



Centre for excellence
for looked after children in Scotland



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**WRITTEN RESPONSE TO THE EDUCATION AND CULTURE COMMITTEE:
POST-16 EDUCATION (SCOTLAND) BILL
January 2013**

1. Overview

- 1.1 We welcome the opportunity to respond to the Education and Culture Committee's call for written evidence on the Post-16 Education (Scotland) Bill. Following the Committee's *Inquiry into the Education attainment of looked after children* (May 2012), members will already be aware of the educational disadvantages facing many young people who have care experiences.
- 1.2 There has been a strong policy drive to improve the educational outcomes for looked after children and young people in mainstream and alternative school settings; however, there has been less focus on the educational outcomes for looked after young people in post 16 education. We would welcome the establishment of designated posts within all further and higher education institutions which focus on early engagement with looked after young people (i.e. a *pre-16* strategy for post school education is required) and provide the dedicated support required by care leavers to succeed in post school learning environments. We would also reinforce the need to protect those staff who support looked after young people and care leavers in education – given that non-academic posts can be particularly vulnerable to funding cuts.
- 1.3 The low educational attainment of looked after young people in Scotland remains a significant cause for concern. Only a small proportion of looked after children progress to higher education compared to their peers. As highlighted in Scottish Government statistical bulletin¹:
- **Sixty-four per cent** of looked after children who left school during 2010/11 were in a positive destination at the time of the initial destination survey, compared with **89 per cent** of all 2010/11 school leavers;
 - Six months later, **only fifty-five per cent of looked after children were in a positive destination** in the follow up survey, compared to 87% of all school leavers in 2010/11;
 - The average tariff score for looked after children who left school during 2010/11 was 79, compared to 385 for all school leavers;

¹ Scottish Government (2012) [The educational outcomes of Scotland's looked after children and young people](#). Edinburgh: Scottish Government.

- **Looked after children leave school younger.** 88 per cent of looked after children who left school during 2010/11 were aged 16 years or under when they left school, compared to only 34 per cent of all school leavers being of this age when leaving school;
- **2% of looked children were in higher education compared to 34% of all school leavers in 2010/2011;** 22% of looked after children were in further education comparable to 25% of all school leavers in the follow up destination survey.

2. Policy and Practice Developments

- 2.1 There have been national policy developments to improve outcomes for this group of young people. [16+ Learning Choices Policy and Practice Framework](#) is the commitment to offer every young person a place in education, training or employment until the age of 19 and grew out of work on improving outcomes for those young people not in education, employment or training.
- 2.2 The Scottish Government's [More Choices, More Chances](#) strategy is aimed at young people at risk of negative destinations. Specifically relevant for careleavers is the commitment to clear Post-16 pathway planning; ensuring learning is financially viable and providing vulnerable young people with the right support to sustain learning. The Strategy also outlines a joint commitment to action between central and local government, employers, learning providers and support agencies to develop the service infrastructure required to meet the needs of vulnerable young people.
- 2.3 The [Buttle UK Quality Mark](#) is awarded to further and higher education providers who demonstrate their commitment to young people in and leaving care. The Buttle Trust Quality Mark has only been taken up by 8 of the 19 higher education institutions in Scotland, demonstrating that there is still some way to go in achieving a more consistent response to the needs of care leavers. We would strongly urge consideration of the Buttle Mark being a requisite for all higher education and further education establishments in Scotland.
- 2.4 There has been some progress in this area, but not enough. In 2010, HMle reported that: 'A few colleges are proactively responding to the call to improve services for looked after young people and care leavers and are targeting provision and resources to better meet their needs and circumstances. Dumfries and Galloway, Dundee, Coatbridge and John Wheatley colleges are making a strong contribution to addressing the needs of these learners.'²

3. Comments on Current Provisions in the proposed Bill

² HMle (2010) *Learning to improve the lives and aspirations of young people in Scotland An aspect report on the provision in Scotland's colleges for young people requiring more choices and more chances*. Livingston: HMle.

3.1 Widening access

We strongly endorse the stated commitment to widening access to further and higher education for young people who may experience disadvantage. Young people in care, and careleavers, are an under-represented group. Opportunities to continue education with practical, emotional and financial support which is well planned and easily accessible are paramount. This requires a commitment to employing and retaining appropriately skilled staff who have a valued and designated role within educational settings. An 'open door' policy encouraging young people to return to education (at least until the age of 25) should also be actively developed.

Looked after children who have aspirations to attain higher education opportunities face many barriers to entering which, in many cases, is a direct result of their care background. Sustaining education at all levels is a difficult task for looked after children who are facing complex issues and multiple care placements in various locations, throughout their formative and development years. Therefore, actions to facilitate looked after children's increased involvement in further/higher education is, in our view, needed. We would recommend that socio-economic groups are defined as part of this Bill, and specifically include young people with care backgrounds. There may also be a need for these proposals to consider developing associated guidance on how best to help higher education institutions in both recruiting and supporting the inclusion of young people with care backgrounds. There are many widening access projects which are currently in place from Universities and Colleges – and it would be beneficial to reflect on how (and if in fact they do) currently engage with looked after children.

3.2 Tuition fees cap

As a corporate parent, full financial responsibility must be taken to ensure equitable access to further and higher education and consideration should be given to whether this should be a duty placed on the local authorities. There are specific issues facing young people with care experiences that must also be addressed:

- 52 weeks a year accommodation options and planning to ensure that young people do not have the anxiety of where they will live over summer holidays or when a course ends; one of the key reasons cited for college 'drop-out' for care leavers is in relation to security and stability of living accommodation.
- Additional financial support for computers, textbooks, equipment and any other materials required for any course (which a parent may reasonably be expected to provide);
- Practical support with transport (e.g. Free travel card) to ensure young people can attend the educational or training course of their choice (without being disadvantaged by financial or logistical barriers);
- Consideration of training and development opportunities that can be provided (for example, summer internships or supporting involvement in volunteering)

opportunities) to enhance the full learning experiences associated with further and higher education.

3.3 College regionalisation

We strongly urge new regional strategic bodies to demonstrate their commitment to providing equitable access and support to young people in care and leaving care. We would be keen to see these colleges have a designated officer to support this group of young people. We would also be keen for all colleges to be awarded the Buttle Mark as a sign of their commitment to this group.

3.4 Review of Fundable Further and Higher Education

We welcome the SFC's role in reviewing the provision of fundable further and higher education to ensure that learning is being provided by post-16 education bodies in a coherent manner.

We welcome greater recognition of the allocation of funds to support the most disadvantaged young people to fully participate in further and higher education.

3.5 Data sharing

We welcome the appropriate and proportionate sharing of data (with consent) by relevant bodies to Skills Development Scotland on young people between the ages of 16 and 24. This will allow them to identify those who are moving through the learning system who have disengaged with, or may be at risk of, disengaging with, learning or training. We require further clarification on how this data will be analysed and applied to improve outcomes for disadvantaged young people.

We would urge the Committee to engage with the Higher Education Statistical Agency (Scotland) (HESA) to encourage them to collate and analyse data in relation to care leavers who have registered for courses. At present, student's registering are not required to declare if they have been looked after yet this would be an obvious locus through which to gather this information. This question is currently asked within the UCAS form but is not mandatory. Access to this information through HESA would allow us to gain a better grasp of the number of young people coming into higher education straight from school and, more significantly, those who access higher education later on in life. We would, however, caution against over-surveillance of this group relative to their non-looked after peers.

Effective local data sharing protocols between local authorities and further education establishments do exist and can assist in more appropriate and individualised approaches to supporting young people. An example of this would be between South Ayrshire Council and Ayr College agreed via a local care leavers group.

4. About CELCIS

- 4.1 CELCIS is the Centre for Excellence for Looked after Children in Scotland based at the University of Strathclyde. Together with partners, we are working to improve the lives of all looked after children in Scotland. Established in 2011, CELCIS has been committed to further improving the outcomes and opportunities for looked after children through a collaborative and facilitative approach that is focused on having the maximum positive impact on their lives.
- 4.2 Robert Gordon University is a CELCIS funded partner and a member of the CELCIS Partnership Group.
- 4.3 Who Cares? Scotland is an independent advocacy service for looked after young people and care leavers. They are a CELCIS funded partner and a member of the CELCIS Partnership Group.
- 4.4 Thank you for the opportunity to provide written evidence. We welcome any further discussions to inform this work.

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