

Building the capacity of student teachers through Initial Teacher Education (ITE) Placements in Family Learning Teams

Initial Teacher Education (ITE) Pilot Placement Programme

Executive Summary

October 2025



EducationScot



@Educationscot



FOREWORD



‘Parents need to model the “thrill of learning”, showing curiosity, engaging in the world, and making connections (to school or beyond)....When a teacher is passionate about their subject, that passion is often contagious. The same goes for parents, who don’t have to teach a subject but can model interest and enthusiasm for it’.

(Anderson and Winthrop, 2025, p150-151)

The teaching profession in Scotland sets high standards for itself. Guidelines published by the General Teaching Council (GTC) for Scotland sets out the content, nature and duration of Initial Teacher Education programmes which lead to teaching qualifications for primary and secondary sectors. GTC Scotland ensure that these requirements are met through the accreditation of all Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programmes in Scotland.

Student teachers should be exposed to national priorities and pedagogies to develop their understanding and practice in key areas of the curriculum as well as parental involvement and engagement, mobile families, inclusion, involvement of young people, learning for sustainability, digital and data and data literacy, and skills for learning, life and work.

To support the parental involvement and engagement priority Education Scotland have worked with Initial Teacher Education (ITE) providers and local authorities to develop a unique Strategic Framework. The Strategic Framework aims to provide a structure within which all stakeholders can engage in and deliver professional learning on parental involvement, parental engagement, family learning and learning at home.

This Initial Teacher Education (ITE) Placement Programme Evaluation Report is the culmination of a joint programme of work between Education Scotland, ITE providers and local authorities across Scotland. Its successes highlight the willingness of sectors to come together to support the workforce and provide transformational change with longitudinal impact. Providing student teachers with the skills, knowledge, experiences and confidence to engage with parents and families at the earliest of stages creates meaningful, effective and trusting relationship which positively impact their children and young people.

I trust that you will find this Executive Summary and accompanying Evaluation Report valuable. We look forward to working with you to deliver positive outcomes for children and young people, parents and families and future generations.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Gregory'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

David Gregory
Strategic Director for Lifelong Learning

Executive Summary

1. Background

The Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006 recognises the vital role that parents play in their child's learning and development. 'Parents are the first and ongoing educators of their own children and know them best' (Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act Guidance, 2006). Scotland's education system is working hard to become a globally respected, empowered, and responsive education system with clear accountability at every level. This will ensure that children and young people, parents and families are supported to have the best start in life and to thrive. Therefore, it is crucial that the system continues to develop the knowledge, skills, values, and attributes of student teachers, probationers and existing staff. This will give children and young people, parents and families the best opportunity to succeed and contribute to Scotland's society and economy.

Findings from HM Inspectors through school inspections states that there 'is room to strengthen the involvement of parents, carers, and the wider school community in shaping the vision and driving change' ([National Improvement Framework \(NIF\) Improvement Plan](#), 2025, p2). The International Council of Education Advisers (ICEA) said in its [2021-23 report](#), that there was a 'need to invest in the professional learning of educational professionals to address the changing needs of the young people' (2023, p8). In addition to this, having highly skilled teachers and school leaders driving excellent learning, teaching and assessment for all is one of the seven outcomes in the 2025 [National Improvement Framework](#).

2. Why Family Learning Teams?

Supporting, equipping and building capacity amongst Scotland's parents to capitalise on children's opportunities for learning is key in raising attainment and closing the poverty-related attainment gap. A family learning approach can also be a catalyst in helping adults take up adult learning and training opportunities, gain employment or attain new skills. This in turn positively impacts on children's individual attainment, their attendance at school, aspirations and personal learning journey.

Placing student teachers within Family Learning teams would provide them with an opportunity to work alongside family learning staff who use a wide range of engagement strategies to engage parents and families from varying demographics, in a learning outcome based on their needs. This would significantly benefit the confidence of student teachers in being able to work with parents and families, better understand barriers to participation and partnership approaches.

3. Approach to the task

Intelligence gathered over a number of years from a range of sources including settings, schools, practitioners and two national mapping exercises, undertaken by Education Scotland, showed a demand for clarity on what practitioners need to know when engaging and working with parents and families. In response, work began in 2022 to develop a [Strategic Framework](#) on Parental Involvement, Parental Engagement, Family Learning and Learning at Home. The Framework was subsequently launched in May 2023 by the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills.

To implement this, Education Scotland worked in partnership with two local authorities and four Initial Teacher Education (ITE) providers to develop a placement programme. Planning for the pilot took place between January and April 2024.

Practitioners involved in the placement programme engaged with and enthusiastically supported the work of the pilot and have shared their feedback at the end of each stage. The ITE Placement Programme Evaluation Report and Executive Summary has been produced in collaboration with stakeholders involved in the pilot.

4. The Pilot Placement Programme

Two local authorities (North Lanarkshire Council and Aberdeen City Council) and four Initial Teacher Education (ITE) providers (University of the West of Scotland, Strathclyde, Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and Aberdeen) were involved in the pilot. Each placement was nuanced and required a degree of flexibility on behalf of the local authorities. Local authority and university staff worked hard to accommodate each student to ensure a quality experiential

learning opportunity. This resulted in a robust and meaningful placement programme that had a positive impact on everyone involved

The pilot consisted of four stages and ran between May 2024 and May 2025.

5. Conclusions

Several key messages and recommendations for strategic leaders, practitioners and researchers have emerged from the evidence gathered throughout this pilot placement programme. One key message is the identified need and desire from student teachers to develop their confidence and improve their practice to effectively and meaningfully engage parents to improve outcomes for children, young people, and their families. Family learning as an early intervention and prevention approach works in reaching disadvantaged families and communities to improve their life chances. Current research continues to highlight that engaging parents and families is key to all aspects of education, including attainment, absenteeism, inclusion and health and wellbeing.

Having a 'globally respected, empowered and responsive education and skills system with clear accountability at every level that supports children, young people and adult learners to thrive' is Outcome 1 of the 2025 National Improvement [Framework](#) (p1). Scottish Government's 2025 [Programme for Government](#) outlines its commitment to investing in Parental Employability Support in every local authority (p18). Family learning programmes have an impact on an adult's own educational attainment, future training and further learning and employment opportunities. Increasing the skillset and confidence of student teachers supports them to relate theory and concepts of engaging parents and families into their practical application. This also allows student teachers to gain an insight into the benefits of partnership working and the range of potential partner and stakeholder organisations that support parents and families. They can also share this knowledge with peers and colleagues during their probationary year thus providing longer term benefits and impacts.

The wider outcomes of family learning are shown through skills development, employability, progression into further education opportunities, and interactions within the family, as well as improvements in parental confidence and parenting skills.

Initial Teacher Education providers and local authorities recognise the mutual benefits to student teachers working alongside experienced members of the workforce through this type of placement programme. Learning engagement strategies from experienced Family Learning teams widens and compliments existing course content within ITE programmes. It also contributes to meeting the GTC Scotland requirements for student teachers.

6. Moving forward

The pilot has identified a real need within placement programmes for a focus on parental engagement and family learning. This is evident from the impact statements from all of the students involved. From their initial trepidation and fear, in some cases, of engaging with parents, they emerged as confident student teachers eager to implement the skills, knowledge and experience they gained through the process in their teaching career. In order to take this forward successfully the following strategic, operational and research recommendations should be considered.

Strategic

- Findings from the ITE Pilot Placement Programme Evaluation Report, alongside the Strategic Framework, should inform the roll out of this opportunity to other local authorities and universities across Scotland. Evidence and feedback should be gathered to continue refining the placement programme to meet the needs of local authorities, universities and student teachers.
- Use the evidence to help inform future ITE policy developments and drivers for change.
- Further discussions should be held in collaboration with Initial Teacher Education Providers, General Teaching Council for Scotland, Scottish Government and the Centre for Teaching Excellence to consider next steps.

Operational

- Learning which has emerged from the four stages of this pilot be used to inform discussions when rolling it out to other interested ITE providers and local authorities.
- The key findings and recommendations of this pilot placement programme form part of the National Improvement Plan for Scottish Education. Discussion should take place with local authorities on the potential of including suitable text within Parental

Involvement and Engagement Strategies to promote the benefits of placement programmes and support professional learning at a local authority level.

- Ensure that evidence-based research influences the design of placement programmes which should be tailored to meet local needs before being rolled out.
- Reference should be made to the Professional Learning Guide when considering training and development for student teachers, probationers and existing staff.
- The National Improvement Framework Improvement Plan for Scottish Education should be informed by the key findings and recommendations of this report and further roll out.

Research

- Further research is required on the longitudinal impact of placing student teachers in family learning teams across Scotland.
- Further research will be required as the Curriculum Improvement Cycle evolves to ensure that student teachers, probationers and existing staff have the knowledge, skills and competencies to support parents and families through the different stages of reform.

Education Scotland

Denholm House
Almondvale Business Park
Almondvale Way
Livingston
EH54 6GA

T +44 (0)131 244 4330
E enquiries@education.scotland.gov.scot

<https://education.gov.scot/>

© Crown Copyright, 2025.

You may re-use this information (excluding images and logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence providing that it is reproduced accurately and not in a misleading context. The material must be acknowledged as Education Scotland copyright and the document title specified.

To view this licence, visit <http://nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence> or
Email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk

Where we have identified any third-party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.