Response from the Scottish Children’s Services Coalition (SCSC) to the Scottish Parliament’s Education and Culture Committee’s call for evidence on the educational attainment gap

Commission for Developing Scotland’s Young Workforce

About the Scottish Children’s Services Coalition

The Scottish Children’s Services Coalition (SCSC) is a policy-focused collaboration between leading independent and third sector service providers. These providers have come together to work with political and other key stakeholders to help improve the delivery of children and young people’s services.

SCSC members deliver specialist care and education services for children and young people with complex needs, such as learning difficulties and learning disabilities, as well as direct help and support for them and their families. They also provide independent advocacy, advice and representation for children and young people with care experience.

Members provide tailored support to children and young people from a diverse range of backgrounds and social circumstances.

Members of the SCSC are:

Falkland House School - www.falklandhouseschool.org
Mindroom - www.mindroom.org
Spark of Genius - www.sparkofgenius.com
Who Cares? Scotland - www.whocaresscotland.org
Young Foundations - www.youngfoundations.com
Kindred - www.kindred-scotland.org

Further information about the SCSC can be found at www.thescsc.org.uk

Background

As a representative body for children and young people with Additional Support Needs (ASN) the SCSC submitted a response to the Wood Commission’s consultation on Developing Scotland’s Young Workforce in April 2013.

The coalition chose to focus its response around the importance of increasing the vocational, education and employment opportunities that are available for those with ASN, such as learning difficulties/disabilities and care experience.
The Commission for Developing Scotland’s Young Workforce recognised the need for more action to support young disabled people and made specific recommendations to achieve that.

In response, “Developing the Young Workforce: Scotland’s Youth Employment Strategy” sets out the framework for how the Scottish Government intends to tackle the issue.

About £3 million has been allocated directly by the Scottish Government in response to the recommendations of the Commission to address wider underrepresentation across employability programmes. It has also provided £2 million for the targeted Employer Recruitment Incentive (ERI), to facilitate transitions to sustainable employment. There is also the community jobs fund, which the Scottish Government delivers in partnership with the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations and which creates targeted opportunities for those who face additional barriers to employment, including those with a disability.

Although we recognise this and that the Scottish Government has taken significant steps in the right direction, as outlined above our response calls for more opportunities and support to be made available to those with ASN.

**SCSC submission to the Committee**

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

As with our submission to the Wood Commission consultation, we are going to focus this response on those children and young people with complex needs, such as learning difficulties and learning disabilities, and those with care experience.

Specifically looking at this grouping, if the recommendations from the Wood Report were to be implemented in full, we are in no doubt that the numbers of, and outcomes for those children and young people with complex needs and care experience going on to positive destinations would increase significantly.

Not only would these individuals be more motivated to remain engaged in education, they would be far more likely to be able to achieve sustainable employment in the long term.

**Recommendation 33: Career advice and work experience for young disabled people who are still at school should be prioritised and tailored to help them realise their potential and focus positively on what they can do to achieve their career aspirations.**

Looking at recommendation 33, it is crucial that careers advice is available from the earliest stages of secondary education. Helping young people to develop career aspirations through early careers advice and vocational opportunities through the likes of local employers will provide a platform to ‘learn while doing’, maximising individual motivation and opportunities for skills development.
This person-centred approach will prove to be particularly effective for those young people with complex needs and care experience who traditionally disengage with the academic nature of education during their secondary school years.

It is crucial that ALL young people are given careers advice as early as possible in order to highlight both the vocational and academic pathways that are available to help prevent disengagement.

To help enhance this process, the ‘Getting it right for every child’ approach should be universally adopted to encourage collaborative working across multiple agencies to ensure that the specific needs of all young people are being assessed and met at the earliest possible stage.

This approach cannot be delivered as ‘one size fits all’ as many, particularly those with complex needs and care experience, will require 1:1 support to help identify their career aspirations and opportunities.

**Recommendation 34:** Funding levels to colleges and MA training providers should be reviewed and adjusted to reflect the cost of providing additional support to young disabled people, and age restrictions should be relaxed for those whose transition may take longer.

**Recommendation 37:** Educational and employment transition planning for young people in care should start early with sustained support from public and third sector bodies and employers available throughout their journey toward and into employment as is deemed necessary.

**Recommendation 38:** Across vocational education and training, age restrictions should be relaxed for those care leavers whose transition takes longer.

**Recommendation 39:** In partnership with the third sector, the Scottish Government should consider developing a programme which offers supported employment opportunities lasting up to a year for care leavers.

With regards to recommendations 34 and 37 to 39, we cannot emphasise enough the importance of early and person-centred transition programmes.

Under the Education (Additional Support for Learning) Act 2004, councils and other agencies must start planning transition for ASN students at least a year before they leave school, but it would clearly be better to start transition planning much earlier, perhaps even in the early years of secondary school, a scenario outlined in related official guidance.

The Scottish Transitions Forum (STF) last year recommended that the one in five school leavers with additional support needs (ASN) should be offered more than a decade of help – from the ages of 14 to 25 – as they make the move from school to college, university and work.

While some regions, such as Highland, are very good at helping pupils plan for the future early, for others it is a postcode lottery that leaves some of the most vulnerable in our society out in the cold. Early intervention is absolutely critical if we are to ensure that these young people realise their full potentials and reduce the stress of transitions for this vulnerable group.
As a society we spend heavily in meeting the costs of failure, but through early intervention and tailored transition programmes we can ensure that we give the most vulnerable the best chance as they move from school into further education, employment and training.

Implementing these recommendations will demonstrate a universal commitment to reducing the numbers of young people leaving school with no qualifications. Furthermore, a person-centred approach will help the most vulnerable young people to identify their career aspirations and skills development opportunities, providing them with that critical encouragement and motivation to remain engaged in education.

**Recommendation 35: Within Modern Apprenticeships, SDS should set a realistic but stretching improvement target to increase the number of young disabled people. Progress against this should be reported on annually**

We commend the Scottish Government’s expansion of its Modern Apprenticeship programme from the current 25,000 starts a year to 30,000 by 2020.

However, 2014 figures from Skills Development Scotland show that only 0.32% of those in a Modern Apprenticeship have a declared disability, down from 0.48% in 2010/11, yet approximately 8% of the 16-24 year old target population is disabled. We mention this with caution as figures are based upon self-declaration by the individual and there will be instances where people choose not to disclose their status, but this figure is still woefully low.

As a society, we have a collective responsibility to give the most vulnerable people the opportunity to realise their full potential. The rewards of getting these young people, many of whom boast excellent skills, into work are well worth it, with higher loyalty and retention rates. Apprenticeship programmes provide the opportunity to do just this and at the same time help businesses thrive, especially in the sectors where we are currently facing a skills shortage.

We therefore support the implementation of a target against which the number of young disabled entering apprenticeships can be measured.

**Recommendation 36: Employers who want to employ a young disabled person should be encouraged and supported to do so.**

By the time they are 26 young people with complex needs and care experience are nearly 4 times more likely to be unemployed than their wider peer group, with care leavers facing among the most dire outcomes. Not only languishing at the bottom of employment leagues, but also those for health, education and crime. They are more likely to die prematurely, be unemployed, be addicted to drugs or alcohol and be imprisoned.

As the Scottish Government’s skills agency Skills Development Scotland has a responsibility to work with services and employers to reduce the stigma of employing those with complex needs and care experience and to provide the extra support to those who need it in order to secure sustainable employment and reach positive destinations.

Again, the Scottish Government is to be commended for its recent work in supporting those with complex needs and care experience through the likes of the expanded Employer Recruitment
Incentive (ERI) and the Make Young People Your Business Campaign. These and other packages of support available to employers and young people with ASN should received further funding and be made more widely promoted, as well as a greater effort made to support employers to personalise and design jobs for young people in this category and provide appropriate training.

We need to now Scotland’s employers to look beyond the label when taking on new employees and take advantage of the various recruitment incentives and support mechanisms that are on offer.

**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?**

The Wood Commission Report highlights the following existing inequalities for those with complex needs and care experience:

- Young people with disabilities are much more likely to experience difficult transition through education and to be unemployed after they leave education.
- And young care leavers as a group experience some of the poorest educational and employment outcomes of any group of young people in society.

Splitting young people off into separate streams at school age would undoubtedly deepen these inequalities and would serve to increase the existing stigma regarding those with complex needs and care experience.

It would further discourage employers from seeing and understanding the merits of taking on young people from this grouping, who could in turn be left unmotivated and demoralised. This approach could lead to disengagement from education by those with complex needs and care experience.

In order to avoid further disadvantaging this grouping we would recommend the following:

- A national review of educational opportunities and employability services.
- With a specific focus on career management skills, person centred careers advice must become part of the curriculum for ages 13+ to ensure effective engagement with all young people.
- Greater cohesion and increased dialogue between schools, local service providers and local employers. In order to implement careers education, schools need to be aware of the ‘skills for work’ that employers are looking for.
- A greater holistic approach combining financial resources as well as targeted support is vital in assisting those who have care experience and complex needs to re-engage with education and training and ensure that they are ready to take up employment. Learning and training programmes must recognise that these young people will have complicated needs as they make the transition into adulthood, requiring support covering housing, health and education.
- Encourage the public and private sectors as significant employers to make greater use of work experience opportunities, in particular for those young people with complex needs and care experience. It is crucial to begin working with young people as early as possible,
highlighting the vocational pathways that are available in order to prevent them from disengaging.

**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 note that socio-economic inequalities are of great concern and are definitely something that should be tackled, we are concerned that this consultation has chosen to focus only on this particular area.

We believe that this question should be expanded to include those with disabilities as the full Wood report does. We are concerned that those with learning disabilities, complex needs and care experience have not been included in this consultation and that the proposed consultation later on in 2015 only extends to those with physical disabilities.

In the equalities section of the Wood Report, Commission specifically illustrated the points made by using a case study from ENABLE Scotland of those with “learning disabilities” not just physical disabilities.

Those with learning disabilities face a huge number of barriers to sustainable employment and it is disappointing that we do not have the opportunity to comment upon how these specific inequalities might be overcome.