The General Teaching Council for Scotland Standards consultation – See Me Response

See Me is Scotland's national programme to end mental health stigma and discrimination. Our vision is to enable people who experience mental health problems to live fulfilled lives.

We are working to change negative behaviours towards mental health, by creating a movement for change, bringing people together all over Scotland who are passionate about tackling stigma, to work as one. We work with our supporters, volunteers and champions, to make real changes in communities across the country.

We want to change the culture around mental health so people feel confident enough to speak about how they are feeling and can ask for help if they need it, without the fear that they will be stigmatised and discriminated against. To do this we are targeting key settings where people face stigma and discrimination; in work, education, health and social care, and in their local communities.

See Me welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the Community Mental Health and Wellbeing Supports and Services draft framework. Please note that we have divided our comments into general comments and specific comments on the content of the draft framework.

General points:

- All references to physical health and wellbeing should be rephrased to "physical health, mental health and wellbeing". See Me research shows that where there is no explicit focus on mental health, learners and teachers find they do not the necessary support and tools to create mentally healthy schools and challenge stigma.
- The introductory document references how it can be challenging to implement standards across the teaching profession, but there are no clear steps in place to counter this problem. We would like to see greater consideration to how to ensure that these documents will have be absorbed by the teaching profession. For example, what mechanisms are in place to ensure that teachers keep up to date on changes to legislation and policy? Especially relevant given the incorporation of the UNCRC.
- There is welcome commitment to promoting equity, equality, respect and compassion and recognising the diverse needs of every learner. In addition the commitment to inclusion is welcome; however, we would like to see greater consideration of the role stigma plays in creating barriers to inclusion. For example, a learner experiencing stigma because of their mental health is less likely to reach out for help and support making achieving the above aims much harder.
- It is good to see a commitment to teachers being "aware of social context", and commitments to teachers making links with their communities is key. However, we like to see more explicit examples for how teachers are intended to make links for example, what databases of support are available locally, are teachers aware of these, how to make contact with the local third sector?

Introduction to the Professional Standards and the Professional Code

Within the introduction, we would like to see greater emphasis on teachers' role in creating mentally healthy, stigma free learning environments. For example, the diagramme at 2.1.4 the professional code, should be accompanied by text making it clear that the professional values sitting at the heart of the teaching profession must include a focus on creating mentally healthy environments.

We welcome the commitment to developing critical reflection on values, assumptions, beliefs and professional judgements and practice, but would like to see greater consideration of how these are to be maintained over a career and across teaching cultures. Part of supporting this would be to develop peer support mechanisms for teachers.

Section 3 Core Values and Themes - includes a list of conditions and that may affect learners' needs that teachers must be aware of to promote equity. We would welcome explicit reference to common mental health conditions within this list. We know that mental health problems and people not feeling able to be open about their mental health have a negative impact on a person. These conditions should be explicitly referenced to ensure that teachers are aware of their impact.

There should also be an acknowledgement of the role that stigma plays in preventing people from opening up and seeking help. This will have a negative impact on their learning and overall wellbeing. We know that only when these issues are highlighted and explicitly focus on are teachers empowered to address these issues.

3.1 professional values – The key values of integrity, trust and respect and social justice, can only be achieved when there is explicit reference to creating mentally healthy, stigma free learning environments.

We would recommend adding leadership to the middle circle on the diagramme, as it will highlight that teachers at all levels can and should take leadership within their schools building integrity, trust and respect and social justice. Combatting stigma and discrimination is foundational to achieving inclusion.

Teachers should be aware of their local community and how they can reach out to local community groups. E.g. through databases of local support, reaching out to Third Sector interfaces, etc.

List of values, 3.1 bullet point 4. We would welcome a definition of what requiring additional support means, as this can be interpreted differently. What does that support look like?

Bullet point 12 – we would edit this to read "Promoting positive physical health, mental health and wellbeing and that of colleagues".

Personal commitment 3.2 we welcome the explicit reference to overcoming conscious and unconscious bias. We would like to see explicit reference to combatting stigma within this list.

Leadership 3.4 What mechanisms are in place to inform leaders and teachers of changing policy priorities? For example, the changes that the incorporation of the UNCRC will require.

We would also like added to the leadership section, an explicit mention of making links to the community and how this can be done to best effect.

Professional Code

Section 2 –bullet points 2 and 3: How can and should the code be used? - What mechanisms are in place to inform learners and public as a whole of the teaching standards and duties set out in the code?[1]

Our values – section 3, Bullet point 8 – would welcome some consideration on how teachers will be supported to challenge their assumptions, beliefs, values and practices, especially in reference to combatting stigma and discrimination.

Recognition that **bullet points 10 – 12** can only be achieve when there is an explicit focus on combatting stigma and discrimination. An essential part of "creating a supportive, caring and compassionate ethos" can only be achieved when there is explicit focus on the role that stigma plays in preventing people from seeking support and being open about their mental health.

Bullet point 12: we would recommend an explicit focus on "physical health, *mental health* and wellbeing". Our research shows that when there is an explicit focus on mental health, as opposed to only on wellbeing, it means measures are taken to explicitly improve mental health.

There should be a commitment to creating mentally healthy working environment for learners, teachers and head teachers.

Section 4 – our commitments: Commitment 5 to "Promoting and demonstrating inclusive practices to support the needs and abilities of all learners, and managing my assumptions, biases and personal beliefs, as well as challenging those of others, to ensure professionalism" is laudable. However we would encourage greater focus on providing teachers with tools to challenge their "assumptions, biases and personal beliefs". This should also include an explicit reference to combatting stigma and discrimination. Our experience shows that young people often learn from the biases of older people in their lives, and as such steps should be taken to ensure that teachers are positive mental health role models.

We would like to see a commitment to teachers engaging proactively in their community and greater clarity on how this can be done to best effect. E.g. linking to third sector groups and how to find out what is available in their area.

The standards for registration: Mandatory requirement for registration with the GTCS

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[1] Professional code, page 2 (with page 1 being front cover)

Planning for teaching 2.1.2 – bullet point 2 on matching the level of curricular areas to the needs of all learners is welcome. However we would like to see reflection of the impact of stigma and fear of seeking help, and its impact on learners to be explicitly addressed.

Broader context for learning 2.1.3 – we would like to see explicit consideration of the foundational nature of combatting stigma and discrimination to creating safe environments for learning.

There needs to be an explicit reference to mental health, and also other types of wellbeing e.g. financial and environmental wellbeing.

Education systems 2.2.1 – add to the list of legislation of which student teachers need knowledge: Mental Health Act 2003, Children and Young People Act 2014, the UNCRC incorpation

How are current teachers to be informed of changes in policy and legislation?

Learning Communities 2.2.2 – we know from our consultations with teachers that they feel there is a lack of formal support and supervision for them to keep updated and supported throughout their career. There should be a greater emphasis on peer support between teachers and the role of leaders in supporting teachers.

Effective Planning to meet learners' needs 3.1.1 – bullet point 5 should be amended to promoting good physical health, mental health and wellbeing.

Planning appropriately to meet the needs of all learners requires an explicit focus on promoting positive mental health.

Expectation of Leaners 3.1.4 - An awareness of the barriers to learning, needs to recognise the barriers that stigma poses to people seeking help and support, and also the negative impact on their learning ability and overall impact on the person.

Partnership for learning and wellbeing 3.1.5 – we would like to see greater emphasis on every teacher's role in linking to the local community. Especially examples of how this can be done to best effect.

The standards for leadership and management: supporting leadership and management development

Introduction 1 – emphasis on creating stigma free environment as a key part of the leader's role. Creating a positive ethos needs to emphasise combatting stigma.

Leadership at all levels 1.1 – specific examples of agencies to approach and engage with as leaders. E.g. TSI, CAMHS.