Education and Culture Committee

Post-16 Education (Scotland) Bill

Scottish Children’s Services Coalition

Introduction:
The Scottish Children’s Services Coalition (SCSC) is a policy-focused collaboration between leading third sector and independent children’s services providers who deliver residential care and special education for children with complex needs (see later for members). They also provide independent advocacy, advice and representation for children and young people who are looked after in Scotland, campaign for positive changes in the care system and consult with children and young people to ensure their voices are heard by policy makers locally and nationally.

Members provide tailored support to children with complex needs from a diverse range of backgrounds and social circumstances. Many have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, sometimes brought on by being a victim of neglect or abuse, and/or complex developmental disabilities, such as:

- **Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD):** can include behavioural, medical and psychological interventions, counselling and psychotherapy, complementary therapies and dietary support, to name a few.
- **Aspergers Syndrome (AS):** Support may include communication-based interventions, behavioural therapy and dietary changes.
- **Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD):** depending on the severity, the condition can be managed through a combination of medication and psychological, educational and social therapies.
- **Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD):** requires one to one counselling and support.

As highlighted above, children with complex needs often need dedicated, specialist care from the highest quality of providers who are attuned to their requirements and able to better equip these vulnerable individuals for the challenges of life.

Provisions of the Bill

**SCSC would like to take this opportunity to provide a specific response to the “Widening Access” provisions contained in the Bill.**

SCSC welcomes this aspect of the Bill which will allow Ministers, when providing funding to the SFC, to impose conditions relating to access to higher institutions for under-represented socio-economic groups.
(1) The Scottish Ministers may, in particular, impose a condition that the Council, when making a payment to a higher education institution under section 12(1), must require the institution to comply with a widening access agreement of such description as the Scottish Ministers may specify.

SCSC welcomes this provision. However SCSC would, in this context, recommend that socio-economic groups are defined as part of this Bill, and specifically include children and young people with complex needs, including learning difficulties.

Children and young people with complex needs face additional barriers to entering higher education, and addressing the obstacles to entry through measures such as those outlined in the Bill, reinforced with greater encouragement and financial support, would be greatly welcomed.

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 complex needs. 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. Awareness and support in accessing these opportunities will be needed as early as possible with those children with complex needs.

SCSC also recommends further education institutions also be included in addition to higher education institutions.

(2) A ‘widening access agreement’ is an agreement under which a higher education institution is to take actions specified by the Council for the purposes of enabling, encouraging or increasing participation in fundable higher education provided by the institution by persons belonging to socio-economic groups which are under-represented in fundable higher education (either generally or in such education provided by the institution).

As above, SCSC recommends that those children with complex needs are defined as a distinct socio-economic group should any ‘widening access agreement’ put in place with a higher education institution.

(3) For the purposes of this section, a socio-economic group is to be treated as under-represented in fundable higher education if participation in such education by persons in that group is disproportionately low.

As above.
**SCSC members**

**Falkland House School**
With over 25 years’ experience, Falkland House School is an all-through residential school based in Fife for boys from early primary to aged 18.

**Mindroom**
A Scottish charity dedicated to creating awareness of all kinds of learning difficulties. Mindroom also provide one-to-one support to families and offer help, advice and training to individuals and organisations who work with people with learning difficulties.

**Spark of Genius**
Spark of Genius provide education, residential care, employment services and software solutions at 17 sites across Scotland to enable young people who need a variety of support to achieve their potential.

**Who Cares? (Scotland)**
A third sector advocacy organisation supporting all of Scotland’s children and young people in care. Who Cares? Provide a voice by working directly with young people, listening to what they say and speaking out with them.

**Young Foundations**
Young Foundations provides a range of services for children and young people – with or without learning difficulties – through residential care, transition and fostering across the UK.