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# Myths of Immigration

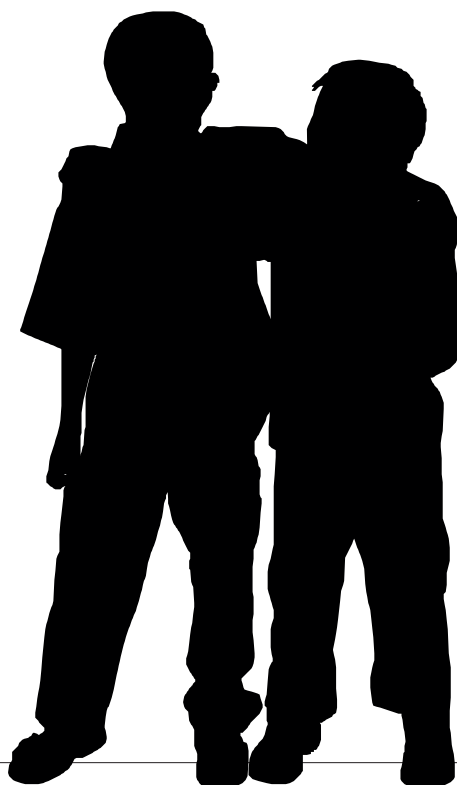


**Guidance for nursery and primary teachers on  
challenging myths and misunderstandings**

***“War is bad. It’s when they throw bombs out of planes. Sometimes I heard bombs. But I don’t remember. I only think of good things. I have a box in my head and put all the bad things in there and keep it locked. At the start in the UK it was hard because we knew no one. I was shy at first, but I have many best friends here now. I like school.”***

**Ahmed**, age 9, from Syria but now living in the UK.

Source: [www.refugee-action.org.uk/refugee\\_voices/2919\\_jana\\_ahmed](http://www.refugee-action.org.uk/refugee_voices/2919_jana_ahmed)



## Introduction

**We hope that teachers will find this resource useful for supporting open, honest conversations about immigration and for countering some of the misinformation that has spread in recent years. It should be used in the context of a broader anti-racist education programme.**

The EIS welcomes and values a diverse and inclusive society. We welcome refugees and asylum seekers to Scotland. We support a rights-based approach to migrants and refugees, and expect governments to uphold all relevant laws including the 1951 UN Refugee Convention. We reject the demonisation of refugees and asylum seekers. We seek to enhance understanding of migration.

Migration is the movement of people from one country to another. The people who move into a country are considered immigrants to that country, though they would be considered to be emigrants by their home country.

Historically, immigrants have faced a number of challenges when settling into a new home within a host country. One of the most significant challenges faced by immigrants in Scotland is a lack of widespread public understanding about immigration, and the persistence of myths, often propagated by certain sections of the media. These myths taking hold can create a very hostile discourse about immigration and can lead to racist attitudes and behaviours.

Misinformation about immigration has encouraged a rise in racist attacks here, and put additional barriers in the way of people abroad who are on the move, many fleeing for their lives.

Often racist ideas take root if children do not have the chance to have open discussions about difference and diversity when they are very young.

This booklet aims to provide nursery and early primary teachers with some ideas for discussing the myths of

immigration within their schools and nurseries; myths such as “we have loads of immigrants in the UK” and “people come to the UK because we’re a soft touch and give out loads of benefits; people just want free healthcare and free houses.”

We know that teachers are already very busy and that the curriculum is crowded. However, there are many different ways to engage with this issue. Whether you have time to organise one assembly or learning focus or to plan a few activities or a themed day, there is something you can do to help children and families understand this issue better.

***“These myths taking hold can create a very hostile discourse about immigration and can lead to racist attitudes and behaviours.”***

## Language and definitions

Some sections of the media use the words ‘migrant’, ‘refugee’ and ‘asylum seeker’ interchangeably. There are, however, vast differences in their meanings, which carry different implications for data and research, but also different legal obligations. It is important to use clear language when discussing immigration. Age appropriate definitions suitable for nursery and early primary might include:

**Racism:** treating someone differently and unfairly just because of their race, culture or skin colour.

**Immigration:** people moving from one country to another, and living somewhere new.

**Asylum seeker:** someone who has left their home country because they were being treated badly or because they were sad or scared, and who has asked the government if they can stay in their new country.

**Refugee:** someone who is allowed to stay in another country because they are not safe at home.

A more extensive list of definitions is appended at Annex A.

It is important to explain to children at Early Level that some people come to other countries to get a job or to learn something new, and some people move because they don't feel safe, so that they understand the range of reasons for people moving between countries. This provides a foundation for further conversations at First Level and beyond.

## The scale of the issue

- **65.3 million people** were “forcibly displaced” in 2015, including 21.3 million refugees and 3.2 million asylum seekers (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees)
- An estimated **12.4 million people** were displaced due to conflict or persecution
- The number of asylum applications by unaccompanied minors tripled in one year reaching a record of **98,400** applications lodged across 78 countries in 2015
- **169 countries or territories** worldwide host refugees
- **80% of refugees** are hosted by developing countries
- There were **38,878 applications** for asylum in the UK in 2015, compared with 431,000 in Germany, 163,000 in Sweden and 163,000 in Hungary
- An estimated **323,000 people** emigrated from the UK in 2015; the main reason people leave is for work and the most common destinations for UK citizens are Australia, Spain, the United States and France
- **Less than 1%** of the world's refugees live in the UK, and refugees make up only **0.19%** of the UK population.



## Legal context

- Immigration is a reserved issue in the UK, not a devolved one, meaning that powers over immigration sit with the UK Parliament, not the Scottish Parliament
- The UK's approach to immigration is the subject of intense debate at present, due in part to the June 2016 vote for The UK to leave the European Union. This may lead to changes in the UK's approach to immigration, which would change the future legal context in this country
- Since 1954 the UK has been signed up to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention. Almost every country is bound by this international law. Under this law, anyone in the UK has the right to seek asylum; and the UK Government has an obligation not to return anyone forcibly to a country where they have a genuine fear of being persecuted
- The right to seek asylum is completely separate to the issue of immigration. It is a human right

***“Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.”***

- Article 14 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights

- There is no human right to immigration, so fair and non-discriminatory limits can be placed on economic migration (moving to another country for work); but the right to asylum can never be limited
- Human rights, including the right not to be subjected to degrading treatment; the right to a private and family life; the right to free expression and protest etc., apply to all human beings. These rights do not depend on citizenship
- The Equality Act 2010 protects people in the UK from discrimination on various grounds including race and religion. This law can protect immigrants who experience racism.

## Historical context

Immigration to the UK and Scotland is not new, and the debate about levels of immigration is a recurring one.

Britain once had an empire of colonised countries, which contributed to the movement – not always freely – of people between countries. British history is steeped in migration and emigration.

During the 19th and 20th centuries, linked to increasing industrialisation, the UK has experienced immigration from many countries, including the West Indies, Ireland, Pakistan, Italy, China and Poland, many of whom have formed large communities, which are well established and have added to the richness and diversity of our society.

Simultaneous to their arrival, often, has been scapegoating of immigrants – blaming them for societal problems such as shortages of jobs and housing, caused by political decisions like pursuing austerity. Scapegoating of ‘others’ can lead to multiple forms of oppression and ultimately to murder. Jews were used as scapegoats by the Nazi government in Germany before and during World War 2, and six million Jewish people died in the Holocaust as a result. Dehumanising people opens the gates to abuse.

One tool for understanding how the Holocaust could have happened, the Allport scale<sup>1</sup>, posits that hate speech (which is itself harmful) is the foundation for all forms of abuse, discrimination and violence towards groups. That is why it is so important to challenge the myths of immigration and the prejudices that can arise from misinformation.

## Policy context

The Scottish educational context provides a range of ways to support anti-racist education on immigration:

- Curriculum for Excellence, with its emphasis on the four capacities and through the Experiences and Outcomes on a range of equality and inclusion issues;
- Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) policy and practices support inclusive education which meets the needs of immigrant, refugee and asylum-seeking children. The SHANARRI well-being indicators include feeling safe and included, which can be especially relevant to refugee and migrant children;
- How Good is Our School 4 has an increased focus on equality, and says 'inclusion and equality leads to improved outcomes for all learners';
- The General Teaching Council for Scotland expects teachers to commit to "the principles of democracy and social justice" and to "demonstrate a commitment to engaging learners in real world issues to enhance learning experiences and outcomes, and to encourage learning our way to a better future". Providing education about the myths of immigration is entirely consistent with the GTC standards;
- The Equality Act 2010 protects people in the UK from discrimination on various grounds including race and religion. This law can protect immigrants who experience racism. It provides a framework for tackling discrimination and promoting equality.

## Policy context – Scottish Government immigration policy

The current Scottish Government's stance on immigration differs significantly from current and recent UK Governments' positions. Immigration is reserved, not devolved, so that Scotland cannot determine its own policy on overall numbers of immigrants.

However, several Scottish Governments have used their powers to shape the debate and frame immigration as a positive development, as a means of attracting fresh talent to Scotland, and a way of addressing the challenges of a declining population.

Scottish Government spokespeople are on record as noting the important economic, social and cultural contributions migrants make to Scottish communities. In 2015 the then Minister for Europe and International Development said, *"We work hard to attract the best international talent to Scotland and those who choose to make Scotland their home will always be welcomed."*

## Whole setting approaches

There are various ways to discuss immigration involving the whole school or nursery. You could:

### You could:

- ✓ Hold an assembly or a learning focus about immigration, possibly involving a speaker from an external organisation, a parent or teacher who is an immigrant, or using a video clip which shares a child's experience of immigration (see Further Reading - p10)
- ✓ Display posters or materials around the school or nursery, to convey a welcoming and inclusive environment, to pupils, parents, staff and visitors - for example:
  - A poster which says how many different languages are spoken here
  - A poster showing the word "Welcome" in every language spoken here, made with the children's and possibly their parents' participation
  - Posters from anti-racism organisations e.g. Show Racism the Red Card.
- ✓ Take part in themed weeks such as Refugee Festival Scotland (June) or hold special events on special days e.g. World Refugee Day (20 June), International Day for the Elimination of Racism (21 March), or Children's Rights Day (20 November)
- ✓ Have clear anti-racist policies, and procedures to prevent, record and respond to racist incidents and the use of racist and anti-immigrant language, including among staff.



## Exploring the issues in the classroom or the nursery

### You could:

- ✓ Use puppets to act out scenes of people leaving their home, and having to live somewhere new, and explore with the children what they already know and what they think about people moving here.
- ✓ Discuss issues about moving to a new country during circle time, and talk about what makes children feel safe, and why someone might need to go and live somewhere new where they feel safe.
- ✓ Use games and activities to explore issues around immigration – see below.
- ✓ Listen to music about travelling, a new home, making friends, and being kind and fair to everyone. The children could learn songs from other countries or cultures.
- ✓ Share stories about immigration, moving from one country to another, finding a new home, and differences between people and cultures e.g.
  - Gervelie’s Journey: A Refugee Diary by Anthony Robinson (Early and First Level)
  - Hamid’s Story by Andy Glynne (Early and First Level) – NB: this is one of a series from the ‘Seeking Refuge’ range of books, which are all useful
  - Azzi in Between by Sarah Garland (Early and First Level)
  - The Colour of Home by Mary Hoffman (First Level)
  - Here I Am, by Patti Kim (Early and First Level)
  - My World, Your World by Melanie Walsh (Early and First Level)
  - All Kinds of People, by Emma Damon (Early Level).
- ✓ Ask a parent or friend of the nursery or school who has come to Scotland from another country to come and talk to the children about why they moved, what was the same and what was different, and what made them feel welcome or unwelcome.
- ✓ Discuss with the children how they might notice if someone is not joining in, perhaps someone who might not speak very much English, and how they can include that child.

## Meeting the needs of refugee and migrant children

Some children in our nurseries and in early primary in Scotland have fled their homeland in terror with their parents or have fled not knowing what has happened to their mother, father or other family. They have ended up in a strange country with different cultures and language.

Other children have come here because their parents came to Scotland for work, and they also have to adjust to a new language, culture, climate and school system.

Many children who start a new nursery or school will experience some difficulty as they try to make new friends and ‘fit in’. Children of refugees and asylum seekers have added burdens. They may be suffering trauma and a sense of loss because of what they have seen or heard in their journey here. They may be missing home. The children may have come from a prosperous background in their home country and now live in poverty. It is important for nurseries and schools to provide a welcoming, safe and inclusive environment.

The EIS provides specific guidance on meeting these children’s needs (see Further Reading) but some key pointers include sensitivity around:

- ✓ Religious, dietary or cultural differences
- ✓ Home languages e.g. all pupils learning words of greeting, using bilingual signs around the school or nursery, displays of words in children’s own languages
- ✓ Correct pronunciation and spelling of names
- ✓ Children’s right to silence, especially in the beginning
- ✓ The need to create a sense of belonging and achievement
- ✓ Your local authority English as an Additional Language (EAL) service can help with meeting children’s language needs and with other issues around cultural differences.

***“One night the bombs were coming closer and closer... We were so terrified we didn’t even think about taking anything with us. We’ve been here for three years now. We miss everything about home. We would love to go back.”***

**Amira, 16**, from Syria, now living in a refugee camp.  
Source: [www.tearfund.org/en/latest/2015/06/diary\\_of\\_a\\_teenage\\_refugee/](http://www.tearfund.org/en/latest/2015/06/diary_of_a_teenage_refugee/)

## Games and activities

There are organisations listed in the Further Reading section who can signpost games, activities, and materials for use in nursery and early primary.

Here are two examples:

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### Same but different (source: Woodcraft Folk, 'Same but Different' – first level)

**Aim:** To help children understand that everyone is different, and these differences make us individuals, but that we all have some basic needs that all human beings have.

**Activity:** Draw a chalk circle on the floor, or make one in string, big enough for everyone to fit in. Ask everyone to stand just outside the circle, and to jump into it when a statement is read that applies to them.

**Activity outline:**

[www.woodcraft.org.uk/resources/same-different](http://www.woodcraft.org.uk/resources/same-different)

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### Pack up a bag (source: Woodcraft Folk 'Time to Flee' – First Level)

**Aim:** This activity is to get the children thinking about what they would take if they had to leave home suddenly. It aims to get them to think about how difficult it can be for refugee children who have to leave home without any choice.

**Activity:** Ask the children what 3 things they would pack if they had to leave home today. Ask them to share with the group. Discuss what items are important to the children. Variations:

- You could get them to draw the items and the bag they would take
- You could get them to count common items, e.g. how many teddies?
- You could get them to choose items from around the nursery or classroom
- You could ask them to bring in a special item from home to share with the class.

**Activity outline:**

[www.woodcraft.org.uk/resources/time-flee](http://www.woodcraft.org.uk/resources/time-flee)

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You could also use the table of Myths and Facts on pages 9 and 10 to develop activities.

## Working with parents

Working with parents is an important feature of Early Level education. Parents involved with the school or nursery may come from a variety of backgrounds. Some may be economic migrants (who came to the UK for work), or refugees or asylum seekers (who had to flee their homeland because of danger or persecution). They may have varying levels of fluency in English and confidence in coming into the setting. Schools and nurseries which provide a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere can play an important role in countering some of the prejudice that migrants can encounter elsewhere.

Things to consider:

- ✓ Offering information in various languages
- ✓ Involving parents in telling their stories of migration to the children
- ✓ Asking parents to share food, music or clothing from their culture with the children
- ✓ Visibly letting parents know that this is an anti-racist setting that welcomes everyone e.g. by prominently displaying multi-lingual or anti-racist posters.





## Myths of Immigration: Countering misinformation

Myths	Facts
<p><b>“We have loads of immigrants in the UK”</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Less than 1% of the world’s refugees live in the UK, and refugees make up only 0.19% of the UK population.</li> <li>• 86% of the world’s refugees live in the poorest countries.</li> <li>• There are more refugees in Turkey, Pakistan and Lebanon than anywhere else.</li> </ul>
<p><b>“Loads of immigrants are criminals”</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Immigrants are no more likely to commit crime than anyone else.</li> <li>• Crime fell significantly in areas of the UK that had experienced mass immigration from eastern Europe, with rates of burglary, vandalism and car theft down since 2004.</li> <li>• Newcomers often face the poorest conditions and become targets for crime and exploitation.</li> <li>• Immigrants can also experience hate crimes and racist attacks.</li> </ul>
<p><b>“People come to the UK because we’re a soft touch and give out loads of benefits”</b></p> <p><b>“People just want free healthcare and free houses”</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most immigrants are refugees, fleeing persecution, violence and war and they cannot safely stay where they are – their lives are at risk. That’s why they sometimes use such dangerous ways of leaving e.g. unsafe boats or container lorries.</li> <li>• More than 3,700 people drowned in 2016 trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea.</li> <li>• Some people choose to leave a safe country and seek a better life in the UK; just as many UK citizens choose to live in Australia, America or many European countries. Migration is part of British history and culture. 1.2 million people born in the UK live in other EU countries.</li> <li>• The UK has comparatively low levels of social security benefits and a high level of refusals of asylum applications. Only 41% of asylum claims here are granted, compared with over 70% in some EU countries.</li> <li>• Refugees and asylum seekers have to live where they are placed, often in very poor quality housing.</li> <li>• Sometimes the UK has put asylum seekers, including children, in prison-like detention centres while their claims are processed.</li> <li>• Immigrants make a net contribution to the economy – they pay more tax than they take out in benefits.</li> <li>• Migrants coming to the UK since 2000 have been 43% less likely to claim benefits or tax credits compared to the UK-born workforce.</li> <li>• More people leave the UK for medical treatment abroad than arrive here seeking care.</li> <li>• Without immigrants the NHS would struggle to provide effective care. 11% of NHS staff are not UK citizens, including more than a quarter of doctors.</li> </ul>
<p><b>“Immigrants are all the same”</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are important distinctions between economic migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. (See definitions at Annex A).</li> <li>• Immigration has brought new and exciting cultures to Scotland. We are a mix of races and have benefited from that diversity.</li> <li>• Ultimately we are all human beings with the same rights and needs.</li> </ul>
<p><b>“Immigration is a taboo subject; everyone is afraid to talk about it”</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Immigration features in the newspapers and on TV/radio/web news every day but there is a myth that it is ‘taboo’ to discuss it.</li> <li>• Media portrayals of immigration can create or exacerbate racism and prejudice and are very worthy of discussion and critical examination.</li> </ul>

## Myths

## Facts

<b>“Immigration causes terrorism”</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Many immigrants are fleeing terrorism.</li><li>• Many immigrants have been victims of terrorism.</li><li>• Most terrorism is committed by people who are legally resident where they commit their crimes.</li><li>• Leaders from Black and Minority Ethnic groups and from faith and community groups condemn terrorism.</li><li>• Terrorism is a complex issue with complex causes; stigmatising immigrants is wrong.</li></ul>
<b>“Immigrants take all the jobs and drive down wages”</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• There is no evidence of an overall negative impact of immigration on jobs, wages, housing or the crowding out of public services.</li><li>• Scotland needs immigrants because of its declining and ageing population.</li></ul>

## Further reading

### EIS publications and policies

Asylum seekers and refugees

Challenging Racism

Islamophobia

[www.eis.org.uk/Equality\\_Publications/Equality\\_policies.htm](http://www.eis.org.uk/Equality_Publications/Equality_policies.htm)

Teaching Children from Asylum and Refugee Seeking Families

[www.eis.org.uk/images/equality/Asylumbrochure.pdf](http://www.eis.org.uk/images/equality/Asylumbrochure.pdf)

### Useful contacts and further reading

**Show Racism the Red Card** - [www.theredcard.org](http://www.theredcard.org)

**British Red Cross** - [www.redcross.org.uk/What-we-do/Teaching-resources](http://www.redcross.org.uk/What-we-do/Teaching-resources)

**Scottish Refugee Council** - [www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk](http://www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk)

**Woodcraft Folk** - [woodcraft.org.uk/resources/results/taxonomy-415](http://woodcraft.org.uk/resources/results/taxonomy-415)

**Various resources:** [refugeeweek.org.uk/info-centre/educational-resources/classroom-resources](http://refugeeweek.org.uk/info-centre/educational-resources/classroom-resources)

**British Council** - [www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/immigration](http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/immigration)

**Unison myth-buster** - [www.srtrc.org/uploaded/Immigration%20Myth%20Buster%20May%202014.pdf](http://www.srtrc.org/uploaded/Immigration%20Myth%20Buster%20May%202014.pdf)

**TUC leaflet: Truth, lies and migrants** - [www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/myths%20book%202014.pdf](http://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/myths%20book%202014.pdf)

**Famous Refugees** - [refugeeweek.org.uk/info-centre/famous-refugees](http://refugeeweek.org.uk/info-centre/famous-refugees)

**Ruth’s story (video clip)** - [www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/36714334](http://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/36714334)

**Seeking refuge (video clips)** - [www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01k7c4q/clips](http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01k7c4q/clips)

**Assembly ideas** - [www.risc.org.uk/files/refugee\\_assembly.pdf](http://www.risc.org.uk/files/refugee_assembly.pdf)

<sup>i</sup> Allport’s scale of prejudice: [http://the-classroom.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Prejudice\\_And\\_Allport\\_Scale.pdf-1.pdf](http://the-classroom.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Prejudice_And_Allport_Scale.pdf-1.pdf)

## Annex A:

**Racism:** prejudice, discrimination or antagonism directed against someone of a different race based on the belief that one's own race is superior. A suggested definition for primary might be "treating someone differently and unfairly just because of their race, culture or skin colour."

**Immigrant:** a person who comes to live permanently in a foreign country. Immigration is about coming into a new country. This is often confused with emigration, which is about leaving your country of origin.

**Emigrant:** a person who leaves their own country to settle permanently in another.

**Expat:** short for expatriate, a person who lives outside their native country, often used in the UK to refer to a UK citizen living abroad; has the same meaning as immigrant but usually used to refer to White Europeans and seen as less pejorative in tone than immigrant.

**Migration:** the movement of people from one country to another.

**Migrant:** a person who makes a free and conscious choice to leave their country to seek a better life elsewhere; often wrongly used to describe refugees or asylum seekers.

**Economic migrant:** someone who has moved to another country to work. For example, members of the European Union are currently free to move between EU member states and to seek work in any of them. A suggested definition for primary might be "someone who has moved to another country to get a job".

**Displaced person:** A person who has been driven from their homeland or place of residence by war, internal upheaval, or natural disaster; another term for a refugee.

**Asylum seeker:** a person who has fled persecution in their homeland, has arrived in another country, made themselves known to the authorities and exercised the legal right to apply for asylum. A suggested definition for primary might be: "someone who had to leave their home country because they were not safe at home, because of violence or war or being treated badly because of what they believe in or how they live, has arrived in another country, and has asked the government for permission to stay".

**Refugee:** a person whose asylum application has been successful and who is allowed to stay in another country, having proved that they would face persecution or threat to their life in their home country; they have been given the legal "right to remain." A suggested definition for primary might be "someone who was not safe in their home country and has been given the right to stay in their new country".

**'Illegal immigrant':** a term commonly used to refer to someone who has entered the country through deception, perhaps not applying for a visa or for asylum. Some people do try to avoid detection when they get to another country but that may be because of a fear of authority, a fear of persecution, illiteracy, trauma or other good reasons. This is the least common type of immigrant to the UK. We recommend that other terms be used instead of this one.

# Myths of Immigration



**eis** Scotland's largest  
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The Educational Institute of Scotland  
46 Moray Place, Edinburgh, EH3 6BH, Feb 2017