ADES would support the remit of the Committee in examining the reasons why more significant progress has not been made since devolution in improving the educational attainment of Looked After Children and at what can be done. The Scottish Government statistics, which have become increasingly more detailed, provides evidence that Looked After Children tend to have poorer school attendance records, higher rates of school exclusion and are less likely to go on to employment, further or higher education training or voluntary work after leaving school. They also form a very vulnerable group of young adults whose life chances and outcomes tend to be more negative in terms of being homeless, involved in the justice system or involved in substance abuse. It is important to note that the statistics show particularly poor outcomes for those children and young people who are looked after at home and the analysis of the education statistics produced by the Scottish Government makes that very clear.

ADES has been involved in the Looked After Children's Strategic Implementation Group and the activity hub related to improving learning outcomes linked to LACSIG. This was a particular issue that was investigated by the Improving Learning Outcomes Activity Hub and there are some particular issues related to Looked After Children living at home that we will outline in our submission.

The reasons for poor educational outcomes for Looked After Children are very complex. As a result the approaches to how educational outcomes could be improved are also complex. One of the key issues is that there is a strong link between attendance at school and attainment and research suggests that there are significant positive relationships between the two. Looked After Children often experience disrupted education making high levels of attendance more difficult and if they have been transferred through a number of care placements this again adds to the difficulty. A multi-agency approach to promoting attendance at school on a consistent and sustained basis will contribute towards improving attainment. It also provides an individual with an aspect of their life that is secure and stable and examples of where Looked After Children are successful tend to feature this stability of a learning environment with positive adult support.

There is also a relationship between early language development, early reading and later educational attainment. Where very young children experience chaotic family life, where effective and rich early learning play and language development are not experienced then this will have an impact on later educational attainment. One of the things that will be important to consider, particularly in children in the care system who are under three, is how their socialisation, language development and early learning needs are addressed through care planning.
The importance of stability is in terms of learning and caring is essential. Children who are in an environment that provides consistency, stability and security are much more likely to have higher levels of attainment. Being successful in life depends on the underpinning conditions for well-being and relationships being present in everyday life. A child with a disrupted environment is less likely to establish either their own well-being or effective long term relationships.

There have been a significant number of policy developments and government initiatives emanating initially from the Learning with Care report and continuing through policies such as We Can and Must Do Better.

A great deal of effort has been put into training, for example the training for designated managers supported by the Core Tasks for Designated Managers and legislation such as the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2009 defining the requirements for providing additional support for Looked After Children and Young People.

The conclusion is that there is an adequate policy and legislative framework which allows public services to facilitate support for children and young people. This has been further reinforced by the requirement for Corporate Parenting Plans. The key issue is that despite this work over the last 10 or 12 years we are still in the position where this group of young people have had a continued focus at national and local levels, but the outcomes are still not as good as they should be for these young people.

This leads to considering a number of issues:

- Do the existing systems through which Looked After Children and Young People progress create barriers for them and what could be done working across agencies to reduce these barriers, e.g. the number of care places that a child may experience over a given period of time?

- A change in culture and practice is fundamental to ensure that all agencies can deliver services that are effective in meeting the needs of this particular group. This requires a detailed understanding of the interface between, for example health, education, social care and the justice system and where they work most effectively together and where they create barriers.

- The model of inclusive schooling supported by Curriculum for Excellence, in principle, is the way in which schools will be able to more effectively respond to the educational needs of these young people. However, again that requires a shift in culture and in practice. There is also the issue of a national perspective on what is a successful school. We are still focusing very much on the examination results as being the effective way of measuring what is a good school. A different set of measures could be developed that endorse nationally the importance of schools including all pupils and provide value added for all pupils. This is an issue that the new inspection bodies need to consider.

The concept of corporate parenting has been one that has existed for a while and local authorities are required to have a Corporate Parenting Strategy. As yet no evidence
has been collected as to the direct correlation between the establishment of such a strategy and positive outcomes for young people.

At this point in time it is likely that there are varying levels of success related to Corporate Parenting Strategies but this would need some evaluation.

As was indicated at the beginning of the this submission, the group that is of the most concern in terms of outcomes but has probably had the least consideration over the last 10 years are those children who are looked after but live at home. The national data indicates that they have, of all the sub-sets of Looked After Children and Young People, the poorest educational outcomes across the board. Poor outcomes relate to attendance, poor parental care and support, chaotic family environments, possible substance or domestic abuse impacting on the child and this significantly affects relationships in school and with peer groups because of poor attendance and therefore poor attachment to those social groups. This will all be part of long term established patterns of experience at home, in the community and in the school which are difficult to change.

There are a number of strategies where it is evident that there can be an impact on the educational attainment of Looked After Children. These can all be fitted within strategies related to the implementation of Getting It Right and also Curriculum for Excellence. They include:

- Earlier identification and intervention with children and young people living in situations which have a negative impact on their educational progress.
- Better assessment and intervention in relation to early learning and local community based support for more effective parenting for children under three.
- Plans such as additional support plans and child plans should reflect both strategies to support the home situation and clear targets to improve developmental/educational outcomes from the earliest age.
- Joint working between key staff in different agencies to improve the understanding of how issues at home impact on educational progress.
- A focus on ensuring that children’s homes and foster care placements are educationally rich environments.
- A continuation of training for designated managers and for staff coming into professions such as trainee social workers and probationary teachers. Within the context of Getting It Right the idea of core competencies for everybody who works with children would particularly support this group. This should also be extended to services providing community learning, sport and cultural activities.
- The new Inspectorate bodies must give an increased level of attention both at a service level (local authority) and at the front line delivery level (schools, early years centres) so that there is an awareness of where practice is effective but also where there are concerns. This should also be included within any requirements for self-evaluation at school level but also local authority level.
- Some consideration needs to be given to the effectiveness of corporate parenting strategies and the direct impact on the educational outcomes for Looked After Children but also improving life chances.
• An increased focus on the very specific needs of Looked After Children who live at home in terms of parental support, attendance and developing the role of significant adults who can support learning.
• Support for young people who are looked after as they progress into work, training or further or higher education requires further consideration. Often these are young people who are lacking in resilience and do not have the networks or family support which can help them in sustaining places. There is a need for more systematic ongoing mentoring and safety net support to ensure positive outcomes.
• The development of collective culture across all agencies to give a higher value and higher levels of expectation related to education that can be shared with parents and carers and children and young people. It is important to raise aspirations and expectations on a collective basis.