Commission for Developing Scotland’s Young Workforce

About Who Cares? Scotland

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 experience. At Who Cares? Scotland we utilise the voice of the care experienced population of Scotland to inform everything we do as an organisation. Most recently we have published research that sought to ascertain care experienced young people’s interpretation and views of the new Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014. 87 care experienced young people contributed to the research. This research can be accessed here.

Background

Who Cares? Scotland is a member of the SCSC, a representative body for children and young people with Additional Support Needs (ASN). As a coalition the SCSC has responded to this committee’s call for evidence, with our support. The SCSC submission is focused on the needs of children and young people from a diverse range of backgrounds and social circumstances. Our organisation has a purpose to represent the needs of the care experienced population of Scotland, and as a result we are submitting an individual response focused solely on the views and needs of this group of young people.

We believe there is a need for an individual response as the report has a focus on tackling socio-economic inequalities. However, the inequalities faced by care experienced young people do not appear to have been afforded the same consideration. In 2014 Scottish Government statistics highlighted that 85% of the looked after population leave school at the earliest possible stage\(^1\) and only around 4% presently transition from school to university education. Educational outcomes highlight the need for care experienced young people to be provided with adequate support, tailored to their needs. Needs led support will better enable them to achieve the same as their non-

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looked after peers. We asked young people about their education experiences in the research mentioned above. 75% of the young people who were consulted informed us they were not in further or higher education. 60% of these young people had aspirations to access further and higher education in the future and they identified that they would need support in doing this to overcome the barriers they face².

Since the publication of The Curtis Report in 1946, a report on children and young people deprived of a normal home life, it has been widely acknowledged that educational attainment has implications for looked after children’s future life chances³. Care experienced young people are at higher risk than their non-looked after peers of experiencing social problems. It is imperative that education is a protective factor that they can achieve, better preparing them for independent living and positively impacting on their life chances.

**Who Cares? Scotland 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?*

If the Wood Report’s recommendations were to be fully implemented we believe that the educational outcomes for the care experienced population would improve. We believe that the full implementation of the recommendations would also lead to an increase in the numbers of looked after young people going on to positive destinations.

We are of the view however, that any form of support should be needs led, and underpinned by relationship based practice. If support was not done on a needs led basis then the support package offered to the young person would be misinformed, and therefore ineffective. The focus of vocational educational opportunities should not result in teachers seeing beyond presenting issues and encouraging all young people to achieve at whatever level they are capable of, regardless of whether or not they have a care identity.

In saying this we are of the view that if the recommendations were to be fully implemented then the numbers being able to better engage in education would be better placed to transition into employment, further training or education.

The following recommendations of the Wood Report speak specifically to care experienced young people:

*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.

As with the SCSC response to the committee, we cannot stress how important early and person centred transition programmes are.

Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2009 deems that looked-after children and young people are entitled to ASN support throughout their education; unless the education authority assesses otherwise. This Act also informs that all students who have additional support needs should be supported in a multi-disciplinary manner to plan for their transition out of secondary education; at least a year in advance. We support calls from our partners in other organisations who advocate that this transitioning planning should begin at an earlier stage. We believe that the imbedding of GIRFEC into legislation, with the incremental implementation of The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act, will ensure this can be done with greater ease. It is important to note however, that when schools assess a care experienced young person as not in need of additional support for learning then their automatic entitlement to support ceases. At Who Cares? Scotland we are fully supportive of the minimum intervention principal of legislation. However, we believe that care experienced young people should have support to address any unmet need as their looked after status evidences they require intervention to meet their most basic of needs. Our advocacy experience informs that there are instances when care experienced young people do not have access to support as their needs are not assessed to be complex. We would advocate that the care experienced young person’s views are taken into account during all assessment process they are involved in. This will ensure that a greater number of care experienced young people feel prepared to transition out of secondary education successfully.

Our independent advocacy experience informs us that the inclusion of care experienced young people in this assessment process varies not only from school to school but from individual to individual. It is essential that those assessing the educational support needs of an individual ensure that the young person is aware of the process and that they can contribute to it. Assessments are utilised to inform intervention; in this instance educational support. If the assessment is not holistic and accurate then the support implemented will be insufficient. This could not just adversely impact on the distribution of scarce resources, but most importantly leave educational support needs unaddressed. It is imperative that all care experienced young people are enabled to reach their full potential and support is available to address all unmet needs.

We are supportive of the recommendations that access to education for care leavers is not impeded by the enforcement of rigid age-restrictions. This will ensure that a more needs led approach is adopted in the provision of vocational education. We would encourage that this approach is considered across the education system and not solely afforded to those pursuing access to vocational education.

The implementation of GIRFEC across the public sector has meant that ‘achieving’ is one of the indicators used in assessing a child or a young person’s wellbeing. The use of the wellbeing indicators should assist those supporting care experienced young people through educational

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transitions by doing it earlier and more effectively. We are hopeful that the Named Person provision, Part 4 of The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, will also assist in the efforts in improving the educational attainment for all, but more specifically the care experienced population; and those on the periphery of being taken into care. These provisions should ensure that education, and additional support if required, will be delivered in a manner underpinned by relationship based practice and in a collaborative manner by all those providing support in the young person’s life.

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?

It is acknowledged within The Wood Commission Report that the educational and employment outcomes for those with care experience are amongst the worst of Scotland’s young people. The attainment level for Scotland’s care experienced population will not be addressed by “splitting young people off into separate streams at school age”. We commend the reports aim to enhance vocational content, whilst still ensuring inclusion within the education system.

If groups of young people were to be taught in differing “streams” during their school career we believe the stigma and discrimination, which care experienced young people are often subject to, could potentially worsen. Positive work is being done within the care system to better enable care experienced young people to become more integrated within their community. This must now be replicated across the public sector. We must support meeting the needs of all our young people, including the care experienced child, whilst promoting inclusion for all.

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

It is essential that attempts are made to address socio-economic inequalities as there is undoubtedly a link between poor educational attainment and deprivation. However, the Wood Report acknowledges that educational attainment will not improve by having a singular focus on one issue.

We, along with other organisations, are concerned that this call for evidence is not fully reflective of the measures required to best support the care experienced population in education. We are hopeful that the consultation proposed for later this year will acknowledge the needs of the care experienced population in considering measures to address the attainment gap.

If the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act is to truly evoke transformational change in Scotland then all measures taken by corporate parents to improve the outcomes of the general population must consider the needs of the care experienced young people. All of Scotland’s children need the same opportunities enabling them to aspire for a better future and to become a contributing responsible citizen.

If you wish to discuss this further please contact:

Thomas Timlin, Policy Development Officer: ttimlin@whocaresscotland.org
Carly Edgar, Senior Policy Development Officer: cedgar@whocaresscotland.org