

**Briefing in advance of Members' Business on educational psychologists**  
**Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> January 2015 – David Stewart MSP – S4M-11796**

**Background**

The Scottish Children's Services Coalition (SCSC) is a policy-focused collaboration between leading independent and third sector service providers who have come together to work with political and other key stakeholders to help improve the delivery of children and young people's services.

SCSC members deliver specialist care and education services for children and young people with complex needs, such as learning difficulties and learning disabilities, as well as direct help and support for them and their families. They also provide independent advocacy, advice and representation for children and young people with care experience.

**Educational Psychologists: Key issues**

1. As outlined in the 2013 Association of Scottish Principal Education Psychologists (ASPEP)/Scottish Division of Educational Psychologists (SDEP) report<sup>1</sup>, a quarter of educational psychologists may retire in the next four years and too few trainees are being recruited. The profession has a concern that this will leave a major gap in skills, knowledge and expertise.
2. The same report identified that the number of trained educational psychologists in Scotland is "dangerously low" and that psychological services in Scotland are reporting a significant increase in demand. There is also a concern that some local authorities could breach their statutory obligations on provision of services for those requiring support if the situation does not improve.
3. In recent years the number of children identified as having additional support needs has increased significantly, from 69,587 in 2010<sup>2</sup> to 140,542 in 2014<sup>3</sup>, a more than doubling in the number. Due to this, as well as increased community awareness, legislative changes and changes in practice via GIRFEC etc there has been a significant increase in demand for psychological services across all local authorities in Scotland.
4. The 2001 Currie Report *Review of Provision of Educational Psychology Services in Scotland* which was commissioned by the Scottish Government at the time (there has been no further review of Psychological Services in Scotland) stated in the Minister's foreword that given the current level of staffing there was an "urgent need to recruit and train more educational psychologists."
5. In 2001 there were 379 full-time equivalent (FTE) educational psychologist posts across Scotland. Currently the FTE figure across Scotland is around 394.
6. The FTE across Scotland reached a high point of 443 FTE in 2009 - this was the follow through from the progress made following the Currie Review in 2001. Given that the current FTE is about 394 FTE there has been a drop in staffing across Scotland since 2009 of about 11%.
7. Greatly increased demand for psychological services exists at a time when numbers of educational psychologists have therefore declined to roughly the same level they were at in 2001.
8. Indeed, the ratio of educational psychologists to the population is now even worse than in 2001, with 1:13,613 of the population in 2012 compared with 1:13,362 in 2001. This is in comparison with clinical and other NHS psychologists where the ratio has improved from 15,577:1 in 2001 to 8,126:1 in 2012, a more than doubling in staffing ratios over the last 10 years.

9. The removal in 2012 of the bursary paid to each trainee by the Scottish Government, coupled with a very limited loan facility, means that new trainees need to have access to around £25,000 each year for two years to self-fund course fees, travel and living expenses. This has led to a 70% drop in applicants for the selection process for the training courses.
10. This is unlike the NHS staff group, including clinical psychologists, who are still fully funded in their posts as has been the case for many years.
11. The current perspective is that the reduction in applicants has not impacted on the quality of trainees currently training. However, as most trainees now have to take up employment during their study days to pay for their training, current trainees have less time to study and are likely to be less well prepared when entering the profession than in previous years when the courses were funded. This in turn will have a knock on impact on psychological services which are already struggling with capacity issues due to increased demands.
12. The removal of the bursary has caused, and will cause in future, a much reduced pool of available potential trainees. As a result, there is a concern amongst the profession that a reduced pool of future candidates will have an adverse impact on the quality of professional skills in the longer term. It is likely that a proportion of the most gifted individuals will choose alternative professions which attract less debt. This will lead to an inevitable narrowing of access to the profession to exclude those who are unable to access to the necessary financial resources to undertake the training.
13. Coupled with cuts to local authority budgets and the withdrawal of funding for the training of educational psychologists the profession is very close to a tipping point.
14. A major function of educational psychologists is to support the education system, address inequality and the gaps in attainment and achievement outcomes of the vulnerable and at risk in society. The Scottish Government should acknowledge that removal of funding for training exacerbates societal inequality issues that the profession is actually trying to address.

## **Actions required**

In order to address this, the SCSC is calling on the Scottish Government to:

- Intervene and give councils clear guidance on how many educational psychologists are required per head of population to safeguard an effective level of service.
- Increase financial support for those looking to enter the profession.

Further information about the SCSC can be found at [www.thescsc.org.uk](http://www.thescsc.org.uk).

For further information please contact Alex Orr, Policy Adviser to the Scottish Children's Services Coalition, on 0131 603 8996 or [contact@thescsc.org.uk](mailto:contact@thescsc.org.uk).

<sup>1</sup>The Association of Scottish Principal Educational Psychologists, Workforce Planning Report, September 2013. Available at: [http://www.aspep.org.uk/?page\\_id=204](http://www.aspep.org.uk/?page_id=204).

<sup>2</sup>Scottish Government, Summary Statistics for Schools in Scotland, No 5: 2014 Edition, December 2014. Available at: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2014/12/7590/downloads>.

<sup>3</sup>Scottish Government, Statistical Bulletin: Summary Statistics for Schools in Scotland, No.1 2010 Edition: 1st December, 2010 (amended 3rd August 2011). Available at: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2011/03/04154230/21>.