

# **Common Core of Skills, Knowledge & Understanding and Values for the “Children’s Workforce” In Scotland**

**Final Common Core & Discussion Questions**

## Ministerial Foreword

This Government's vision for children and young people is clear: we want Scotland to be the best place in the world for them to grow up. A place where children can access all the opportunities and support that they need, when they need it. We believe every child in Scotland has the right to be active, achieving, nurtured, respected, responsible, included, healthy – and above all, safe.

**The people who work with children, young people and their families every day, who build up strong relationships and promote children's rights, are key to ensuring we achieve this vision.**

Organisations and workers across the country are responding positively to developments such as the Early Years Task Force, the children and young people's legislation, the national parenting strategy and the continued roll-out of the *Getting It Right For Every Child* approach. It is through these developments and existing social policy frameworks that we are channelling our efforts to promote and support children's rights and wellbeing. All of these developments ensure that this is an exciting time to be working with children, young people and their families in Scotland. We must continue to support our workers to be ready to face the challenges ahead and the Common Core of skills, knowledge and understanding and values is a resource designed to do just that.

From the perspective of children, young people and their families, the Common Core describes what is fundamentally important to them, no matter what service they are using or their own circumstances or backgrounds. From the perspective of workers (whether paid or unpaid) the Common Core describes the fundamentals that every worker should demonstrate and contains the basics needed to build positive relationships and promote children's rights.

The Common Core draws on the views of children and young people about what they want from those who work with them. It also reflects the areas of agreement from respondents to a public consultation. So no-one should be surprised by the content of the Common Core, but the question to ask is not *whether* you demonstrate the characteristics within the Common Core, but *how well* you do it.

For that reason it is important to reflect on the areas within the Common Core, either individually or in your teams and this report contains examples of questions that will help the process of reflection. Sharing your thoughts and actions linked to the Common Core is a big part of the process and so I encourage you to sign up to and use the GIRFEC Knowledge Hub.

Working with children, young people and their families is one of the most rewarding jobs in Scotland. Whether you are an employee or a volunteer you have a crucial role in helping children and young people fulfil their potential. I hope you find this report helpful and I look forward to hearing about the different ways people are reflecting on and implementing the Common Core.

**AILEEN CAMPBELL**

Minister for Children & Young People

## **Introduction from the Chair of the Common Skills Working Group**

I have been enormously encouraged by the goodwill and positive engagement throughout the process to create the Common Core. Individuals and organisations right across all sectors, including those not necessarily thought of as part of the “children’s sector” but who also work with children, have grasped the opportunity to become involved and contribute.

Whilst this is excellent it also brings with it challenges. It would be fair to say that if you ask 100 people what should be in a common core of skills, knowledge and values you will get 100 different answers (and we did!). However, amongst all of the suggestions there were certain themes that everyone agreed on. It is those areas of agreement that have made it into the final Common Core.

The focus on relationships within the Common Core is one that I particularly welcome. Children, young people and families are experts when it comes to their own lives and as workers we need to tap into their knowledge and views by building meaningful relationships with them. I also believe the Common Core has the potential to act as a catalyst, inviting different parts of the children’s sector, and others, to come together and improve their connections, or even make new ones.

Some have called the Common Core a “badge of honour”, others will use it as a guide to help shape their recruitment literature, staff guidance or induction training. Some have said they will take the Common Core and add to it to better reflect their particular local circumstances or add in some elements that are particular to their workforce.

All of these ideas are valid. The Common Core is a tool for you to use as you see fit and we have included a number of self reflection / discussion questions to help you use it. However, the permanent benefit I would like to see is that there remains common ground where new alliances or relationships across individuals and organisations can flourish, with children at the centre. Whenever the policy environment throws up new challenges, and it will, the Common Core should be there to remind you about what children, young people and families really value, so that the fundamentals are never lost.

**ANNE HOUSTON**

Chief Executive, CHILDREN 1st

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## About the Common Core – what it is and who it’s for

1. The Common Core describes the skills, knowledge and understanding, and values that everyone should have if they work with children, young people and their families, whether they are paid or unpaid. The skills, knowledge and understanding are described as “essential characteristics” and are set out in two contexts; relationships with children, young people and families and relationships between workers. They are also explicitly cross-referenced to the guiding principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and can be found on page 7. The values are taken from the *Getting It Right For Every Child* approach and can be found on page 8.

2. The Common Core is based on the consensus of views from organisations who contributed to a public consultation. It was further developed by a multi-disciplinary Working Group (see Annex A) and in workshops by workers from a diverse range of roles, organisations and parts of the children’s sector.

3. The vast majority of workers will have a range of skills, knowledge and understanding far more comprehensive than that described in the Common Core. They may also have values that they view as particular to their profession or which are set by regulatory bodies. The Common Core is not an attempt to water down or replace the important skills, knowledge and understanding and values that workers possess and demonstrate but rather to strengthen that which is universal across all workers. It is perhaps better to look at this initiative from the perspective of children, young people and their families. From their perspective the Common Core forms the minimum expectations they will have of anyone who works with them because it reflects areas that are important to them.

4. Whilst acknowledging the key role for recognisable professionals such as teachers, nurses and social workers, our definition of those who can make a difference goes well beyond this group. Scotland’s social policy frameworks<sup>1</sup> recognise the breadth and depth of workers who make a difference to the lives of children, young people and their families. For example: auxiliary workers such as cooks or drivers, volunteers, assistants or support workers, practitioners and professionals. Our definition includes all of those working with children, young people and families in health, education, social services, justice, community services, cultural and creative industries, the voluntary sector and private sector. We also include those who work with the whole family in “adult” services such as housing or drugs and alcohol services.

**5. If, through your work, you help to improve the wellbeing of children, young people and families then the Common Core is valid for you and demonstrating its characteristics and values will make you better able to meet their needs.**

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<sup>1</sup> *The Early Years Framework* January 2009, *Equally Well* June 2008, *Achieving our Potential* November 2008

## Benefits of the Common Core – why we need it

Acting on the views of children and young people

6. We know that when children and young people are asked about what they want from those who work with them, a familiar set of issues is raised e.g. “listen to me, respect me, keep me safe, include me, explain things to me, work with others to bring support to me, help us all have the same chances”<sup>2</sup>. These issues have been raised in the past and continue to be raised which suggests they remain high on their agenda. Therefore, they should remain high on the agenda of workers too. **We would encourage every worker to constantly reflect on the areas within the Common Core**, learning from new approaches and seeking feedback on these areas from fellow workers as well as children, young people and families.

Working Together

7. It was also clear from the development of our social policy frameworks that we cannot “transform” outcomes for children, young people and families unless we work together in innovative ways utilising the diverse range of talent that exists. Workers must understand what is important to the people they work with and the role they can play in helping to improve their lives, most often in collaboration with others. Although synergies across the vast group of workers (outlined in paragraph 4) are constantly being generated there is still enormous untapped potential when it comes to joint training / joint working, improved communication and engagement. **Those looking to create new links should start a dialogue using the Common Core as the common ground, a meeting place, where different workers, services and organisations can come together.**

Promoting strengths

8. Every worker should help identify and promote the strengths that lie within children, young people, families and their communities to ensure less automatic reliance on services, over time. This strengths based approach permeates the Common Core. Demonstrating the characteristics within the Common Core will ensure workers adopt an **appropriate non-judgemental and empathetic attitude** that is conducive to the identification of strengths within individuals and communities.

Promoting children's rights

9. The Common Core is explicitly cross-referenced to the guiding principles of the UNCRC. This helps to highlight the fact that observing and promoting the UNCRC need not be complicated and that it is fundamental to all of our work with children and young people. **As workers strive to strengthen they way in which they include the UNCRC principles within their work, the Common Core can be used as a useful starting point for discussion.**

10. More information on the different practical ways the Common Core can be utilised and implemented can be found on page 23.

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<sup>2</sup> References used to come to this view include:

*A Right Blether: What's Important to You?* National Vote Results, Scotland's Commissioner for Children & Young People, March 2011

*Higher Aspirations, Brighter Futures*, National Residential Child Care Initiative: Workforce Report, December 2009

*Protecting Children & Young People: The Charter*, Scottish Executive, April 2004

## Common Core of skills, knowledge and understanding and values

### Essential Characteristics of those who work with children, young people and families in Scotland

	<b>UNCRC guiding principles</b>			
	<b>Non-discrimination</b>	<b>Best interests of the child</b>	<b>Right to life, survival &amp; development</b>	<b>Respect the views of the child</b>
	<i>As an employee or a volunteer you will:</i>			
<b>Context A: Relationships with children, young people and families</b>	<p>A1. Recognise that the needs and strengths of children, young people and families are unique and will be influenced by their environment, backgrounds and circumstances</p> <p>A2. Understand your impact on children, young people and families and how they might perceive you. Adapt your tone, language and behaviour to suit the circumstances</p>	<p>A3. Help identify and work with the needs and strengths in parents, carers and their networks in the interests of children and young people for whom they care</p> <p>A4. Ensure children, young people and families understand what information will be kept in confidence; and why some information from or about them may be shared</p>	<p>A5. Be aware of how children and young people develop, seek to understand vulnerability and promote resilience</p> <p>A6. Understand appropriate child protection procedures and act accordingly</p> <p>A7. Consider the needs and potential risks for each child &amp; young person in the context of where they live, their relationships and their wider world</p>	<p>A8. Include children, young people and families as active participants, listening to them, offering choices</p> <p>A9. Explain decisions and ensure children, young people and families fully understand them and their implications, especially if the final decision isn't what they hoped for</p> <p>A10. Keep children, young people &amp; families informed of progress</p>
<b>Context B: Relationships between workers</b>	<p>B1. Be aware of who can help when provision for the needs or promotion of the strengths of children, young people or families is affected by their environment, backgrounds and circumstances</p> <p>B2. Be aware of who can help when you cannot communicate effectively with children, young people or families for any reason</p>	<p>B3. Understand the extent of your own role and be aware of the roles of other workers</p> <p>B4. Respect and value the contribution of other workers</p> <p>B5. Know what information to share, when to share it and with whom</p> <p>B6. Be aware of who can help parents or carers identify their own needs or strengths</p>	<p>B7. Know who to contact if you have a concern or wish to make a positive recommendation about a child, young person or family</p> <p>B8. Contribute to assessing, planning for and managing risks in partnership with others</p>	<p>B9. Seek to support children, young people and families in partnership with them, their networks and other workers</p> <p>B10. Recognise that timely, appropriate and proportionate action is appreciated by children, young people and families as well as other workers</p>

## Common Values of those who work with children, young people and families in Scotland

**Common values and principles** are at the heart of the Common Core and the *Getting It Right For Every Child* approach. These values and principles build from the *Children's Charter* and reflect legislation, standards, procedures and professional expertise. They bring meaning and relevance at a practice level to single agency, multi agency and inter agency working across the whole of children's services. Together with the Common Core essential characteristics, the values provide a common platform for working with children and young people which all workers can draw from.

1. **Promoting the well-being** of individual children and young people: this is based on understanding how children and young people develop in their families and communities and addressing their needs at the earliest possible time
2. **Keeping children and young people safe:** emotional and physical safety is fundamental and is wider than child protection
3. **Putting the child at the centre:** children and young people should have their views listened to and they should be involved in decisions
4. **Taking a whole child approach:** recognising that what is going on in one part of a child or young person's life can affect many other areas of his or her life
5. **Building on strengths and promoting resilience:** using a child or young person's existing networks and support where possible
6. **Promoting opportunities and valuing diversity:** children and young people should feel valued in all circumstances and practitioners should create opportunities to celebrate diversity
7. **Providing additional help should be appropriate, proportionate and timely:** providing help as early as possible and considering short and long-term needs
8. **Supporting informed choice:** supporting children, young people and families in understanding what help is possible and what their choices may be
9. **Working in partnership with families:** supporting wherever possible those who know the child or young person well, know what they need, what works well for them in their family and what may not be helpful
10. **Respecting confidentiality and sharing information:** seeking agreement to share information that is relevant and proportionate while safeguarding children and young people's right to confidentiality
11. **Promoting the same values across all working relationships:** recognising respect, patience, honesty, reliability, resilience and integrity are qualities valued by children, young people, families and colleagues
12. **Making the most of bringing together each worker's expertise:** respecting the contribution of others and co-operating with them, recognising that sharing responsibility does not mean acting beyond a worker's competence or responsibilities
13. **Co-ordinating help:** recognising that children, young people and families need practitioners to work together, when appropriate, to provide the best possible help
14. **Building a competent workforce to promote children and young people's well-being:** committed to continuing individual learning and development and improvement of inter-professional practice.

## Components of the Common Core

11. The Common Core is mapped onto the 4 guiding principles within the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. This section expands on what we mean by the essential characteristics in the Common Core and provides some additional information taken from the views expressed during a public consultation and workshops.

12. In response to views expressed during the workshops we have also included some examples of questions that workers can reflect on alone or discuss in their teams. Doing so begins the process of implementing the Common Core and helps to bring the content to life.

13. As well as discussing these questions (and solutions) within your teams you are invited to post questions or solutions up on the online GIRFEC Knowledge Hub (see Annex B for details on how to access this free resource).

### ***All the rights guaranteed by the Convention must be made available to all children without discrimination***

UNCRC Article 2

#### **Relevant sections of the Common Core:**

*As an employee or volunteer you will:*

Recognise that the needs and strengths of children, young people and families are unique and will be influenced by their environment, backgrounds and circumstances

Understand your impact on children, young people and families and how they might perceive you. Adapt your tone, language and behaviour to suit the circumstances

Be aware of who can help when provision for the needs or promotion of the strengths of children, young people or families is affected by their environment, backgrounds and circumstances

Be aware of who can help when you cannot communicate effectively with children, young people or families for any reason

#### **What people told us during the Consultation and Workshops:**

Recognise that the needs and strengths of children, young people and families are unique and will be influenced by their environment, backgrounds and circumstances (Common Core ref: A1)

14. Every child, young person and family is unique with a variety of needs and strengths. The factors that make them unique are broad and varied and may not be immediately clear.

15. During the workshops the most commonly discussed factors were disabilities, long term health conditions, additional support needs, immigrant families and children, young people and families suffering through poverty, unemployment or abuse (this list is not exhaustive, for a broader understanding of the factors that make people unique, reference should be made to the Equalities Act 2010).

16. It is important to get to know the likes and dislikes of children, young people and families, as well as the environment and community they live in, their backgrounds and circumstances. An important area that people raised was the need for workers to understand that, as well as individual factors, different economic, environmental and social circumstances in which children grow and develop contribute to unequal outcomes for children and young people. Consequently there is a need for workers to understand both the importance of prevention and early intervention in reducing these unequal outcomes (health, educational and social), and their role in this.

Understand your impact on children, young people and families and how they might perceive you. Adapt your tone, language and behaviour to suit the circumstances (Common Core ref: A2)

17. Given the centrality of relationships to the Common Core it is understandable that the importance of social skills was highlighted regularly. Being self aware, empathetic, non-judgemental and having a grasp of non-verbal communication (e.g. body language) were the most frequently mentioned points. A number of commentators stressed that these skills must also be demonstrated in relationships between workers as well as between the worker and the child, young person and family.

Be aware of who can help when provision for the needs or promotion of the strengths of children, young people or families is affected by their environment, backgrounds and circumstances (Common Core ref: B1)

18. For children and young people with complex needs there is always a variety of workers involved. With such a variety there are often delays in providing the right support when it is needed. The good practice examples in the workshops highlighted the importance of minimising delays and where possible having one key person to liaise with the family.

19. The key importance of professionals like teachers, social workers and various health workers working well together was highlighted but many good practice examples also highlighted the benefit of including the voluntary sector or workers such as childminders. For example “befrienders” or support workers quite often know the child, young person and family the most but their views are not always sought by statutory agencies. The value of community childminding was also raised on a number of occasions, especially as a temporary resource that can be used when parents are under pressure and can often avoid more significant problems materialising.

Be aware of who can help when you cannot communicate effectively with children, young people or families for any reason (Common Core ref: B2)

20. The importance of going the “extra mile” and bringing additional help to children, young people and families with any form of communication difficulty was raised. Examples cited through the consultation and workshops included children whose first language was not English to those who need specialist equipment to communicate. As a worker it is important to be aware of the variety of other workers (e.g. Speech and Language Therapists) and range of equipment available to help you and the child communicate.

21. From the workshops we heard about one family who had recently moved to Scotland, did not speak much English and seemed wary of the Police. Officers brought in a victim support worker who spoke their language with immediate positive results.

### **Relevant quotes from the consultation:**

*Unless practitioners have an understanding of the context in which individual children, young people and families live their lives, they cannot accurately make sound observation, judgement and decisions. Lanarkshire specifically included a core competency about understanding the inequalities of health and poverty within our communities and understanding more about how adverse factors can co-exist....this was seen as vital by practitioners.*

*It is important that the children’s workforce is encouraged to be self reflective in their practice and to continually consider the ways in which their own attitude and behaviour might impact on the individuals they work with.*

*Deaf children deal with a variety of professionals in any given day and this variety causes hurdles for children and young people. We need to have more streamlined procedures.*

*Under the social model, disability is understood as being caused by the barriers in society – attitudinal, institutional and environmental and barriers in information and communication – rather than being caused by the individual’s condition or impairment. Understanding this idea will help workers empower children with disabilities to overcome the barriers they may face.*

### **Self reflection / Discussion questions:**

22. The following questions are *examples* of the sorts of questions you can reflect on individually or discuss in your team. By doing so you are already beginning to implement the Common Core.

- **Do you understand the factors that contribute to well-being and health and to the differences in outcomes for children? Where can you go to find out more about this?**

- **Can you think of instances where you have adapted your tone or body language and this has led to positive results? This can be in your contact with children, young people and families or your contact with other workers.**
- **Are you aware of a range of options and contacts available to you if you need extra help to communicate effectively with children, young people and families? Where can you go for more information?**
- **Which individuals or agencies do you have a good working relationship with? What is it that makes the relationship work? Can you use this knowledge to refresh relationships with all of your contacts and establish new ones?**
- **Using the definition of the social model of disability (Page 11) consider the barriers listed and reflect on times when you have worked with disabled children, young people and their families. Do any of these barriers exist where you work? How can you / your employer overcome them?**
- **Do you feel confident working with the families of children and young people (the adults)? How can you build your confidence in this area?**
- **Where can you find out more about the 54 articles within the UNCRC?**

Would you like to share your views or do you need more help?

Post your comments or questions on the workforce section of the GIRFEC Knowledge Hub. See Annex B for details.

*That the **best interests** of the child must always come first*

UNCRC Article 3

**Relevant sections of the Common Core:**

*As an employee or a volunteer you will:*

Help identify & work with the needs and strengths in parents, carers and their networks in the interests of children and young people for whom they care

Ensure children, young people and families understand what information will be kept in confidence; and why some information from or about them may be shared

Understand the extent of your own role and be aware of the roles of other workers

Respect and value the contribution of other workers

Know what information to share, when to share it and with whom

Be aware of who can help parents or carers identify their own needs or strengths

**What people told us during the Consultation and Workshops:**

Help identify & work with the needs and strengths in parents, carers and their networks in the interests of children and young people for whom they care (Common Core ref: A3)

23. Workers must always act in the best interests of the child or young person. Quite often this will involve supporting parents, other family members or carers. The importance of being non-judgemental is a key area to help parents discover the things they are good at, their strengths, and the areas where they need more help.

24. A strong example was given during the workshops of a mum with learning disabilities who had other children in care and was desperate to keep her one remaining child with her. The range of workers involved never gave up on mum and their patience and professionalism eventually paid dividends. The factors of success involved helping mum to discover her confidence and strengths - although she may have had difficulties discussing issues with workers, she was a good “hands-on” mum and really engaged in play activities with her child. This was the platform to build on that nursery staff, social workers and health workers were looking for.

25. The importance of bringing early help to parents was also highlighted during the workshops. Examples of parents who are failing to cope due to, often, temporary emotional upset (e.g. marriage break-up or unemployment) were raised regularly during the workshops. In these instances “respite” type help (e.g. via a community childminder) was utilised and, in these cases, this early help was all that was needed to prevent more serious problems developing.

Ensure children, young people and families understand what information will be kept in confidence; and why some information from or about them may be shared (Common Core ref: A4)

26. Acting in the best interests of the child also requires the sharing of information where appropriate. Being open and honest with children, young people and families from the outset and explaining why some information may have to be shared was seen as a key building block for positive relationships. ChildLine and ParentLine volunteers stressed the importance of this during the consultation.

Understand the extent of your own role and be aware of the roles of other workers (Common Core ref: B3)

27. Workers need to be clear in their understanding of the boundaries of their own role and where that boundary meets the boundary of another worker's role. This is crucial in understanding when to get other workers involved. An awareness (at least) of these other roles and what they can do to help was seen as important.

Respect and value the contribution of other workers (Common Core ref: B4)

28. Mutual respect between workers must be shared at all times. This point was raised frequently during the consultation and workshops. Examples of where respect is important included colleagues working in the same team, relationships between different statutory agencies and relationships between statutory agencies and the voluntary sector. Where examples cited a lack of mutual respect, this was seen as one of the key barriers getting in the way of providing the right support for children, young people and families, when they need it.

Know what information to share, when to share it and with whom (Common Core ref: B5)

29. The "human" side of information sharing, described at paragraph 26, was just one important factor raised. During the workshops the complexity and "grey areas" around information sharing procedures added real pressure to workers. There were calls for clearer guidance and information sharing protocols to help workers understand what information to share, when and with whom.

Be aware of who can help parents or carers identify their own needs or strengths (Common Core ref: B6)

30. The example given of the mum struggling to find her confidence and strengths (paragraph 24) also shows the importance of different workers working together to help identify strengths. It was not until social and health workers involved the local nursery that the ability of the mum to really engage in play activities with her child was recognised.

### Relevant quotes from the consultation:

*Workers need the ability to build warm engaging relationships, putting families at ease, being non-judgemental*

*Building on strengths is more than utilising existing networks and support. It is also about utilising and building on the existing knowledge, skills and abilities of parents themselves*

*Spot when parents are doing well and encourage that behaviour*

*[Workers should] limit their advice to their area of expertise and competency but ensure families have access to the right sources of support*

### Self reflection / Discussion questions:

31. The following questions are *examples* of the sorts of questions you can reflect on individually or discuss in your team. By doing so you are already beginning to implement the Common Core.

- **Think about occasions when you were working with parents. Can you identify the range of strengths that the parents demonstrated? Were there any that were not obvious to you or to the parents before you started to work with them? Which other workers helped uncover the strengths of parents?**
- **Reflect on a time when you shared information with another worker or agency. What was the most difficult part? What more could be done to make information sharing more straightforward?**
- **What does “mutual respect” mean to you? Consider having a session with other workers to discuss what mutual respect means to you all and try to agree a definition.**

Would you like to share your views or do you need more help?  
Post your comments or questions on the workforce section of the GIRFEC Knowledge Hub. See Annex B for details.

## **All children have the *right to life, survival and development***

UNCRC Article 6

### **Relevant sections of the Common Core:**

*As an employee or volunteer you will:*

Be aware of how children and young people develop, seek to understand vulnerability and promote resilience

Understand appropriate child protection procedures and act appropriately

Consider the needs and potential risks for each child & young person in the context of where they live, their relationships and their wider world

Know who to contact if you have a concern or wish to make a positive recommendation about children, young people or families

Contribute to assessing, planning for and managing risks in partnership with others

### **What people told us during the Consultation and Workshops:**

Be aware of how children and young people develop, seek to understand vulnerability and promote resilience (Common Core ref: A5)

32. Knowledge of child development is the cornerstone of working with children and young people and most workers will have knowledge far in excess of mere “awareness”. One important area that was raised in the consultation and workshops was “attachment”. Recognising that this word means different things to different people, Scottish Attachment in Action has developed a definition, for inclusion here:

*We are all born with attachment seeking behaviours such as crying, clinging, imitation and smiling. These behaviours are designed to keep carers close ensuring that the baby’s needs for survival, safety and sensitive care are met.*

*Attachment is a process. When a baby needs something – food, comfort, play – he feels stressed and signals his discomfort through, for example, crying, seeking to have his needs met. Parents/carers ‘tune in’ (attune) to their baby’s unique cries and signals for different needs. This ongoing attachment process, in the first few years of life, is crucial in shaping how we grow and develop through childhood and into adulthood – neurologically, physically, emotionally, socially and psychologically. What happens to us in the womb also contributes to our resilience or vulnerability.*

*Research informs us that a child’s first attachments are vitally important – he or she needs to feel loved and special. Children whose needs have been met in a sensitive, loving and timely way by their primary carer – described as secure attachment – have a sense of trust and confidence in themselves. Securely attached children do better at school and are likely to be good at making friends. Their early attachments help them to form close relationships*

*later in life. They grow up knowing that when they need something someone will help them.*

*There can be barriers to secure attachment - within the child, within the parent, within the environment. Children whose early experiences of attachment have been less optimal can have insecure or disorganised attachments. These children will potentially be more vulnerable with respect to coping with future relationships and life events.*

***As an employee or volunteer you will be aware of how early childhood experiences will have affected the way in which children have grown and are able to understand the world around them and will be able to empathise and communicate with children in a way they are able to understand and respond to, informed by your understanding of the significance of your own attachment relationships.***

Scottish Attachment in Action, 2012

Understand appropriate child protection procedures and act accordingly (Common Core ref: A6)

33. An area of critical importance to all workers, is keeping children safe. The particular wording here recognises that many people will never be involved in formal Child Protection procedures, but any worker who works with children should know, at the very least, who to contact if they have a concern.

Consider the needs and potential risks for each child & young person in the context of where they live, their relationships and their wider world (Common Core ref: A7)

34. Workers need to take a holistic view of children and young people, their physical, social, educational, emotional, spiritual and psychological development. The GIRFEC “My World Triangle” is a tool that can help.

35. From the workshops we were given an example of a young girl, leaving residential care and finding it hard to make the transition into independent living. The residential staff had built up such a strong relationship with the girl that they “kept the door open” and the girl sought further help from them as a safe haven where she could avoid alcohol. Indeed the fluid situation many young people find themselves in when leaving care was raised regularly during the workshops. A common characteristic of the good practice in these cases was the flexibility of support from workers and services. Being non-judgemental and keeping as many options open as possible for young people often resulted in positive outcomes and stems from the establishment of meaningful relationships.

Know who to contact if you have a concern or wish to make a positive recommendation about children, young people or families (Common Core ref: B7)

36. If you have a concern or spot something that a child or young person is particularly good at, tell someone. These same strengths or needs may not be apparent in other settings and this information helps workers develop a holistic view of the child or young person.

37. One example highlighted the importance of cultural and creative activities in the lives of children and young people. One boy was at risk of being unable to take a music exam due to his learning disabilities, but after spending a day with a composer as part of a production for a youth theatre the composer wrote to the school to point out the boy's strengths; his ear for music. This encouraged school staff to look for ways for the boy to sit the exam.

Contribute to assessing, planning for and managing risks in partnership with others (Common Core ref: B8)

38. Even if you are not responsible for risk management you may be invited to contribute your views. It is important to get the balance right between managing risks and being non-judgemental.

#### **Relevant quotes from the consultation:**

*An understanding of child development / developmental milestones is essential to improving outcomes for children, as is an understanding of theoretical frameworks such as attachment theory and resilience*

*Counselling staff...stated that respect for children and young people, a non-judgemental approach, and active listening skills were fundamental...staff pointed out that it is the possession of these core values and skills that allow adults to build up relationships of trust with children and young people*

*Understanding child growth, parenting capacity and carrying out holistic assessment to recognise strengths and vulnerability. Judgements should be made on holistic assessments*

#### **Self reflection / Discussion questions:**

39. The following questions are *examples* of the sorts of questions you can reflect on individually or discuss in your team. By doing so you are already beginning to implement the Common Core.

- **Do you feel comfortable with your knowledge about “attachment” and how that knowledge helps in your day to day work? Where can you go if you need more help?**

- **Do you feel comfortable with your level of skills and knowledge in relation to child protection? Do you feel equipped to act if you needed to? If not, where can you go for help?**
- **Are you aware of the Getting it Right for Every Child “My World Triangle” and other tools?**
- **Where can you find the latest information on the *Getting It Right For Every Child* approach in your local area?**
- **Reflect on instances when you balanced the need to have a non-judgemental attitude with the need to accurately assess risk for children, young people and families. What factors help you challenge appropriately but still maintain a non-judgemental approach? What, if anything, made this difficult and how do you overcome these difficulties?**

Would you like to share your views or do you need more help?  
Post your comments or questions on the workforce section of the GIRFEC Knowledge Hub. See Annex B for details.

***Children's views must be considered and taken into account in all matters affecting them***

UNCRC Article 12

**Relevant sections of the Common Core:**

*As an employee or volunteer you will:*

Include children, young people and families as active participants, listening to their views and offering them choices

Explain decisions to ensure children, young people and families understand them and their implications, especially if the final decision isn't what they hoped for

Keep children, young people and families informed of progress

Seek to support children, young people and families in partnership with them, their networks and other workers

Recognise that timely, appropriate and proportionate action is appreciated by children, young people and families as well as other workers

**What people told us during the Consultation and Workshops:**

Include children, young people and families as active participants, offering them choices and listening to their views (Common Core ref: A8)

40. The active participation of children and young people in the services they access is an important issue raised by most respondents to the consultation. Workers must also offer genuine choices and listen to the preferences of children and young people and their families. There was recognition during the consultation that often choices will be limited due to resources available, but that workers should strive to ensure multiple choices can be offered possibly by developing new contacts with other workers / services.

Explain decisions to ensure children, young people and families understand them and their implications, especially if the final decision isn't what they hoped for (Common Core ref: A9)

41. During the consultation it was stated that simply telling a child, young person or family what the decision is does not guarantee they have actually understood what you are saying or why the decision has been made. Clarification should always be sought that children, young people and families know not only what the decision is but *why* a particular decision has been taken and feel reassured that their view was considered as part of the process.

Keep children, young people and families informed of progress (Common Core ref: A10)

42. Keeping children, young people and families informed of progress was raised in the workshops. The good practice examples cited how important it was to keep them informed, even if a decision had still not been made or there had been no significant progress.

43. During the workshops we heard of the frustrations by families (and other workers) if there is a lack of communication or that communication is slower than expected. Examples were cited of workers not turning up for multi-agency meetings with no prior notice being given.

Seek to support children, young people and families in partnership with them, their networks and other workers (Common Core ref: B9)

44. A strengths based approach requires workers to work **with** children, young people and families rather than provide services to them (more information available at Annex A). This partnership approach is important and stems from building meaningful relationships.

Recognise that timely, appropriate and proportionate action is appreciated by children, young people and families as well as other workers (Common Core ref: B10)

45. As well as the need to keep children, young people and their families informed of progress, they do appreciate timely progress. This principle is the same when other workers are waiting on you.

### **Relevant quotes from the consultation**

*our work consistently demonstrates the mutual benefits gained from young people's participatory involvement in projects designed to support them. We understand the importance of drawing on the resources individuals already have to co-design the services they use and to develop their own solutions. The Common Core needs to promote recognition within the children's sector of the expert knowledge children, young people and their carers have about their own lives. It should include the confidence of workers to allow service users to take the lead – to set their own priorities and to identify their own needs*

*children are both articulate and able to understand the issues that affect their lives – such as poverty – and should be treated with equal respect and involvement*

*an open discussion regarding next steps brings benefits in terms of openness, participation, empowerment and capacity building*

*many children will only respond to adults who are able to build a bridge between the adult world and the world of the child...the ability for a worker to exist in both the adult world and also visit the world of the child is a skill that can be learnt*

## **Self reflection / Discussion questions:**

46. The following questions are *examples* of the sorts of questions you can reflect on individually or discuss in your team. By doing so you are already beginning to implement the Common Core.

- **Do you understand what the active participation of children, young people and families in your service looks like? Who else can you discuss this with in your area to learn new methods?**
- **Reflect on occasions when you were able to keep children, young people and families informed and action took place in good time. What worked well on these occasions? How can these occasions become the norm?**
- **Reflect on occasions when you have had to tell a child, young person or family that a decision has not gone the way they wanted. How do you handle this type of situation? Consider ways you have dealt with frustration, disappointment or anger. How do you try to avoid this experience resulting in them feeling that it is not worth expressing what they would like to happen in future? How do you prepare children, young people and families for the possibility that a decision may be different from what they ideally want but still encourage their participation?**

Would you like to share your views or do you need more help?

Post your comments or questions on the workforce section of the GIRFEC Knowledge Hub. See Annex B for details.

## Implementation

47. Implementing the Common Core can be done in a variety of ways by any individual and organisation. Implementation activity need not require additional resources. Existing products like standards, frameworks, training courses or guidance are regularly updated and organisations should assess whether there is sufficient coverage of the areas of the Common Core as these products come up for review.

48. Just being aware of the Common Core and having the chance to reflect on what that means in a work situation or to discuss it with colleagues will help workers be able to demonstrate the Common Core characteristics and values in their every day work.

## Views from the Consultation

49. During the consultation process we sought views regarding implementation from respondents and received the following suggestions:

### Individual actions

- Reflect on the areas within the Common Core (using the self reflection / discussion questions) and **gauge your own level** of skills & knowledge in each of the areas
- Discuss with your **manager** whether your level of skills & knowledge is appropriate to your role

### Employer actions

- Revision of **recruitment** literature or interview questions to ensure prospective workers are fully aware of the relevant skills, knowledge and values and can demonstrate adherence to them
- Re-structure **induction** training or literature to highlight the importance of the Common Core
- Discussions with workers, through individual **appraisal & development**, to identify areas of skills & knowledge in the Common Core that should be strengthened and/or reinforce the values
- Discuss the Common Core in team meetings to ensure that, over time, the **culture** of organisations promotes the essential characteristics and values
- Rationalise and prioritise local **training** and development programmes

### National Actions

- Analysis of **competency frameworks** and/or **national occupational standards** to ensure the basic skills and knowledge are reflected
- Increase the focus on the elements of the Common Core within national **qualifications**, where appropriate
- Provide online space for stakeholders to **share** their proposed local and national actions with each other to increase opportunities for different organisations to **learn** from each other and develop activities together.

## **Implementation - Keeping in Touch**

50. A fundamental principle of implementing the Common Core is that if you are altering a product such as an induction programme, and your neighbour is also planning to do that, why not work together? A number of organisations have commented that this is the real added value that the Common Core brings, the opportunity to share resources and forge new links.

51. For this to work effectively it is important for us to be able to share our plans or ask questions about implementation. We have set up a dedicated area on the GIRFEC Knowledge Hub portal where you can share your ideas, comment on other ideas, ask questions and forge new relationships. More information, including how to join the GIRFEC Knowledge Hub can be found at Annex B.

## **Common Core and other skills / competency frameworks**

52. Specific professions or groups have their own frameworks, quite often broken into levels setting out, in detail, the skills and knowledge required of a particular role or profession. We also know of areas of the country who have developed their own competency frameworks (for example the “Getting It Right For Every Child in Lanarkshire: Core competency framework”).

**53. The relationship between the Common Core and other skills / competency frameworks is complementary. The Common Core does not attempt to replace what exists already.**

54. The Common Core is generic and will benefit workers in any role. It does not go into the detail that existing frameworks do (although we would expect there to be overlaps) and focuses on the key area of relationships. As one commentator put it, “our skill frameworks help to deliver good social workers, health visitors etc. The Common Core helps deliver people who are good at working with people”.

55. Implementing the Common Core can be done in parallel with any improvements to be made as a result of current or future skills / competency framework developments. If you are revising your frameworks in future we would encourage you, at that time, to ensure there is sufficient emphasis of the areas within the Common Core.

## **Common Core and *Getting it Right for Every Child***

56. The Common Core is heavily interwoven into the GIRFEC approach aimed at improving the wellbeing of all children (every child in Scotland has the right to be active, achieving, nurtured, respected, responsible, included, healthy – and above all, safe). The Common Core incorporates the GIRFEC values and principles. Demonstrating these, and the essential characteristics of the Common Core, will put every worker well on the way to “getting it right” for children, young people and their families. Over and above the Common Core there will be aspects of implementing the GIRFEC approach where particular skills are required e.g. those around leading and managing in a multi-agency context.

## GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE COMMON CORE

### What “common” and “core” means

The Common Core is a description of the skills, knowledge and understanding and values that are valid for every employee and volunteer working with any child, young person or family. They are **common** because they apply to everyone, even though the detailed application may vary for different workers and/or different ages/groups of children, young people or families. They are **core** because they are fundamental if workers are to help improve the lives of children, young people and families.

### Strengths Based Approach and the Common Core

Our social policy frameworks (Early Years Framework, Equally Well and Achieving our Potential) promote an “assets” or strengths based approach to tackling poverty, inequality and ensuring that all of Scotland’s children get the best start in life.

Key principles of the strengths based approach include:

- Working with people, rather than seeing them as passive recipients of services – “doing with”, rather than “doing to”
- Helping people to identify and focus on the innate strengths within themselves and communities and enhancing and supporting them
- Supporting people to make changes for the better through enhancing skills for resilience, relationships, knowledge and self esteem
- Building networks and friendships so people can support each other, make sense of their environments and take control of their lives

Demonstrating the characteristics and values within the Common Core helps to ensure all workers are able bring a strengths based approach to their work.

### Membership of Common Skills Working Group

The Common Skills Working Group met between October 2010 and March 2012 to agree the Common Core.

Anne Houston	CHILDREN 1 <sup>st</sup> (Chair)
Frances Scott	Scottish Social Services Council
Ann McSorley	Scottish Social Services Council
Mary Boyle	NHS Education for Scotland
Pauline Beirne	NHS Education for Scotland
Tom Hamilton	General Teaching Council for Scotland
Marian Healy	Life Long Learning UK / Learning & Skills Improvement Service
Christine Fitton	Life Long Learning UK
Debbie Willet	SkillsActive
Jacqueline Conway	Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland

Tommy Cuthbert	Skills for Justice
Rory Macleod	Community Learning & Development Standards Council for Scotland
Norah Campbell	Creative & Cultural Skills
Lesley Joyce	Scottish Qualifications Authority
Lorna Hunter	Skills for Health
Lesley Musa	Scottish Government, Children & Families Directorate
David Purdie	Scottish Government, Children & Families Directorate
Marilyn Tweedie	Scottish Government, Children & Families Directorate

## Public Consultation

Over the summer of 2011 the Scottish Government consulted on the first draft of the Common Core. That draft listed a set of skills such as “observation, judgement and decision making skills”. Respondents did not suggest this was wrong but there was a clear message that the Common Core should focus on the step prior to the utilisation of these skills. Respondents made the point that these skills cannot be utilised effectively, and it will prove impossible to accurately identify a strength, if you have not built up a relationship with the child, young person or family in the first place. A summary of the consultation responses was published and can be found here: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2011/10/12094300/0>

In summary the main points emerging from the consultation were:

- The Common Core should be more explicitly linked to children’s rights and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
- It should be strengths based, to ensure it is applicable for all children, young people and families i.e. not only about dealing with "concerns"
- The key role of relationships should be the main focus within two contexts: relationships between workers and children, young people and families and relationships between different workers
- The Common Core should not be complicated and should be clear that it is designed for those working with children, young people and families
- The GIRFEC values and principles were overwhelmingly accepted through the consultation

## Workshops

Two workshops were held in February 2012 with 90 workers from a range of different disciplines, including volunteers. The purpose was to bring the characteristics and values within the Common Core to life, making them meaningful for workers. The challenge was to bring good practice examples to the day and highlight the different elements of the Common Core that were demonstrated during these examples.

One of the key aims of the day was to show that the Common Core is demonstrated by a range of workers engaging with children, young people and families from a diverse range of backgrounds and circumstances. We received a number of examples over the two days and many of the views from the workshops have been included in the section describing the “Components of the Common Core” (from page 9).

## Terminology

Whenever the terms “workforce” or “worker” are used in the context of the Common Core they refer to employees and volunteers.

Whenever the term “family” is used it refers to one or both parents but also carers.

Many verbs are used within the text of the Common Core such as “understand”, “recognise”, “be aware”. This is not an attempt to specify the **level** of understanding that individual workers should have (this is a matter for employers and other related bodies). These terms have emerged from the public consultation and subsequent discussions. The choice of word is pitched at a level that meets the point being made through the consultation whilst keeping it reasonable for the full range of relevant workers. It remains the responsibility of employers and other related bodies to judge the right level of skills and knowledge for their workers.

## **GIRFEC KNOWLEDGE HUB - Description and Joining Instructions**

The GIRFEC Knowledge Hub is a space on the internet where those with an interest in children's services in Scotland can come together to discuss relevant issues on line. This includes asking questions or posting up examples of work that you want to share with others. When you post up a comment anyone who is a member of the GIRFEC Knowledge Hub can see it and reply.

Everyone involved in children's services in Scotland is welcome to join and we would encourage as many people as possible to sign up and share questions and ideas about the Common Core and more.

### **How do I access the GIRFEC Knowledge Hub?**

#### **I'm already a member...**

If you are already a member of the GIRFEC Knowledge Hub, follow this link and then scroll down to the "Workforce" forum:

<https://knowledgehub.local.gov.uk/group/gettingitrightforeverychildandyoungperson/forum>

#### **I'm not a member yet...**

If you are visiting the GIRFEC Knowledge Hub for the first time you will be asked to register on the Knowledge Hub site. You can register here:

<https://knowledgehub.local.gov.uk/register>

After you have registered follow this link to take you to the GIRFEC area:

<https://knowledgehub.local.gov.uk/group/gettingitrightforeverychildandyoungperson/forum>

#### **It's not working...**

If you are having any problems please email:

[gettingitrightforeverychild@scotland.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:gettingitrightforeverychild@scotland.gsi.gov.uk)



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First published by the Scottish Government, June 2012  
ISBN: 978-1-78045-868-7 (web only)

eBook first published by the Scottish Government, June 2012  
ISBN 978-1-78045-870-0 (ePub)

Kindle eBook first published by the Scottish Government, June 2012  
ISBN 978-1-78045-871-7 (Mobi)

The Scottish Government  
St Andrew's House  
Edinburgh  
EH1 3DG

Produced for the Scottish Government by APS Group Scotland  
DPPAS13068 (06/12)

Published by the Scottish Government, June 2012