Who Cares? Scotland supports young people who have care experience up to 26 years of age, by providing on-going support and independent advocacy. We are the only organisation in Scotland to provide this service. Who Cares? Scotland aims to provide looked-after young people in Scotland with knowledge of their rights and strives to empower them to positively participate in the formal structures they are often subject to solely as a result of their care status.

The educational outcomes for looked after young people are unacceptably poor in comparison to their non-care peers. The 2012/13 Scottish Government statistics highlight that the exclusion rates for this group are unacceptable, with 209 exclusions per 1000 for looked after young people in comparison to only 33 per 1000 for their non-care peers. Trauma, mental ill health, stigma, frequent placement moves and chaotic living arrangements are all examples of how a looked after young person’s experience of education can be a negative one. With such poor experiences it is unsurprising that 85% of looked after young people left school before the age of 16 and only 4% of looked after young people went straight on to study at University.[1]

- Given recent trends in local authorities’ spending on schools, what are likely to be the main pressures on education budgets in financial year 2015-16? Will there be any impacts on pupils and families; attainment; teacher numbers; the length and scheduling of the school week; teachers’ terms and conditions; developing and strengthening links between schools, colleges and employers; etc?

For many care experienced young people, school can offer them a safe and steady environment. Strong and positive relationships with teachers and friends can offer them a life-line and an escape from very complex care experiences. However, the chance of them achieving this at school is often hindered where decisions are made for them, such as to change their placement type or to allocate a new social worker. This disruption impacts on the capacity of many care experienced young people to have the educational journey which they deserve, and most certainly have the ability to undertake. The educational outcomes mentioned above are a symptom of their care journey. The removal of care experienced young people from classes to take part in their children’s panel or their Looked After Children Reviews means that they are experiencing a lot less actual learning time than most of their non-looked after peers. Additionally, the emotional impact of what they are facing in their young lives, as well as dealing with the consequences of what gets decided at the panel or the review meeting, can leave the care experienced young person able to focus on their education at all.

Who Cares? Scotland is concerned that the recent trend of reduction in expenditure on staff costs has had considerable impact on the experience of both teachers and care experienced pupils within

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the classroom. With the reduction in the number of Classroom Assistant roles, young people who require extra support within the classroom are now reliant upon their teacher alone. Additional support for learning is a common need from care experienced young people. This in turn means that teachers have to spend extra time with pupils who either struggle with the work, or struggle to manage their behaviour and hold their attention within the classroom. In their role, Classroom Assistants are able to focus their attention on the young people who need extra support and play a vital role in ensuring that all pupils are able to learn in an environment which is conducive to their education. We believe that care experienced young people should have this extra support, should it be required. However if this option is decreasing, we are certain care experienced young people will be negatively affected. Additionally, if teachers have less time to dedicate to lesson planning, individual tutoring and getting involved in extracurricular initiatives; they are less likely to be able to accommodate the needs of care experienced pupils in their classroom.

The Scottish Draft Budget for 2015/16 outlines several spending priorities for the Education sector. One of these priorities commits to strengthening the link between schools, colleges, employers, local authorities and Skills Development Scotland, to help all young people make a successful transition into work. As already mentioned, many care experienced young people are disengaged from education. Their chaotic living situations, poor family relationships and past experiences of trauma, directly affect this. Once this disengagement begins, the opportunity for this group of young people to engage in further education or establish positive employment destinations is reduced considerably. This is further evidenced by the positive destination outcomes of care experienced young people in terms of both access to education and employment, as well as sustainment.

For all young people to progress into the world of work, those identified as being key in this – schools, colleges, employers, local authorities and Skills Development Scotland – must recognise care experienced young people and the specific issues they face. For those corporate parents, many of which are those public bodies mentioned above, there is an opportunity to do better. One method of encouraging this is to provide training to help them understand the journey and experiences faced by the care experienced population. If this training was to link with the expectations under the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, particularly the duties placed upon corporate parents to give regard to care experienced young people, local authorities would be in a better position to understand how to strategically work with others and to best help this vulnerable population succeed in education and employment. The Who Cares? Scotland Corporate Parenting Training Programme could play a role here.

Ultimately however, Who Cares? Scotland recommends that care experienced young people have less disruption to their learning. Care experienced young people have said that children’s hearings and other formal meetings should take place out with of school hours. They have also suggested that there should be a specific level of support in place for them in school in instances where they come back from a hearing or a meeting that has left them upset. They want support to help them cope with their home lives whilst on school grounds. There is scope to look at how access to an independent advocate during school time could help care experienced pupils. This advocate could be provided across school clusters or several high-school campuses, and help the care experienced
young person in their place of learning. This would also potentially remove some of the pressures on teachers.

- How do the Scottish Government and local authorities ensure that funding for schools is spent in a way that best delivers value for money?

Care experienced young people, who do not attain the levels of education they are capable of due to their care background, are more likely to rely on welfare assistance as adults. It is important that the educational journey of care experienced young people is positive, supportive and lacks disruption as much as possible. Who Cares? Scotland would recommend that the necessary resources required to improve the learning experience of care experienced young people are invested in, if the poor long-term outcomes which they face are to be addressed. We believe that the extension of care leaving age, the continuing care option and enhanced, longer after care brought in by the Children and Young People Act 2014 (effective April 2015) will help. However, to truly address them, the experience in the classroom and the space to reach their potential must be enhanced. It is vital that the experiences of young people with care backgrounds, alongside the experiences of the teachers who teach them, are understood fully. Who Cares? Scotland has undertaken some specific educational focused corporate parenting training in several local authorities with teachers and head teachers and we feel that more investment in increasing the awareness and understanding they have of care experienced children and young people is needed. This works best where care experienced young people, who have good insight and understanding of what could work better in school, are part of the training being delivered.

We believe that best value for money is realised for care experienced young people, where they are supported both early and often in their schooling. From the moment they are involved with social work and at risk of attaining a care status, the school must be able to support that young person through this, whilst encouraging them to continue to learn. Whilst we realise this is not solely doable by the teacher or the school alone, and does demand a collaborative approach by all corporate parents, we would recommend that additional support is invested in for these young people. As mentioned, this means additional support in the classroom and out with, such as access to an independent advocate whilst in school.

There is also scope to do widespread consultation with all involved in delivering education services across Scotland to care experienced young people. This consultation would of course, have to involve care experienced young people too, in order to learn from their direct experience and potential solutions to make things better and to help provide best value solutions. Who Cares? Scotland, as well as the Education and Culture Committee, have significant experience of consulting with care experienced young people on issues which affect them and therefore recognise the strength that lies in empowering disadvantaged groups to speak out about their experiences, as well as their hopes for the future.

- How will the draft budget advance the preventative spending agenda in relation to school spending?

Who Cares? Scotland are pleased to see reference to the need for independent advocacy for all young people involved with Children’s Hearings Scotland within the 2015/16 draft budget. By ensuring looked-after young people are supported to be heard within this formal structure, we can
better prepare them to participate effectively in the decisions which affect them. Who Cares? Scotland recently consulted with 89 young people across Scotland in regard to the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act. The response from those who participated showed strongly the link between feeling listened to and having greater participation in their care journey. This increase in participation can improve the decisions made by local authorities by ensuring they understand the needs of the young person and thus, encouraging better engagement with services.

Who Cares? Scotland supports the focus on early intervention within the draft budget and we believe this method can reduce the need for crisis led, reactive work later. Early intervention with regards to supporting children and young people at risk of being taken into local authority care or those already looked-after is essential in providing them with stable, positive experiences of education. By focussing efforts at this early stage to ensure looked-after young people are engaged in education, we can help to better the poor educational outcomes for this marginalised group of young people.

However while the early intervention model of working is important to creating stability and good quality education for looked-after young people, it must not have the impact of reducing the focus on the support needed to continue this engagement later on in education. Young people growing up in care can experience trauma, rejection and many other setbacks throughout their young lives, which can have the effect of destabilising their journey into adulthood. We need to ensure that methods of early intervention link closely with other methods later on in life which can strengthen the types of support looked-after young people can access. Early intervention strategies must link well with the new duties within the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014. For example, the Act now ensures corporate parents take account of the experiences of young people with care experience when designing their services and requires them to create opportunities for this often disadvantaged group. For early intervention strategies to be effective in the long term, the notion of the corporate parent and the duties placed on them, must be understand and utilised at this early stage.

If you wish to discuss this further, please contact:

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