

Equity and Excellence Leads

Report on The Care Inspectorate Special Inspection Focus and Update on Development of The Role

March 2021



Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
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EQUITY AND EXCELLENCE LEADS

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What do we mean by equity?

The KEY AIM of the Equity and Excellence Lead policy is to address the POVERTY RELATED GAP IN CHILDREN'S OUTCOMES

Advantage compared with disadvantage...

Applying equality to address disadvantage...

Applying equity to address disadvantage...

For instance - children from most advantaged backgrounds were found to be 18 months ahead in vocabulary, compared with least advantaged Scottish peers (GUS, 2011)

Equity and Excellence Lead Role

considerations

This role affords the OPPORTUNITY for settings in the least advantaged communities of Scotland to provide skilled and highly qualified ELC specialist staff to work directly with children.

Local authorities have been given freedom to utilise leads depending on their local needs and the lead's experience - but - it is crucial that the role across Scotland should contribute to the national policy aspirations of working to close the poverty related gap in children's outcomes.

This new role requires support and careful consideration from the Local Authority and setting management for the equity and excellence leads and the wider ELC workforce. This is needed to assist them in setting in and establishing their purpose in meeting the needs of the children, families and staff and the wider community of their particular setting.

relationships

It takes time to build positive relationships and trust. As this new role is established it will take time to gain a shared understanding of its nature and purpose - by the equity and excellence leads themselves and with families, colleagues and the wider community of each setting. Even if the Lead was already a member of staff in the setting, this is a new role with a focused purpose - working directly with children and families to address the poverty related gap in children's outcomes.

The focus for building relationships starts with taking time to really get to know all of the children in the setting well. Understanding not only where they are as learners but also working in true partnership with families to learn from each other and move forward together.

Not 'doing to' but working with

practice

Practice should be rooted in the children and families needs.

Equity and excellence leads should draw on their training and research, and evidence driven practice, to ensure appropriate pedagogies are utilised.

Looking inwards, outwards, forwards.

Leads should model good practice, working as part of the wider setting team. Leads can inspire and empower other staff members through this leading by example and learning from each other. Not 'doing for' other members of staff but working with.

TRAINING
SCHOOLS
REVIEWING SKILLS
TRUE PARTNERSHIPS

Introduction

This publication pulls together information from a Care Inspectorate special inspection focus on Equity and Excellence Leads during the inspection year April 2019 to March 2020, with follow up detail provided on specific case studies from March to December 2020.

We assume readers will be familiar with the policy, regulatory and legal framework for early learning and childcare (ELC) in Scotland. Further information on this can be found on the Scottish Government's [early education and care webpage](#).

We would like to thank The Care Inspectorate and all settings and practitioners who have contributed to this report.

The Special Inspection Focus Area

The Care Inspectorate included a 'specific Focus Area' for the inspection year April 2019 to March 2020, which gathered information on the role of Equity and Excellence (EE) Leads. This aimed to understand how the commitment was being implemented and supported, and how well the roles were understood by staff.

Data for the Focus Area was gathered by the The Care Inspectorate during inspections. The Care Inspectorate identified settings scheduled for an inspection that had an EE Lead in post – settings to take part in the Focus Area were then selected to reflect a variety of local authorities and setting types. Inspectors interviewed EE Leads and their setting Heads/Managers using a mix of closed and open questions. Data collection began in September 2019 and 74 interviews in 37 early learning and childcare (ELC) settings (37 EE Leads and their 37 Heads/Managers) were conducted by February 2020. Inspections and data collection were stopped in March 2020 due to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and associated restrictions. As a result, we have decided to analyse the data collected to date. The findings are presented below. It should be borne in mind when reading these findings that they only present the views of Leads and Setting Heads in a small proportion of the settings in which EE Leads are currently working (around 10%).

The Care Inspectorate have also written five case studies after following up with five EE Leads and their colleagues who took part in the Focus Area. Inspectors spoke to Leads, setting-staff and parents to find out more about the work the Lead has been doing in that setting, including during the period from March 2020 – December 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic. These Care Inspectorate case studies have all been linked to the Scottish Government's Health and Social Care (HSC) Standards¹ to highlight how the EE Lead approach also supports the delivery of high quality childcare.

¹ [Health and Social Care Standards: my support, my life - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

Policy context

The Scottish Government recognises that access to highly qualified practitioners with expertise in early childhood learning and development plays a key role in realising our ambitions for our youngest children. This is particularly true for young children who face the greatest disadvantages, where additional support may be required to ensure equity of outcomes.

We committed to provide an additional graduate in early learning and childcare settings in Scotland's most deprived areas by August 2018. Funding was provided for 435 Leads across all Scottish local authorities, with the [Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation \(SIMD\) 2016](#) used to decide allocation. £18 million per annum has been committed to local authorities as part of the funding for the expansion of ELC.

These posts could be either: a teacher with existing early years expertise (or a willingness to develop this expertise) or; a practitioner with a graduate level qualification as recognised by the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) (including the BA/PDGE Childhood Practice or the Level 9 Professional Development Award). A key element of the original aim of these additional posts was to contribute to addressing the poverty-related gap in children's outcomes.

The '[Rapid evidence review: Childcare quality and children's outcomes](#)' (Health Scotland 2017), found that higher quality learning experiences for children are more likely to be offered by staff with higher level and early childhood specific qualifications, and complementary skills. Working with key partners, the Scottish Government has enhanced the range and accessibility of learning and development opportunities at a degree qualified level. By ensuring settings comprise of staff with the knowledge and skills to provide high quality, child-focused experiences, we are able to support children in reaching their potential and improve their lifelong outcomes.

Nationally, the posts are known as Equity and Excellence Leads ('EE Leads') although locally have different names. While the original commitment was described in terms of a national allocation of posts, local authorities are responsible for the recruitment and management of EE Leads and they are part of the local early years work force. Local authorities were given freedom to shape the EE lead role depending on local needs and priorities and on the individual practitioner's experience and expertise. The focus of the role therefore differs across settings and across local authorities.

Local authorities work with funded providers in the private and third sectors on the delivery of the commitment. Whilst the majority of the EE Leads were allocated to local authority settings, some private and third sector organisations (who are funded providers) were identified in some local authority areas.

What do EE Leads do?

EE Leads, using a rights based approach, are a key partner in delivery of effective multi agency working. Leads are not tied to settings' adult-child ratios like other staff and therefore have greater flexibility and reflection time for this purpose.

The Theory of Change (Annex A) was developed in 2019 with key stakeholders including EE Leads and local authority strategic leads and sets out the commitment's desired outcomes and the required outputs. The desired long-term outcome for the EE Leads posts is to contribute to closing the attainment gap between the most advantaged and disadvantaged children. In order to achieve this, we must communicate the purpose of the roles clearly while ensuring Leads have the necessary tools to develop and progress their professional skills.

Snapshot national figures for numbers of EE Leads are published annually in the additional ELC tables that support the 'Summary Statistics for Schools in Scotland'.² While we have previously reported on national numbers of posts filled, Scottish Government no longer track local recruitment and retention of these posts and our focus is now on building and supporting the community of practice.

Findings from the Focus Area

Inspectors conducted interviews in 37 ELC settings between September 2019 and February 2020. Thirty seven EE Leads and 37 Heads/Managers were interviewed. Of the settings included in the Focus Area, 33 were local authority providers, three were partner providers and one was a voluntary setting. Settings in 17 discrete Local Authority areas were featured in the Focus Area interviews. Prior to becoming EE Leads, graduates had been practitioners/teachers for an average of 11 years and eight months, ranging from six months to 29 years. Setting Heads/Managers had been in post for an average of four years and eight months, ranging from brand new in post to 29 years.

We have analysed responses to the closed and open questions and present key findings below. We also present the case studies for further context.

Understanding of the Equity and Excellence Lead role

Responses to the survey suggested that the EE Leads, staff and Heads/Managers interviewed had a good understanding of the Equity and Excellence Lead role. Table 1 below shows the majority of Leads felt their role is well understood by both the leadership (34 out of 37 agreed or strongly agreed) and other practitioners/teachers (32 out of 37 agreed or strongly agreed) in their settings.

² [Summary Statistics for Schools in Scotland 2020 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/summary-statistics-for-schools-in-scotland-2020/pages/summary-statistics-for-schools-in-scotland-2020.aspx)

Table 1 (EE Lead interviews)

	My role is well understood by the leadership in my setting(s)		My role is well understood by practitioners/teachers in my setting(s)	
	N	%	N	%
Strongly agree	23	62%	12	32%
Agree	11	30%	20	54%
Disagree	2	5%	4	11%
Strongly disagree	1	3%	1	3%

Table 2 shows Setting Heads/Managers share this view: 34 out of 37 agree or strongly agree the role is understood in their setting.

Table 2 (Head/Manager interviews)

The EE lead role is well understood by other practitioners/teachers within my setting(s)		
	N	%
Strongly agree	15	41%
Agree	19	51%
Disagree	3	8%
Strongly disagree	0	0%

Leads and Heads were further asked the following open question: What do you think the key purpose(s)/aim(s) of the Equity and Excellence Lead role is in your setting(s)? The most common theme to emerge in their answers was the need for Leads to address the attainment gap and support the most disadvantaged children and families. Responses included:

‘... closing the poverty attainment gap and to ensure that all children are given the same opportunities and experiences regardless of their background...’

‘...to reduce the poverty related attainment gap, build resilience and wellbeing, lifelong positive outcomes’.

‘... to raise attainment in Literacy and English. To provide support to other staff in doing the same. Working as part of a team, leading the team. Building strong relationships with families. Relationships with the wider community’.

Case Study 1 (linked to [HSC Standards 3.13 and 4.2](#))

Benarty Primary School Nursery Class is provided by Fife council and delivers a day care service for up to 30 children aged from three years. The service operates from a dedicated nursery space within Benarty Primary School.

Lindsay Masterman is the EE Lead at Benarty Primary School. We spoke with Lindsay about how she shares her knowledge of good practice with staff to ensure children benefit from the learning opportunities available to them. Lindsay told us: "it is important that everyone is clear about expectations of high quality provision within the nursery." She told us she achieves this through her approach to leadership and modelling of good practice. A key aspect of this is to support staff to work with families to identify any barriers that may impact on children's learning. Building strong and trusting relationships with families working simultaneously, making decisions, looking at various supports and strategies along with next steps to get the best outcomes for children.

"To do this it is important that we recognise and emphasise the importance of working together with families. This ensures that next steps or targets are appropriate for the children and that they are engaged and interested in their learning journey. Through discussion and role modelling of good practice, staff are more confident in their approach and recognise and can take positive steps to minimising the barriers to learning that exist within Benarty Nursery and Community. Sharing information with parents allows parents to contribute and invite them in to feel part of Benarty Nursery Community. This gives both child and their parent a sense of belonging."

"I feel my role as an Equity and Excellence Lead allows me to support and empower the staff to become more confident and reflective practitioners. Through working in partnership with parents and other professionals it allows us to identify and implement strategies for their child's next steps".

We also spoke with Alison Pratt, the Depute Head teacher about her view of the contribution the EE Lead had made in respect of children's literacy. Through a review of available data for the nursery, it was clear there was a measurable increase in children's attainment in literacy since the introduction of the EE Lead role. The figures reviewed demonstrate that in 2019/20 all children on entering primary one were achieving average or above average scores in literacy.

Alison told us: "Lindsay has a key role in our Nursery Leadership Team. Her approach to target setting and information sharing with all stakeholders means children and families who face the biggest barriers to Education can make the most of their Early Learning and Childcare experience. This is reflected in the data we gather for P1 where our children now enter school more ready to learn. This impact can be directly linked to the role of The Equity and Excellence Lead working alongside colleagues to improve outcomes for some of our most vulnerable families."

Leads also mentioned the importance of their roles in supporting staff. Answers included:

‘...to help empower staff to provide challenge for the children and parents within the setting. To act as a good role model for practitioners within the setting in order to up-skill and support their CPD development. To identify skills and abilities of the practitioners in order to support the children's learning and development in all areas of the curriculum’.

‘... to lead on practice; role model; embed a pedagogical approach. Support children in the lowest SIMDs. And support all children within the setting.’

‘... to work with the team to deliver quality and early learning development. Supporting the development of the curriculum to raise attainment. Helping and supporting others in enhancing children's wellbeing and nurture. Working with practitioners and parents/carers and management to support learning and help develop strategies to support learning. Help deliver with colleagues to raise attainment across the establishment’.

The work and impact of the EE Leads

The EE Leads agreed they were doing role-appropriate work and were able to support their colleagues. Table 3 shows that 36 out of 37 believed they were doing work that reflects their roles' priorities, and have been able to support other practitioners. Case Study 1 above from Benarty Primary School Nursery Class provides an example of sharing and role modelling good practice with staff. Case study 2 below from Bowhouse Primary School Nursery provides an example of working with practitioners and parents/carers to adopt and embed a pedagogical approach within the nursery and increase family engagement.

Table 3 (EE Lead interviews)				
	Do you feel that the work you are doing reflects the priorities of the EE lead role (working directly with children and improving practice within your setting)?		Have you been able to support the practice of other practitioners/ teachers in your setting(s)?	
	N	%	N	%
No	1	3%	1	3%
Yes	36	97%	36	97%

Case Study 2 (linked to [HSC Standards 1.31 and 3.14](#))

Bowhouse Primary School Nursery is provided by Falkirk Council and delivers a daycare service for up to 56 children aged from three years. The service is located in Grangemouth and is part of Bowhouse Primary School.

Care Inspectorate spoke with Gemma Paterson about the different projects she has been involved in within her role as EE Lead at Bowhouse Nursery. One of these was adopting and embedding a pedagogical approach within the nursery. It was important that this approach was one that staff and parents could understand and provided a level of consistency for children and their families.

“Since 2017 practitioners had been working to link evidence from Building the Ambition with Curriculum for Excellence to promote high quality in the setting. When this project began, I was Senior Early Years Officer within Bowhouse. The role of the Equity and Excellence Lead, which I adopted in 2018, was pivotal in the success of the approach. This role enabled me to embrace the approach, research, work individually with practitioners and develop materials which enhanced practice and current thinking. I was able to embrace the role of researcher and implement small tests of change which influenced the progress and the path the project took.

The project involved a number of key developments, including development of a pedagogical charter highlighting the individual pedagogical approach and image of the child within the setting. A Building the Ambition practitioner guide was also developed and used as part of the approach to learning, teaching and assessment. Gemma recognised the importance of recognising and building on the work practitioners had started prior to the EE lead appointment and the need to continue to recognise achievements and promote opportunities for practitioners to gain confidence and share good practice.

“Practitioners were integral to the project in: the development of the pedagogical charter; in researching skills, dispositions and stages of development; and in evaluating their practice and developing next steps and action plans for improvement. All practitioners have had the opportunity to share our project more widely with successful local authority open events being hosted. This contributed to a wider impact on children across Falkirk.”

The role of the EE lead in developing trusting relationships with parents enabled Gemma to establish the use of Play Boxes as a method of increasing family engagement with play at home. The project began with a small trial involving three families, supported by the EE lead, and a practitioner. The initial trial was successful, and the project was spread across the setting and is a part of core family learning practice.

“Involving families to be part of the research was crucial and the Lead role ensured there was time, space and consideration given to planning the approach.”

Case Study 2 (cont.)

“We discovered that enabling families to lead this research provided us with more significant evidence and further next steps. Families felt more prepared to play using the play boxes and resources within them. Feedback told us that parents could make links with children’s play at nursery and play at home. Some families felt that the play boxes ensured they made time to play at home. Something that may have been missed before.”

“I was able to delve further and work with families in establishing the approach. I took the time to meet with the families on a 1-1 basis and explain the rationale. One family stated they felt a little pressure to access the playbox every day out of the five they had it. I made sure this barrier was overcome by explaining the methods and reasons behind the boxes. I was always honest and open with them throughout and listened to their feedback. I demonstrated a positive outlook and enthusiasm for the project and this I believe transferred to parents and their view of play boxes. Parents were enthusiastic to share the play at home photos and videos and began to talk about different experiences they had tried or were going to use. This resulted in a lasting change for families at home.”

Marvellous Mealtimes was an initiative that began just as the EE lead role was introduced. The aim of the project was to support improvements in children’s eating patterns, wellbeing, and relationships with food. The opportunity afforded by the role enabled Gemma to undertake additional training that she was able to use to ensure the success of the initiative. Gemma told us, “I was able to gather baseline data using knowledge gained on the Scottish Coaching, Leadership and Improvement Course. Knowledge and skills I would not have gained had I not been in this role. My role was to develop practitioners’ capacity to understand and use the data gathered to influence improvement.”

It was important to Gemma that practitioners were able to develop new skills and a depth of knowledge to continue the success of the programme independent of her input. “Although there was some learning together, I aimed to instil autonomy within the team to ensure there was a lasting effect of staff’s enhanced skills. I role modelled, shared my knowledge and skills to motivate my team and help them to embrace new and innovative ways of working.

Together we analysed the data and used this to inform next steps. It showed improvements in children’s eating patterns, wellbeing, and relationships with food. Projects can sometimes become tokenistic if implemented only by the Lead, however our hope is that even as we step away, projects and initiatives remain in place supported by high quality practitioners. Not only has Marvellous Mealtimes been sustained in Bowhouse, it has also spread in scale to all other settings in the Falkirk area. This role enabled me to share this widely with my colleagues and I have presented this initiative through open evenings, continuing practice and learning sessions and to other local authorities.”

Leads were also asked about their relationships with colleagues. Table 4 additionally shows that all 37 EE Leads agreed or strongly agreed they have been able to build relationships with colleagues.

To what extent do you agree or disagree that you have been able to build relationships with other staff in your setting?		
	N	%
Strongly agree	31	84%
Agree	6	16%
Disagree	0	0%
Strongly disagree	0	0%

Leads were asked to reflect on their work and how they think it has had an impact in their settings. They were asked: what do you think the impact of the support you have been able to provide has been? The most common theme in responses was their ability to upskill other practitioners and improve their confidence. Answers included:

‘[I have] been able to develop staff skills, knowledge and motivate staff, they are on the journey with me,.. [I am] empowering them [and] developing their leadership skills’.

‘[I] allow staff to develop confidence in what resources they can use to develop numeracy and to raise attainment. In the playroom there is now more numeracy and maths experiences taking place. Made numeracy and maths to be more of a focus for staff when planning their areas’.

‘...Building staff confidence and empowering staff to be involved in changes to the environment. Make staff feel more valued. This has an impact on improving outcomes for children’.

Leads were further asked how they have measured the impact of their work. They described using a variety of techniques, including staff and parent questionnaires, environmental audits and playroom observations. Many Leads detailed their use of improvement methodology to track impact over time.

Heads/Managers also have positive views of the EE Leads’ work. Table 5 shows 36 out of 37 believed Leads were having a positive impact on staff, and 35 out of 36 (one Head did not answer the question) believed Leads were having a positive impact on children from deprived backgrounds. Table 6 further shows 35 out of 37 Heads/Managers feel Leads were using evidence to improve practice.

Table 5 (Head/Manager interviews)				
	The impact of the work the EE Lead has been undertaking with children from the most deprived backgrounds has been positive.		The impact of this work on practitioners/ teachers has been positive.	
	N	%	N	%
Strongly agree	29	78%	28	78%
Agree	7	19%	7	19%
Disagree	1	3%	1	3%
Strongly disagree	0	0%	0	0%

Table 6 (Head/Manager interviews)		
Have you found that the EE Lead is using evidence to improve practice?		
	N	%
No	2	5%
Yes	35	95%

Case study 3 below provides an example from Kelloholm Nursery of how the EE Lead and another senior member of staff worked together in leading pedagogical practice, empowering staff to improve outcomes for children. Case Study 4 below further provides an example from Stobhill Primary School Nursery of the EE Lead training and upskilling staff.

EE Leads and workplace support

EE Leads were asked about support they had received in their role from setting leadership, their local authority and from informal networks. The Leads reported feeling supported in their roles.

Case Study 3 (linked to [HSC Standards 1.30 and 1.31](#))

Kelloholm Nursery is provided by Dumfries and Galloway council and provides a daycare service for up to 60 children aged from 2 years to those not yet attending primary school. The service operates from a dedicated nursery space within Kelloholm Primary School.

The service was last inspected 5 February 2020 when it was graded as good across all quality themes. This was a marked improvement on the evaluation one year previously when the service was graded as weak across all quality themes. Both the manager and staff attributed this to the combined contribution of a seconded primary one teacher and the EE Lead. These two senior members of staff worked together in leading pedagogical practice, empowering staff to improve outcomes for children. They also helped engage parents/carers as valued partners in planning for their children.

Kelloholm's EE Lead Dorothy Dundas told us, "Working in this role, I was given the time and flexibility to support and build relationships with the children, families, staff and also the wider community. I was able to further research issues or topics which in turn ensured we could offer individualised support when needed."

A particular initiative that worked well for the children and families at Kelloholm Nursery was the Peers Early Education Partnership (PEEP) project. The EE Lead worked collaboratively with the school family learning worker and the local authority adult learning worker to deliver the PEEP programme. Dorothy explained: "through this initiative, parents were becoming more confident; confident to recognise different communications techniques with their children, confidence in themselves as their child's first educator. If we can support the parents to be more confident, then everything else will fall into place." The PEEP project supports parents and children to learn together so that everyone is included and achieving. This meant parents were progressing their own learning journey, thus increasing their future chances of accessing employment.

Staff felt very well supported by the EE Lead. They participated in professional development activities including formal training, professional reading and peer to peer learning to ensure everyone had a grasp of the theory underpinning their practice. Dorothy highlighted the positive impact the role of the Equity and Excellence Lead had on the staff team: "Supporting staff to understand practice documents allowed for everyone to develop their practice and understanding. The time to effectively support staff has not only increased their knowledge but has allowed us, as practitioners and as a team to be reflective on all we do, resulting in continued improved outcomes for all our children."

Table 7 shows all 37 said they were satisfied or very satisfied with the support from their setting leaderships, while 34 out of 37 were satisfied or very satisfied by the support from their local authorities.

Table 7 (EE Lead interviews)				
	How satisfied are you with the support provided to you by your setting leadership?		How satisfied are you with the support provided to you by your local authority?	
	N	%	N	%
Very satisfied	28	76%	20	54%
Satisfied	9	24%	14	38%
Dissatisfied	0	0%	3	8%
Very dissatisfied	0	0%	0	0%

Similarly, Table 8 shows 35 out of 37 Leads said they had been able to access informal support networks.

Table 8 (EE Lead interviews)		
Have you been able to access informal networks of support (e.g. peer mentoring with other EE Leads)?		
	N	%
No	2	5%
Yes	35	95%

Leads were further asked: what have you found most useful in terms of local authority support? Responses mentioned training opportunities and regular meetings with other Leads as useful for their development. Answers included:

‘I have found this very useful as the local authority has provided training and support for the equity and excellence lead through network meetings and training programmes in order to bring this back to demonstrate and show the staff’.

‘...That we meet as EE leads from across the authority. The support of my EE peers and that the authority model supports this’.

‘The meetings we have had with other EEL's and the early years team have been useful. Also networking meetings with other authorities has been beneficial in supporting me in my role’.

‘EE lead focus groups and improvement methodologies workshops (once a month) PDSA (Plan Do Study Act) Action group (once a month) Networking support’.

Case Study 4 (linked to [HSC Standard 2.27](#))

Stobhill Primary School Nursery is provided by Midlothian council and provides a daycare service for up to 32 children aged from 2 years to those not yet attending primary school. The service operates from a dedicated nursery space within Stobhill Primary School.

Kristina Robb has been in post as the EE Lead at Stobhill Nursery for two years. Her role has been determined by Midlothian's holistic approach to establish a reduction of the attainment gap, support pedagogy and upskill fellow practitioners. The values of Stobhill Nursery are to establish the role of the whole team, supported by the EE Lead. This ensures that continued support for disadvantaged children is embedded in practice and improves outcomes for all children and their families.

Work with the Early Years team initially focussed on the environment, which was a key factor in addressing the needs of all children in the setting. Through professional reading and discussion, visits to other settings, and examination of the children's use of spaces, the environment was changed significantly to address the needs of learners.

Kristina shared an example of how they had developed the environment to improve outcomes: "We wanted to promote our block play and engage all the children with the opportunity to further develop their skills in problem solving, curiosity and mathematics. We added natural materials and interesting loose parts and changed the position of this area of play to a central part of our nursery environment. These changes resulted in an increased flow of traffic to the block play area, and we found the gender mix improved, and children were engaged for longer periods of time. These changes have enhanced curiosity and creativity learning outcomes for all the children."

Alongside the enhancement of the environment, the EE Lead developed a plan for upskilling the practitioners through the development of the learning cycle, addressing specifically observation and planning. Through training both with specialists from the Early Years central team, and in-house with the EE Lead, the team developed a system of observation and planning that evidenced learning and builds on children's strengths to develop learning further. As a result, observations are clearer and focused on the learning of the child, with identified next steps as appropriate.

Kristina told us: 'My aim was to empower the staff by increasing their confidence and allowing them to independently identify priorities in learning. I used a modelling and coaching approach in pedagogical strategies. The results were fantastic and outcomes for all the children have improved due to the staff having further developed their knowledge of on the whole planning cycle and having gained a shared understanding of our pedagogy'.

Case Study 4 (cont.)

Kristina shared other positive aspects of her role and told us: “While identifying learning priorities and engaging with the team in planning, it became apparent that the team were not confident in their knowledge of numeracy and other STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) based outcomes.” She accessed training for the team, which she co-delivered with a Principal Teacher from the Early Years central team. The team also took part in ‘online STEM training’ during lockdown.

Further to these training opportunities Kristina confirmed the improvement in staff understanding and delivery of this area in the curriculum, she told us: “The difference was instantaneous, there is no fear of STEM anymore, staff knowledge, skills and understanding has developed to the extent that staff are now competent and confident within this area of learning which has significantly improved outcomes for the children.” Following on from this, an initiative involving older children within the school, in the delivery of STEM experiences to the younger children won the setting an Early Years Innovation award from the Scottish Government.

The Head teacher Margaret Sikes told us of the value of the role within the nursery: “The Equity and Excellence Lead role has been beneficial in developing the pedagogy of play across the Early Level at Stobhill’. The Lead gave a presentation to the senior leadership team, Early Level teachers and learning assistants to engage them in a process of thought and discussion, which resulted in the P1 teacher implementing play as part of the daily learning cycle in the classroom. She has supported and advised through classroom observation and discussion, this project is ongoing and will develop further throughout the school year.”

Views on the role of local authorities

Heads/Managers also reported feeling supported by local authorities: Table 9 shows 33 out of 37 were satisfied or very satisfied with the support provided by their local authorities.

How satisfied are you with the support provided to you by your local authority?		
	N	%
Very satisfied	20	54%
Satisfied	13	35%
Dissatisfied	4	11%
Very dissatisfied	0	0%

However, when asked, 'what could be improved in terms of local authority support?', some Heads noted communication around the EE Lead roles could have been better. Examples included:

'It would have been helpful to have the role defined consistently across the Authority'.

'More information about the role before the appointments were made. Information has been very slow, particularly for the EE lead; to the point she was unsure whether to continue in the post'.

'Clarity around what lead officer should be doing'.

Future development

EE Leads will continue to work towards delivery of the outcomes detailed in the driver diagram in Annex A, including an increase in evidence based practice, improved pedagogical practice, and the increased confidence and capability of parents in the most deprived areas. A community of practice has been developed by EE Leads and this will be further supported with opportunities for professional dialogue and sharing of practice. Quality Improvement Advisors will continue to provide training and guidance to EE Leads on the use of quality improvement methodology, as outlined in the [three-step improvement framework for Scotland's Public Services](#).

EE Leads during COVID-19

Case study 5 below provides an example of the role the EE Lead at Waterfront Nursery played in supporting children when the setting reopened following the initial COVID-19 lockdown. Further research into the support provided by Equity and Excellence Leads to families during the COVID-19 pandemic is also planned.

Case Study 5 (linked to [HSC Standards 1.8 and 3.10](#))

Waterfront nursery is provided by Edinburgh College and provides a daycare service for up to 120 children from birth to not yet attending primary school. The service operates from a dedicated nursery space within Edinburgh College, Waterfront Campus.

Lucyna Mierczak is the EE Lead at Waterfront Nursery. We spoke with the manager Victoria Shiels about the role Lucyna played in supporting children when the setting reopened following the initial COVID-19 lockdown.

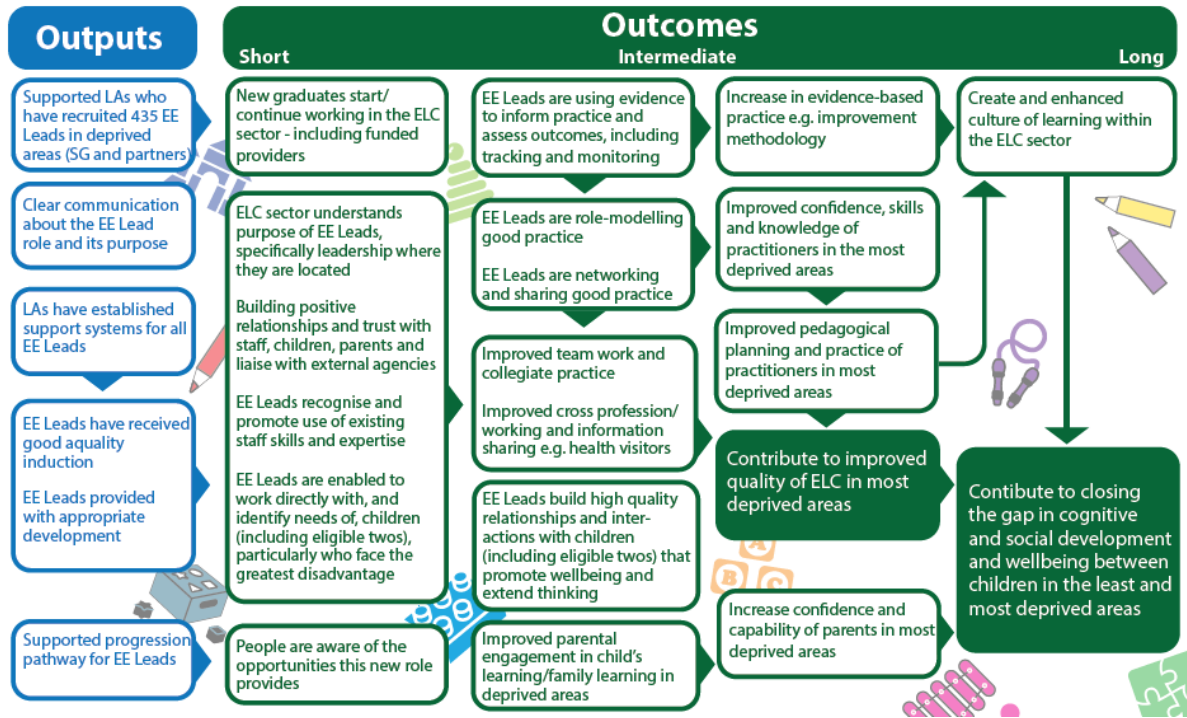
“As part of our re-opening, we were conscious that some children may struggle in our larger playroom bubbles. Some of our returning children had been in our toddler room before lockdown and were now moving to preschool having never visited before, some had English as an Additional Language with very little understanding of English at all. We decided to create a nurture group to allow these children to be cared for in their own learning environment. The group was never more than 10 children with Lucy and one of our practitioners bringing them into nursery each day, working with them to develop their confidence and supporting them to integrate into a larger bubble group. This group was extremely successful and between August and December we re-integrated the group into a larger bubble as each child was ready to progress, in an individual and manageable way.”

Lauren Wiltshire an early learning and childcare practitioner worked alongside Lucyna to lead the initiative and told us about the benefits to her development as a practitioner as a result. She told us, “As part of our goal to transition children to their new environment, Lucy and I became a team to run a nurture group, designed to help children that were requiring extra support to settle back in after a long absence due to COVID-19. Lucy and I worked together for six months to create a welcoming and nurturing environment. Working alongside Lucy helped me to develop my practice in many ways. Her passion for her role and her underlying knowledge enables her to be the confident and well-practiced person she is. Now that the nurture group has ended, I can take what I have learnt to improve my own practice”.

Lucyna told us “Being an Equity and Excellence Lead has been very rewarding, providing me with opportunities to be a leader of early years pedagogy whilst working directly with children and staff. Within my role, I have been able to adopt a focused approach, based on identified needs of the setting, such as our Nurture Group and the outdoor nursery, where I would support children’s individual learning and development through quality interactions and role-modelling. The flexibility and reflection time afforded by the role, has enabled me to pick up the golden thread of quality that runs through early years in every area, from developing an enabling learning environment to recognising and promoting the skills of practitioners through peer support”.

Annex A

Equity and Excellence Leads Theory of Change





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This publication is available at www.gov.scot

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at
The Scottish Government
St Andrew's House
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

ISBN: 978-1-80004-867-6 (web only)

Published by The Scottish Government, March 2021

Produced for The Scottish Government by APS Group Scotland, 21 Tennant Street, Edinburgh EH6 5NA
PPDAS842686 (03/21)

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