Chapter 1
Working in an early education and childcare setting

Introduction

Working with children is interesting and varied. It is a job that requires careful planning and preparation, personal skills and attributes. These include skills of communication, problem-solving and the ability to work with others. You will also find you need to have the skills to organise and plan activities for children and to prepare and manage the play environment for them.

In this chapter you will learn about some of the practicalities of working in the early education and childcare sector. This will help you to develop the professional skills you need to organise day-to-day experiences for children in the setting you work in. You will learn about the importance of reporting and recording what young children do and how this is used in planning appropriate experiences to support their learning and development. The process of reporting and recording will also be vital when you work with other key professionals such as teachers, educational psychologists, social workers and community nurses.

In Chapter 4 you will learn how to develop play-based activities for children, and with information from this chapter you will begin to develop a clearer understanding of some of the key features of children's learning and development and how you can contribute to supporting this. This will include understanding what you can provide, how it can be provided, why you should do this and the type of important relationships that will be involved in the process.

When you work with children and with other team members, it is essential to be able to stand back and evaluate what has gone on. This means thinking about the successes of the day and what might have been done differently. This chapter will help you understand some of the subtleties of doing this and will support your understanding of why it is important to be evaluative when offering a professional service to children.

As an early education and childcare practitioner in Scotland, you are part of a regulated workforce. This chapter will guide you through some of the key points about the Scottish Social Services Council’s (SSSC) Codes of Practice (2003) and how they impact on the day-to-day work you do.

In this chapter you will learn:

- How appropriate skills are used to create a nurturing and stimulating learning and play environment
- How to plan, organise and implement development and learning opportunities in an early education and childcare setting
- How reporting and recording supports the work of the early education and childcare practitioner
- How other professionals support the early education and childcare practitioner
- How to evaluate your own contribution in creating a nurturing and professional service for children
- Ways in which codes of practice inform the work of the early education and childcare practitioner
How appropriate skills are used to create a nurturing and stimulating learning and play environment

Early education and childcare practitioners quickly discover that working with children isn’t an easy option. It’s a job that requires knowledge and understanding, with professional values, skills and abilities, and personal commitment. When you put these together you achieve professional action. It is through professional action that the early education and childcare practitioner provides an effective service for children and their families.

Early education and childcare is an important profession and you should never underestimate the skills required to do the job.

Not all children are the same

Children are unique individuals and you should be aware of how to work with a range of children with varying needs. This includes understanding that children will have different dispositions with different ways of playing and learning, and understanding what additional support a child may need from time to time. You will already be aware that some children may be quite outgoing while others are more introverted; some children prefer to be alone while others seek the company of peers. Some children will be very tenacious and spend a lot of time trying to solve a problem while others will give up easily. As an early education and childcare practitioner you should respect and value children as unique, whole individuals who have a right to participate and be consulted about what they want to do and how they like things done. You will learn more about this in Chapter 2. Part of the skills of an early education and childcare practitioner involves supporting children’s play and learning as well as helping children who move quickly from activity to activity to concentrate for longer periods. This may mean sitting with a child and gently encouraging or posing questions that help the child to rethink or reconsider what he or she is doing. These strategies sometimes help children to concentrate for longer.

You may also find some children favour only one type of play or stay for very long periods at one activity. As you become more experienced, you will learn to use your professional judgement to decide whether this is unusual or undesirable for the child. You will learn techniques that help you gauge accurately the preferences of each child. This, in turn, will help you to plan activities that are appropriate for each child’s age and stage of development.

In Chapter 4 you will read about the type of experiences children should have in a setting, but it is useful to mention here that children should have opportunities for play that is freely chosen and will help them to explore, observe, listen and talk, respond, think, experiment and be active, among other skills.

Key term
Professional action is the way you apply the knowledge and skills you have learned and the observations you have made to the day-to-day actions in your chosen profession. It combines the way in which you behave at work with your professional values and the knowledge and skills you have developed.

Activity
Working in small groups with others from your class, consider the skills you have that you think will make you a good practitioner. Discuss these as a group and choose one person to list all the skills that everyone in your group has.

How do you think these skills can be used?
Make a group poster of these skills then compare the poster with others in the class. Are there similarities common to each group?
As an early education and childcare practitioner you will have high expectations for all children and you will be committed to making sure they are provided with opportunities to achieve their full potential.

At some point in their lives, most children will have additional support needs. These may be long-term needs such as a disability, or may be for the short term such as going into hospital for a procedure. As an early education and childcare practitioner, you will develop skills to deal with specific and additional support needs in the course of your day-to-day work. This could involve the need to develop specialist skills in communicating with children by alternative methods. It could also involve researching a specialist area or bringing in a specialist practitioner, such as a hospital play specialist to talk to and try to reassure a child.

The Act moved away from a system that narrowly defined special educational needs to accepting that there is a broader spectrum of need that may be long term or short term. Examples might include: children who are being bullied; very able or ‘gifted’ children who have suffered loss or have been identified as abused; children with disabilities. There are different ways children with additional support needs can be supported, including providing a coordinated support plan for those children who have particularly complex needs. You will learn more about this Act and about the ways children are supported in Chapters 6 and 9. You may want to undertake further research on the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act (2004) which can be accessed through the Scottish Government’s website (www.scotland.gov.uk) which also provides links to other useful sites to visit.

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The Scottish Government’s Skills for Scotland: A Lifelong Skills Strategy (2007) has identified some of the key skills needed by employers in all sectors as being ‘soft skills’. It describes these skills as less definable but nevertheless essential. They are listed below.

- Effective time management
- Planning and organising
- Effective oral and written communication skills
- The ability to solve problems
- The ability to undertake tasks or make submissions at short notice
- The ability to work with others to achieve common goals
- The ability to think critically and creatively
- The ability to learn and continue learning
- The ability to take responsibility for professional development
- Having the skills to manage, or be managed, by others

### Activity

Make a table similar to the one provided below. Fill in the type of play you might expect to see for each of the categories. You might also want to think about how you could extend that play and what additional materials would help you to do this.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of play</th>
<th>Describe what you have observed</th>
<th>Describe the way this was extended</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exploring</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observational</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening; talking and responding</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinking</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experimenting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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- The ability to learn and continue learning
- The ability to take responsibility for professional development
- Having the skills to manage, or be managed, by others
All of the skills highlighted by the Scottish Government are relevant to you as a practitioner and with regard to the way you approach your placement experience. Many of these skills will be looked at in detail in Chapter 7, which looks at team working. Later in this chapter, there is an opportunity to consider the skills you think you currently have and to see how you use them when you go to placement. This list of skills will also be a useful reference point for you. Other skills are discussed below.

The skill of listening and responding

When you are in placement and in your day-to-day work, you will begin to develop the skill of active listening. This will be explained further in Chapters 2 and 7, but essentially it means you should listen without interrupting and make sure you are giving the person who is talking your full attention. Children and adults are very aware when someone is only partly listening or when that person’s body language suggests a lack of interest. This might mean you are staring into the distance when a child or adult is speaking, or you have a tendency to butt in to a conversation before it is finished, or you don’t stop what you are doing to give the child or adult your full attention.

One way of showing you are actively listening is by repeating the child or adult’s comment or question when they have finished talking. For example, if a child tells you she is ‘gonna be a bridesmaid at my auntie’s wedding’, you might helpfully respond: ‘Oh, you’re going to be a bridesmaid, Lucy. Tell me all about it. What is it that a bridesmaid has to do?’

In the same way, if a child tells you he ‘cannae get thae boxes to stick together’, you might want to say: ‘I see what you mean, Ryan. They’re just not sticking together, are they? How can we solve that?’ This type of response shows a child you are interested and have been listening.

Consider this

How do you feel when someone you are talking to yawns or is distracted by something that’s going on elsewhere?

How would you feel if you had an important piece of information that you were dying to tell someone, but when you told them they simply said: ‘That’s good’ and walked away?

Approachability, adaptability and flexibility

Among the key skills needed by the early education and childcare practitioner is the ability to be approachable, adaptable and flexible. Children and parents will often come to you with news they want to share or for advice or reassurance. As with listening skills, being approachable means sending out the correct messages or cues. The cues you give are an indicator to the recipient of what they might expect. These cues can be verbal or non-verbal and will be explained in greater detail in Chapter 7. However, non-verbal communication will
cue children in without any spoken language. So, if you are talking to a child without making eye contact or while scowling, this is likely to cue indifference or annoyance. Any cues you give should suggest openness, so don't stand with your arms folded or tap your foot in frustration or impatience. You can use positive cues such as smiling, making good eye contact, lightly touching a child's arm when you are giving praise and getting down to the child's level when he or she is speaking to you. Remember, children also use cues, so you have to be alert to what these might be indicating verbally or non-verbally.

Some nurseries and out-of-school centres operate a ‘key workers’ system. This means you will have a small group of children for whom you have particular responsibility. So, the child knows you are the adult he or she needs to go to each morning. This is important in a busy centre as children can often be intimidated by large numbers or the noise of a strange environment.

In some settings, practitioners are encouraged to put children at ease by shaking hands and saying ‘hello’ to each child when they arrive in the morning and ‘goodbye’ when they leave. This can be good practice because it means you are actively welcoming the child every day, saying his or her name, and it is a polite acknowledgement that you are pleased each child is there. It is also a way of showing approachability and friendliness. Please check out whether there are any cultural sensitivities associated with handshaking and don't assume it will be acceptable to everyone. Other strategies include starting the day with circle time and a song that acknowledges each child in turn: ‘Molly Ross, Molly Ross, how are you?’ Molly would reply: ‘Here I am, here I am, how do you do?’ However you do the daily introductions and goodbyes, it is really important the child is made to feel welcome.

Introductions are important in giving the child adult contact and a chance to share with you something that may have happened since you last met or something special the child is looking forward to.

Approachability matters to children and parents and to other team members. If you seem unapproachable, the child and his or her family are less likely to feel able to discuss or raise important issues with you. This means you will miss out on building a professional relationship in which you can form an accurate picture of the child and of the significant things that are happening in his or her life.

Further research

Often centres will have posters displaying different ways of saying welcome and good day. It is always important to welcome children in a way they can understand. Try to find out how your placement supports children and their families whose first or preferred language is not English. Comparing and contrasting your experience with those of others in your group might be a useful discussion point.
Adaptability and flexibility

Some people come into childcare with quite fixed and rigid views about what they think children should know and how they think children should behave. The best practitioners are those who are flexible and adaptable to change because when you are working with children the pattern is constantly changing. It is a truism that no two children are alike. Even if something works well for one child it may not for the next. So you need to be prepared to change your approach and to be flexible. It can be annoying if you have planned to do something and it has to be altered in some way, particularly if you are in a centre on placement for just a few weeks, but this happens. Occasionally, because of staff absence or when other situations occur in the centre, you have to change the original intentions and you have to be prepared to go with those changes. This is also true when you have prepared something because the child was really interested in it the day before but you find he or she just isn't interested in it the next day. Again, you have to be prepared to change your plans to accommodate a new interest.

Flexibility means you will have a fairly relaxed or open approach to change. You may be asked to step in for another colleague at short notice or to take responsibility for a part of the centre you hadn't anticipated being in. The more flexible and adaptable you are, the greater the asset you will be and the more likely you will be to learn quickly.

The Scottish Government identified the ability to step in and adapt at short notice as a skill many employers seek. For example, you could occasionally be asked to stay later than you had anticipated or to come in early to help set up the centre. Nurseries are collaborative spaces and it's important that all the practitioners in the centre are sufficiently flexible to help each other out and are mutually cooperative.

Working with others

Most of the time you will be working as one of a team of people. However, you might also be working as a sole provider such as a childminder or in a parent-led playgroup that is reliant on parents and volunteers. Often you will be involved with key people in the child's local or cultural community. Key to working with others is to understand and value the contribution each person has to make. Your behaviours are important to others you work with, so you should learn to be dependable and make sure you follow through on any commitments you make. It is vital to the team and to children and families that the centre opens on time every day. Some workplaces operate a shift system which means they are open for an extended day; this can mean 7 am to 7 pm. It is unlikely you will work a 12-hour day, but you may start work when a colleague finishes. It is important you are on time so that you can relieve other members of staff, and you need to be prompt to make sure you don't disrupt the work of the centre.

As well as working with colleagues, you will work with parents and carers of the children. You may also work with key people in the child's cultural community. All are integral to the child's

Case study Pulling together

You work with two other colleagues in a 20-place centre. The children are putting on a small event at harvest time for their families. This involves working with the children to set up displays of their work in the days preceding the event, making, printing and copying programmes and ordering refreshments. On the day before the event the manager discovers the programmes have mistakes in them. Also, the janitor has gone home sick so no seating has been set up for the following day, and the delivery you have been expecting with the refreshments hasn’t arrived. You usually go home at 3:45 pm but you have been asked to stay to help sort out this difficulty.

1 Do you think this is a reasonable request?

2 If you are unable to stay, are there ways you might still be able to help?
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It is important for you to link with them, to be welcoming and to communicate well.

What skills?

Sometimes, it might seem the early education and childcare practitioner needs to be superman or superwoman. In reality, you do need to have a range of skills to work with children. You have already heard about some of the skills you require and others that have been identified by the Scottish Government.

Some of the key skills which will be discussed in more detail throughout the book include: empathy; the ability to listen and respond well to children and adults; the ability to read and understand instructions; the ability to show a caring and committed attitude towards children; a willingness to take on a range of roles in the course of your working day; a professional approach to your work; an ability to understand the role of other colleagues and to respond positively to co-workers and other professional

Activity

You might like to complete the chart below and keep it at the start of a folio or log book you are asked to keep for placement activities.

It’s a useful device to keep checking back to remind yourself of the skills you actually have, as well as to remind yourself how you are developing these on a day-to-day basis. You will see how you are becoming more proficient. It’s always good to remember what you can do but also to think of ways to improve.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skills I have</th>
<th>How I demonstrate these skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skills I am developing</th>
<th>How I demonstrate these in placement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Case study Supporting Sandeep

Sandeep has just come back to the nursery having spent six months with his mother in Pakistan. He cries for most of the morning and is reluctant to settle to any activity. He keeps looking out of the window and asks when his mum will come back for him. He is following you round the nursery all the time and doesn’t like to lose sight of you.

The area in which you work has a thriving Pakistani community who support the school really well.

1. Describe some ways you might help to settle Sandeep.
2. How can you best use your skills to ensure Sandeep’s needs are met effectively?
colleagues for the benefit of the children; practical skills; professional skills and abilities; kindness and a caring approach.

Consider this

Which of the key skills listed do you think you have? How did you develop them and what strategies do you have in place to continually improve them?

One of the professional skills you will develop through going to placement and by reading and research is the ability to understand children and to put into context their developmental stages with an understanding of their behaviours. Chapter 3 describes some of this in more detail.

When you are working with children, you need to respond to them appropriately. Sometimes, you may think a child shouldn’t be behaving in a particular way but are not sure what to do about it. You should be aware of your own limitations and know how and when to ask for help or support. This means you will learn by observing others, become aware of any particular existing strategies that may be in place and start to develop your own strategies for dealing with difficult situations. Asking for support and being aware of personal and professional limitations shows a mature response and provides you with a positive learning experience. It is not an admission of defeat to explain you are not sure what to do. Remember, the only ‘stupid’ question is the question you don’t ask.

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Case study Responding to Liam’s behaviour

Liam is shouting, kicking and screaming because he can’t have blocks.

A student is with Liam at the time but is unclear what to do. She calms Liam down by talking gently to him and taking him away from the area. She isn’t sure she has done the right thing and later asks the nursery practitioner about this. The practitioner explains she did the correct thing and will discuss some methods they use of effectively distracting then engaging

Different types of provision in early education and childcare

Key term

Vocational course describes a course that trains you for a specific career so you know the type of job you will have when you qualify. Teaching, nursing and dentistry are vocational courses.

HNC Early Education and Childcare is a vocational course. This means you will have placement experiences as part of the course and will need to use and develop skills in those placements. During your HNC year you are likely to have more than one placement and each may provide a different experience and new opportunities. Some colleges send candidates on three placements during their course. These are likely to be for a range of centres, including those shown in the table opposite. This tells you a little about each type of placement, the way it is funded and managed, and the age ranges of children you could be working with in each. In Chapter 9 you will learn how Scottish and central government policy provides some financial support for parents. The way it appears in the table is ‘government funded’. If you are clear about the different types of provision you can be sent to, this may help you to consider in advance the type of skills you are likely to need.

Liam when he behaves this way. She also explains they record these incidents as the centre and Liam’s family are working together to try to deal consistently but fairly with Liam’s outbursts.

1. Have you encountered a situation like this before? If you have, discuss with others how you were supported to deal with it.

2. Describe some of the ways you might want to tackle this situation that also support Liam.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provision</th>
<th>Age ranges</th>
<th>Who inspects</th>
<th>How it is funded</th>
<th>Duration of service</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Childminder</td>
<td>From 12 weeks to 12 years (or older)</td>
<td>Scottish Commission for Regulation of Care (Care Commission)</td>
<td>Individual families pay. Can be claimed back through tax credit or through government-funded places.</td>
<td>Varies from one hour to all-day care; varying times of the week and varying times of the year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursery school or class (local authority)</td>
<td>3–5 years</td>
<td>Care Commission and HM Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) (if providing pre-school education)</td>
<td>Government funded, usually up to 15 hours a week but in some cases can be full-time.</td>
<td>Usually 5 days x 2.5 hours, term times only.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child and family centres including voluntary providers</td>
<td>Birth to 5 years</td>
<td>Care Commission and HMIE (if providing pre-school education)</td>
<td>Usually by referral and to support families with particular needs. Government funded.</td>
<td>Varying times but can be for up to 2–3 hours daily or longer. Can be for a set period depending on circumstances of referral.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private nursery</td>
<td>12 weeks to 5 years. May also run after-school care for 5–10-year-olds</td>
<td>Care Commission and HMIE (if providing pre-school education)</td>
<td>Mixed economy. Some government-funded places are up to 15 hours a week but with additional hours privately funded by families.</td>
<td>Varies from hourly to all-day sessions. Can be up to 10 hours a day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playgroups (voluntary sector)</td>
<td>Often 2.5 to 5 years</td>
<td>Care Commission and HMIE (if providing pre-school education)</td>
<td>Some government-funded places up to 15 hours a week but with hours privately funded by families.</td>
<td>Usually for 2–3 hours daily, term times only, but can vary to full-year provision.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out-of-school care</td>
<td>Usually children aged 4–10 years but can be for children up to 12 years</td>
<td>Care Commission</td>
<td>Usually privately funded but families can claim Tax Credits to help with funding.</td>
<td>Usually for 2–3 hours daily, but can be extended in school holidays to full-day provision.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crèches</td>
<td>Can be children from 12 weeks to 10 years, but often children 2–8 years</td>
<td>Care Commission</td>
<td>Usually privately funded by parents. Can be free to parents depending on who is running the service.</td>
<td>Usually for a limited time from one hour to a maximum of 3 to 4 hours. Can be open all year or can be for specific occasions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools including special schools and classes</td>
<td>Children from 4.5 to 16 years plus. You would normally be in a P1 but could work with older children with ASN.</td>
<td>HMIE</td>
<td>Government funded, unless in the independent sector where funded wholly by parents. Special schools independently run receive grants from a variety of sources and normally offer free places for children.</td>
<td>Usually 9am–3.30pm, term times only.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How to plan, organise and implement development and learning opportunities in an early education and childcare setting

Planning is used by professionals to consider, prepare and organise a suitable environment and materials for children's play, development and learning. When you are planning you need to consider what the purpose of it is. Sometimes it may be related to different stages of children's development. In other circumstances it is to extend and elaborate play experiences or to provide a suitable environment for learning to take place. Where nursery schools and classes are using Curriculum for Excellence, planning may be considered against the four capacities you will read about in Chapter 4.

Planning is an important feature of what you need to do for this unit. You will be asked to plan activities while you are in placement, but will be supported in this by key people. In placement you will be working with a mentor or a placement supervisor, who should be consulted every day, so you need to agree times at the start of your placement for discussing your plans. At college you are likely to have a placement tutor or workplace assessor, who will support your understanding of what you need to do to provide evidence for the unit.

Planning is the key to any successful activity. It takes place in collaboration with others in the early education and childcare team, with parents and with children, and is one of the most important professional skills you will acquire.

Good planning helps to ensure you provide children with the right opportunities at the right time to achieve positive outcomes. Plans can be long term and short term. The short-term plan can be broken down into individual plans.

Long-term planning

The purpose of a long-term plan is to be more strategic about what you intend doing and how you will embed interests that you know are likely to occur, such as seasonal or cultural ones. Long-term plans outline the programme for the centre. This means you are prepared for interests that will most likely occur throughout the year or that you can predict are very likely to occur, and you will know who is doing what and when. In a nursery school or class this can be achieved over a school session. It provides an opportunity for staff to be proactive in organising to ensure resources are in place and allows them to source materials if they have to be secured from elsewhere. It also allows forward planning, such as any required site visits and other key activities.

Short-term planning

Short-term plans allow you to focus on more specific objectives which enables you to build on children's current interests or identified needs. The observations the staff make are fed into the short-term plans and staff discussion is an important part of constructing a plan. Often the long-term plan, e.g. 'Where our food comes from', will generate visits and additional activities. These need to be considered against key development or curricular areas. An example would be how a particular centre ensured opportunities for listening, talking and recording within the broad theme of a visit to a local farm. This centre would also pick up on particular interests the children showed while there and would develop activities or play opportunities based on these. Short-term planning will vary from centre to centre but generally the long-term plan is distilled into smaller, specific key themes or actions. The short-term plans closely follow observed needs, including play needs.

Individual plans

Within the short-term plans will be the daily or weekly plans for children. They provide a clear focus of the child's needs and how those needs can be met in relation to planned provision and activities. These are likely to be discussed.
either daily or weekly depending on the type of service provider you are working in. These daily discussions will be specific to what staff observed daily to be the child's needs or interests.

Some centres outline their weekly plans by taking broad headings, such as 'Taking part in sustained conversations about a topic of interest': with the assessment focus listening and responding to questions. A plan is written up to show this, including: starting points for activities; what it is anticipated the children will gain from these experiences; any particular children who key staff are being asked to observe that week; and, finally, what resources are needed and who will provide these.

Any planning is subject to change but generally it helps to build up a picture of the child, what the starting point is for the child, what is needed to support that child's development or learning and how the centre will go about providing for this. This gives the practitioner a clearer idea of general and specific objectives for children's play and learning, and how to evaluate successes or identify ways needed to help the child consolidate learning, play or skills. Planning meetings give staff an opportunity to discuss and contribute to the overall planning in the centre. You will be invited to take part in meetings but may feel you want to watch and listen when you first go to placement. Later on you will feel you can contribute more confidently to discussions as they are an important way of finding out who has responsibility for what part of the day-to-day activities in the centre.

Why planning is important

The planning process helps to set goals for children and aims for staff. It is directed at what children need and defines how the practitioners supporting them are going to provide for this effectively. Planning also means the environment is kept fresh and children are given new choices in their play. Some children

During circle time ask individuals questions – ‘Tell me what you liked doing today?’

Talk to children while they are helping to set up activities – ‘Is there something else that could go here?’

Plan to meet and greet each child daily and ask, ‘How are you today?’

Listen carefully to what children are saying

Ask some of the quieter children to listen and to follow instructions, e.g. ‘Anne, can you bring me the book with tigers in it?’

Make news books using captions about what children have said, e.g. ‘Sammy said he could find me some glue.’

Make a wall display using examples from circle time, e.g. ‘We said we like to do these activities on Mondays.’
are in full day care for five days a week. These children need variety and choice. Planning will support children's independence, and a well-organised environment will make it easy for the children to find and to put away activities of their choosing. This doesn't mean rigidity, lack of choice or the loss of spontaneity for children. The well-designed and carefully structured environment will be planned in a way that means those working with children are clear and confident about developmental, play or learning needs, and what and how they are providing for these needs. Effective planning means that contingencies can be dealt with easily, so staff know where and how they can source materials quickly and according to the required need of the child. Good planning allows opportunities for change to occur and provides a backdrop of support for children's all-round development.

**Ways to plan**

There are different types of planning processes. Some of these may seem quite informal while others may be more formal. Below and opposite are two examples of planning sheets that are used in centres.

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**Sunnyside Nursery: Planning Sheet**

**Child's name:** Sui Ling  
**Date of Birth:** 02 05 2004

**Sui Ling's own comments:**

I saw lots of bugs when I was helping my nan dig her garden. I like looking at the bugs but they move quite fast you know

**Key worker’s comments:**

Tuesday 08 September 2007

Putting out magnifiers for Sui Ling and Amy to use.

Suggesting we might dig in the garden and look under some leaves that have accumulated outside the door.

Resources required: spades, bug boxes, books.

Provide some slate-coloured and brown paints in painting area and some pictures of centipedes and beetles on table as inspiration to paint some insects.
Chapter 1 Working in an early education and childcare setting

One example of planning you will hear more about in placement is the personal learning plan. The personal learning plan, or PLP, is a way of providing appropriate learning that is targeted at an individual child’s needs. In some local authorities in Scotland, every child has an individualised learning plan, including children in the nursery. This could be similar to the one shown above for Tommy. Throughout Scotland, personal learning plans are key to providing effective development opportunities and learning for children with additional support needs. You are less likely to find this type of planning in out-of-school care. However, this doesn’t mean that you don’t need to plan for children in out-of-school settings. Planning can be informal but it is important as it ensures practitioners know their role and the expectations of them.

### Laurel Kindergarten Planning Sheet

**Name:** Tommy  
**D.O.B.** 11.12.2006  
**Planning for week beginning:** 01.10. 2007.

Tommy is starting to move on his feet while holding on to furniture for support. Enjoys knocking down blocks and bricks; he laughs and tries to build them up so we can knock them down again. Starting to vocalise.

**This week we will:** provide Tommy with safe areas to move around with a key worker on hand to support him.

Make sure he has a range of activities to stimulate his interest including large blocks, soft blocks and Brio which he can build up and knock down.

Make sure we have time for alliteration rhymes and for songs. Use look-and-tell books with single images on each page.

### Activity

When you first visit your placement, find out how staff plan for children’s needs. Do they plan every day or every week, or do they use thematic or seasonal planning? Does each child have a personal learning plan? Establish who is involved in the planning process, how this is recorded and how the staff keep planning records up to date.

Finally, find out what the centre expects of you as a student.
Planning the child’s environment

*A Curriculum for Excellence* (Scottish Executive, 2004) is one of the key documents used in nurseries in Scotland to support children’s play and learning. You will read more about this in Chapter 4 and it is important to remember it when discussing planning. Scottish ministers believe it underlines how children will acquire what are described in the document as four capacities, namely to become successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors. So, when planning for children’s development and learning, pre-fives practitioners need to keep this in mind. It will be an important feature of many of the settings in which you work and it is important you learn more about this curriculum document while you are doing the HNC course.

*A Curriculum for Excellence: Building the Curriculum 2 – Active Learning in the Early Years* (Scottish Executive, 2007) speaks about the need for active learning. This means learning that engages children and in which they are actively involved. This can be described as planned purposeful and spontaneous play that engages and challenges children to think and respond by becoming actively engaged in real life or imaginary experiences.

Planning in placement

When you are in placement, one of the key purposes is to learn to create engaging environments for children. This means you will learn to plan and create spaces where children can thrive, develop, explore, experiment and learn. A well-organised environment will be calm, creative and organised. It will give children lots of scope for exploratory and imaginative play among other types of play; it will ensure children have space in which they can be creative and can have fresh air and exercise; it will be a space in which children can be nurtured and feel safe. This doesn't mean an environment that is too quiet, over tidy or rigidly controlled; a calm atmosphere can be created that still gives children freedom and scope for movement and play.

Some nurseries organise rooms according to children’s ages. A key requirement of planning for different age groupings is an awareness of child development (see spider diagram opposite). When you work with children under 12 months, your first considerations will be about developmental and exploratory play.
opportunities for the child. These will be based on aspects of child development that include: physical development; emotional development; social development; language development; cognitive development. You will use the child’s developmental stage to support an understanding of what you need to provide for him or her.

When you are working with older children, developmental needs and, sometimes, curricular needs and progression will play a part. When you are planning a play-rich environment for children, you have to be able to create an environment that is suitable for a variety of play experiences.

The environment is the space in which children play and the space that surrounds them. It may be restricted by physical constraints or it may be a large outdoor area. One nursery in Edinburgh uses roof space for outdoor play, while another uses a church hall that has to be set up and put away every day. Often playgroups are limited by the space they have and are usually expert at maximising space for children’s play.

One of the first things you could usefully do on placement is to draw a floor plan of the nursery, indicating where key play and discovery areas are situated. This provides a way of considering play areas and gives an opportunity to think about how children use the space. Sometimes it is called ‘looking at the geography of space’. You may want to look at how the children use space by drawing lines to indicate how they move across the floor area and how they navigate the space. Eventually, this might seem to be just random patterns that you have created, but if you use a different colour for each child you will soon see areas of heavy usage and areas that are visited less frequently. It allows you to consider why that might be and whether the space is being used effectively.

Example floor plan of a nursery
Sometimes areas don’t work together. This can be because noisy and quiet areas are inappropriately put together or because there simply isn’t enough space for children to spread out. Wherever possible, nurseries and out-of-school care should aim to maximise the space they have. They can include outdoor space for activities you might naturally think of as indoor. So, sand and water can be put outside as can painting, discovery activities and activities that use large motor movement.

If there is space available it can be useful to plan a quiet room or a white room, where there is calming music playing, some lava lamps or bubble tubes, and lots of soft furnishings and different textured cushions. It’s helpful to include listening tapes or CDs and to have lots of books available, so that children can relax in this space. You need to think about the core purpose when planning this type of space. While adult supervision is essential, keep it low key and keep noise to a minimum. This creates a calm space to take a distressed child or a child who may be new and nervous about his or her environment. Planning and creating a quiet area, and its effectiveness in calming children, may be an interesting topic for future research in your graded unit.

**Activity**

Consider the diagram on page 15 of a floor plan of a nursery. Can you suggest improvements on the arrangement of the activities in this floor plan?

Draw your own nursery floor plan showing what activities are offered in each area and how children naturally move from area to area. Try to work out your own floor plan that will keep a quiet space separate from the other activities.

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**Case study** *Working together*

Jimmy and Daisy are working together on the computer. Daisy tells Jimmy her dad has a new digital camera and she says they have got lots of new pictures at home to look at. Jimmy remembers they have a digital camera in the centre and goes off to find it for Daisy. Daisy says ‘Here, I’ll show you how it works’, takes some photographs of Jimmy at the computer and shows him how to see the pictures on the screen of the camera. Mrs Kohl watches and observes what they are doing and asks Jimmy and Daisy if they would like to know how to see the pictures on the computer screen and how to print them off.

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One of the key concepts the Scottish Government wants to embed across children’s learning, their day-to-day lives and the communities in which they live is citizenship. Citizenship will be explained in later chapters but it is important to remember here how it can support planning for learning, play and development. It includes cooperation with others and peer learning, which is often a more effective way to learn and consolidate facts. The case study below is an example of how children can actively support the planning process and can support each other’s learning. It also shows how practitioners can effectively intervene to support and develop learning.
### Evidence gathering and the planning process

When you go to your placement you may be asked to provide some written evidence of how you have planned for children’s play, learning or development. Most courses ask candidates to prepare a folio of what they have achieved in their placement, and these usually need to be signed by your placement supervisor to show they were authentically done by you.

You will gradually build up confidence and the folio will show how your judgement has developed over the year. By the end of the year you will be writing well-constructed plans and will know how to observe and record evidence effectively and professionally.

In your placement you may be asked to provide a specific learning or play experience, and to record how you planned. You will identify the reason for choosing a particular activity or experience, what your role is in the process and how your role fits with others in the team. You may also be asked to consider some of the resources you need to deliver or to develop the activity, and what the anticipated benefits are for the child who is doing it. Remember, you need to carefully observe the activity before you can actually say what the child has gained from any experience.

Above is an example of the type of planning record used by some colleges for candidates’ folios.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Play opportunity offered</th>
<th>(describe briefly)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reason for choice</td>
<td>(this should relate to a need you have observed or one that you have been told about)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the active learning experience</td>
<td>(Curriculum for Excellence, if appropriate)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My role in this will be and this is how it relates to other team members</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anticipated benefits to the child</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources required and how this was planned and organised</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation of my role</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is likely your tutors will give you specific activities or tasks to do each time you are out in placement. These will vary according to the stage of learning you have reached in your course. They may involve developing play for particular age ranges such as babies; they may involve working with older children. Eventually, it will involve you being asked to provide specific activities or play that relates to the full range of experiences you would expect children to have. These will include providing play that supports children's literacy, numeracy and language development, as well as exploratory and investigative play that will allow children to create problems and work out solutions.

You will be asked to plan and contribute to children's outdoor play and to play that provides calculated and acceptable risk and physical challenge. This is particularly important to make sure children are fit, healthy, active and achieving. These are key priorities of the Scottish Government. When you are planning this type of activity or an activity that takes you outside the centre, you will need to carry out a risk assessment and be clear about how you are going to ensure children’s safety. The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) provides advice on how to minimise the risk of accidents and it might be useful to download this from their website (www.rospa.com).

Each placement will vary but it is likely that you will be asked to provide a minimum of one and a maximum of two planned experiences for children’s play, development or learning each
These should be taken from a wide range that will be described in Chapter 4, but which could include creative and aesthetic experiences for children such as dressing up, dance, music, creative crafts, and construction, along with any other play or activities that allow children to be imaginative and inventive.

When children are inventive and use their imagination, they learn how to construct new possibilities or new experiences. You need to know how to support this by carefully considering if the activities that are there for children are becoming tired and need to be refreshed. If you are attentive and actively involved in planning, you will notice whether, for example, the sand and water have the same equipment in them week in and week out, and if the children are reluctant to go to the activities because there is no further challenge for them. You could bring this as an observation to the daily planning meeting. This may lead you to suggest a new activity, which can be planned, implemented and evaluated as a placement activity. If successful you may be asked to consider other areas of the nursery or your observations may be used to inform further change.

Planning, observation and evaluation together form a cycle, sometimes called the planning cycle. This circular process helps inform all you do in the centre. If used well, you will be considering and reconsidering what you need to offer and refining what you think is appropriate, according to what you have observed.

Sometimes you will be working with families and will need to explain why you have planned particular experiences for their child and how you think they will benefit the child. You may be working alongside parents and need to be clear about the rationale behind all you are doing. You will provide a role model and your effective planning and organisation will support a better understanding in parents who, for a number of reasons, may be unable to play effectively with their children. Once qualified, you are expected to be able to speak with authority to parents and to other professionals whose backgrounds will not be play-based. This will mean keeping up to date with web materials, articles, books and other research that is written about how to plan and organise children’s play. This type of personal planning is valuable for the research activities you will be doing for this and other units, and for your graded unit.
Chapter 1 Working in an early education and childcare setting

Children and the planning process

Children of all ages can be actively involved in determining their own play and learning, and it is important when you are planning that you take account of this. As you progress through the HNC, you will have the opportunity to offer a range of experiences. Sometimes, you will note that children get stuck at an area or at a single activity. This can happen for a variety of reasons, including the child feeling secure at a particular area and apprehensive about joining other children, or it can be because the child isn’t particularly confident about trying something new. Children can easily be discouraged and it may be that the child has found something too difficult to manage in the past. If you are planning with the child, you can engage him or her in conversation about what he or she currently likes to do and might potentially do. You can also find out about whoever a child plays with now and anyone he or she might like to play with in the future. The planning sheets on pages 12 and 13 show how a child’s comments were used to create a learning experience. When you plan with the child you can use his or her ideas to help resolve issues.

Parents and the planning process

Parents and carers are integral to children’s lives so involving parents in the process of planning is important. Some children are looked after by others and these key people are equally aware of the child’s needs and can also be included in planning. Centres will have their own processes to involve parents and carers, and will have procedures in place to ensure parents’ comments are taken account of in the planning process. This might mean an informal discussion with a parent about their child or inviting a parent in to the nursery or centre to work with staff. Either approach allows parents and staff to make decisions that support the child and that make sure a parent or carer feel they have been part of the process.

Organising a play or learning experience

Earlier in this chapter, you considered how planning can be carried out on a daily, weekly, monthly or termly basis, and is described as long-term and short-term planning. In long-term planning there are likely to be key seasonal or cultural trends. For example, the centre can anticipate they will be celebrating seasonal changes such as spring and autumn or annual cultural or religious festivals such as Diwali or Christmas. This helps in organising, preparing and storing props, books, storysacks, drapes, and other key items or equipment required. The well-organised centre keeps these clearly labelled, and part of the organisation and storage is ensuring materials are kept in good condition, are clean and are complete before storing them for use in the future. As an HNC student you will be asked to help put up displays and to change areas of the centre to reflect a particular theme that has emerged.

When you are planning activities for your folio, you should try to be well prepared. Ask in placement whether you can use materials from there and if you can spend some time looking at these. It might mean you need to stay late or come in early to investigate. You may also need to source your own materials. Develop contacts and sources for ends of paper, materials and other odds and ends. Improvise by making really interesting visual aids such as puppets – but always be aware of health and safety issues. You can also develop your own database of where you have sourced materials in the past and add this to your contacts list. Parents often have useful contacts and can be very supportive of the centre; they are also a useful point of contact for the local community.

When you plan activities for your folio, you need to keep the following in mind:

- Do you know the aim of the experience?
- What are the ages of the children?
- How many children are you working with?
- What materials will you need?
- Is the area you will be working in safe and free from hazards?
- Do you need to store materials before you start your activity?
- How are you going to encourage children to take part in the experience?
• Is everything you need clean and displayed in a way that makes children want to take part?

If you are organising materials for activities like painting, crafts or cooking, make sure you’ve got the right quantities ready for when the children want to use them. Finally, think about how you will clear away and tidy up. You can encourage the children to help with this.

If you are baking or cooking, try out recipes first, using the same equipment you will be using on the day, to make sure it works! If you are encouraging children to follow printed instructions, make sure you’ve pitched them at the correct level of understanding for the child and check the instructions make sense. This is something you might like to try out on your friends first of all. If you are using symbols or pictures on recipe cards, it’s better if you print them off and laminate them and it’s often more professional to use web-based images.

Remember to involve the children in the organisation, preparation and clearing away of activities. It is a really effective way of engaging interest and extending choice where you think children have become self-limiting. Children usually love being involved and this type of experience provides excellent opportunities for them to practise problem-solving and working together.

**Personal organisation**

Your workplace folio or folder will provide evidence of what you have accomplished and of how you’ve planned and completed workplace activities. Different course providers may have varying ways they want to generate evidence for this unit. Normally, you will have a workplace supervisor who will be asked to sign and authenticate any work you have done on your placement. It will save you a great deal of anxiety if you try to keep as well organised as possible. Try to:

• write up any work you’ve done on the day you do it
• save your work in a placement folder in your documents
• back up all your work on a memory stick so you have a copy
• photocopy any handwritten work and keep it in a separate folder so you have a copy
• keep your folder with you at all times, such as when you get off the bus.

Some HNC candidates like to keep personal resources in an ideas book or folder. Many early education and childcare practitioners find they still add to books they started as students. You can make a paper-based folder or an electronic folder with different types of activities such as: songs and rhymes; poems; stories; art and craft; discovery activities; seasonal and cultural activities; miscellaneous items. As you go from placement to placement, you can add ideas you see there and you can include ideas from professional journals. It’s a useful resource when you need to think of an activity fast.

**How reporting and recording supports the work of the early education and childcare practitioner**

**Reporting and recording**

It’s very tempting to think you will remember everything you have done and what everyone has
said on a daily basis. This is true of what children say to you. If it is particularly funny or engaging you may think you are bound to remember. In reality, few of us have the capacity to do this. This is one of the reasons why reporting and recording are important in early education and childcare settings and are skills you will develop when you are in placement.

Reporting and recording is the process by which we write down and feedback information we have. This important process can be carried out either formally or informally. In Chapter 2 you will read about the need for the accurate recording and reporting of child protection issues. In Chapter 4 you will see that observation of what children do is a key component of recording.

Observation involves watching and listening to what children are doing or saying. It is a professional skill and should be done as unobtrusively as possible. By watching what children are doing and recording it in a way that is meaningful, observations provide us with some evidence for the statements or claims we make about the children. Observations will be central to completing workplace folios and are integral to the planning process. Focused observation allows you to see what a child is doing in a given situation and to take appropriate actions. An example of this is in the Case study given below. This is a typical example of how observation can be used to support a child and to work with the parent or carer.

What is reporting and recording?

Reporting and recording are ways of helping staff keep track of how children are developing and learning. They allow practitioners to speak with understanding to parents and other professionals about individual children. Records provide a way of showing progression and sometimes regression in children, and centres use them to inform staff when children are making a transition from one centre to another. You will read more about transitions in Chapters 3 and 6.

Case study Observing Katie

Katie has just started in Primary 1. She had been really happy to go to school for the first week when the children were finishing at 12 o’clock. In the second week they are staying until after lunch. On Thursday, Katie’s mum has told the centre that Katie has been quite tearful about coming to school this week and the teacher and practitioner have said they will try to find out if there is anything upsetting Katie. At lunchtime the practitioner observes that Katie is last to finish her lunch and all her friends have gone out to play. Katie is observed to be agitated, pushing her food around and starting to get upset. The practitioner observes this the following day as well and concludes Katie is happy in the dining room until her friends finish and leave her. When the practitioner speaks to Katie about this, Katie says it’s too noisy and she doesn’t like it there.

The practitioner and teacher explain what they have observed to Mum and they all discuss ways of resolving the situation. Katie’s mum tells them Katie has always been a slow eater.

Consider how you have used observation, or seen others in your placement use observations, to reassure or inform.

1. Can you think of ways to improve your recording of observations? List any ideas you may have. See if you can put these ideas into practice during the next few weeks.
There are some key features of keeping records, as follows:

- Records provide accurate information about individual children and the progress they have made. This is sometimes called the child’s profile. Parents and carers are provided with a written record of the child’s progress at set intervals each year.

- They are a means of planning the next steps in the centre. Plans will be built around need that has been recorded in profiles or otherwise observed.

- Records ensure staff are clear about particular actions they may need to take at a given time because a particular need has arisen.

- They are a means of being selective and of making professional judgement. It is not possible to record everything that goes on in a centre. Professional judgement has to be used by early education and childcare practitioners to decide what to record and how to record it.

- They encourage collaboration among staff and with other key professionals.

**How to report and record**

There are various ways to report and record and you will see examples in your placements. Some centres, with permission from parents, use photographs and multimedia to record what children are doing in the centre and ways they are collaborating with others. This can be a really useful way of showing parents and other professionals how children respond in given situations. The illustration above shows how a photograph can be used to record collaboration in a setting. An example of a multimedia record is shown below. Kevin’s dad had been telling the nursery he was concerned that Kevin didn’t speak about other children he played with and he was worried that Kevin had no friends. The practitioner was able to show Kevin’s dad a range of images which had been put together as ‘Kevin’s Book’. Below are some of the things in Kevin’s book.

This helped to reassure Kevin’s dad that Kevin played well with other children.

Some centres use video images in the same way. It should be stressed that this can only be
done with explicit permission from the parent or authorised adult dealing with the child, who should be informed at the outset of the purpose of the recording. All images need to be kept in secure files. They should not, in any circumstances, leave the centre unless they are required for a legitimate, professional reason following a request by another agency which has been made known to the child and parent, and for which their permission has been granted. There are ethics and guidelines governing this, which you need to be absolutely clear about.

Further research

Investigate the policies that are in place in centres and within local authorities concerning the use of images of children for professional observation purposes. The British Psychological Society has a code of ethics that describe how they view this (see www.bps.org.uk).

Following your investigation, create a list of key points that you think are relevant to your work as an early education and childcare practitioner.

Other methods of recording

Some centres still favour paper-based methods of recording information. This includes day-to-day snapshot recording done on Post-its. At the end of the session these are transferred into the child’s individual record or on to the planning sheet as a way of planning the following day’s activities, and to take account of individual children’s interests.

Some centres adopt a ‘Plan do and review’ approach, and the children are encouraged to record their own interests or what they have done that morning on a large sheet of paper or on a whiteboard. This recording can be done on their behalf by an adult or they can draw their own picture. For example, in Stonypark Nursery the children go to their key worker at the end of the morning to review what they have enjoyed that day. Kylie tells her key worker that she really liked shining the torch through some coloured glass. The key worker writes this down. Timmy says he liked playing with the cars best and he draws a picture of a car to illustrate this point. At the end of the morning the key worker takes her record to the planning meeting to discuss with others.

Parents will often come into the centre with important information for staff. In some centres they are encouraged not only to provide this information verbally but to write it into the child’s home book. A home book is a book that the child brings from nursery to home and then back again, and is a way of encouraging two-way dialogue. Mary’s gran wrote this in her home book: ‘Mum went into hospital yesterday. The new baby should be here today and Mary and I are going to see her after nursery.’ This is helpful for the staff and alerts them to think about bringing out the baby dolls, the prams and the bath, so, the home corner has a ‘baby’ theme.

Recording should be done over time and evidence from observations should be used in context. It is wrong for staff to try to use a single observation as evidence of fact. However, if you gather information over time you will see patterns of behaviour emerge and how progress has been made. You may find you need further evidence or that you feel the child is lacking opportunity in a particular area of play or needs some challenge to help their developmental progression. Keeping accurate records enables you to do this effectively.

Reporting

Reporting back provides you with an opportunity to reflect on what has been achieved with the child involved. It is a really important part of what you do and encourages children as active participants in their learning. You will use reporting skills in feedback sessions to parents, colleagues and to other professionals. An important skill to learn is to be succinct in what you say, accurate – so make sure you can always back up what you say – and positive. Reporting is always much more effective if it is based on what a child has achieved rather than a deficit model that focuses only on lack of achievement. It is very disheartening to hear about what we can’t do rather than what we can do. So, if a child has struggled with completing a jigsaw but has finally managed it, it is much more encouraging to say: ‘with encouragement, Dolly managed to complete the jigsaw today’.
Activity
Consider and comment on how you might feel as a parent if you received this feedback. Which do you think is preferable?

Scenario 1
Sally is 4 years old now and we expect a little more from her, and it’s clear that she can do lots of activities well if she sets her mind to it. She has been at nursery for three months and in this time has shown she can get into a real temper. She struggles to complete things such as dressing the dolls and needs to let adults help her with this. She is using silly words a lot and this gets other children started. She really will need to learn to be a bit more focused.

Scenario 2
We are really pleased to welcome Sally to the nursery. In the last three months Sally has shown many of the developmental skills we would expect at 4 years. She loves to use words, is enquiring about them and makes these words rhyme if she can; she is very sociable and loves to be with close friends; she is very imaginative and enjoys dressing up. Sally can become a little frustrated if she feels she should be able to do something but can’t quite manage it yet. This is evident when she is trying to undress and dress the smaller dolls. With some encouragement and coaxing she is learning to do this.

How other professionals support the early education and childcare practitioner

One of the key skills spoken about earlier in this chapter was the need to be able to work with others and to see what you are doing as part of a bigger picture. While you are an HNC candidate, you may notice there are a range of other professionals who work with you in centres or are called into the centre to support the child. For Scotland’s Children: Better Integrated Children's Services (Scottish Executive, 2001) identified the need for all those who are working with children to be more integrative in how they go about this. It is an important document because it outlines expectations for children and their families. It concludes there are gaps in sharing information across agencies and across professional groupings that mean children in need don’t always get the level of service or the level of support they need. Often children and families who need the support of other professionals find those professionals don’t always coordinate what they are doing. The result is that children and parents often have to provide the same information to a range of people who may or may not take a coordinated approach to supporting them. It is also possible to make mistakes or to fail to follow something through because the support hasn’t been well coordinated.

Key term
Children in need are defined as follows by The Children (Scotland) Act 1995 (Section 93/4/a):

A child under the age of 18 years is in need because:

- the child is unlikely to achieve or maintain or to have the opportunity of achieving or maintaining a reasonable standard of health or development unless services are provided; or
- the child’s health or development is likely significantly to be impaired or further impaired unless such services are provided; or
- the child is disabled; or
- the child is adversely affected by the disability of another family member.

(A table that provides the key features of children in need is provided in Chapter 2.)

Sometimes, working with others is called inter-professional working. This means working with people from different professional groups.
Intra-professional working, on the other hand, means working across professional groups – that is, with people from the same profession as yourself.

**Key terms**

*Inter* is a Latin word that means ‘among’ or ‘between’.

*Intra* is a Latin word that means ‘within’.

At other times you may hear about inter-agency working. This means different agencies are dealing with a child and family at the same time. So, the education service, the health service and the social work department may all be working with the same family. If you are working across agencies you will find you are carrying out inter-professional working. For example, you may go to a Child and Family Centre on your placement, where you are likely to be working with a range of other professional groups including social workers, community health workers and (occasionally) psychologists, speech and language therapists or physiotherapists. If you are sent to a special school on placement there is likely to be a diverse range of inter-disciplinary staff there, including teachers, speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, educational psychologists and social workers from the local child and family teams.

**Which workers contribute to the early education and childcare team?**

**Social workers**

Social workers are degree-qualified, specialist practitioners whose role is to support and guide individuals and families with complex needs and problems, to find solutions to those problems and enable them to live successfully within their local communities. Social workers often work with families with complex problems or short-term need and support them to find a way through particular difficulties they may encounter. This may mean working with other agencies such as health and education services. Social workers try to empower individuals to take personal responsibility and will work with service users to construct packages of care. They need to make sure the most effective measures are put in place to protect children from possible risk from abuse (*Key Capabilities in Child Care and Protection*, Scottish Executive et al., 2006).

**Public health nurses**

Public health nurses (health visitors) are qualified nurses who work within communities to support the health and well-being of individuals. To this end they support a better understanding in communities, and with individuals and families, of health and well-being. They also provide what has been called ‘anticipatory care’. This means supporting people to lead healthier lives that will help to reduce the need for hospital admissions and acute care. Working with families is an important part of this drive, as is working within nurseries and other childcare centres in communities. These nurses will work with individual families at key points in the child’s life, including with newborns. They are intended to support children’s and families’ general and mental health and well-being, and should work closely with others in doing this.

**Educational psychologists**

Educational psychologists are degree-qualified individuals with an additional specialist award in educational psychology. They support and advise on educational programmes for children who are experiencing difficulties with their learning so that they can enhance that learning. They are asked to provide evidence if the child is being assessed for a place in a special education programme or school. They work closely with others in the team to build up a clear and accurate picture of the child and will use techniques such as observation and assessment to make recommendations about the best way of helping the child achieve and develop potential.

**Speech and language therapists**

Speech and language therapists are qualified specialist practitioners who work with the child and family to identify any speech, language or communication difficulties a child may have. They
work as part of a multi-disciplinary team to make sure any programmes they devise for children are understood by the people who are supporting the child and are followed appropriately. The programmes might include making sure the correct environmental conditions are in place to help the child. They may support children who have difficulty forming particular words and sounds because of a physical difficulty they have had or because of general developmental delay.

**Teachers**

A teacher’s main role is to transmit learning and to support children in reaching their full potential. Teachers are degree-qualified and those working in a nursery or pre-school may have an additional specialist qualification. They work closely with other partners to ensure the planning and organisation of learning opportunities is appropriately provided, to evaluate what they have provided and to ensure this is reported appropriately to parents and to others. They are accountable for the quality and standards of what they teach and have a responsibility to work with parents and others in the best interests of the child.

**Visiting specialists**

Visiting specialists are sometimes introduced by centres that need practitioners with particular specialisms to add value to what the centre is offering. These individuals usually have personal skills that are required by the centre and may include one-off visitors or individuals who come on a more regular basis. One example is centres that offer specialist foreign language teaching. Often, a teacher or member of a local community will come into the centre to teach children that language. This is also true of music and dance specialists. Some centres that are attached to primary schools will work with an Active Schools Coordinator. This person will work closely with the staff and children in the centre and with the local public health nurse to provide suggested healthy eating and exercise programmes for children and families.

**Working with other professionals and specialists**

When you are working with others, one of the key requirements is to develop a positive working relationship based on mutual trust and respect. We each have our own professional skills and develop judgements based on these. It is important to remember that different practitioners have their own skills, too. This means you should listen to what others are saying, make sure they have all the facts about the children or groups they will be working with, and work to develop relationships that have a common goal for the child or children involved. You should make sure you have time to discuss strategies and aims with other professionals. This might mean providing evidence such as observations or records so that other professionals can support the children appropriately. It may mean following up the work of other professionals by adopting a particular programme, or it may be that you simply work with them for the benefit of the child.

**Activity**

Consider the type of additional professional support that might be involved in the following circumstances.

**Family 1**

The Gray family have recently moved to Scotland. John, age 4 years, is the youngest in a family of six children and has been identified as having communications difficulties.

**Family 2**

Susan and Ben both misuse drugs. Ben has recently been in prison. Both are extremely caring parents who are trying to get their lives back on track. Lindy, their 12-month-old daughter, is attending the Child and Family Centre.
How to evaluate your own contribution in creating a nurturing and professional service for children

When you are in placement you will be asked to plan and organise activities and experiences for the children you are working with. This is important, but what is more important is how well you are able to evaluate what you have done. A key requirement of an early education and childcare practitioner is to be able to say what you did, why you did it and how well it worked, so that you are able to consider carefully what the next steps should be. The final step is the process of evaluating.

Evaluating as a skill is something that runs through all parts of the HNC. Evaluation allows practitioners to make a judgement based on evidence of whether something has worked and allows us to constantly improve what we do and what we offer children. A really important component of your graded unit is the evaluation. One thing to remember is that no matter how well you have planned and organised activities, they don't always go to plan. This doesn't matter. What does matter is the ability to stand back from an experience and consider why it didn't go to plan and how you might alter it the next time so that you do achieve your goal. You may also need to accept that while the activity wasn't appropriate, children still got something beneficial from the experience. Good evaluation is a key research skill. It is concerned with extrapolating information from a range of sources and making judgments based on evidence.

How to gather evidence

Evidence can be derived from a range of sources. One of the main sources in an early education and childcare setting is observation. So, a straightforward way to consider if an activity is popular is to stand back and watch how many different children go to it in a given time. Another way of looking at an activity is considering if it is fulfilling its aim. For example, you may have set up a painting activity because you hoped children would be inspired by something you had spoken about that day. An example of this is the practitioner reading ‘The Tiger Who Came to Tea’ to a small group of children. The children become excited about the story and start talking about tigers, what they look like, how furry their paws are and whether or not they are very fierce. When John, the practitioner, plans for the following day, he decides to limit the colour of paint available to orange and black. He also puts up a picture of a tiger as a prompt and decides to tell the story of the ‘Tiger Skin Rug’. John sits back and observes as one by one the children produce pictures of ‘their scary tigers’. John also observes some really interesting discussions about visits to the zoo to see the new tiger cub. In this situation it would be fair to say the children had a continuing interest in tigers and John would need to consider how to take this interest forward.

As an early education and childcare practitioner, you will be able to gather evidence from other sources. Some HNC candidates need to produce taped observations of children’s conversations, so they can consider their stage of language acquisition. Sometimes you will be asked to transcribe this. This means writing down accurately what the children are saying from the tape.

Case study

Scenario 1: Observing Jake

Jake has been attending the out-of-school club for three weeks now. A practitioner has been observing Jake carefully to make sure he is settling in well. Every day when Jake arrives he goes straight to the café area and helps himself to some fruit. His friends tend to go off to play with the Playstation. Jake joins them after about 10 minutes.
Being objective

If you are evaluating your own contribution, you need to be able to stand back and be objective. Objectivity is usually concerned with the examination of facts. Subjectivity usually describes opinions that are based on personal beliefs and values. So, a subjective view would be that all 2-year-olds have temper tantrums. An objective view would be that those 2-year-olds you observed in the nursery often became frustrated, some cried due to frustration and some cried, kicked their legs and screamed when they were frustrated. As an HNC candidate you are encouraged to be objective and to evaluate your contribution based on evidence. This is called self-evaluation.

Centres are also asked to carry out self-evaluation for their Care Commission and Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) inspections. This involves asking key questions about how good the experiences being offered are and if there are ways of improving these for the benefit of the children and their families. There is no virtue in self-delusion – that is pretending something is going well when it isn’t. This type of behaviour means you don’t make improvements and the service suffers as a result. There is also nothing wrong in admitting something didn’t go as well as it might have done. Providing you can see why and can identify ways of changing this in future, this approach is very positive.

Sometimes, others evaluate your contribution to the centre or what you are offering to the children. Mentors or workplace supervisors will do this in an objective way and will provide feedback based on fact: for example, ‘I saw you working with Amy earlier. You spoke very kindly to her when she was upset,’ or, ‘I’m a little disappointed you haven’t brought in those books you said you would bring in today.’ You will usually receive a report at the end of the placement that will identify the key skills you brought to that placement, the successes of it and the key areas for improvement or further development. Accept this type of evaluation as a positive experience.

Evaluating your folio

When you are completing evidence for your workplace folio it is likely to be divided into key sections. The section on evaluation provides you with an opportunity to think about what you contributed and how well you planned, organised and carried out the experience. It also provides an opportunity to evaluate what you think the children have gained from it. Usually your discussion with your placement mentor will help to support your understanding of this, as will discussion with the children. Try to find ways of asking children how they enjoyed an activity or whether they thought you provided them with the right materials or equipment. This is part of the overall evaluation. Your mentor is likely to

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Scenario 2: Working with Louise</th>
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<td>You have been asked by the physiotherapist to work with Louise. She has suggested you try throwing and catching a beanbag to encourage Louise’s large motor movements. On day one, Louise doesn’t manage to catch or throw with any accuracy. On day two, Louise catches the bag once and doesn’t throw. By day three, Louise catches the bag three times and manages to throw it once. On day four, Louise throws and catches the bag three times out of six.</td>
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</table>

Which option would you choose and why?

1. You tell the physiotherapist that Louise is fine at throwing and catching now and she enjoyed it.
2. You show the physiotherapist the chart you have made and explain you have observed Louise has made some incremental progress on a day-by-day basis. You suggest you continue with this work to see if this progress is consolidated.

Which option would you choose and why?

1. You tell Jake’s parents he seems hungry when he comes into the club and ask if Jake is used to having a snack straight after school.
2. You tell Jake’s parents he seems to have an eating disorder and they need to get it checked out immediately.

Which option would you choose and why?

1. You tell Jake’s parents he seems hungry when he comes into the club and ask if Jake is used to having a snack straight after school.
2. You tell Jake’s parents he seems to have an eating disorder and they need to get it checked out immediately.
ask you what you think the children learned or gained from an experience, or how you think it contributed to a child’s development or play. This is sometimes called *reflective practice*, because it refers to how you think about or reflect on what you have done. Being reflective isn’t just about what you think, it is also about what you can prove through observations.

To help you reflect, you need to be well prepared, which includes knowing as much about a child as possible. It is much easier to reflect when you have some background to help you. So, if you know a child doesn’t concentrate for long periods but has stayed at your activity for longer than usual, you can point this out in your evaluation. When you are writing an evaluation, try to remain positive, pointing out what the child was able to do well and identifying key points for development rather than deficits.

**Receiving verbal feedback**

The feedback you receive from other adults is important in building up your confidence and skills. Make a point of asking for feedback, although good placements will do this anyway. If you receive feedback which you think is wrong or undeserved, ask politely if you might discuss it. Ask if there are examples of when you worked in this way so that you can learn from them and try to rectify a problem. Make sure you share feedback with your college supervisor so that it can be discussed openly at three-way meetings.

Parents and others will often give impromptu feedback. This is useful and can be encouraging. An important aspect of feedback is to be clear about what is being said how you can move forward as a result of it. This is sometimes described as personal or professional development.

**Using evaluation in other HNC units**

Part of undertaking the HNC is to develop the necessary professional skills and competences to allow you to make professional judgements and so take professional action. This means that sometimes you will be asked to comment on books, articles and journals based on the facts you have read. You may disagree with what has been said, and another key skill is to be able to evaluate what you have read, sum up what you think is being said and offer evidence-based or enquiry-driven solutions. These solutions require careful thought and consideration of other points of view that have been arrived at through research or observation. Because your graded unit is based on your workplace experience, it is really important to develop the skills of analysing what you are reading and what you are being told, and to ask the following questions:

- How do I know this to be the case?
- How can I find out more about this and
- is there sufficient evidence to back this up?

You will read more about the skills of analysis in Chapter 10, which looks at the graded unit in more detail.

**Ways in which codes of practice inform the work of the early education and childcare practitioner**

Early education and childcare is part of a regulated profession, and Chapter 9 looks at the policy drivers behind this. It is regulated through the Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act (2001). Those working in the service, unless they are teachers registered with the General Teaching Council for Scotland or are registered by another professional body such as the Nursing and Midwifery Council, are required to register with the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC). Early education and childcare services are inspected by the Care Commission and sometimes jointly inspected by the Care Commission and HMIE.

Employers and those working in the sector are expected to adhere to the SSSC’s Codes of Practice for Social Service Workers and Employers.

**The SSSC Codes of Practice**

These describe the standards of conduct and practice within which social services practitioners should work. They are intended for both employers and employees and should be seen as complementary to each other. This
means that both workers and employers have responsibilities to behave in an appropriate way.

The SSSC Codes of Practice list statements that describe the standards of professional conduct and practice required of practitioners. The statements are intended to reflect existing good practice and a shared understanding of the standards practitioners need to aim for when working with children and other service users. They are a key step in the introduction of a system of regulation and the SSSC (and other councils in the UK) need to take account of them when considering issues of workers’ or employers’ misconduct. The standards are important when making a decision about whether a registered practitioner should remain on the register.

The SSSC Codes of Practice highlight employers’ responsibilities to service users and workers, and employees’ responsibilities to the people they work with and to their employer.

- putting in place and implementing written policies and procedures to deal with dangerous, discriminatory and exploitative behaviour and practice
- promoting the SSSC Codes of Practice to workers, service users and carers, and cooperating with the SSSC’s proceedings.

For social service workers, the five key requirements of the SSSC Codes of Practice are:

- protect the rights and promote the interests of service users and carers
- strive to establish and maintain the trust and confidence of service users and carers
- promote the independence of service users while protecting them as far as possible from danger or harm
- respect the rights of service users while seeking to ensure their behaviour doesn't cause harm to self or others
- uphold public trust and confidence in the social services. This includes: not abusing trust, exploiting service users or abusing or harming colleagues; considering whether your behaviour out of work as well as in work might call into question your suitability to work in the sector.

(Adapted from Codes of Practice for Social Service Workers and Employers, Scottish Social Services Council, 2005.)

You should have been given a copy of the SSSC Codes of Practice when you started your course. However, it can be downloaded from the SSSC website (www.sssc.uk.com) or you can request a copy by going on to the website.

In practical day-to-day terms, the SSSC Codes of Practice should provide you with a strong sense of values as you progress your career in the social services sector. They should also help you to see what your responsibilities are as a social service worker. The codes serve as a useful reminder of what employers need to put in place for their workers and how they can act positively, decisively and effectively in protecting children from practitioners whose practice does not meet an appropriate standard.
What you have learned in this chapter

This chapter has provided you with information about the key skills you will need when working with children. It has shown you some of the ways you will need to plan and organise day-to-day activities and experiences for children when you are out in placement. It has also emphasised the importance of team working and of effective communication with children and their parents and carers.

You will find that other features of Unit DF4Y 34: Working in an early education and childcare setting are covered in other chapters in this book; these are detailed in the chart below.

During the HNC there is an expectation you will keep a record of all activities you have done in placement, and you will be expected to work with different age groups of children. Your placement experiences will help support the work you do for the graded unit. This is explained fully in Chapter 10, but as well as keeping records for this you will be expected to develop skills of analysis and reflection. Some colleges suggest you keep a placement diary, where you can note significant outcomes from each day’s placement experience, what you have learned about a child or group of children that day, and how your contribution has supported change or improvement in the centre. By analysing your contribution you will start to build up the skills you require for the graded unit. You will also be able to reflect on what has gone well and how you might improve your contribution for the benefit of the children in the setting. It is also useful to consider the impact you have had on a particular setting or a situation in the setting. Sometimes this can be positive, but sometimes the presence of another adult can have a negative impact. You need to be able to stand back and consider this and listen to feedback from others, including children. Feedback will be essential in helping you decide what activities and experiences you want to develop in your placement and, ultimately, what topic or theme you want to pursue for your graded unit.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Working in an early education and childcare setting (Unit DF4Y 34)</th>
<th>Outcome 1</th>
<th>Outcome 2</th>
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<tr>
<td>How learning or play takes place in an early education and childcare setting</td>
<td>Chapter 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>How to plan, organise and implement development and learning opportunities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Identify and demonstrate how appropriate skills are used to create a nurturing and stimulating learning and/or play environment</td>
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<td>Evaluate your own contribution in creating a nurturing and professional service for children</td>
<td>Chapter 1</td>
<td>Chapter 4</td>
<td>Chapter 7</td>
<td>Chapter 10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Complete the following questions, to see what you have learned from this chapter.

1. Why is planning important for the early education and childcare practitioner?
2. In what way can planning help you organise day-to-day activities for children.
3. Explain why team working is important in an early education and childcare setting.
4. Describe your role as an early education and childcare practitioner in setting up and putting away activities for children.
5. Explain why the SSSC Codes of Practice for Social Service Workers are important to your day-to-day work.

6. How would you describe some of the key skills required to work with children?
7. In what way does observation support a child making a transition from nursery to Primary education?
8. How can an early education and childcare practitioner make sure parents and children are involved in reporting?
9. Explain why objectivity is important when working with children.
10. Explain why it is important to be able to evaluate your own performance in the centre.

**References**


Scottish Executive et al. (2006) *Key Capabilities in Child Care and Protection*, Edinburgh


Scottish Social Services Council (2005) *Codes of Practice for Social Service Workers and Employers*, Dundee