

PE1668/M

Dr Sarah McGeown submission of 27 May 2019

I am writing to follow up on petition PE01668 on improving Scottish teachers' access to research informed reading instruction (via professional learning and initial teacher education). This petition was submitted due to the considerable lack of guidance and support for teachers in research informed reading instruction, more specifically, their lack of knowledge and understanding of phonics instruction (particularly systematic synthetic phonics instruction).

Before I continue, I'd like to clarify a couple of points which have already been made but which seem to be lost in this discussion. Firstly, we fully understand that teacher autonomy is at the heart of CfE. This petition is not about prescribing a specific approach to the teaching of reading across all schools in Scotland by mandating systematic synthetic phonics. This petition is about improving teachers access to, and understanding of, high-quality reading research (e.g., <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1529100618772271>). During several workshops over the past 18 months I have made a point of speaking to teachers (who studied at various Scottish Universities) about their initial teacher education experiences and they have been very clear that they received little or no teaching in the 'science of learning to read' (i.e., research informed approaches - understanding of the alphabetic principle, phonological awareness, phonics instruction etc). These teachers also note that current University students on placement in their schools also have little or no knowledge in this area.

Secondly, this petition was never about improving teachers access to research informed word reading instruction (i.e., systematic synthetic phonics) at the expense of supporting reading comprehension or reading for pleasure (which was implied in previous correspondence). Early word reading success is a very strong predictor of reading comprehension and successful readers are more likely to enjoy and choose to read. Phonics instruction (specifically systematic synthetic phonics instruction) is just one element of research-informed reading instruction. Research-informed approaches to optimally develop reading comprehension and enhance motivation/engagement in reading are also essential and should similarly be covered in teacher training/professional learning.

In 2019, colleagues and I established a new multidisciplinary language and literacy network in Scotland, focused on raising attainment and achieving greater equity in Scottish education (www.lalco.org.uk). This network includes teachers, researchers, third-sector organisations and other professionals all working towards improving language and literacy attainment and achieving greater equity. Our second workshop theme (improving early reading acquisition and development) is directly relevant to this petition and based on conversations I have had with teachers following this workshop, I have no doubt that teachers are increasingly recognising the lack of research-informed guidance they receive during initial teacher education.

It is crucial that we restart the conversation around this petition and discuss the nature and type of evidence that is used in initial teacher education/professional learning in Scotland. We have a responsibility to ensure we are doing all that we can to support children's early reading acquisition and development, by ensuring the quality of guidance and support we give to teachers is optimal.