Thank you for giving Quarriers the opportunity to respond to this consultation. Quarriers is a major Scottish charity providing practical care and support every day to thousands of people. Through more than 120 services for Adult Disability, Children and Families, Epilepsy and Young Adults in Scotland and a growing number of services in parts of England, we challenge inequality of opportunity and choice, to bring about positive change in people’s lives.

Quarriers has a particular interest in providing support to children and young people, and has developed a number of innovative programmes that assist young people who have become, or are at risk of becoming, looked after, and/or have additional support needs in relation to learning and the formal education system. This includes a residential school and care resource; a support service that offers support to young people to make a successful transition from primary to secondary education; support for children and families experiencing challenging circumstances through Family Resource Centres in Glasgow; residential and family based short breaks for children with disabilities; childcare and family support at home projects; and long term specialist residential care for children and young people with disabilities.

Quarriers believes that poor educational attainment is only one symptom of the challenges faced by looked after children, which should be addressed as part of much wider considerations, and with a view of preventing some of the negative consequences of this, for example:

- 50 per cent of Scottish prisoners have been in care
- more than one in 10 young people leaving care in Scotland experience homelessness within two years
- 45 per cent of looked after children in Scotland have mental health problems.

There are many diverse elements which impact on pupils’ educational attainment, which require to be addressed using a wide range of approaches and attitudes. Over the past years, there has been a large amount of research, reports and regulatory frameworks concerned with looked after children and the challenges they face, eg Learning With Care. This submission does not revisit this wealth of knowledge but instead intends to focus on what, in our experience, works well for looked after children and to explore how this could be further developed.

**Supporting children’s wellbeing by getting alongside families**

Educational attainment is only one aspect of a child’s life, but can be an important measure of lack of wider wellbeing. A child who does not experience consistent care and nurture within loving, safe primary attachment relationship/s in the very early and pre-nursery school stages of life is less equipped to understand and be able to adapt to the current education model we offer within Scottish schools. The greater majority of
looked after children become looked after as a result of poor early life experiences, disrupted attachment relationships, and/or abuse and neglect. Over recent years, through the work of clinical practitioners and in particular neuroscientists such as Bruce Perry, we are beginning to understand that children who are abused, neglected and traumatised in infancy and early years sustain acquired brain injury and that we need to adapt our education and teaching methods and models to respond effectively to this – to teach children how to learn – rather than expecting troubled children to adapt to our current universal provision.

Families experiencing difficulties need a range of community-based support, not just “parenting programmes”, which can work for some families, some of the time, but should not be regarded as a panacea for all. There is clear evidence that it is more difficult for children facing challenges such as poverty, poor housing and health, disability and discrimination, to be kept safe and to achieve their full potential, including educational attainment. However, it is also recognised that this disadvantage can be decreased by factors such as parental access to supportive personal networks and community cohesion, and that parents’ access to social and community support are critical to the resilience of individual families and children. Family centres are ideal locations from which a range of flexible services can be offered, because they provide a non-stigmatised, informal atmosphere and are highly valued as a ‘one-stop shop’, being well placed to make services accessible, and reach families who may not normally engage with more formal service provision. Many children and their families can benefit from the emotional, educational and social supports and resources they provide, for the same cost as removing a sibling group from their family and placing them in specialist residential care.

Using residential care as a positive choice
However, research shows that the looked after children population in foster placements and residential care/schools do considerably better overall at school than their peers who are looked after at home. There is no clear cut explanation for this – but given what we know about the importance of healthy attachment and consistent care-giving to enable children to grow and learn positively, for some children care settings provides the security, stability, role modelling and guidance that their birth family cannot.

Despite the commitments made in ‘Higher Aspirations’ following the NRCCI, residential childcare is often still seen as a last resort when everything else has failed. The children now being referred to Quarriers Seafield School are some of the most damaged – psychologically, physically and emotionally. It is not uncommon for children to have experienced between 5 and 10 different care placements before coming to the school, and to have moved repeatedly in and out of care. Extensive gaps in education are usual. But for many children, high quality residential care could be a positive choice. Well-qualified and skilled staff provide a positive, motivating environment where children benefit from social, psychological and educational opportunities which, far from placing them at disadvantage, constructively contribute to their well-being and development.
Inclusion is extremely important at Seafield and pupils are encouraged to play an active role in the school, including participating in the Young People’s Parliament. This is often the first time that some children have had a say in what happens in their lives and results in increased motivation for learning. Every child has a dedicated key worker and is offered an opportunity to engage with a volunteer befriender. Parental involvement in the school is proactively promoted, in a sensitive and positive way, to try and minimise the gap that can develop between school and home life.

However, there needs to be far better ‘join up’ between the professionals and agencies involved in the corporate parenting of children looked after away from home. Frequently, local authorities refer children in crisis to resources like Seafield following placement breakdown in a residential or foster placement. Children who experience constant disruption and placement change are very unlikely to build trusting relationships with teaching and education staff, form lasting friendships with school mates, benefit from the ‘whole school community’ learning experience, and achieve academically.

The way in which we deliver teacher training and provide CPD for education staff must change to ensure that our educators understand the issues affecting looked after young people and respond appropriately.

**Improved implementation of Additional Support for Learning**

It is disappointing that Additional Support for Learning has not had a greater impact on the educational attainment of looked after children. There appears to be little local authority support and very few Co-ordinated Support Plans. It is, therefore, difficult to access the additional resources that many children need and much time and effort is spent in attempts to persuade local authorities and health services to provide this.

The mainstream education system does not appear to be responsive to the needs of looked after children, although the majority of children are schooled there. Learning support units are not well resourced and would benefit from improved levels of specialist support. There is little time for assessment and planning, and often looked after children are moved to another placement before any actual remedial work has been established.

Learning difficulties are often ‘missed’ due to children having been repeatedly excluded and moved from one school to another, with teaching staff (currently poorly trained in understanding child and brain development) often unable to look beyond a child’s difficult behaviour and recognise that the child has learning and/or attachment issues that mean they are physically and psychologically not able to sit in a classroom setting and cope with our current group teaching approach.

Likewise social workers and others involved in supporting children and young people need to understand the education system and give cognisance to the impact of disruption e.g. placement change on a young person’s ability to achieve positive educational outcomes. Teachers are not trained in understanding children holistically, and social workers and care givers with the responsibility to ensure the child receives effective support in relation to the SHANARI wheel indicators are not trained to
understand the education system, yet we know from the Edinburgh report that doing well at school is vitally important in relation to future outcomes for children and young people across all SHANARI indicators.

**Preventing disengagement by supporting transitions**
A major challenge for any young person is the move from primary to secondary school, but for looked after children this can be particularly difficult. Dealing with the unknown at school, at a time of difficult family circumstances, can cause extreme levels of distress and worry, and without additional support at this time, there are many children who are at risk of disengaging completely from the education system. Working with pupils from primary 6 through to secondary year 1, the Quarriers Opt In project helps young people and families deal with the difficulties and anxieties which can affect young people at this important transition stage between primary and secondary schooling. The aim is to ensure that vulnerable young people make successful transitions and ultimately reach their potential as learners and young citizens.

**Using alternative models and learning from others**
Quarriers has been piloting the European model of Social Pedagogy to improve outcomes for young people who are looked after in 2 residential children’s homes in the South West of England. These young people are some of the most damaged children, having been subjected to neglect, abuse or exposed to extreme trauma, and they often find it difficult to build appropriate and stable relationships and engage in the normal educational, recreational and social activities of their peers.

Support to these children comes from a whole range of agencies and professionals. Children living in children’s homes can therefore have contact with many professionals for relatively short periods of time and they often view these interventions as “doing things to them” as opposed to working “with them”.

Social Pedagogues are highly qualified professionals, trained in a number of disciplines enabling them to provide a holistic, personal approach to work with children. In 2009 Quarriers recruited three German Social Pedagogues to work alongside Residential Child Care Workers in two children’s homes and some distinct improved outputs with children were observed, including improved attendance and engagement in education.

In Denmark and Germany, the use of social pedagogy as an approach for direct practice with children produces better quality of life and outcomes for children in residential care than those experienced by young people in England. This includes better educational achievement (60% go on to further or higher education) and employment prospects, and lower rates of teenage pregnancy and offending behaviour.

Consideration might also be given to the use of a “life coach” model. This is currently being introduced in one of Quarriers children’s homes in England and, although at an early stage, it is already having an impact on improved school attendance by having a “life coach” working alongside the child i.e. working from the children’s home, building strong relationships and being prepared to go the extra mile. The Life Coach also works
with school staff to enable them to understand the pressures that looked after children face and offer them support.

**Combining our resources - the third sector as a valued partner**

In these times of economic challenge, it is essential that scarce resources are shared and combined to produce different outcomes for looked after children. The Third sector can offer different ways of doing things, a different way of thinking and a less proscriptive approach. There are tremendous opportunities for better shared learning between the voluntary and statutory sectors.

The learning gained by Quarriers staff and the young people we support could be applied across a range of educational settings, to provide an alternative approach, and to develop thinking that recognises the value of the third sector instead of seeing it a merely a provider of services. This is particularly so for our residential and fostering services who are acting as the day to day parent or ‘shared carers’ for young people in care away from home, but are rarely included in any meaningful way in transition planning for looked after children.