Introduction
CELCIS welcomed the opportunity to present oral evidence to the Education and Culture Committee. During the oral evidence session, Claire Burns (Strategic Policy Implementation Manager) was asked by the Committee to share best practice examples that have improved educational outcomes for looked after children. Across Scotland, there is a considerable breadth and diversity of interventions aimed at improving the educational outcomes for looked after children at different stages of their childhoods. This work requires a committed multi-agency approach in which the voluntary sector can play a pivotal role. In this paper, we draw together some key learning and principles that should inform any intervention aimed at improving the educational outcomes of looked after children.

National overview
There are key opportunities for learning ‘what works’ in improving educational outcomes for looked after children and young people across Scotland. In 2004, the Scottish Minister for Education and Young People announced a £6 million grant to support a programme of pilots across local authorities to improve educational outcomes for looked after children and young people. A research study was undertaken to identify interventions that appeared to make the most difference in terms of both the educational experience and outcomes of the looked after children and young people participating in the local authority pilot projects (Connelly, et al., 2008). Data on attendance, exclusions and attainment were collected for a population of more than 600 children and young people. The research also analysed qualitative data, based on interviews with project co-ordinators, professionals, children and young people, and their parents and carers.

The study highlighted four ‘key factors of success’: a flexible, personalised approach providing a wide breadth of learning opportunities; positive attitudes towards looked after children among staff; trusting relationships between staff and young people that continued over time and activities that encouraged the development of resilience among young people (Connelly et al., 2008).

The key impacts of the pilots

- Creating a general desire to increase achievement, while providing support for young people, their parents and carers and schools. Practitioners also emphasised the importance of stability and a sense of normality for looked after children and young people, as the basis of achievement in education.
Parents and carers had derived immense support indirectly from interventions designed to improve the achievement of their children. They also indicated that involvement in pilot activities had made a positive impact on the self esteem and confidence of their children.

Attendance at school improved among the pilot participants, in all age groups, findings which were statistically significant among 9-10 year olds and those over 15. The instances of exclusion and the number of days excluded reduced significantly amongst those young people over 15.

About 40% of the young people participating in the pilots advanced by one 5-14 National Assessment level, much better than the average progress reported for all looked after children and similar to advances made by non-looked after children nationally.

Younger looked after children who had high levels of involvement in the pilots appeared to have made appreciably more progress in one year than the others, measured by 5-14 National Assessments in reading and writing. This is encouraging because it also suggests that providing targeted additional support can raise attainment.

**Examples of ‘Promising Practice’**

There are many examples of promising practice across Scotland. This provides an opportunity for local authorities to learn from each other, to consolidate practice and plan for the future. In Connelly et al’s (2008) work, five interventions were highlighted: Direct support; personal educational planning; support for children at transition points (e.g. moving from primary to secondary school); developing staff and parent/carer capacity and using information technology/computer-based approaches. Local authorities are providing a range of interventions across these areas in partnership with other sectors. In 2010 the Looked after Children’s Strategic Implementation Group’s (LACSIG) *Improving Learning Outcomes Activity Hub* invited the 32 local authorities in Scotland to give an update on their progress since the pilot programmes came to an end.¹ 19 local authorities responded and identified the progress and barriers in improving educational outcomes for looked after children.

Almost all local authorities responded that providing direct support to looked after children improved learning outcomes (for example, Angus has two LAC support teachers; Aberdeen City has dedicated teachers in residential units; Perth and Kinross Reintegration Team work with the whole family).

Local authorities also highlighted the positive impact of multi-agency working at a strategic and local level to improve information sharing and planning (for example, West Lothian had a Multi-agency team for Looked after Children; Dumfries and Galloway had developed partnership working to improve

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¹ LACSIG (2011) Improving learning outcomes for Looked after Children: Practice examples (Unpublished report)
information sharing; Falkirk had a Post 16 multi agency planning group for transitions).

- The role of the Designated Manager in providing training, being a contact point for LAC and co-ordinating activities, was broadly welcomed. The use of *We Can and Must Do Better* training materials have been received very positively and are seen as a valuable resource. However, although welcomed, attending training was limited in some local authorities due to pressures on staff time. One solution may be the further use of Designated Managers in providing training (with external support as necessary) on-site focused on the specific support needs of the looked after children at the school.