Education and Culture Committee
Inquiry into the educational attainment of looked after children

Entrepreneurial Exchange in Scotland

The Entrepreneurial Exchange in Scotland is a unique model created by and for entrepreneurs. We have approximately 450 members, heading-up companies employing more than 270,000 people and with a collective turnover of over £20 billion. Our activities are focused on collaboration & shared learning. We support growth oriented entrepreneurs who commit to our tenant of “Work hard, play hard, give something back”.

Enlight

Enlight is the mechanism for Exchange members to “Give something back” by engaging in Venture Philanthropy. Our model enables members to give time to provide skills & expertise to other organisations as well as cash investment. Our USP is capacity to invest in more “high risk” ventures that have the potential to achieve long-term meaningful change and enable innovation.

Enlight has chosen to work on two programmes - The Change Programme and The Strategic Programme. Both are focused on supporting under 25 year olds in Scotland.

Our Strategic programme aims to tackle one of the most challenging areas of child deprivation - The care of children who can no longer live safely with their birth family, or who lose that family.

The strategic programme builds on the successes of the more established “Change Programme”. Two of the most significant indicators of success in changing the lives of young people in care are:

1. The leadership qualities of the local authority and the individual establishments (schools, care homes, social services)
2. Access to high quality and consistent mentoring support from an adult role model.

We have met with organisations involved in working with looked after young people, from the Scottish Government and local authorities to charities and in particular, with the young people themselves. Through these consultations we have developed a robust, evidence based framework that will enable us to make a strategic, systemic change. Our focus will be on improving educational attainment & achievement.

We believe that by identifying and building on successful interventions in the transition from Primary to secondary School we can affect a positive change in looked after children’s long term prospects and we know that change is not only possible, it is imperative.
Despite considerable efforts to improve services for children who are looked after, the outcomes on leaving care for a large proportion of them are still poor and they are highly likely to be socially excluded.

**Leadership**

Not only is poor educational attainment a characteristic of Looked after children but is an area where our Local Authorities seem reluctant to demonstrate real ambition and vision. Across all of the single outcome agreements between authorities and the Scottish Government you will see that the attainment targets set for looked after children is 2 standard grades in English and maths at level 3. There are no targets for anything beyond Standard Grade. What are the aspirations for young people who stay on at school beyond 16? It seems that the authority doesn’t have to do very much.

So is this ambitious enough? Is this what we would want for our children.

Local authorities do not generally apply the concept of ‘being a good parent’ to their relationship with looked after children. Services are too inflexible to listen and respond to the needs of individual children. Low expectations and aspirations for children looked after by local authorities are a continuing barrier to improvements in their care. Social service managers appear to be holding back change by giving a higher priority to costs and budgets than to their corporate role as parents.

*Each local authority, along with its partners, should develop an education, employment and training strategy to cover all young people in their area who have been looked after. This should include plans for better information systems; communication to staff at all levels of their responsibilities in this area; and mechanisms to provide mainstream funding for services. This should include a scheme for brokerage with large employers.*

A major issue is the need to involve employers in the private sector in providing opportunities for young people who have been looked after. A key role at authority level should be to provide brokerage with large employers to gain their commitment to providing employment opportunities across the authority.

**Service Provision**

Because of lower educational achievements there are still a very significant proportion of young people who will not be able to engage with schemes aimed at the wider population and there is a danger that in generic schemes their needs will be unmet.

As corporate parents, the children’s sector needs to take a lead in ensuring schemes lead to ‘real jobs.’ One possibility is through the provision of apprenticeships and the use of supernumerary posts leading to long term employment. This should run across all the functions of the agencies involved.

A mechanism is needed to share the growing experience of providing employment opportunities. The Scottish Government should provide a map of what is currently available and contacts for projects. These should continue to be updated and published and this responsibility should be assumed at authority level.
A key problem is that responsibility for this work is either split between a number of people or was one small part of a busy person’s job. Stronger ownership could be achieved by having a coordinator. Where an authority has a small number of looked after children, such a role might be shared with neighbouring authorities.

*Each local authority should have a coordinator whose sole responsibility is to develop sustainable employment opportunities.*

Research identifies the need to relieve young people of concerns about their accommodation if they are to engage successfully in gaining employment. This requires further improvement in the joint actions between housing suppliers and departments for children’s services as well as financial support for the accommodation of young people engaged in employment and training.

*A key requirement is the further development of stable accommodation for care leavers who participate in training and employment opportunities.*

**The role of Carers**

*Training and education at all levels for carers needs to promote the importance of education and employment for looked after children*

The attitudes and values of carers about education and employment are key factors in the motivation of children. The children’s workforce needs to be prepared for their role in raising children’s aspirations for and preparing them to do better in education and employment.

The organisation as a whole needs to care about what happens to each individual child, whether they are happy, doing well at school, are healthy, have friends, and so on. In reality, the responsibility for children’s welfare is fragmented amongst different people and different organisations.
Enlight’s Experience

The Looked After Supported Employment (LASE) Scheme provides paid work experience for 'looked after' young people aged between 16 and 19. It is an opportunity for new and positive experiences within a work place environment.

Young people on the scheme experience working life, but with that much-needed, additional, personal support. Every young person has a work-place mentor who will supervise, support and encourage, when necessary. We will provide references to future employers if a young person completes the main parts of the scheme.

Placements are organised to suit the individual needs of young people and vary from two to five days a week. The length of placement depends on the training undertaken. Young people who do not feel ready for accredited training can have a placement for up to 12 weeks.

Many of the young participants have struggled to achieve in other areas of their life, so it is a credit to LASE that all the young people currently on the scheme are doing vocational training. Our hope is that both the work experience and
training will equip these young people with the skills, confidence and self-discipline for future work.

- Originally, all placements were within Bolton Council. Most departments have responded to their 'corporate parenting' role by offering looked after young people various opportunities. They provide supportive, safe and caring placements which offer self-development and work-place satisfaction. Young people gain an overview of how these council departments work and there are possibilities for apprenticeships or more permanent employment, in the future.

- Limitations in the type of placement available within the council have been addressed by developing links with local businesses and several good, reliable placements have been secured within the Bolton area.

- The scheme is managed through the Corporate Children's Office. The scheme co-ordinator makes sure that both mentors and young people are fully supported throughout the placement.