EVIDENCE FOR THE EDUCATION AND CULTURE COMMITTEE INQUIRY ON THE EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT GAP

Consultation 1: Implications for Schools, Teachers and pupil of the Commission for Developing Scotland’s Young Workface (Wood report)

Introduction

We welcome this opportunity to submit evidence to the Education and Culture Committee’s inquiry into Scotland’s educational attainment gap. Established in 2011, CELCIS is the Centre for excellence for looked after children in Scotland. Our remit is to work with service providers (such as schools and colleges) to improve the experiences and outcomes of children and young people who are (or have been) ‘looked after’ by local authorities. For this reason our responses to the questions posed by the Committee are framed in consideration of the particular circumstances of looked after young people and care leavers.

Question 1: If the Wood report were fully implemented, what would be the likely impact on attainment in schools and which pupils would benefit most?

While we broadly welcome the conclusions of the Wood report, we believe that full implementation of its recommendations would have only a limited impact on ‘attainment in schools’. This view is based on a number of factors. First, an important precursor of the ‘attainment gap’ for young people is the ‘literacy and numeracy gap’ among pre-school and primary school aged children. As the recent report from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Closing the Attainment Gap in Scottish Education¹, shows, this literacy and numeracy gap starts to be evident at a very young age. The primary focus of the Wood report is a group of young people aged 14-plus whose attainment is likely to be significantly impacted by gaps in their foundation academic skills. Increased emphasis on providing support for children (and their families and carers) in reading, writing and mathematics at the primary stage will be required if significant and lasting improvement is to made at the secondary and post-school stages, a point acknowledged by the Government’s Scottish Attainment Challenge² with its focus on primary schools.

Second, the Wood report presents a compelling picture of ‘employer retreat’ from Scotland’s young people (with fewer opportunities into employment being made available) without providing a satisfactory explanation of ‘why’ this may have happened. Through our work with organisations providing support to looked after young people and care leavers we suggest that one possible explanation for employers’ apparent preference for

¹ http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/closing-attainment-gap-scottish-education
young people with ‘qualifications’ is that qualifications act as a guarantee of the basic foundation skills (literacy and numeracy). As the annual tariff scores for ‘looked after’ school leavers confirm, many young people are leaving school at 16 with limited skills. In such a context employers’ reluctance to carry the cost of bringing skill levels up to the required standard may be understandable. Unfortunately the result is a recruitment process which disadvantages those already disadvantaged in education, and risks the loss to skilled and higher-paid employment of young people whose ‘capacities’ are not evidenced by traditional qualifications.

Furthermore, the barriers faced by some young people are not restricted only to school attainment or a lack of training and employment opportunities. Children from more socio-economically advantaged homes have better access to opportunities to learn about career options, but they also have better access to social and cultural opportunities which, while not directly vocationally oriented, help to develop the psychological attributes (self-belief, persistence, sociability) which enable individuals to succeed in the modern work environment. In considering how to develop Scotland’s young workforce, all aspects of the ‘senior phase’ (not just the vocational) must be considered, and the broad principles underpinning Curriculum for Excellence kept at the centre.

The third reason why full implementation of Wood may only have limited impact on school attainment relates to the way ‘attainment’ is measured in Scotland (i.e. pupils’ performance during the senior phase). Although Modern Apprenticeships do contribute to attainment measures through the Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework (SCQF), the SCQF is weighted heavily towards ‘academic’ qualifications. The Wood recommendation of increasing the availability of Modern Apprenticeships to pupils in schools could have a positive impact on school attainment figures (as young people at risk of disengagement from education continue in school). But it may also divert some young people from the ‘academic’ qualifications which contribute more heavily to a school’s ‘tariff score’ measure of attainment. This point suggests there is a need to consider adapting the current approach to measuring student ‘performance’ and ‘outcomes’.

If the Wood report recommendations are implemented in full, we believe the pupils who would benefit most will be young people whose school attainment is likely to be slightly below the national average. This group may include young people who do not complete the senior phase of school (or do so with only limited ‘attainment’ success) and who, although able and possessing the necessary basic skills, lose out to their peers in an increasingly competitive jobs market. Implementing Wood’s recommendations should lead to growth in opportunities for this group. However, if there is a desire to improve the range (and uptake) of opportunities available to those young people who have disengaged from education at an earlier stage, significant additional support may be required. The cumulative effect of social, emotional and educational difficulties acts as a barrier to engagement in training and employment opportunities. To increase the engagement of this group it will be necessary to have a triple-track approach: first helping the most vulnerable and disengaged families to benefit from pre-school and primary education; second, having suitable arrangements for meeting the additional support for learning needs of individual children throughout school stages; third, providing flexible and continuing social and emotional support (potentially in partnership with the third sector) as they take up educational, employment and training opportunities. The new national mentoring scheme for looked after children, recently announced by the Scottish
Government, has the potential to make a significant contribution to achieving this triple-track approach. But it is important that looked after children (including those in kinship care and ‘at home’) receive the additional support at school to which they are entitled under the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004. It should be regarded as unusual for a looked after child not to have a Coordinated Support Plan, and the Scottish Government (through its agencies) should regularly monitor the type and range of additional support for learning provided to this population.

Question 2: The report aims to significantly enhance vocational content “without splitting young people off into separate streams at school age”. What would be the disadvantages of such an approach and how could they be avoided?

We welcome Wood’s proposals for school-college partnerships. These ‘dual-enrolment’ arrangements have been available in some parts of the United States for many years. For example, Massachusetts instituted the Commonwealth Dual Enrolment Partnership in 1993, allowing students to attend college classes while continuing in high school. Benefits cited by State education officials were better grades, higher staying-on rates and improved access to employment opportunities. In 2012 the James Irvine Foundation published a review of dual enrolment, which reported that students who participated had better academic outcomes relative to a comparison group (who followed traditional pathways). The Massachusetts programme was suspended in 2001 due to budget cuts (a reminder that such initiatives are vulnerable in the search for immediate savings) but was restored in 2008.

Dual enrolment offers advantages to young people from a looked after background (more than 80% of whom typically leave school at 16 or earlier) in that the school where they are known and have built good relationships would maintain responsibility for their welfare and for monitoring progress. Transitions are particularly problematic for looked after young people, who can easily become lost in the post-school education system. While college is currently an important first destination for a high proportion of looked after school leavers, annual statistics suggest that they are at a high risk of dropping out. Dual enrolment might help to avoid this problem, allowing colleges and schools to demonstrate their corporate parenting responsibility, as set out in Part 9 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014. The particular circumstances of residential and day special schools need to be considered in arranging such partnerships.

To mitigate the risk of ‘splitting off,’ and the negative consequences of low status being accorded to vocational education, opportunities should be provided in a broad range of occupational areas (particularly in high skill occupations found within the renewables, Information Technology and hospitality sectors). Thought should also be given to how dual enrolment is configured in a way that is non-stigmatising, perhaps by ensuring it is

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3 As amended by Section 8, Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2009
4 http://www.mass.edu/strategic/read_cdep.asp
5 http://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2014/07/20/state-aims-boost-awareness-program-allowing-high-school-students-earn-college-credit/YejTr3qHjd6Dos0XeYjuN/story.html
6 https://www.irvine.org/youth/linked-learning/broadening-the-benefits-of-dual-enrollment
7 Scottish Government (2014) Looked After Children’s Educational Outcomes Statistics, Additional Table 2.1
attractive to more than the most disadvantaged, and that options for re-engaging in traditional ‘academic’ subjects are both available and accessible.

We endorse Wood’s recommendations in relation to countering the effects of gender stereotyping in career options. We think that one way to do this is to resist approaches which attempt to match vocational courses in the senior phase too closely to intelligence about local employment needs, but rather to help young people to gain a broader set of modern, transferable skills and aptitudes while also learning about different employment possibilities (through high quality placements and internships). Another valuable influence is for young people to have direct contact with people who themselves represent the opposite of gender stereotyping, such as women engineers and men in caring roles.

It is also important that vocational tracks in the senior phase permit - and encourage - opportunities for participation in sport, music, drama, travel and other activities that help young people to develop confidence and other social skills. There is considerable evidence that the most disadvantaged are not distinguished from the most advantaged in terms of aspiration, but they may need more support to develop the social capital which is valued by employers alongside formal qualifications.

The SCQF framework facilitates progression to more advanced education, principally by allowing progression from non-advanced further education to higher education within colleges. While this arrangement also extends to progression from higher national-level qualifications to degree-level provision, there are significant barriers which continue to impede equality of access. For example, while many college-university articulation arrangements exist, the range of opportunities may be limited in particular areas, and the ‘rules’ surrounding progression tend to be variable and in some cases highly idiosyncratic.

The barrier whereby a student progressing from a Higher National Diploma qualification to a vocational degree programme (e.g. in law or teacher education) would not receive SAAS funding for the first year has now been removed, but this still leaves students having to meet the other costs associated with an extra year (or two years) of study, and raises questions of equity (in respect of the fair treatment of entrance qualifications) across courses, between and within institutions. As a simple first step, the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) and Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) should ask Scottish universities to end the practice of designating HNC/HND qualifications under the heading ‘non-standard entry’ or similar, and explicitly indicating that holders of these qualifications will be treated on an individual basis when applying for entrance.

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8 e.g. http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/influence-parents-places-and-poverty-educational
Question 3: Are any measures other than those advocated in the report needed to ensure more young people leave school with “high level vocational qualifications which have strong currency in the labour market”?

We think that a logical extension of the Wood proposals is for the ‘education’ leaving age in Scotland to be raised to 18. This is the approach adopted in England, where from June 2014 all Year 11 (S4 in Scotland) school leavers are legally required to remain in education or training up until their 18th birthday.\(^9\) This would represent an unequivocal statement of how important Scotland considers the education and training of our young people. While we acknowledge that ‘compulsion’ can sometimes be associated with low motivation and disengagement, and that an ‘entitlement’ approach (such as currently available in Scotland) ensures active participation, in view of the scale of challenge identified by Wood, bolder measures are now necessary. Moreover, in relation to looked after children and care leavers, an extension of compulsory education and training should help prevent school staff (and other professionals) from colluding with young people’s view of the senior phase as ‘not for them,’ an effect our contacts tell us is not uncommon. The academic Stephen Ball describes such attitudes as the ‘economy of student worth,’ a condition which compromises the fundamental purposes of education.\(^10\)

We endorse Recommendation 37 (p.66) in Wood which calls for ‘educational and employment transition planning for young people in care to start early’. First, we suggest that Government must be vigilant for any arrangements which use a narrow definition of ‘care’ and thus exclude young people looked after ‘at home’ or in formal kinship care. Second, we think that all looked after children should have access to bespoke and frequent career education (including meaningful work visits and placements) before the senior phase, in order to help them to make informed and supported choices. We also think that career education for looked after children needs to involve families and carers. In view of the obligations placed on many publicly funded organisations as ‘corporate parents’ (Part 9 of the 2014 Act), these aims should be relatively easy to achieve.

Question 4: Does the report – which includes a section on improving equalities – place enough emphasis on pupils’ socio-economic inequalities and how these could be overcome?

While we welcome the Wood’s conclusions and recommendations on equalities, and we are particularly pleased that the report recognised ‘care leavers’ as a special group, we believe the issue needs greater emphasis and exploration. For instance, emphasis must be given to the fact that the term ‘care leaver’ includes children who were looked after at home, or in formal kinship care. While these children have equivalent needs to their accommodated peers, traditionally they have received a much more limited package of support. One outcome of this is a growing attainment (and educational engagement) gap between children ‘looked after at home’ and those who have been accommodated. Working with children who are ‘looked after’ but cared for by families is challenging, but it must be done if outcomes for all care leavers in Scotland are to be improved.

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\(^9\) UK Government website, [Raising the Participation Age](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/raising-the-participation-age) (accessed on 25 Feb. 15)

The notion of guaranteed employment for a year put forward by Wood has merit, but we restate our concern that, for such opportunities to be successful, they must be buttressed by considerable mentoring/coaching support. This would relate to the practicalities of maintaining employment, and in dealing with the continuing effects of childhood trauma and intrusive family difficulties that characterise a looked after background. Local authority ‘aftercare’ and youth employment teams are currently not adequately resourced to provide such support, so detailed consideration needs to be given to how it would be made to work.

The provision of supported employment and training for looked after young people, such as ring-fenced Modern Apprenticeships offered by a number of public-sector and third-sector agencies (e.g. Glasgow City Council’s Commonwealth Apprenticeship Scheme) is a welcome step, but there are still too few examples of this kind of activity. The introduction of a corporate parenting duty to ‘provide opportunities […] to participate in activities designed to promote their wellbeing’\(^\text{11}\) should result in more of these work-related opportunities, but if the needs of all care leavers are to be met there is also a need for sustained commitment from private-sector companies to provide placements and apprenticeships.

We think there could be merit in having specific initiatives aimed exclusively at the most disadvantaged young people, for example, focusing on STEM-related opportunities, acknowledging to be successful these would require additional support in maths and science. While we welcome the Scottish Government’s commitment to providing supported employment opportunities in the third sector and access to mentoring, we are disappointed that Scotland’s Youth Employment Strategy does not take the opportunity to restate a firm commitment to the Government’s own 2011 report, *Our Family Firm*\(^\text{12}\), and to support reasonable resource allocation which could ensure that the principles and standards articulated in that report could be realised to open up a broader range of employment opportunities to young people from a looked after background. We think there should also be a commitment to provide regular reports so that progress can be evaluated.

Finally, overcoming the inequalities associated with having a ‘care experience’ requires further attention in two related ways. First, while support to address inequalities in education or health should be available across the life course, an increasing level of resource must be targeted at early years and primary school stages. Second, shifting towards a preventive model will require an additional resource commitment (e.g. in investing in specialist teachers) in the short to medium term. The mandatory preparation of Children’s Services Plans in each local area presents the Scottish Government and Parliament with a valuable opportunity to audit how well service leaders are achieving this objective.

\(^{11}\) Section 58(1)(d) of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014

Question 5: Would there have to be significant reorganisation in schools to accommodate all the proposed changes (for example, to enable more links with colleges / to have a greater focus on work placements)?

It seems reasonable to assume that there would have to be some reorganisation of schools to accommodate all the changes proposed by Wood. There is already a culture of collaboration between schools in relation to meeting the requirements of the senior phase, and many schools have long-standing, constructive relationships with colleges. It will be important to ensure that such partnerships are available across Scotland so that they can be accessed by all young people. There is also a need to consider ways in which residential schools, secure care units and youth custody (i.e. HMYOI Polmont) are accommodated in the senior phase arrangements. This illustrates a more general point, which is that the aim of equality of access to the senior phase means that every young person, wherever they are placed in education, should have a right of access to a broad range of vocational and academic options. The residential school and youth custody sectors have developed creative ways of providing learning opportunities consistent with the principles of Curriculum for Excellence, but they have also typically offered a narrower curriculum, though it is generally broader than in the past. These sectors must not be marginalised in the new arrangements. There are organisational challenges associated with the fact that these institutions are not within local authorities, but it is vital to address these challenges to avoid the young people who are placed in them missing out.

In implementing of Wood’s recommendations (and the necessary reorganisation of schools) there is a risk that we create a map of Scotland on which ‘vocational’ schools are clustered in low income neighbourhoods (where fewer pupils have traditionally studied for Highers) and ‘academic’ schools in more affluent areas. Parents in more affluent neighbourhoods may be less likely to value vocational aspects of the curriculum in the senior phase and may exert pressures on schools to avoid reorganising in ways that would facilitate equal valuing of vocational and academic courses13. The development of a two-tier school system should be actively avoided, suggesting an important role for Education Scotland and other national agencies.

It is important to guard against an assumption that because a young person is looked after or a care leaver that he or she is best directed to a vocational route. It may be more challenging to support a looked after young person with significant additional needs to obtain Highers, but this should not determine that a vocational option is best. The most disadvantaged young people have a right to realise their academic potential, and while vocational qualifications offer enhanced employment opportunities, with commensurate financial benefits, traditional ‘academic’ routes into the professions still offer efficient and effective ways out of poverty.

13 Parity of esteem was a major issue which impacted upon the effectiveness of vocational education qualifications in England in the 1990s, and more broadly across Europe. See, e.g.

Finally, if Wood’s recommendations were implemented there may be additional administrative requirements placed on schools, associated with making more complex curriculum arrangements for pupils, and tracking their progress. Assuming the school is the principal point of pupil registration (an arrangement we would support) it likely that the school would need to employ professional staff whose qualifications and backgrounds are more varied, for example, in counselling, youth work or human resource development.

**Question 6: What action and resources would be required to deliver the specific recommendations aimed at schools and teachers?**

As mentioned earlier in this submission, we support the Wood report’s proposals for school-college partnerships, since dual registration offers significant advantages to young people who traditionally disengage with education at the earliest opportunity. We also favour schools retaining the primary responsibility for their students. Both of these developments will have resource implications, particularly during the set-up stage, and we also recognise that much is being asked of schools currently in reforming the curriculum more generally. Therefore Wood’s proposals have little chance of success without the implementation being carefully costed and the additional costs met.

The changes proposed by Wood will also have implications for teachers’ skills and knowledge base, and therefore for high quality in-service training opportunities. Initial teacher education and CPD will need to include opportunities to learn more about the effects of disadvantage and childhood trauma on education, and about the evidence base for interventions, including approaches being tested in other schools. As teachers work with children in relatively short time frames, it is also important that they learn about the life experiences of young adults who were not conventionally successful at school, but who have subsequently made significant achievements academically or vocationally. The House of Lords report, *Make or Break: The UK’s Digital Future*[^14], highlighted the need for teachers to adapt in order to provide education in a way that young people can relate to, and also to keep up with the requirements that they should have useful skills in digital technology.

We do not think it is necessary for teachers to become careers advisors, or to tailor the curriculum to data about local employment opportunities. Schools are - and must remain - about more than just employability, and they must continue to have a lead role in helping young people to acquire the transferable social and emotional skills on which a successful and satisfying life depends.

**Thank you for this opportunity to contribute to this important inquiry. We would welcome any further discussions with Committee.**

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