



Scottish
Attachment
In Action

MAPPING ATTACHMENT-INFORMED, TRAUMA-SENSITIVE PRACTICE IN SCOTTISH EDUCATION

Scottish Attachment in Action & Partners



FOREWORD

‘Making Scotland the best place in the world to grow up and learn’ is one of the many commitments which have provided the policy and legislative context for life in Scotland, over the past decade.

Contributing to this ambition, the language of attachment and of trauma has increased significantly across education, with greater understanding leading to notable examples of attachment-informed practice across educational settings.

In this context SAIA organised an event in October 2019, hosted by Sir John Timpson, with 50 attachment-informed participants from across Scotland: educationalists, clinicians, parents/carers, and care experienced young adults. We celebrated the progress which had been made in attachment-focused knowledge and practice in educational settings and recognised too that, in our experience, such practice was not universal.

The consensus of the gathering was to have a better understanding of the current landscape of attachment-focused and relational practice in education. In so doing, understand where it works well and why, and identify ways to support educationalists and policy makers to realise universal provision of attachment-focused, trauma-informed culture and practice.

The subsequent Project aimed to sketch a ‘map’ of attachment-focused practice which would add value, provide learning, and share experience of ‘what worked’ for teachers and educational professionals and stakeholders. The wider journey of the Project, through the pandemic months, was an opportunity to marvel at the resilience of teachers and better understand how human connection and relational practice makes a significant contribution to wellbeing.

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Policy, legislation, and theory – a Scottish Education context for attachment informed practice

Scottish Education and children's services have at their heart the entitlement of all children and young people to grow up safe, protected and with opportunities to thrive. It places nurture, relationships and connectedness at the centre and emphasises the responsibility of all to ensure that Scotland is the best place in the world to grow up and learn.

The key National Outcome that our children are 'loved, safe and respected' so they realise their full potential is supported by a raft of education policy and legislation which has been evolving over two decades, creating a climate in which attachment-informed, trauma-sensitive relational thinking has had the opportunity to flourish and inform practice.

Scottish Education is distinctive in that it has long had a key focus on wellbeing. Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) emphasises the 'importance of nurturing learners to help them develop the knowledge and skills they need for positive mental, emotional, social and physical wellbeing at school, in their everyday lives, which will be sustained into adult life.

An understanding of how early experiences affect children and young people and the importance of relationships in shaping later outcomes is the foundation which underpins much of the Scottish policy landscape and curriculum. The shift from a focus on specialist services to meet the needs of the most vulnerable to a universal approach based on ecological systems thinking has also contributed to this changing context.

In 2001, the (then) Scottish Executive Report 'For Scotland's Children: Better Integrated Children's Services, 2001 emphasised the key role of universal services in supporting all children including those most vulnerable. The Standards in Scotland's Schools Act 2000 placed a duty 'to make sure that a child's education is directed to the development of their personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential'. It also introduced the concept of presumption of mainstream which required that children's needs be met in mainstream schools and establishments, apart from exceptional circumstances.

Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) (2006) places entitlement to all aspects of wellbeing as expressed by the SHANARRI (Safe, Healthy, Achieving, Nurtured, Active, Respected, Responsible, Included) indicators at the heart of planning for children and young people. It recognises that children and young people will have different experiences in their lives and that every child and young person has the right to expect appropriate support from adults to allow them to grow and develop and reach their full potential. The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 places the rights of children and young people on a legislative footing.

Delivering Excellence and Equity in Scottish Education: A Delivery Plan for Scotland (2016) sets out the approach to addressing disadvantage and ensuring equity within the context of driving up excellence. Health and Wellbeing continues to be a priority and a key driver of the National Improvement Framework (NIF) which is designed to deliver these twin aims¹. Relational and Rights based approaches engendering safe and nurturing environments underpin the Scottish Education policy context and form a key element of Education Scotland's self- evaluation and inspection framework How Good is Our School 4 (HGIOS4), whose Quality Indicators emphasise the central importance of relationships in promoting wellbeing and learning.

Additional Support Needs legislation and practice guidance also encapsulates these principles. The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act, 2004, 2009 identified four broad overlapping themes as potential barriers to learning: learning environment, family circumstances, disability or health need, and social and emotional factors, and highlighted the responsibility of all to support children and young people to realise their full potential through the provision of universal and staged support. The recent review of Additional Support for Learning (ASL) Support for Learning: All our Children and All their Potential (2019) identifies gaps between intention and implementation and highlights the needs of those children and young people with social, emotional, and behavioural needs.

The General Teaching Council for Scotland's (GTCs) refreshed and revised Professional Standards 2021² reinforces the commitment of Scottish education to support the development of children and young people's wellbeing. It includes a new section called 'Being a Teacher in Scotland', which highlights the professional values of social justice, trust and respect and integrity as central to what it means to be a teacher in Scotland. The strong focus on professional values helps teachers develop their professional identity and underpins a deep commitment to all learners' cognitive, social, and emotional growth and wellbeing. The GTC states that "this roots the Professional Standards as a framework that supports what it means to become, to be and to grow as a teacher in Scotland."



¹ Education - Achieving Excellence and Equity: national improvement framework and improvement plan 2022 - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)

² <https://www.gtc.org.uk/News/news/professional-standards-2021-officially-enacted.aspx>

The impetus for change continues, most recently demonstrated by the Independent Care Review (2020) and the resulting Promise³ that all children “grow up loved, safe, and respected so that we realise our full potential”. It reinforces the need for a root and branch systems change across children’s services to ensure the wellbeing of care experienced children and young people and those on the edges of care. The approach to The Promise Scotland and political commitment to its implementation are testament to Scotland’s attachment and trauma informed journey, but also makes it clear that there is still a distance to travel.

Alongside this developing policy and legislative landscape there has been a burgeoning interest in Attachment Theory and its relevance to Scottish Education’s ambition for all children and young people. Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1958; Ainsworth, 1969; Main and Solomon, 1996) is an evolutionary theory of human development which holds that in order to survive and receive comfort babies and young children need to be able to bring their carers close and be comforted by them in stressful situations, so that they can provide safety and security for the infant. Attachment behaviours such as crying, cooing, smiling, are adaptive as they enhance the infant’s chance of survival. This forms the foundation for what Bowlby describes as a ‘lasting psychological connectedness between human beings’. (See following section for detailed definitions).

Developments in the field of neuroscience, for example, Perry’s Neurosequential Model; Baylin and Hughes’ concepts of blocked trust and blocked care; and Porges’ Polyvagal Theory have further strengthened the place of attachment theory as an underpinning and cohering theoretical framework for practice. Research has confirmed the importance of attachment experiences during the early rapid period of brain development in which the foundations for the regulation of stress and emotions are laid. A renewed interest in the Adverse Childhood Experience Study (1998)⁴ which highlighted the link between early experiences of adversity and later health and mental health difficulties has also contributed to growing public awareness of the importance of early experience.

Studies of Resilience (the capacity to adapt and thrive in the face of adversity) have consistently highlighted the importance of connectedness to others as providing a ‘safe base’ from which to explore and learn. In some instances, a single important relationship in which someone has felt valued and cared for has made the difference to life outcomes. Bruce Perry⁵ points out that a “history of relational connectedness is a more powerful indicator of health outcomes than ACEs”.

³ <https://thepromise.scot/>

⁴ <https://www.escap.eu/uploads/Resources-disorders/felitti-1998-relationship-of-childhood-abuse-and-household.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.bdperry.com/>

Attachment & Trauma Definitions

Although the terms attachment and trauma are widely used in professional settings and increasingly in the wider public domain, a lack of clarity about their meaning persists. This reflects changes in understanding and contested definitions. The confusion contributes to miscommunication and a disputed evidence base. This report attempts to provide clarity by providing definitions of these key terms. In a shifting and disputed theoretical frame, inevitably these definitions will be open to question. We believe, however, that we use them consistently throughout this report and that they can be helpful to those responsible for supporting and improving the learning of our children and young people.

Attachment was described by John Bowlby⁶ as ‘a lasting psychological connection between human beings’. Underlying this connection is a biological drive to seek safety and comfort to promote survival that is common to all mammalian species. Without the support of at least one adult, infant mammals will die. Attachment - seeking behaviours bring infants into close proximity to their special adult(s) and ensure that they cannot be forgotten. Crying, reaching out, smiling, gaze and moving towards their carers are all inbuilt behavioural signals that infant humans use to keep themselves safe and their adults engaged with them.

This attachment drive is common to all babies. Most of them are met with a reciprocal caregiving response from adults who instinctively tune in to their babies and usually respond sensitively and lovingly in a timely way to their needs. Emotional, physical or practical barriers may interrupt this instinctive interaction and babies may have to adapt their behaviours to engage adult attention. Almost invariably parents love their children and wish to do the best for them. Some parents may, however, be struggling with their own emotional challenges from their childhoods, with stressful current relationships or they may be consumed by extreme practical struggles created by poverty or inequality. Others may have their own disabilities or health problems that make it more difficult to be immediately responsive to their children or to provide a reliable feeling of safety and comfort despite their efforts. Similarly, if the baby or child has a developmental problem such as Autism, learning difficulty, a physical difficulty, then signalling their attachment needs may be more challenging.

These factors underlie the different attachment strategies and styles (secure, ambivalent-insecure, avoidant-insecure, disorganised - insecure) that infants develop in their relationships with adults. The strategies are attributes of the relationship not the child and are adaptive ways for children to get their basic survival needs met.

Several key emotional and social skills are built through these early attachment relationships. Through the process of responding to an infant's distress and providing comfort, adults are able to help the infant and themselves to reduce their arousal and become calm and relaxed after a stressful situation.



⁶<https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.604.4524&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

Alongside this, the curiosity and wonder that parents experience about their infants' internal worlds develops the capacity for intersubjectivity and mind mindedness. By responding to their infants as intentional human beings with desires and emotions, adults are building children's internal capacity for self-awareness, insight, joy, and empathy. The predictability of a positive attuned response also helps to build 'epistemic trust' – a sense that the world is a good place, people are safe, and the future is secure.

Insecure attachment is not evidence of mental health disorders, and most children can develop into well-functioning adults despite having insecure attachments with their caregivers in infancy. Where adversity persists or where family difficulties are unresolved it is more likely that children will experience problems in later childhood or adulthood – but this is not inevitable. The availability of other attuned adults either in the family or in the community can also allow children sufficient experience of safety and comfort to develop their regulatory skills and emotional understanding. Where children are exposed to extreme and persisting neglect or if attachment difficulties are combined with abuse, children's development can be severely compromised leading to a fundamental distrust in others and a sense of oneself as bad or unworthy of care.

Although the attachment drive is most apparent in infancy where humans are at their most dependent on others it persists throughout the life course. Our capacity to seek and accept help is affected by our previous attachment experiences. Children with very difficult early childhoods may deal with anxiety or stress in ways which challenge or exhaust the adults' capacity to offer them care or help them learn. Some children who have not had particularly difficult childhoods, but who have neurodevelopmental problems like Autism, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) or Learning Disability, might also have problems dealing with stress or with regulating themselves. For example, a child who is extremely sensitive to certain noises or who is very easily distracted, might struggle to cope with a busy classroom. Children who have experienced abuse or neglect in early childhood are at higher risk of having neurodevelopmental problems. For these children, their inherent challenges with self-regulation coupled with their problems with seeking help, can make it even more tricky for adults to help them regulate.

Yet, when adults are able to respond to these troubling behaviours with empathy and concern, they can provide children with an experience of co-regulation that can help to shift their developmental trajectory and change their view of the world and sense of themselves. Connecting to children can evoke immense joy and pleasure for adults whether as parents, carers or educators, yet if the child is struggling to seek support when stressed, or is showing stress through negative behaviours, these connections can also leave adults stressed and anxious. Adults who provide co-regulation for children in such situations also need emotional containment.⁷ They need predictable relationships and spaces to turn to for safety and comfort whether at home or at work and the opportunity to reflect on how their own attachment histories affect their responses.

⁷*Containment is when one person receives and understands the emotional connection of another without being overwhelmed by it and communicates it back to the other person. This process can restore the capacity to think in the other person. Solihull Approach definition from the work of Wilfred Bion*

Trauma occurs when an individual is faced with an event outside normal human experience that overwhelms their capacity to cope and leaves them feeling terrified and helpless. It is often associated with the actual or threatened death or serious injury of oneself or someone close. Trauma is the reaction to frightening events not the events themselves. Many children can cope with terrifying experiences without being traumatised because they have the support of close adults who can buffer the emotional experience and contain their own and their children's anxiety.

Trauma can be categorised into four types:

- acute trauma, which is associated with single terrifying events such as a train crash or an assault
- chronic trauma, which is associated with the repeated and prolonged exposure to terrifying events such as military service in a war zone or continual domestic violence
- complex trauma, associated with exposure to multiple different traumatic events usually over a prolonged period and occurring within close personal relationships
- developmental trauma, associated with terrifying and stressful experiences in the period from conception to the onset of conscious verbal thought (occurs between ages 2 and 3).

It is important to highlight the impact of neglect here⁸. While it can be argued that neglect is not trauma, the impact of neglect on the developing brain is well documented⁹. Furthermore, if a child is neglected then the lack of basic care and provision of a safe environment makes trauma more likely.

Trauma and neglect can have devastating impacts across multiple domains of functioning - physiological, cognitive, social, and emotional. Trauma and neglect occurring in the first decade of life is likely to have a more damaging impact than later trauma, and if it occurs in the context of close relationships is also likely to be more detrimental than that inflicted by a stranger or as a result of accidental or natural causes. Sensory experiences associated with the original traumatic event(s) can unconsciously trigger powerful neurological, bodily and behavioural reactions when encountered in future situations. Many people recover spontaneously from trauma, but this is less likely when trauma has been chronic and interpersonal. Children recover less easily if close caregivers have also been traumatised, since providing a feeling of safety is key to supporting recovery from trauma. Although trauma can have very negative effects, many people show post - traumatic growth and resilience which can leave them with an enhanced capacity for love, productivity, hope and joy. Such outcomes are usually associated with positive human connections and a capacity to see meaning and the potential for positive effects even in very difficult experiences.

⁸<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/types-of-abuse/neglect/>

⁹<https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/inbrief-the-science-of-neglect/>



“The more healthy relationships a child has, the more likely he will be to recover from trauma and thrive. Relationships are the agents of change, and the most powerful therapy is human love”

Bruce Perry¹⁰

¹⁰ *The Boy Who Was Raised as a Dog: And Other Stories from a Child Psychiatrist's Notebook--What Traumatized Children Can Teach Us About Loss, Love, and Healing.* Perry, B.D, Szalavitz, M

Outline of Project & Methodology

A semi structured interview schedule was devised (Appendix 1) and used as a basis for an in-depth conversation to explore the successes and challenges in implementing attachment - informed, trauma- sensitive practice. Over 40 interviews were carried out with a wide range of stakeholders including teachers, early years specialists, educational psychologists, parents, academics, social care workers and young adults with recent experience of the education system. Participants were identified by approaching those who had attended the attachment event funded by Sir John Timpson in 2019 and inviting them to take part in the research or to suggest people who might usefully contribute.

To ensure a consistent approach, interviews were conducted by only three members of the project group. As the data collection took place during the early stages of the pandemic, all interviews were conducted online or by phone. These were audio recorded and then transcribed. The interviewers were then joined by a further three members of the project group and together they developed an agreed coding frame. To make the process as rigorous as possible all coders initially coded the same small subset of transcribed interviews and then met together to compare their work. This discussion led to the development of an initial coding frame with agreed themes and sub themes. This was tested on a further sample of the interviews and additional codes identified and agreed. Finally, all remaining interviews were coded by the original interviewer working with a colleague who had not been involved in the interview process. Examples and quotations that illustrated themes were also identified at this stage.

A short document identifying the emergent themes was produced and circulated to other members of the project group, critical friends, and all interviewees for feedback¹¹ and their feedback has been incorporated into this report.

Our research is a qualitative exercise and as such seeks to explore difference, diversity, and divergence rather than report on a single perspective. We come from a value base that different voices be heard even if discomfort is engendered as a result.

This led us to conduct a survey with care experienced individuals asking about their experiences of the education system. (Appendix 2). Children and young people involved with the care system are likely to have had several early adverse experiences including serious disruptions in their school lives. Their voices provided us with a valuable and different perspective on how the needs of traumatised children are responded to in school settings and the power of educational professionals to transform their lives for the better or to compound their difficulties and distress.

¹¹*See acknowledgements for details*

Research Themes

The aims of the project were threefold: we wanted to identify what was happening in educational settings across the age range through an attachment/trauma lens; we wanted to identify what participants believe were the characteristics of an attachment - informed/trauma- sensitive approach; we wanted to explore both what facilitates the adoption and maintenance of this type of approach and what are the barriers to it.

In relation to the first of these aims, we have been given a great insight into numerous initiatives at every systemic level as well as countless examples of good practice. We intend to provide brief accounts of this work and, where possible, contact details for those leading such initiatives, so that new connections and networks can develop across Scotland and beyond. We will also develop a list of the various models, tools, individuals, and organisations that are influencing this work which will also be available.

We have, however, heard that practice is variable across the sector and sometimes even within individual educational settings, so that some children and young people still experience a lack of understanding and limited support for their distress.

Participants overwhelmingly believed that attachment experiences in childhood had lifelong implications and that they affected children's emotional wellbeing, capacity to self-regulate, understanding of others and ability to engage in learning. There was also clear recognition that trauma, particularly complex and developmental trauma, could have shattering effects on children's sense of themselves, their trust in other people, and their hopes for the future.

There was an acknowledgement that where children were met with a lack of informed understanding in schools, their educational experiences could compound and intensify their difficulties. If education professionals are not part of the solution, they become part of the problem. However, participants also recognised that education settings provided opportunities for children to recover from early adversity and can also provide safe havens for children experiencing current difficulties. In analysing the data, we have been struck by the ecological and systemic nature of this topic. While recognising that the experience of individual children is affected positively or negatively by the way that their teacher relates to them, the critical importance of the whole environment including the school, the community and society has been highlighted. Enablers and barriers exist at all these levels, and this has helped us to structure our themes.



Societal Themes

Structural inequality. Whilst it is widely acknowledged that there is a national ambition to address structural disadvantage in Scottish Education, for example through the Attainment Challenge, Care Experienced Fund and Pupil Equity Fund, the significant structural inequalities of poverty, racism, stigma, and prejudice remain challenging. The need to recognise the impact of intergenerational trauma was particularly highlighted. An area that emerged through very powerful testimony was that of racial trauma and the often-unrecognised nature of the experience and its impact. This was clearly seen as structural¹² and despite policies being in place both nationally and within education services it was felt that there is little attention paid to trauma through the lens of race and racism.^{13,14}

Quote from Teacher from a minority ethnic background

"There is no capacity or confidence within the Scottish teaching workforce to look at trauma through the lens of race and racism. We are nowhere near where we need to be. There has been progress around LGBTQI history, and this will now be part of the Scottish Curriculum which is fantastic but the issues around race, BAME (Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic) history isn't in the curriculum, and we need to fight for that to be included."

Structural inequality was also identified by those who teach and support care experienced children and young people in educational settings. Notably, societal stigma was something that it was felt first became apparent in school and carried into the wider society. This reflects the significant themes of stigma embodied in The Promise.

Quote from care experience young person

"There was a strong sense (in school) of deliberate 'othering', both spoken and unspoken, by teaching staff. Expectations were very clearly stated that care experienced students would become a drain on society and were an undesirable social element."

¹²<https://www.aspeninstitute.org/blog-posts/structural-racism-definition/>

¹³Promoting and developing race equality and anti-racist education

¹⁴Impact on Mental Health – Promoting Race Equality and Anti-racist Education (glowscotland.org.uk)

Negative impact of austerity. Concern was expressed about the cumulative effects of a lengthy period of austerity on the availability of resources. It has been widely recognised that the most fragile funding streams are typically used to support the most vulnerable children and young people including those affected by neglect and trauma, and there is anxiety that this could be exacerbated because of further economic restraints. There was also concern of the limitations for creativity in the use of limited resources – usually because of stringent rules which stifled creativity.

Quote from a Parent

"I was able to negotiate school support because I knew how much it [specialist service] would cost, especially an out of area placement. I said that 'you could get two classroom assistants and a .5 teacher and that is going to cost you about a third of the amount of an out of area placement – give that [money] to the school.'"

Implicit contract of education. There was a suggestion that there is an embedded public understanding of education that demands 'good behaviour' as a pre-requisite for access to learning. This was seen as starkly different from an attachment-informed approach which asks "how can we help you to access learning? This is our responsibility and does not depend on you being good". This implicit contract is also in direct conflict with the policy aspirations of Scottish Education which has a long-standing commitment to meeting the needs of all learners in a mainstream setting. The societal expectations that flow from a basic assumption about an implicit contract can also lead to demands from other parents to exclude or punish children who present with difficulty. This points to a need to share more widely the thinking, values and evidence that underpin the policy and legislative frameworks which are the drivers for the delivery of education in Scotland.

Impact of Covid 19: The impact of the pandemic, with all its awfulness, has also opened up some real opportunities. People have a greater understanding of the importance of connection and the effects of trauma as we have all experienced and witnessed so much distress and pain during the pandemic. There has also been a renewed realisation of the importance of a positive school experience for children and how the absence of connection affects the capacity to learn.

In addition, the learning from the Covid experience was that when we choose to do something, we can move very fast! There are numerous examples of very rapid positive responses to the changed demands and environment, for example, the creative ways in which people connected with each other and the facility for many to work and learn from home.

Quote from Principal Nurture Teacher

"The opportunities of being attachment aware and trauma informed are how to better support teachers with practice, and with Covid I think we'll see a rise in poverty and if we can support families that will help. We need to build relationships with parents and help them to come into schools to talk to us and that will support every school to develop that community spirit. Schools will have a crucial role after Covid."

Public policy and understanding. Several aspects of national public policy were frequently referenced: GIRFEC; ACE Aware nation; the Resilience film; NES work; Best Place to Grow up; The Promise. Many participants felt that these have created a context that at a policy and public understanding level has transformed the way these issues are recognised over the last 15 or 20 years.

There has been an undoubted shift too, at a policy level, in education especially through Nurture Principles; the health and wellbeing drivers of the National Improvement Framework (NIF) and quality indicators of improvement and scrutiny for example, 'How Good is Our School (HGIOS) 4?' on wellbeing, equality and inclusion; and a move from promoting positive behaviour to promoting positive relationships.

Although these inspiring visions have not (yet) always translated into practice, they do provide the opportunity to make closer links between attachment - informed practice and the aspirations of the policy context.

Transformational power. Many participants believed that changes in educational practice based on attachment and trauma theory with supporting policy aspirations at all levels could have a positive ripple effect throughout society, transforming the relational and political context of Scotland in years to come.



System Wide Themes

Whole system. Overwhelmingly participants believed a whole system approach is essential and that it needs to be strategic and cross agency. It was also acknowledged that “splits” can easily occur amongst professionals when working with the depth and complexity of children and young peoples’ experience.

Quote from Educational Psychologist

"I think it (whole system) is the number one thing, we need from the bottom up. It's how we are with each other, colleagues, staff, families, it is a way of being...not just with young people, it's how we are as human beings with each other, a central theory we need to use...a belief we have and we need to look at everything. We cannot move forward and think about behaviour and mental health in isolation. We need to look at these things in the context of attachment. It's the foundation of everything and if we can help everyone understand that it helps everyone. It will help schools, help everyone change the mindset with behaviour that is challenging and help practitioners see that behaviour as distress and be more mind minded and see things from others' point of view. We want all practitioners to be trauma-informed and attachment-aware.

The Strategy in (local authority) brings the two together. [We need to] understand/see the whole person, the early attachment history, secondly, hearing the voice, the history and seeing the person, how that history had impacted on the person in front of you...in the class. This is where the trauma informed practice comes in. The second part is about how we respond and responding knowing 'all behaviour is communication', we respond with compassion and move forward to create a safe space. The challenge? There's many, as lots of schools have had attachment training, which is really good, but many are at different levels in knowledge and understanding and we are not saying start from scratch, but we want everyone to have this mass training and it is set within the framework of the Strategy. We want everyone to use the same language at meetings, case conferences, JAT (Joint Assessment Team) meetings, round the table, and have the same understanding and that will be a huge benefit...it is a huge task."

Enabling environment. Changes in practice need to be supported by enabling policies, procedures, and processes.

Quote from a Parent

"Health and Wellbeing must be prioritised from Government level to practice or the attainment gap will still prevail."

Quote from Lead Officer, Local Authority

".....people don't want to fall back to a deficit model. It's the dovetailing hand in hand with examples of hope because the majority of kids do turn things around and create better lives for their children than they had. Not everybody but the majority. I know from my experience and my volunteers that even if they went down that road for 20 years they are now contributing, have jobs etc. That idea that's it's never too late.

We have to guard against a deficit model. For me the big difference between early years when your brain is being shaped for you and understanding that you come into late adolescence and early adulthood, and you can shape your own brain. It is possible to change your habits and thinking. That's the bit that's not come across enough. Even for young people. I think there's a myth somewhere that if it's all gone wrong in adolescence it's too late. You're not worth our investment now but what we know is that you can turn it back around in your 20's. What we need to do is give many more examples of how if your house is built on dodgy foundations then it doesn't need to stay that way, you can turn it around."

Some participants differentiated between trauma and attachment, referencing the universal relevance of attachment theory and the relatively new and untested science of trauma and the brain.^{15,16}

Over bureaucratic and attainment focused workload and inspection processes. There was a clear view that teachers feel under constant time pressure, experiencing anxiety as a result of workload pressures and a focus on attainment targets. Although inspection frameworks include quality indicators on wellbeing, equality, and inclusion there is still a view that scrutiny can interfere with relational practice. It might be interesting to speculate that, even though the National Improvement Framework (NIF) emphasises wellbeing as integral to the work of a school in delivering Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) and improving attainment, there might still be a tendency to view these as separate rather than integral to the quality of teaching and learning.

Quote from Head of Education, Independent School

"HMIE questioned the introduction of a shorter school day – we stuck to our guns. Got to be able to stand ground and have knowledge to back it up."

¹⁵ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4760853/>

¹⁶ Bath_H_The_Trouble_with_Trauma.pdf (traumebevisst.no)

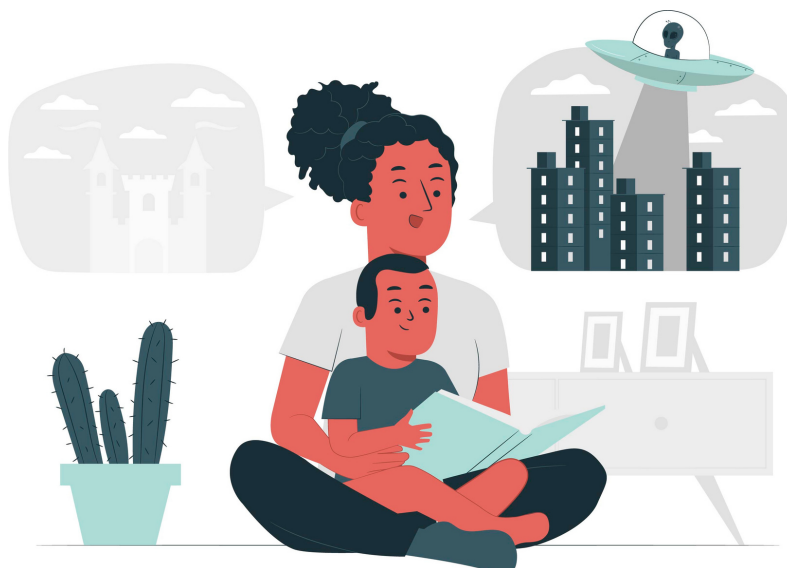
Quote from Educational Psychologist

"To me it's about a 'relationally enriched environment' and it's routine, structure, it feels safe. Children, parents, and visitors come into school and don't feel they 'are done to' and things happen alongside them. Children are attuned to and seen individually which is a challenge. Also, the whole school approach benefits all children but is particularly honed for children who don't feel safe, don't automatically feel relational safety from adults in the school."

Attachment is for all. Participants emphasised that an understanding of attachment should underpin all relationships. It is not just relevant for children who have experienced adversity – all children and all adults need an attachment - informed environment. Everyone benefits from a relational approach. Participants emphasised that this needs to go across the entire hierarchy e.g., from Director of Education to classroom assistant. There is no inherent tension here. The policy and legislation context within which all operate lends itself readily to an attachment - informed, trauma - sensitive approach.

Primary task. All agencies and individuals must retain a focus on their primary task but share an understanding and a language that will promote good practice across children's lives. The primary task of education, school and establishment settings as set out in Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) (3- 18 years) is to ensure that all children and young people become confident individuals, effective contributors, responsible citizens, and successful learners. Health and wellbeing is central to this along with literacy and numeracy. Any and all changes in practice must support this task and continue to support the development of the four capacities.

Deficit model. Some participants were concerned that poorly understood and poorly implemented approaches based on attachment and trauma theory could contribute to low aspirations and stigma, for example, seeing ACEs as a 'deficit' or wrongly being a predictor of certain outcomes. This would also be at variance with the thrust of education policy which has a long-standing ecological perspective as encapsulated in, for example, Getting it Right for Every Child but that has its roots in much earlier legislation and policy.



This theme also relates to other themes (below) which attest to the importance of training, Career Long Professional Learning (CLPL) and ongoing practice support. It straddles both whole system and school level themes and points to the connectivity and interdependency at all systems levels.

Quote from Educational Psychologist

"There is a tension between attainment and wellbeing, but they are not mutually exclusive, and they should be intertwined. There is a danger schools go too far with relationships and forget about learning and teaching and others have a real focus on getting attainment up, but children learn best when lessons are engaging, and practice is trauma responsive and still there is a big tension between those and we need to be clearer about what we want for our children. Importance of a value-based approach."

Quote from care experienced young person

"Every piece of work comes back to very strong values-led leadership that says we won't give up on a child, articulates that, and explaining that to the children, we won't give up on you and it's been a tricky day today, but things will get better."



School Level Themes

Whole school. Whole school approaches were widely referenced, and many elements of effective whole school systems distinctively emerged as themes.

Whole school approaches are widely recognised as an effective vehicle for the promotion of children and young peoples' emotional wellbeing and are closely aligned to the principles of equity and inclusion. NICE (National Institute of Health and Care Excellence) defines the whole school approach as follows:

'A whole school approach goes beyond the learning and teaching in the classroom to include school culture, ethos and environment. It also involves proactive engagement with children and young people, their parents and carers, teacher and school leaders and outside agencies'.

All these elements were highlighted by participants.

Quote from Co-Ordinator, Independent School

"When you get into the depths of the Curriculum for Excellence it's meant to be inclusive, it's meant to accept various approaches and when you take that from paper to reality it seems that each step it loses something. Although on paper it looks good and sounds good there's something along the way that's getting missed or lost. I believe that any child right now is fully within their right, whose had a difficult time within education, to hold their local authority or government to account. To say, you said you would give me this and in fact this is what I got, and I left school essentially, in some cases, re-traumatised where their mental health has taken them to self-harm or suicidal thoughts. And that is genuinely what's happened. So, there is something along the line in the system that gets lost in translation and I would like to know what it is."



Head teachers and school leadership. Participants extolled the transformational power of head teachers who were passionately adopting an attachment - informed trauma - sensitive approach, giving examples of head teachers who made it clear that 'we love our children' or 'we do not shout at people in this school'. Conversely, there were also examples where – no matter how passionate a classroom teacher in a school may have been about this way of teaching - if the head teacher did not share that vision the relational approach was described as 'disappearing overnight'. This example points to the critical nature of leadership in promoting practice and 'setting the tone'.

Quote from Lead Officer, Local Authority

"Headteacher - loving – lightbulb moments! A Head Teacher couldn't understand why the kids ended up in prison or self-harming or young mothers. Once he understood the correlation between their early life experience, their environment, trauma, and their behaviours then he understood that he/the school had put in protective factors, but it wasn't enough for some kids. Stopped him feeling as if he had failed. 'Ah, this is why!'"

Ethos and culture. Closely connected to leadership, the effect on the whole school community of developing an ethos and culture grounded in these ideas was felt to be huge. Many participants described how schools adopting this approach, providing a safe and nurturing environment, were able to shift toxic cultures of poor attainment and relational conflict into well-functioning communities where adults and children were both happy and achieving.

The importance of a welcoming school environment in which children experiencing adversity are met with an understanding, compassionate response is paramount. The ethos and culture of local authority central teams who engage with and support schools also has an impact as part of wider system contexts.

For children and young people going through changes of school as a result of difficult family circumstances, changes in ethos and culture can have a significant impact, either positively or negatively, on the challenges faced as a consequence of multiple transitions.

Importance of involving children and families: As well as consulting children and young people and their families, participants also described much more active ways in which co-production could occur among professionals, families and young people.¹⁷ One pertinent comment on this topic suggested that whole school approaches which are universally acknowledged to be the most effective way of implementing practice are, in many instances, whole **staff** approaches and may not proactively involve children, young people, their parents and carers in a wholly meaningful way.

¹⁷ <https://www.mind.org.uk/media-a/4639/co-production-web-pdf-061017.pdf>

Quote from Care Experienced young person

"Listen and consult with children and then they would be able to adapt to the needs of the child and not pressures of paperwork."

This is not to say that in less formal or structured ways, children and families do not feel supported but rather that it is less usual for children and families to be involved in school planning processes from the outset.

However, there is at times a disconnect between families and children's actual experience and the policy and practice frameworks of schools and wider system. Some parents and carers described schools' reluctance to accept the parent or carer's deep knowledge and understanding of their child's needs based on an understanding of attachment. This was particularly so for foster carers and adoptive parents whose lived experience gave an invaluable insight into the impact of early adverse experience which was not always reflected in support planning. The depth and complexity of the child or young person's world and the individual nature of their experience needs to be held in mind.

Recognising different needs. The importance of acknowledging and recognising difference was highlighted. This includes cultural or ethnic diversity; different personal histories; the impact of a variety of physical, cognitive, or sensory conditions; understanding the particular needs of care experienced children, adopted children and refugee children. The simple reality that every child and family is unique and that their uniqueness should be cherished and understood was emphasised. Some variability was highlighted in the extent to which different needs are recognised and addressed, for example in building culturally responsive workforce capacity.

At the same time there was recognition of the demands placed on school staff in meeting a wide range of needs, particularly at times of diminishing resource.

Quote from Care Experienced young person

"Offer better support, guidance and understanding, create hubs of activism for those wishing to raise awareness of care experience. To support them to realise their full potential and not settling for second best!!"

Messaging and language. The whole physical, social, and emotional environment should reflect the message: 'All are welcome here – you are welcome here'. Language is powerful and participants recognised that it mattered how children and families were talked to or written about. Use of pejorative or stigmatising terminology (words such as manipulative, devious, calculating etc.) had lasting effects on self-esteem and trust, and can also impose a barrier to a full understanding and assessment of children's needs by creating a negative narrative about a child or young person.

Sometimes the use of professional language can be alienating and unhelpful.¹⁸ Some participants even questioned the use of the word 'attachment' as they thought it implied some deficit in parental capacities.

Quote from Senior Educational Psychologist

"I think we need to take more responsibility as professionals about the unintended impact that some of our well-intended desire to help has, particularly in this area because it is so emotive. As soon as you say that you think a child has a problem with attachment, then the parent is going to feel blamed even if you didn't say it in that way. I think thinking about stress or change and loss can be said in a different way because there has been lots of stressors in your life and the timing/where your child's brain was at that time when you had the trauma and loss in your world, that has just meant they have had difficulties with person permanence and constancy. That's a different message than saying you have an attachment difficulty with your child. I think we need to think more about that."

Understanding behaviour as communication. This was a powerful theme that seemed fundamental to this type of approach (indeed it is one of the 6 Nurture principles)¹⁹ Understanding behaviour was regularly cited by interviewees as something which was a positive step change for teachers but also a barrier for some who didn't agree with the premise. Rather than focusing on trying to control or manage children's behaviour, participants highlighted that it was important to try to understand the distress or frustration that underlay any difficulties the children presented in order to support them to settle to learn. Language as a vital means of communication is also a Nurture Principle and as such is underpinned by an understanding of attachment theory.

There remains a challenge identified in these themes in making the shift from behaviour management to responding to behaviour as distress. There are frameworks, including the Nurture Principles, which can support this. For example, the safe base principle with implicit ideas of structure and predictability can support staff in thinking about boundaries in the context of a relational approach. The Solihull Approach²⁰ integrates attunement and containment with approaches to behaviour. The Dyadic Developmental Practice²¹ model emphasises physical and relational safety preceding all learning as well as considering the needs underneath behaviour before responding PACE-fully to the behaviour. All these approaches (and others)^{22,23} are being implemented and can provide a vehicle for thinking about these themes.

¹⁸ <https://thepsychologist.bps.org.uk/volume-34/december-2021/changing-language-care>

¹⁹ <https://www.nurtureuk.org/nurture/six-principles-nurture>

²⁰ <https://inourplace.co.uk/>

²¹ *Working with Relational Trauma in School*, Golding, Phillips and Bomber (2021) Jessica Kingsley Publishers 2021

²² <https://www.videointeractionguidance.net/page/show/4094>

²³ https://www.incredibleyears.com/wp-content/uploads/IY-Series_A-Developmental-Approach.pdf

Quote from Educational Psychologist

"We want not to be looking at the person, seeing they have a 'problem', it is about changing language, noticing, exploration, being non-judgemental and there is a huge piece of work to be done and we can be using 'emotions coaching' and the strategy is not just for teachers but all facilities staff ...they need to know how important attachment iseveryone needs this."

Importance of training and support. To implement and maintain an effective whole school approach adults need support and the right kind of training. Ongoing support and training that engage them in both a learning and a reflective process. We all have attachment histories that can help or hinder our progress. Adults understanding their own triggers will help them to work effectively with children. Simplistic, superficial training focusing on quick fix techniques was seen as being actively damaging as it could leave adults despairing and reluctant to engage if their attempts to change practice do not produce rapid results. There were however examples of training on understanding attachment which had a significant impact on practice.

Quote from care experienced young person

"[Training should] Provide education for their staff through examining their value base and motivations. Use this opportunity to encourage empathetic practice in reaching out to care experienced students."

Participants were clear that the training of all school staff is important as a first step in embedding practice. There were sometimes practical difficulties in bringing staff together - competing demands and school organisation issues. Participants also highlighted that creating a reflective culture is essential to embed and support attachment - informed trauma - sensitive practice This was identified as a clear gap in practice and one which is essential to implement.

Quote from Principal Educational Psychologist

"We are teaching how to build capacity in children, but we are also helping build capacity in the adults. We must build resilience in teachers, and we must think about how we relate to each other, as adults in the school. A fully 'trauma informed school' makes work a nice place to be, and adult lives can be made better. It can be transformational, and it builds self-awareness in adults. It's very therapeutic not only for the children but the staff too. It shifts mindsets."

Role modelling relational work. Participants emphasised that adults should demonstrate a respectful, relational approach in their interactions with each other, involved professionals and parents/carers as well as in their responses to children, thus acknowledging the powerful influence of modelling and of adults 'setting the tone'.

Quote from Strategic Officer, Local Authority

"(The adults)...To become feelings detectives. Take that sting out of it. If the adults can become more empathetic and emotionally responsive and approach the child slightly differently to have a different outcome rather than escalating up."

Creating a non-shaming disciplinary structure. We were given multiple examples of ways in which current practices can inadvertently shame children even when the intention is to support positive behaviour. There were a few examples of adults deliberately making children feel shame but, in most cases, interviewees described a failure to realise the impact on children of certain interventions or ways of speaking. This can sometimes leave staff perplexed and at a loss when children and young people's behaviour escalates rather than calms as a result. There were also examples of structures and processes within schools that could be inherently shaming even when there was an overt attempt to adopt an attachment - informed trauma - sensitive approach. For example, 'time out' strategies can trigger shame responses when they are presented as a means of 'controlling behaviour'. Conversely opportunities to have a break and space to self-regulate can be helpful. Much depends on the context and the sensitivity with which boundaries and disciplinary processes are set. A climate of repair after rupture can support this and mitigate the risks associated with shame inducing experience.

Quote from a parent

"In P2 my kid told me that if you had been good today, you got so many points or whatever it was, which unfortunately is rife in all the classes - traffic light system and points system. The children come home, and they can tell me who the bad children are in the class. And so that's still happening very much and is not discouraged in any way in which the teachers are dealing with discipline, for example, my kid told me that if you have got so many points throughout the day, you got a cushion to sit on [to hear the teacher tell a story]. If you hadn't, you don't - you sit on the floor. I couldn't understand listening to her. I checked with her about five times. You're sure? Really? That cannot be possible. But no in fact that was possible, and it was this individual teacher's way of saying, 'well done! you did really well today!' or to little Johnny - well what? You didn't do so well today. You sit there but you might get a cushion tomorrow if you're good enough'. For me this is the standing out there saying 'There's me and then there's you'. Absolutely shaming. Horrendous."

Impact of different settings. Participants recognised that an attachment – informed, trauma-sensitive approach became harder to implement the older children become because of the organisation of the education system. In early years settings there is an explicit recognition of attachment needs.

Within primary schools many structures promote safety and security through continuing relationships with adults and children as well as the existence of a consistent physical space. In secondary schools, children are exposed to a constant flow of different adults and children. They experience multiple transitions of relationship and place every day. In further and higher education young people may feel completely disconnected and struggle to find emotional connection to both their teachers and their peers. Staff need more training as there is a culture of responding and teaching to chronological age when socially and emotionally young people can be at an earlier developmental stage. There are pockets of good practice, for example, the HuB for Success²⁴, in Edinburgh and, also, some of the interviewees who worked in a range of settings spoke specifically about understanding and teaching to developmental age not chronological age.

²⁴ <https://hubforsuccess.org/>

Recognising the importance of peer relationships. Participants were able to describe both the negative and positive impact of peer relationships. When the ethos and culture of school expected compassion and respect between children and dealt thoughtfully and firmly with bullying then children could become a source of safety and security for each other. This is closely linked with all facets of whole school approaches- leadership, culture, modelling, non-shaming discipline approaches and engagement with parents, carers, children, and wider community.



Direct Practice Themes

Although there was a clear recognition of the importance of a strategic approach, the area of direct practice produced more themes than anything other. Many of the following themes are also threaded through the wider systems level and whole school level themes linking closely to areas of implementation and development across the entire infrastructure.

This direct practice theme perhaps reflects the fundamental importance of personal relationships in an attachment-informed approach which most participants recognised, either from their own experience or through observation; that individual educational professionals can help children survive personal adversity and difficult school experiences. There was, however, clear awareness that this often placed an intolerable burden on these adults and left children vulnerable to the loss of that one special adult.

Quote from Primary Class Teacher

"I try to adopt some strategies a friend had suggested, minor things. I had a child in my class, and I knew he had been affected by trauma. He was very unsettled in class, low- level disruptive behaviours. He had very low self-esteem and after this discussion with my friend about his anxiety I moved his position so that he could see the door, see everyone around him and everything that was going on. He had a much better view of everything. It made a significant impact on his ability to settle on task for slightly longer periods of time. This meant I could concentrate on other groups. He started to take more pride in his work as he could concentrate better. It freed me up to teach others without being disturbed."



Quote from Principal Educational Psychologist

"The positives are that there will be more success with pupils who are challenging. When the whole team understands the behaviour, it can be empowering, and it can free teachers from feeling helpless. and hopeless as they try to get pupils to learn and find it isn't working. Teachers feel frustrated but when they understand there is more to do before learning can take place, knowing the child must feel safe first, needs to be comfortable first, then that's the key. That must come before the focus on learning. We are teaching how to build capacity in children, but we are also helping build capacity in the adults. We must build resilience in teachers, and we must think about how we relate to each other, as adults in the school. A fully 'trauma - informed school' makes work a nice place to be, and adult lives can be made better. It can be transformational, and it builds self-awareness in adults. It's very therapeutic not only for the children but the staff too. It shifts mindsets."

Quote from Care experienced young person

"(the) Guidance teacher offered a safe space for me.....always caring and she said she was like my mum at school."

Personal qualities. A whole range of personal qualities were mentioned as important in this approach such as loving, caring, warm, compassionate, fun, curious, empathic, trustworthy, having stickability and self-awareness.²⁵ There was a recognition that some people 'just get it instinctively'. Participants also believed, however, that some of these qualities can be learnt through training, modelling and support. There was a concern that professional culture and training in the past has discouraged getting too emotionally involved and that some of these qualities were seen as inappropriate.

Quote from adoptive parent

"[For teachers and other professionals there is] a danger of pathologising behaviour if you don't get to know the child."



²⁵ <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/56707889-the-kindness-principle>

Attitudes/skills. Attuning to children, being prepared to touch/hug children, using oneself, role modelling self-regulation and emotional competence, holding children in mind, de-escalation, flexibility, teaching at developmental age, managing boundaries and empathy simultaneously were all highlighted as the skills and qualities needed. It is interesting to note that many participants referred to experiences during training of 'lightbulb moments' when they had the realisation that distressed and challenging behaviours are often about children feeling unsafe. Having a neuroscientific explanation was felt to be helpful in supporting understanding. These 'lightbulb moments' prompted changes in attitude and in practice.

Quote from Network Learning Support Teacher

"I can think of one wee boy in particular whose mum is a drug addict, and he is being brought up by his grandparents and I've been involved in a support group. He's a lovely wee boy and does have problems, being born affected by drugs or alcohol and once, before the schools locked down, he was quite anxious, and I think something had happened at home. For the first time he was anxious and a bit stressed having to come with me to do his work and what I did was to say, 'we don't need to do this today, we can do something else' to make him less anxious, to make him comfortable, and I said, 'we can do it next time'. He had some leeway, no pressure, knowing he didn't need to do the work today, rather than stress him out. I could tell he was stressed, and I put him at ease. It was about the relationship, nurturing and as a Learning Support teacher you need to see the bigger picture and it cannot always be about 'oh we need to get his work done'. His stress drained away, totally left him and you could see that he was much happier doing something else as opposed to reading and we played a few games and he didn't think that was work, it's about being flexible."

Practicalities. Managing transitions (big and little); creating a feeling of safety through organisation of space, routines, sensory environment, and relational security; providing sensory breaks for all children; providing opportunities for withdrawal in high stress situations either within the classroom or in the school



Quote from former Teacher/Virtual School Headteacher – England

"It's not that people don't understand but you need to be prepared to expose your own fears and vulnerabilities. Can't deny neuroscience but it's not like the teaching methodology of e.g., phonics. You don't sit outside it. Attachment demands an emotional understanding, and you are part of the system."

Child-centred. Providing a sense of belonging, claiming, understanding the impact of a child's individual history, modifying the approach to meet the need, seeing the whole child, one to one support where necessary, and recognising and dealing with distress e.g., bullying.

Quote from Educational Psychologist

"We need to teach young people about attachment and in one school we have a project for S4's, teaching pupils about what early years attachment means and so many pupils have not had positive attachments themselves growing up and we don't want that cycle to repeat. We know that when they become parents it can be difficult so they will need support from the realisation that they maybe didn't get what they needed. We have that project to help support understanding of what babies need and so we can support the next generation, but that project is in its early days. We have some evidence it is helping to support what babies need and it is an area we need to home in on the next generation."

Family-centred. Respecting parents' knowledge of their child, understanding and welcoming difference and diversity, listening to parents concerns and taking them seriously is extremely important. Meetings and discussions are seldom family - focused, chaired by the teacher or social worker, with parents sometimes contradicted and made to feel at fault.

Quote from a parent

"We are trying to turn around a bloody juggernaut with a lawn mower engine. This is steeped in 'this is how it has always been done' and there are all these myths around. We need to somehow break that cycle, to help schools/teachers understand that lots of the parents they meet will have had a very bad experience in education. So, it depends as a parent who you have around you. Parents come with their own story."

On the other hand, sharing information does not always feel comfortable for a teacher.

Quote from Secondary Teacher

"I am uncomfortable with knowing such intimate detail [of young people's lives]. Did that young person really want me, as a PE teacher, to know every bit of information? Young people must have more rights to decide who knows what? Decisions are taken out of their hands, and they have no say."

Communication. There was emphasis throughout on the importance of communication with children, families, colleagues, other professionals. Understanding communication in its broadest sense i.e., recognising that all behaviour (including our own) has meaning. It was striking that many interviewees talked about the child or young person's behaviour as communication demonstrating a growing understanding of attachment and trauma not simply as a choice the child makes to be disruptive.

Quote from Nurture Teacher

"[we must] explain the nurture principles in child friendly language [to children]."

Strengths based approach. The importance of recognising talents, developing resilience, having hope and aspiration, understanding the struggle that children may experience just to get to school, were all seen as important by participants. The importance of gentle challenge to support children to take the risk of engaging with new or difficult experiences was emphasised. This was matched by an awareness of the powerful negative impact on children of stigma, stereotyping and despair.



The Challenges

Many participants shared examples of excellent practice and substantive change across whole agencies and authorities. However, there was also an overall recognition that there are still many challenges and barriers to implementing this approach consistently across Scotland; and that this also applied to all services where joint and integrated working was being undertaken to support children and young people. The variability of training and support offers to all children's services professionals across Scotland was referenced.

Resources: Concerns were expressed that there are insufficient resources available to implement the approach fully. Training, extra time and additional focused support for some individual children are expensive but necessary. Some services which provided a bridge between education and other support services have been reduced or stopped and this was felt to put additional pressure. There was also a sense that there is not a good enough staff - child ratio in mainstream settings even without the additional demands involved in this approach. Several of these difficulties were exacerbated by geographical difficulties particularly in isolated rural or island areas. Lack of resources within the education sector was echoed across all services involved with children but a particular concern was the inaccessibility of mental health services such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) due to the overload on this service.

Quote: Lead Officer, Local Authority

"This is a societal issue and requires a societal response. What I hear now from schools is frustration. They get the issues and feel they are being expected to be the saviours. The challenge is many in the education world feel that the education system is being expected to pick up what is a societal issue. And yet nobody is really tackling how do we teach parents and carers about these issues; how do we reach the housing department. How do we get people to understand that the folk portrayed in the media as druggies or junkies, it's linked to trauma? It's that wider societal public view so that everyone doesn't think it's education staff that have to repair the damage."



Knowledge and skill to provide leadership. Although we heard of several outstanding head teachers who really adopted and promoted an attachment-informed, trauma-sensitive approach to the whole school – pupils and staff - it appears that there are still gaps in in-depth knowledge and skill across the sector. There is certainly more awareness of the basic concepts and neither ‘attachment’ nor ‘trauma’ will be unfamiliar words to teachers as they were a few years ago. The capacity to help teachers through leadership as well as training to translate theory into practice was pinpointed as an area for development. This can mean that even when there is a desire to change practice, it can be undermined by lack of knowledge, for example, about the connection between relationships and learning or the impact of triggers on children’s behaviour. We did find a number of examples of educational psychologists and Educational Psychology Services^{26, 27}, contributing to and, in many instances, leading change and contributing to the strategic direction of the local authorities in which they work, as well as providing training, direct support, research evidence and support with implementation at school and system level.

Quote from Educational Psychologist

"Leadership is variable. Where there is a strong leader in a school that makes a world of difference and so some of our structures haven't changed for a hundred of years in our secondary schools, and that's a barrier."

Quote from Teacher

"The inconsistency in approach causes division between staff. We need senior managers on board. Some people on our training say, 'you are preaching to the converted, and what we really need is for the senior managers to get on board.'"

Some concerns were also raised by participants about the difficulty in understanding the complex interactions between neurodevelopmental conditions and trauma. It was also highlighted that, within an educational setting, hyperarousal was more readily identified and responded to than trauma related dissociation.

Individual v. group need. There was a recognition from many participants that teachers were often faced with the dilemma of attending to the high-level needs of a few children or providing for the more moderate learning needs of the wider group. It was recognised even by participants who were not educational professionals that this feels almost irresolvable. There were, however, examples of organisations/ schools that had found that adopting an attachment/trauma approach made this less problematic.²⁹

²⁶ (<https://blogs.glowscotland.org.uk/re/renfrewshireedpsych/>)

<https://cycj.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/BBBL-Final-Version.pdf>

²⁷ https://education.gov.scot/nih/Documents/ELC/ELC10_AtoZofAttachmentandResilience2014SouthLan.pdf

²⁸ <https://blogs.glowscotland.org.uk/ea/eapsychservices/strategic-involvement/therapeutic-model>

²⁹ <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.3402/edui.v6.27311>

Entrenched resistance. Participants identified that a relational approach demands a culture change and that this was sometimes met by what was described as an 'old school' mentality. They suggested that some educational professionals still focused on controlling children's behaviour through sanctions and exclusions. They did not see relationships or wellbeing as part of their job and expected pastoral/guidance staff or school counsellors to 'fix' children so that they could continue to work in ways they were used to. This referred to a minority of staff members and runs counter to the prevailing educational ethos and direction, but it led to confusion and unpredictability for children as they experienced an unhelpful mix of relational and sanction-focused approaches. It points again to the importance of workforce capacity, Career Long Professional Learning (CLPL) and the ethos and culture which can lead to a turning point for those more reluctant to engage with this thinking.

Quote from parent/teacher

"I have seen a teacher show me a list of interventions and strategies and on that list is 'wondering aloud', for example, but I know as a parent and as a teacher that actually using something like 'wondering aloud' needs a lot of work, and it doesn't often work the first time, and you often meet resistance. It is about being able to adapt and change that is really important. We look for strategies but what we need is to develop an approach and we need to think about our values. We emphasis too much of the doing without understanding the values that need also to be reinforced and strengthened. And, I think, when you are working with another adult it's those values that another person can help hold onto."

Shame. Participants cited the pervasive and toxic presence of shame inducing policies, procedures, and practices evident at every systemic level. The perverse impact of some practices intended to reward positive behaviour was particularly troubling as it was often not recognised as problematic. Recognising the vulnerability to shame of many children who have experienced adversity is central in both attachment and trauma theories. Shame is often at the root of many of the behaviours that teachers find so frustrating and troubling and it is easy for children to find themselves trapped in a vicious cycle where failure to understand their distress induces more shame and difficult behaviour. This issue was reported not only by professionals but also by parents and adults with recent experience of the education system.



Quote from Principal Teacher (Nurture)

"On traffic light charts...the name that ends up in the red, amber ...is standing out in front, and it's probably the same name week after week you know. I see that a lot and I try and challenge that as carefully as I can - just to make people aware that is shaming. It's creating shame. But better relationships create better learning. If you're trying to educate children, it's all about the relationships. If you're shaming children, you're not going to develop a good relationship with them."

Supporting adults to connect and reflect. Almost all participants recognised that, unlike other professionals working closely with children, teachers had little opportunity for support and/or encouragement to reflect on themselves or their practice in a sustained or formal way. This is not to say that teachers are individually unreflective. However, formal support and reflective practice go hand in hand. Built in systematically, participants felt it could help to sustain connections with hurt and distressed children as well as to understand how their own issues/ triggers might be affecting their practice. To create this type of support as the norm for the education profession would be a huge demand on resources and, in the context of resource pressures, there may not be sufficient appropriately skilled people to provide it. It may be that peer support models are a more practical option. Finding creative ways to ensure that support and reflective practice become embedded in education is a huge challenge. It would need to begin during initial training, build on existing workforce structures, and current informal processes for practice support and reflection.



Quote from Educational Psychologist

"..... teachers need more support, supervision, and meaningful coaching, and if there isn't time and space for teachers to reflect then we won't make progress. We have introduced a pilot of DDP (Dyadic Development Practice, Psychotherapy and Parenting) supervision for leaders in our schools who have undertaken DDP Level 1 training and that's been very positively evaluated.... they have spoken about a space to reflect, peer support, being with like-minded peers, a framework for their practice to fall back on.

We are also looking at targeted supervision for those 'at risk' roles, at the coal face dealing with extremely difficult situations. And looking at a peer supervision model for staff who are not in those situations but still have children in their class that they would like an opportunity to explore how best to support the children and their own stress. We need more staff in the system to allow staff to come out of class, to have those reflections, and to make sure when they are in class, they are on form. When we look at November the absences skyrocket, March, and June also, when staff are tired. The system must allow for teachers to give their all to children but when you have had chairs thrown at you from across the room, displays ripped off the walls, by day 3 or 4 they are exhausted and how do they cope? We need to think about support, create therapeutic webs and for that to happen we need it on a national basis."



Professional Learning Themes

The importance of professional learning was highlighted by all participants and there were suggestions about how and when training should be delivered. It was emphasised that although some people appeared to be excellent instinctive practitioners, they still needed to have the opportunity to base their practice in and on a strong theoretical foundation.

Quote from Teacher

"here is a challenge of how you train support staff who only work 9-3."

Initial teacher training and education. Attachment and trauma were felt to be inconsistently and superficially covered in qualifying courses. It was also highlighted that there is little or no focus on racial trauma in initial training. There was general agreement that these should become more of the core components of education at this very early stage. It was also recognised that this might be difficult to understand fully until teachers entered employment. There was also an emphasis that this initial teacher training should encourage students to understand their own attachment histories and their own patterns of behaviour, as well as learning formal theory.

Quote from Head of Education, Independent School

"Teacher training was poor, it didn't prepare me and it hasn't changed."

Quote from Lecturer in Education

"In my setting students need to look beyond behaviour they may see and how they may deal with that and consider issues of trust, sense of safety and self-esteem and how this manifests itself in children's behaviour. We have limited time with students, and they get an overview from me. As an individual student teacher, they need to look at how to build and focus on relationships with children and then there is the trauma informed school and whole system approach that should be in place and how children affected can thrive as they should. I have so little time with students, and we are only scraping the surface of all of this."

I want courses dedicated to trauma and attachment and for it be core for all students, to have a whole module and I hope that may come. Some students have electives in 3rd/4th year, but I would want it to be core for all students. It is a priority for Health and Wellbeing to be at the core of learning and then attainment will come ...it needs to be prioritised as a foundation and if I could wave a magic wand, it would be to have an acceptance that Health and Wellbeing must be at the core of what we do. Curricular success will then come. Also, we need teachers to look after their own self-care, having emotional check-ins and emotions coaching. I would also like to know what every other university is doing so it is more joined up, that would be useful."

Quote from Teacher

"I think it (attachment - aware, trauma- informed practice) needs to be put into university course work as they (teachers in training) need to know where children are coming from. It isn't a 'one size fits all', different backgrounds and getting it right for every child, you need to hone in, use your nurturing side. For example, if I had a child with ADHD, I would deal with him differently than I would with a child in a regular group. Through the courses you learn from experience what that child needs, when someone is coming in to teaching, they may not necessarily know that it is learning on the job, so it needs to be in course work either in the four-year course or PGD. They need to be aware for coming into schools."

Quote from Teacher

"I think we need to start with university courses before student teachers go on their first placements. Student teachers need to understand a class won't have perfect behaviour. As we learn more about the damage to the brain and learning that the brain can be healed there needs to be CPD around this. After university and throughout our careers we need to have continuous training in trauma and attachment, the strategies, and approaches."

Career Long Professional Learning (CLPL). Participants advocated whole school training - from head teachers to auxiliary staff - as they recognised the difficulty of implementing change in a piecemeal fashion. All staff have contact with children and their families and so need to understand the importance of the way they welcome and interact with them. Although theoretical knowledge was recognised as important, participants emphasised the importance of creating mechanisms that ensured that theory was translated into practice – ideas included coaching, mentoring, buddy schemes, external consultation, and regular reflective opportunities. Regular refresher and update training is also considered necessary.

‘Particular’ groups. Participants suggested that some individuals and groups should have additional training. The importance of head teachers in implementing this approach has already been mentioned and there was a view that an understanding of attachment and trauma should be incorporated into Head Teacher training. Guidance and pastoral staff were not only seen as key in providing children with a positive experience but were also more exposed to children’s distress and therefore at higher risk of vicarious trauma. Their need for support and further training in their role was acknowledged. It was also felt that newly qualified teachers required focused support around this approach during their early developmental pathway. This was in recognition both of their vulnerability as they enter the profession and their important role in creating the culture of schools in the future.

Content and method of delivery. Participants were concerned that some training was superficial and disconnected from other initiatives. This was considered not only ineffective but actively dangerous. Training needs to be based on research, and content needs to go below the surface. Training on attachment theory needs to emphasise that it has universal application even though there are cultural variations in how it is reflected in raising children. Understanding of the powerful impact of trauma, in particular, the insights from neuroscience, has to be placed in the context of resilience and recovery. Casual references to ‘damaged children’ can alienate families and cause children to internalise negative self-images.

The importance of understanding children and families’ journeys was considered essential in making sense of any current difficulties in behaviour or learning. Reframing difficult behaviour as children’s attempts to survive can be very helpful. An emphasis that relational safety was a prerequisite for children being able to engage with learning also needs to be a bedrock of training. This leads into helping teachers understand about co-regulation, the effects of shame, and the powerful impact (positive or negative) they can have on children they teach.

Training and support have greatest credibility if delivered or co-delivered by people who are education professionals. Opportunities for reflection and empathic awareness of the personal and professional impact of the content of the training are also seen as essential by participants.



Reflections

There is little doubt that participants were unanimous in the view that there has been an increase in the awareness and practice of attachment - informed trauma - sensitive approaches within Scottish Education. The commitment and passion of interviewees reflected that of a wide range of education, children's services and third sector staff. Much good practice was highlighted. It also needs to be acknowledged that there are many more examples of good practice than we have been able to capture in this project.

There is general agreement that the policy and legislative context of Scottish Education and wider children's services is an enabling one, emphasising as it does an inclusive rights-based system which promotes the wellbeing and learning of all children and young people. There are some indications from themes which emerged that the transition from a sanction-focused orientation to a relational model may have led to a merging of ideas from the different perspectives, thus diluting at times efforts to embed an attachment- informed trauma - sensitive approach. It may be that the previous recent focus on promoting positive behaviour in Scottish Education has contributed to this dilution by emphasising natural and logical consequences and the use of rewards and sanctions. It is now more fully recognised that in order for consequential approaches to be effective children and young people need to feel safe, be able to tolerate stress, make choices based on experience, have the capacity to listen and process information and the ability to regulate shame. The understanding that those children and young people experiencing adversity may not be within this 'window of tolerance' has reinforced the importance of an approach which emphasises relationships and connection to promote wellbeing and learning but may not, as yet, have fully understood how to build on teachers' previous knowledge by integrating it into a relational framework.

Although there is a growing awareness, as highlighted in our interviews, of the role of shame there is not yet an embedded understanding of the impact of shame on the child's sense of self and on their behaviour. Pervasive shame is a sense of 'I am a bad person'. It triggers defensive fight/flight/freeze behaviours. Guilt is about behaviour, 'I did something wrong; I need to make amends; I won't do that again!' It is guilt that promotes pro-social learning. Pervasive shame inhibits learning.

Parents help young children make the shift from shame to guilt. When they need a boundary (as all children do) the parent sets the boundary by saying 'no', and then soothes the child if they are upset and explains why the child cannot do that. This is a process of rupture and repair. A rupture in the relationship caused by the boundary, and a repair which lets the child know 'it's not you, it is your behaviour and the message of 'I still love you no matter what you do, is given.

Where behaviour that needs boundaries is met with hostility, anger, or hitting, the message is you are a bad kid, it's your fault, you are stupid, you are unlovable. Similarly, if the parent demonstrates a combination of anger/ passivity and there is no repair, the young child experiences overwhelming shame. Lack of repair in a relationship leaves a child in shame, not guilt. The shift from shame to guilt is relational. Children who have experienced complex or developmental trauma can be extremely sensitive to being shamed.

Some of the more puzzling and reactive behaviours presented in school can be shame-based behaviours, for example, lying, aggression, denial even when a behaviour is observed. Some intended positive behaviours strategies used in schools such as behaviour charts, traffic light systems, and Golden Time can inadvertently trigger a shame-based response as they inevitably incorporate the reality that some children will not do as well (and this will be clear for all to see). This can be tricky for staff to navigate.

Where there is an understanding of shame-based behaviours in schools, teaching strategies that focus on relationship repair and collaborative consequences can support the child to tolerate momentary shame: can support the shift from shame to guilt.

The values which underpin the shift in thinking and policy are wholly congruent with the values underpinning a relational attachment - informed approach; and indeed, interviewees highlighted the critical nature of values and core beliefs in driving this approach. We know that core beliefs are key to driving behaviour and this is perhaps why there is much emphasis in this approach to education to winning hearts and minds. The General Teaching Council for Scotland's (GTCs) refreshed and revised Professional Standards reinforce this message.

It is important to emphasise that this approach does not stand in opposition to an approach that also recognises neurodiversity. There are various sources of stress for children in the classroom, and an attachment-informed, relational approach will be as helpful for a distressed child with Autism or ADHD as for a child who struggles to regulate due to trauma. Approaches teachers may already be trained to implement, e.g., Autism-friendly classroom techniques, are only likely to be enhanced by implementing them in an attachment informed relational context.

There were some examples given where winning hearts and minds remains a challenge but there were also examples of changes in attitude and practice as a result of training. The importance of Career Long Professional Learning (CLPL) to build workforce capacity and resilience was also a strong theme and directly related to leadership, ethos and culture and the theme of whole system and whole school approaches, all of which were prominent themes. While there were references to effective training there were also clear areas for development which were identified by interviewees. The first of these is Initial Teacher Education. Despite an enabling policy context for attachment informed practice in which newly qualified staff will function, the inclusion of this topic area is patchy at best. There was strong agreement that this should be an integral part of initial training and that although this naturally needs revisiting as experience grows a foundation of understanding attachment is relevant from the outset. This links not only to the needs of children and young people with additional needs as a result of early experience but to the needs of all children and is implicitly linked to education's universality of approach and emphasis on culture and ethos.

Another important theme which emerged through the project is that of racism and racial trauma. This was a very telling example of a disconnect between policy frameworks and aspirations and the lived experience of those who are distressed as a result of lack of awareness or overt prejudice. This is a societal and structural issue which affects all levels of the system, and which requires change, including within education from initial teacher training on.

In terms of ongoing CLPL and professional development the need for opportunities for support and reflective practice was particularly highlighted. The calls on teachers' emotional engagement cannot be underestimated. Unlike some other approaches, the involvement of self is key. Inevitably this can touch vulnerability and at the very least will often invoke a stress response as a natural result of challenge. The skill involved in containing and managing this and responding empathically and effectively to a child or young person in distress is a high level one. Unlike other professions which have built in opportunity for reflection (e.g., social work supervision structures) education staff have little formal support of this nature. There are often practical, and workload demands which make the organisation of such opportunities difficult, but where they have been afforded to staff the benefits are clear^{30, 31}. Currently support tends to be incidental or sometimes offered individually, but there is, as yet (as far as we could determine from this survey) no clear structure or pathway to ensure this type of support is consistently available to school staff. However, as part of the response to pandemic pressures, coaching/support opportunities for head teachers and lead staff are being implemented and this could form the basis for further development.³² It is also worth noting that the OECD report on CfE noted that Scotland had a very low non-teaching time compared to counterparts. It could be argued this reduces opportunity for reflective practice.³⁴

The question of whether different models involving different language and terminology leads to confusion and overload for staff arose throughout the interviews. There can be little doubt that the issue of workload and changing demands is a very real one for school and establishment staff. Where training is clearly linked to existing frameworks and policy drivers, the risk of overload is diminished. For those staff described as 'just getting it' the provision of a model can still be really helpful in supporting thinking and ongoing development.

It is clear that teachers want the best outcomes for their pupils and students. There is a strong commitment to wellbeing and learning and to career long professional learning which supports and enhances this. The professional standards for teachers emphasise the promotion of social justice and equality and encourages challenge to any inequalities or forms of discrimination teachers may encounter.

Students and teachers have long recognised the importance and value of the teaching relationship. Children and young people who thrive in the face of adversity are the strongest advocates of the value of this connection. The care experienced adults who participated in our interviews clearly identified the importance of teachers who understood their journey and maintained a belief in their capabilities and resilience, even when they had lost sight of it for themselves.

³⁰<https://carevisionsresidential.co.uk/media/1180/final-version-research-ar-checked.docx>

³¹https://www.celcis.org/application/files/3416/2308/1018/2018_Vol_17_No_2_Woodier_D_Inclusion_of_young_people.pdf

³²CERG workforce support package | Learning resources | National Improvement Hub (education.gov.scot)

³⁴<https://www.oecd.org/education/scotland-s-curriculum-for-excellence-bf624417-en.htm>

Conclusion

'No research without action, no action without research' - Kurt Lewin

This Project sprang from a shared commitment to the promotion and development of attachment - informed trauma - sensitive practice within Scottish Education, together with a wish for a better understanding of progress. Throughout the process we have been privileged to work with a wide range of partners and participants who have given their time, experience, and insight to support us in gaining a deeper understanding of practice within our schools, establishments, and systems. As a result, new networks have been created which have further enhanced the richness of the conversation and allowed space for reflection and learning. In many ways the experience of the pandemic has not only underlined the importance of connection but has also led us to find new ways of connecting; bringing opportunity to those for whom, for example, geographical distance would have proved a barrier. SAIA will continue to build on ways to link people across Scotland as part of its aim of promoting experiences of attachment across the lifespan.

We have been made aware of much good practice as well as some of the challenges of implementing attachment - informed approaches. We are in the process of compiling information on practice and resources which will be available on our website resource hub in due course. It is hoped this will help to support networks to learn from each other and share ideas, and perhaps allow for some much-needed opportunity to create some reflective space. It is also anticipated that this resource will continue to develop and grow.

The learning from the project has also contributed to SAIA's contribution to the implementation of The Promise. Although wider than educational experience, there is little doubt that education has a major role to play in promoting the wellbeing, learning and resilience of our care experienced children and young people and in working with partners to support pupils in realising their full potential. Our focus is on the voice of children and young people in recognition that this is an area of development within SAIA and other organisations.

In light of the findings about a dearth of attachment - informed trauma - sensitive training in Initial Teacher Education this area of work has also been given priority within SAIA. To progress this, we have been fortunate to receive support from the University of Glasgow. We are offering an internship to scope and research this area alongside a SAIA trustee who is involved in Initial Teacher Education. Links have also been made with the Attachment Research Community³⁵ who, although based in England, share similar aims in this area and have some experience of early implementation. We look forward to this collaboration.

We have also continued to reflect on the theme of racism and racial trauma and sought to expand our understanding of this important issue and develop our own practice. Understanding Racial Trauma in Pupils training has already been delivered and we will continue to explore our contribution to this work.

³⁵<https://the-arc.org.uk/>

The learning and understandings engendered through this project have enabled SAIA to engage with specific areas of work which it is hoped will support and enhance the endeavours of all those educators who work to improve the wellbeing and life chances of all children and young people.

Thank You to Interviewees

A special thank you to all our interviewees for their time, expertise, insights and commitment to our project and dedication to this work.

Educational Resources

In the course of the research interviewees and partners generously provided information and resources for sharing with the community. These resources can be found on our website.

In response to the community and research, we have committed to build upon these original resources and we all continue to learn. We welcome any contributions, links and best practices.

Contact Us

We welcome feedback and if you would like to know more or contribute to our resources, please contact us at admin@saia.org.uk.

Scottish Attachment in Action Education Project Group

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Pauline Lynch, Education Officer, Inclusion, Equalities and Wellbeing, Education Scotland



Reference Group/ Critical Friends

Thanks also to the many who acted as friends to the project and provided invaluable information and feedback, including:

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Tony Clifford, Trustee on behalf of Attachment Research Community

Franny Scott, Management Team on behalf of Education Through Care Scotland

David Woodier, Support Teacher, North Lanarkshire Council

Ben Farrugia, Director at Social Work Scotland

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Elizabeth King, Retired Principal Psychologist, South Lanarkshire Council

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Research

Thanks to those who undertook the bulk of the research work:

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Appendix 1

Interview Questions

We are really interested in hearing, across contexts, about how attachment- informed and trauma-sensitive teaching is being put into practice and the implications of what that means for educational environments.

1.Can you tell me a bit about your role?

- a.How does role relate to trauma & attachment in *educational settings*?
- b.Length of time in role
- c.Has role changed in relation to A&T over time?

2.What is your understanding of what it means for educational environments to be attachment-informed and trauma-sensitive?

- a.Do all your colleagues share this understanding? (Share dialogue or confusion etc)
- b.Where did this understanding come from? (e.g. training, coaching)
- c.Is there anything you still need/want to know to aid your understanding?

3.What are your views on trauma-sensitive and attachment-informed education?

- a.Positives
- b.Negatives
- c.Importance
- d.Challenges
- e.Opportunities
- f.Learning points

4.Can you give an example where /what is being used?

- a.How do you see that as being 1) attachment-informed 2) trauma-sensitive?
- b.What was it? – Was a particular model or approach being used?
- c.Who was involved?
- d.How was it implemented?
- e.Why did it happen? What triggered it?
- f.When did it happen?
- g.What is/was the impact? (On you, the learner, the educational establishment).

5.Is there confidence and capacity for this approach in education do you think?

- a.Generally
- b.Individually
- c.Interviewee's specific context
- d.What would change/impact confidence and capacity?
- e.Challenges

6.Is there anything else you would like to say that I've not asked about?

Appendix 2

Young People's Survey

Criteria

We are looking for responses from young care experienced people (aged 16+)

Why are we doing this?

Scottish Attachment in Action and our partners are working on an Education Project which is looking at schools who show they love and care for their pupils. We want to understand and 'map' what schools do across Scotland so that we may help improve the experience for you and your teachers.

The Questions

The questions arise from the output of research interviews undertaken as part of this Education Project and they also reflect ambitions within The Promise.

1. What school/ area did you go to school in?

2. Do you think people with care experience were treated differently in your school by teachers/ parents?

Yes

No

If you'd like to explain your answer then please do so here

3. Could you have been supported more in school?

Yes

No

If you'd like to explain your answer then please do so here

Appendix 2

4. Is there/ was there someone you could talk to in your school if you felt they needed that?

Yes

No

If you'd like to explain your answer then please do so here.

5. Where you restricted in your timetable or the subjects you could take due to your care experience?

Yes

No

If you'd like to explain your answer then please do so here.

6. If you could change one thing in school in relation to your care experience what would you change?

7. To #KeepThePromise what could schools do to ensure that they are ambitious and ensure that care experienced children have all they need to thrive?

8. Is there anything that you would like the project to know or consider in its next steps?