

# **HOME ECONOMICS**

**A portrait of current practice  
in Scottish secondary schools**

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## 1. Introduction

*Home economics – a portrait of current practice in Scottish secondary schools* is one in a series of portraits by HM Inspectorate of Education (HMIE), illustrating current practice in key aspects of the Scottish curriculum. The portrait series is an initiative by HMIE, flowing from the *Improving Scottish Education* reports<sup>1</sup>. It is intended to promote improvements in Scottish education through illustrating effective practice, raising current issues and stimulating reflection and debate. This portrait includes a link to the Home Economics – Aiming for Excellence Conference which was held in October 2008.

An important purpose of the portrait series is to relate existing pedagogy and curricular provision to the aspirations of *Curriculum for Excellence*. By stimulating debate about teaching for effective learning, the portraits challenge us all to review the extent to which current practice is successfully promoting the four capacities<sup>2</sup> in all children and young people. The series sits alongside *How good is our school? The Journey to Excellence* 3 in concentrating on two key dimensions of excellence:

- engaging young people in the highest quality learning activities; and
- focusing on outcomes and maximising success for all children and young people.

## 2. Improving Scottish Education

*Improving Scottish Education – a report by HMIE on inspection and review 2002-2005* was published by HMIE in February 2006. *Improving Scottish Education – a report by HMIE on inspection and review 2005-2008* was published in January 2009. The most recent report can be found at:

<http://www.hmie.gov.uk/ImprovingScottishEducation.aspx>

Both reports highlight the need to build on strengths in Scottish education to meet the needs of learners for the challenges of a global society. They recognise the many strengths in Scottish education and identify what needs to continue to improve. In the most recent report, the 'looking ahead' section identifies a range of issues which will need to be addressed in order to achieve the high aspirations of improvement for Scotland's learners. The issues and priorities outlined in this section include:

- recognising that achievement and attainment are not alternatives; both are the outcome of a rich and challenging educational experience;

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<sup>1</sup> *Improving Scottish Education*, HM Inspectorate of Education, 2006 and *Improving Scottish Education*, HM Inspectorate of Education, 2009

<sup>2</sup> The four capacities of *Curriculum for Excellence* – successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors.

- ensuring challenge and progression in learning through imaginative, well-judged teaching, leading to the achievement of high levels of understanding and skill;
- establishing clear direction, securing commitment, fostering partnerships and encouraging initiative while constantly focusing on the impact on learners; and
- increasing teachers' capacity to operate confidently and competently within a less directed environment.

These aspects should be priorities for practitioners in home economics and should be reflected in departmental reflection and discussion to inform planning for improvement.

The range of subject areas which comprise home economics and the dynamic nature of the subject challenge teachers to update their knowledge and skills regularly. Departments can offer courses in health and food technology, fashion and textile technology and lifestyle and consumer technology, as well as in aspects of hospitality and care. They contribute to enterprise education and to programmes of personal, social and health education. Home economics teachers need to have a sound understanding of what constitutes effective learning and teaching in home economics. The HMIE resources associated with *Journey to Excellence*, which include self-evaluation guidance and exemplification of effective practice, will be of particular help in this respect. They can be found at:

[www.journeytoexcellence.org.uk](http://www.journeytoexcellence.org.uk)

### **3. How can home economics help to develop successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors?**

Teachers of home economics are responding well to the principles of *Curriculum for Excellence*. They recognise the opportunities that *Curriculum for Excellence* presents to build on existing strengths in learning and teaching and to improve young people's attainment and achievement. This section of the portrait highlights the contributions that home economics can make to developing successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors.

#### **Successful Learners**

##### **What do we do well in home economics to develop successful learners?**

Effective departments offer a variety of learning experiences which enable young people to achieve success in developing a range of skills relevant to their day-to-day lives. They use meaningful contexts for tasks, which involve learning through practical activity, and set high expectations for achievement.

Some approaches which are currently working well include the following.

- Young people work in a stimulating environment which supports their learning. They have access to a range of relevant and motivating resources, including multi-media material and visiting speakers.
- Young people learn through practical activity and investigative approaches, developing their capacities in both the practical and intellectual contexts of home economics. In the area of health, for example, they acquire not only the knowledge on which they should base wise food choices, but also an understanding of the social dimension of eating and the skills required to prepare and cook healthy food.
- Programmes and tasks are designed so that the varying needs of all young people can be met and so that young people can achieve success and make progress in their learning. They take account of the needs of higher-achieving young people as well as those experiencing difficulties with their learning or at risk of missing out.
- Teachers set high expectations and match the level of challenge and pace of learning well to young people's needs.
- Young people take part in activities which help them to develop skills of enterprise and creativity. Their learning is set in stimulating contexts which help them to see the relevance of the subject, particularly in relation to vocational opportunities.
- Increasingly, home economics departments are working on interdisciplinary projects and tasks which help young people to recognise links in their learning across the curriculum.
- Young people understand the tasks that they have been set and what they are supposed to be learning – within a lesson, unit of work, or course – and are able to take responsibility for their learning.
- Teachers make effective use of questioning, not only to check young people's understanding, but also to make young people think and give extended answers.
- Teachers engage young people regularly in discussion about their work. They provide constructive feedback and help them to understand how to improve.

### **Signpost to successful learners**

Successful learners in home economics often display the following characteristics.

- Young people are enthusiastic and motivated by participating in meaningful, relevant tasks which involve practical activity.
- They enjoy working with others on specific projects, often with a focus on enterprise activity, which enable them to develop their individual talents within home economics.
- They talk knowledgably about their work and the success that they have achieved.

### **Example of good practice**

The introduction of a Food and Drink Challenge had led to several departments in a secondary school working together to develop young people as successful learners. The Challenge had become a permanent feature in the school calendar. Staff from several departments – art and design, business studies, English, geography, mathematics, music and science – joined forces with the home economics department to deliver this very successful interdisciplinary enterprise activity. Young people worked together in teams to plan, produce and market a food product for sale in the school canteen. They responded very well to the opportunity to solve problems, work together in teams, develop leadership skills and make relevant links with industry.

### **Example of good practice**

To ensure effective transitions and help young people develop as confident individuals, a secondary school was working very successfully with its associated primary schools. The work focused on supporting aspects of health and wellbeing and the development of practical cookery skills. Home economics staff in the secondary school had been involved in the Focus on Food initiative and in the development of a curriculum pack, *Hungry for Health*. The initiative provided staff development for teachers in the primary schools, visits by the Cooking Bus, and support and resources for schools. This successful collaboration was subsequently extended to include children at P6. The range of activities was also extended imaginatively to include enterprise and work with textiles.

## **How might home economics contribute more to successful learning?**

As part of discussions about current practice and action to bring about improvement, it may be helpful to reflect on the following questions.

- How well do we liaise with our associated primary schools and build on children's experiences in primary when they progress to secondary?
- How effective are we at promoting a positive image for the subject, the courses that we offer and potential career opportunities?
- How well do we build relationships and use praise to encourage young people and to set high expectations for their achievement?
- How successful are we at addressing gender issues and making the activities offered, and the approaches and resources used, motivating for boys and girls?
- How well does our questioning develop understanding, promote deeper levels of thinking and encourage discussion?
- Do we help young people to reflect on their learning and on the skills and knowledge that they are developing? How do we ensure that they know about their successes and the next steps in their learning?
- How effective are we at providing appropriate challenge and support for all young people to enable them to achieve as well as they can in home economics?
- How effective are we at using information and communications technology (ICT) to enhance young people's learning?
- What steps are we taking to gather young people's views about their learning experiences in home economics and how are we using that information to identify successes and priorities for improvement?

### **Example of good practice**

The principal teacher of home economics had decided to carry out an audit of learning and teaching based on the question – are we giving our pupils value for money? Her main aim was to inspire and support teachers in the delivery of stimulating lessons where content is modified to meet individual needs. Staff surveyed 150 young people from S1 to S6, seeking their views on, for example, their preferred styles of learning and how their achievements were recognised. As part of their ‘journey to excellence’ they used the information gathered from this self-evaluation exercise to share best practice and identify aspects for further improvement. The very positive ethos within the department, the wide range of relevant activities it provided and the high expectations teachers set were very motivating for learners. Young people responded very positively to, for example, cooking outdoors as part of a Forest Schools activity and working with the technical education department to design and construct gingerbread houses.

### **Confident Individuals**

#### **What do we do well in home economics to develop confident individuals?**

Home economics provides an ideal context for personal and social development. Through practical activity, young people are involved in task management and teamwork. They are encouraged to reflect on their own work and to offer constructive comment on the work of others. Young people often gain a great deal of satisfaction from the outcome of practical activity, whether that outcome is, for example, an artefact, a successful event or the solution to a problem. That feeling of satisfaction helps to increase their confidence and self-esteem. Home economics can also help to develop a sense of mental wellbeing by encouraging young people to pursue activities and learn skills which they may then continue in leisure pursuits.

Some approaches which are currently working well include the following.

- Teachers provide young people with clear, constructive feedback on what they have achieved and what steps they need to take next to make progress in their learning.
- Young people experience a sense of achievement and increase their self-confidence through successfully applying practical and organisational skills, either independently or when working with others, to tasks set in real-life situations.
- Young people take part in enterprise activities and vocational programmes which help them to set and achieve high expectations for their own achievement.

- Effective teachers and support staff ensure that young people are supported according to their needs and aptitudes, so that they achieve success in their course work.
- Young people respond well when working with others in pairs or groups, sharing roles and responsibilities to complete their learning tasks successfully. They are also able to work well independently and have some choice in what they do.
- Displays of work in departments, and across the school, celebrate young people's successes and help to promote the range of activities undertaken in home economics departments. Many departments involve young people in competitions, at school, local or national level, to help develop their confidence and sense of achievement.
- Young people develop the knowledge and skills to pursue healthy lifestyles – particularly in relation to nutrition and healthy eating, making informed decisions about key aspects of their daily lives and developing the skills required by a consumer.

#### **Signpost to confident individuals**

- Young people enjoy their learning and talk enthusiastically about their achievements.
- They make informed decisions, particularly in relation to adopting a healthy lifestyle.
- They are able to plan and organise their work well, in order to make very good progress in a wide range of tasks.
- They think independently and creatively and propose innovative solutions to problems.

### **Example of good practice**

A secondary school made very effective use of a food product development activity which involved all young people in S2. Home economics staff worked in partnership with a local food producer to set a food development challenge. The activity was very successful in developing young people's self-confidence and enthusiasm for the subject. As one young person noted – 'From my experiences of the Challenge in S2, I chose to continue with home economics at Standard Grade. I was quite successful and chose to progress to Higher, and I found that the work for the technological project was very similar to the Challenge. After successfully gaining an A grade at Higher, I decided to progress to Advanced Higher. I intend to go on to university and hope to progress, in due course, to become a home economics teacher. You can see the natural progression, which all stemmed from the Challenge.'

### **Example of good practice**

Young people following a hospitality course in one school were 'inspired by seeing their work in hospitality coming to life'. The school's links with a special school in Bangalore provided the inspiration for a major activity in S1 home economics. The S3 hospitality students were enthusiastic and excited about acting as peer tutors to share with young people in S1, through demonstrations, the practical food preparation skills that they had learned. Their involvement showed the pride that they took in their own work and raised their expectations and standards. This particularly motivating activity encompassed skills for work, citizenship and enterprise.

### **How might home economics contribute more to developing confident individuals?**

As part of discussions about current practice and action to bring about improvement, it may be helpful to reflect on the following questions.

- How effective are we in using approaches which help to develop young people's independent learning skills, self-reliance and ability to manage their own learning?
- How effective is the feedback that we provide to young people on their work in home economics? Does it help them improve their learning and make good progress?
- Are we taking sufficient account of the use of praise and constructive feedback in raising young people's self-esteem?

- Do we plan programmes and activities which ensure that all young people are able to contribute and therefore develop confidence?
- Do young people at all stages have opportunities to present the results of investigations to other members of their class or to a wider audience?
- Are we paying enough attention to developing skills of literacy and numeracy within home economics?

## **Responsible Citizens**

### **What do we do well in home economics to develop responsible citizens?**

To function properly, society needs citizens with effective life skills who can bring technological capability to the home and workplace. The approaches used in home economics allow young people to develop recognition of differences in cultural background, composition of family groups, behavioural expectations, diet and household priorities. Cooperating with others when carrying out tasks enhances young people's awareness and respect for the values, attitudes and contributions of others. Consideration of ethical and environmental issues is an intrinsic part of effective learning in a subject which deals with human relationships, health, food production and consumerism.

Some approaches which are currently working well include the following.

- Effective departments place a strong emphasis on developing young people's capabilities and attitudes in relation to environmental issues, particularly those related to economical use of finite resources. Young people take part in activities which develop and demonstrate responsible attitudes, for example through using Fair Trade products in practical food preparation lessons and through leading recycling activities.
- Programmes include activities which are designed to support young people's development as responsible consumers who are able to make informed choices and able to appreciate the potential impact of their choices on others.
- Programmes which include tasks set in the context of the local community contribute significantly to the development of young people's understanding of the impact of their actions, and of how they can help to meet needs within the community. For example, young people may be involved in activities which contribute to community organisations that support the elderly.
- Teachers encourage young people to recognise the importance of equality and diversity through, for example, setting tasks in contexts which help young people to understand something of the customs of other cultures.
- Young people can discuss roles and responsibilities – within families, the community and the workplace – and debate issues of gender and stereotype.

- Young people can develop an awareness of global citizenship through involvement in, for example, links with schools in other countries and fundraising for charity.

### **Signpost to responsible citizens**

- Young people are aware of the impact of their actions on others in their families and communities.
- They are able to make sound judgements as consumers, appreciating the impact that developments in technology, materials and resources can have on their choices.
- They understand the importance of showing respect for others, regardless of their race, gender or disability.
- They show determination and resilience when working to tight timescales within practical activities.
- They show a commitment to sustainable use of resources.

### **Example of good practice**

A special school had been very successful in its holistic approach to health promotion, including improving arrangements relating to food provision. Children and young people benefited from a wide range of motivating programmes and activities, planned by the School Health Group – Fit 4 Life. These included the Palm Court Café, led by the home economics teacher. The young people involved showed enthusiasm for this enterprise and were confident and responsible in undertaking their individual roles within the overall team. The café initiative had also helped the school to form very positive relationships with parents and with its community.

### **How might home economics contribute more to developing responsible citizens?**

As part of discussions about current practice and action to bring about improvement, it may be helpful to reflect on the following questions.

- How well do we cover environmental issues within our programmes and activities?
- How well do we develop young people's sense of responsibility through taking part in activities which involve the local or wider community?

- How effective are we in planning for young people to take part in regular discussion and debate about topical issues related to home economics? Topical issues might include organic food products, genetically modified foods, tackling obesity, and technological developments in white goods and textiles.
- How effective are we at equipping young people with the knowledge and skills that will enable them to make sound decisions as responsible consumers and citizens?
- Do we promote effectively the opportunities offered by home economics and dispel any negative views that young people may have of the subject?

## **Effective Contributors**

### **What do we do well in home economics to develop effective contributors?**

Home economics is concerned with using and managing human and material resources for the benefit of individuals, families and society. The effectiveness of people in their roles and vocations in life and the likelihood of their fulfilment are, to a large extent, governed by their ability to achieve and manage a quality lifestyle. Home economics aims to foster an awareness of the need to balance life and work. It aims to provide young people with knowledge, skills and an appreciation of values which will help them to make appropriate decisions about their own lifestyle and to be effective contributors to society. A positive experience of home economics can help young people to make effective contributions at home, in the local and wider community, in the workplace and in leisure activities.

Some approaches which are currently working well include the following.

- Young people contribute fully to the life of the school, particularly in relation to health promotion, by using skills and knowledge acquired in home economics. For example, they often have a key role in a School Nutrition Action Group (SNAG) and in a range of enterprise activities.
- Programmes and activities include a strong focus on problem solving, as part of the development of technological capability.
- Increasingly, activities are focused on developing enterprising attitudes and skills.
- Young people have very good opportunities to work in teams and make effective contributions which result in successful outcomes for the group.
- Effective programmes and approaches promote young people's creativity and encourage innovative solutions to problems.

- Effective teachers help young people to see the relevance of their learning in home economics to their future lives – both working and personal. They assist them in understanding how their knowledge and skills can help them to achieve success in their careers and make productive contributions to their communities.

### **Signpost to effective contributors**

- Young people make valuable contributions to school groups such as pupil councils, health promotion working groups and SNAGs.
- They show ability to take the initiative and can demonstrate effective leadership skills.
- They are attentive in discussion within class, value the contributions of others, and are able to propose useful ideas and solutions.
- They are able to apply their specialist knowledge and skills to solve problems in new or unfamiliar contexts. They make choices, take chances and are innovative in working with food and textiles.
- They communicate their ideas effectively to others, including through use of ICT.

### **Example of good practice**

In a secondary school, young people's achievements in enterprise and effective promotion of healthy lifestyles, including healthy eating, were particular strengths. Home economics took the lead in delivering enterprise activities and in many aspects of health and wellbeing. Education for enterprise was delivered to all young people in S1 and to a group in S6 by the food and consumer technology department. All young people had the opportunity to gain skills of team working, problem solving, creativity, risk taking and time management through a wide range of enterprise activities. They achieved success in several events including Young Enterprise competitions. Pupils were consulted regularly and had a strong voice in the school, including in relation to food and healthy eating issues. Young people in the Advanced Higher group ran the School Nutrition Action Group and made a significant contribution to the school's very successful breakfast club.

### **How might home economics contribute more to developing effective contributors?**

As part of discussions about current practice and action to bring about improvement, it may be helpful to reflect on the following questions.

- How effective are we at promoting the relevance of skills and knowledge acquired in home economics as important contributors to young people's potential employment?
- How effective are we at highlighting the significant role that home economics has in ensuring the necessary attention to health and wellbeing which will enable young people to be effective contributors?
- How effective are we at encouraging young people to take the initiative and be creative in proposing strategies to address challenges and solve problems set within practical activities and investigations?
- How successful are our lessons in enhancing young people's enjoyment of learning, and do we encourage effective contributions to the activities involved?

#### **4. Conclusion**

Home economics continues to have a significant role to play within *Curriculum for Excellence*. Through their experiences in home economics, young people are increasingly demonstrating the skills and capabilities of successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors. They are developing an important range of specialist skills and knowledge set in the contexts of health and wellbeing and the technologies. The knowledge and skills gained within home economics make a considerable contribution to young people's personal and social development. They will serve all young people very well in their day-to-day lives. In addition, they prepare them for the world of work in a wide range of areas related to aspects of the subject.

By using creatively the experiences and outcomes in health and wellbeing and the technologies, home economics teachers can take forward *Curriculum for Excellence*. They can enhance the quality of learning experiences for the young people in their classes and support them in achieving their full potential.

Examples of the impact of effective learning and teaching in home economics were included in the Home Economics – Aiming for Excellence Conference, which took place in October 2008. Information from the conference can be found at:

<http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/curriculumforexcellence/sharingpractice/hmieltsgoodpractice/index.asp>