to adopt a rights-respecting perspective in my emerging classroom practices?;
- How is a rights-respecting culture reflected in my practices, texts used, and other means of communication?

Reflecting on these questions, and in conjunction with further reading, the following question grid was created for the students to stimulate discussion and reflection. The students could choose to focus on one question or engage with several of them.

Can you simultaneously respect the rights of all children (and adults) in the classroom? If so, how? If not, where do the challenges lie?	The UNCRC rights are to be considered as an interconnected ‘whole’ – what opportunities and challenges does this create?	Do children receive more rights as they grow and mature? If so, should this be the case?
Are children’s rights Universal?	Is respecting children’s rights about giving children everything they want (i.e., child as customer)?	How well poised are we in Scotland to advocate for all children’s rights?
Do children enjoy the same rights consistently across all contexts (home, school, community settings)?	What does it mean to adopt a ‘rights-respecting perspective’ in practice? What might that look like?	What types of decisions might children be involved in making when at school? How do you do this in an authentic / meaningful way?

University B

'Inclusion and social justice' are covered early in the 'school and professional studies' module in the PGDE (Primary and Secondary) programmes. As part of this input, students are introduced to the National Framework for Inclusion and engage with the 5-step model. As part of individual work, students are encouraged to choose any one of the framework questions that resonates with them and reflect on it. This individual reflection is followed by group work. During this time, students share their chosen questions and reflections with the other members of their group. After the group discussion, students choose one of the questions considered in their group and develop a group response to this one question using the 5-step model recommended in the framework. Once they have done this, they share their responses with the other groups.

Here is one example group response:

How do I make sense of differences? In what ways does this enhance inclusion and a sense of belonging?

We followed the 5-step model

1. Strengths:

- Identifying specific needs of individual, committing to learning more about that need
- Commitment to motivating and including all learners
- Having experience of working with children from a range of backgrounds; gives knowledge and experience of learning needs, socio-economic difficulties, ACEs etc.

2. Identify issue/problem

- Diversity; race, religion, gender, sex and sexuality, Disability.
- Unconscious bias
- Sense of belonging
- Trauma and ACEs.

3. Browse NFI questions

- We chose question 'How do I make sense of differences? In what ways does this enhance inclusion and a sense of belonging?'

4. Critically reflect on specific NFI question

- Celebrating differences to make sense of differences; increases knowledge, awareness, acceptance, support. Contributes to a positive culture in the classroom.
- How well do you know your learners? Before being able to cultivate a sense of inclusion and belonging we must identify differences. Ensuring we know the right techniques for our learners and their specific needs (including learners with ASN).
- This should be taken as a whole-school approach (or, community approach).

5. Work to resolve issue/problem

- Awareness that discrimination is learned- we must be prepared to unlearn bias'.
- Celebrate differences.
- Creating a safe and caring environment.
- Pastoral care – working with appropriate agencies to ensure the child is receiving the right care.
- CPD, professional training.
- Challenging assumptions.

University C

Selected questions from the National Framework for Inclusion are used to encourage initial teacher education students to consider aspects of their inclusive practice, both thinking ahead to future placements and to support them in reflecting on prior professional practice experience. For example, in the third year of the MA (Hons) undergraduate course, teaching about inclusive pedagogy is supported by small group discussion tasks using NFI questions such as:

Discuss, drawing on your own experience of being in school both as a learner and as a student teacher:

‘Are some learners more valued than others, and, if so, why?’

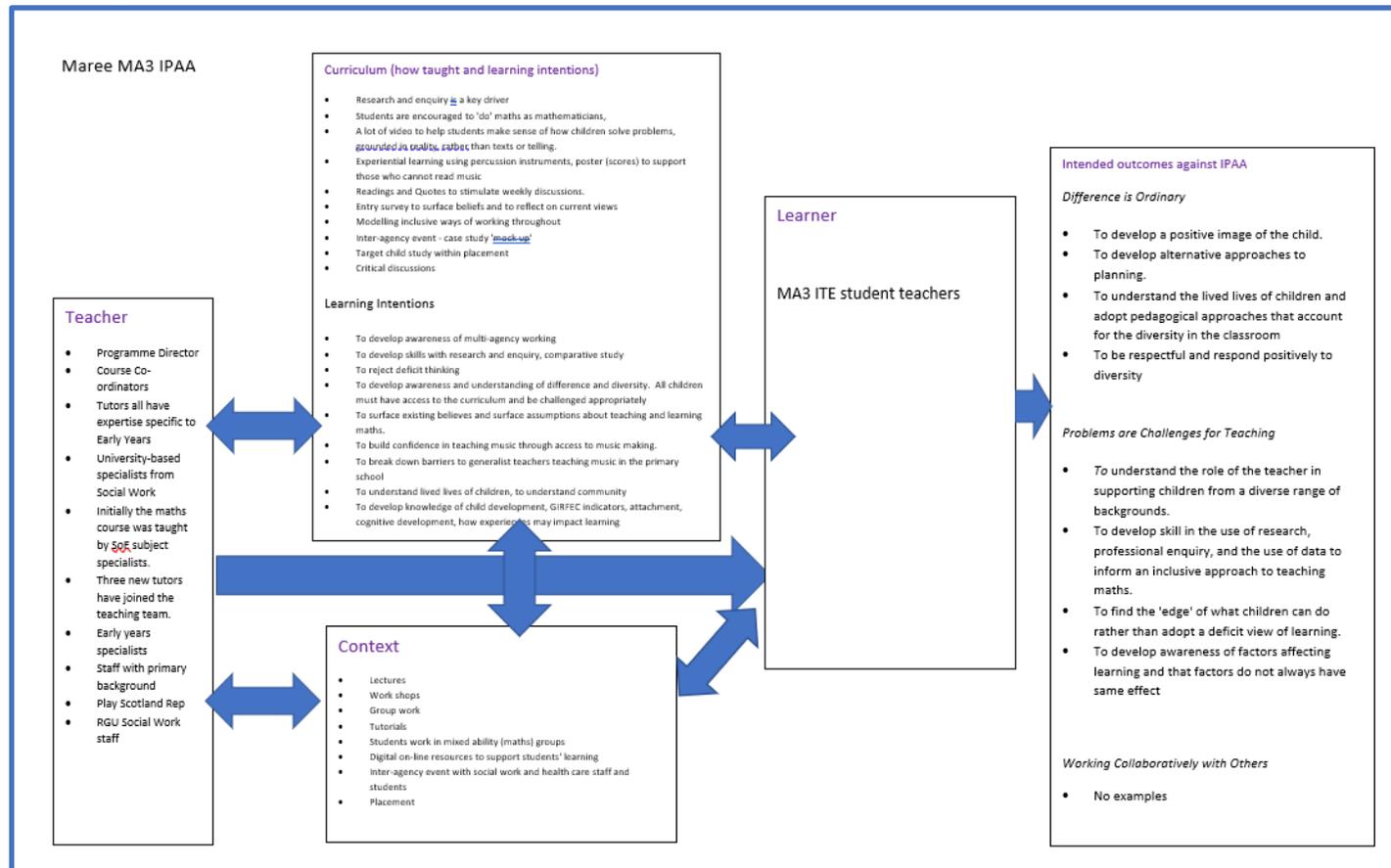
You may find it helpful to make some reflective notes after the input which you can return to later in the year, to reflect on how your thoughts and engagement with this challenge question have informed how you approach SPR 1 in your MA3 placement.

A follow-up activity designed to support students in reflecting on their inclusive practice during placement is:

Choose two questions from the Framework for Inclusion, one to be from Section 2 and the other from Section 3. Reflect on them in the light of your placement experiences. How might these inform your aims for next placement?

Appendix 2: Examples of maps created during the research project

University A



University B

PGDE Primary and Secondary

