



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Social Security Committee

Thursday 15 November 2018

Session 5



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SOCIAL SECURITY COMMITTEE

23rd Meeting 2018, Session 5

CONVENER

*Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*George Adam (Paisley) (SNP)

*Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)

Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con)

*Michelle Ballantyne (South Scotland) (Con)

*Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab)

*Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green)

*Shona Robison (Dundee City East) (SNP)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Lauren Baigrie (Member of the Scottish Youth Parliament)

Fiona Collie (Carers Scotland)

Gordon Lindhurst (Lothian) (Con) (Committee Substitute)

Allan Lindsay (Young Scot)

Louise Morgan (Carers Trust Scotland)

Wilma Murray (Carers of West Lothian)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Anne Peat

LOCATION

The David Livingstone Room (CR6)

Scottish Parliament

Social Security Committee

Thursday 15 November 2018

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:00]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Bob Doris): Good morning and welcome to the 23rd meeting in 2018 of the Social Security Committee. I remind everyone present to turn off mobile phones and other electronic devices or to put them in silent mode, please, so that they do not disrupt the meeting.

I welcome Gordon Lindhurst, who is attending in place of Jeremy Balfour, who sends his apologies. Our deputy convener, Pauline McNeill, unfortunately cannot make it this morning; she also sends apologies.

Agenda item 1 is a decision on taking in private item 3, which is consideration of evidence. Do we agree to take item 3 in private?

Members indicated agreement.

Scottish Government

Consultation: Young Carer Grant

09:00

The Convener: We move to agenda item 2. To inform its final policy, the Scottish Government has launched a consultation on a young carer grant; the consultation closes on 10 December. The committee agreed to hold an evidence session to inform the views that we might wish to feed back to the Government as part of the consultation. Rather than read out a list of names, I invite everyone around the table to introduce themselves.

I am Bob Doris MSP, the committee convener.

Allan Lindsay (Young Scot): I am the participation and co-design director at Young Scot.

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): I am an MSP for Central Scotland.

Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): I am an MSP for Lothian.

Lauren Baigrie (Member of the Scottish Youth Parliament): I am a member of the Scottish Youth Parliament for Carers Trust Scotland.

Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): I am the MSP for Na h-Eileanan an Iar.

Fiona Collie (Carers Scotland): I am the policy manager for Carers Scotland.

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): I am Paisley's MSP.

Louise Morgan (Carers Trust Scotland): I am the director of Carers Trust Scotland.

Michelle Ballantyne (South Scotland) (Con): I am an MSP for South Scotland.

Wilma Murray (Carers of West Lothian): I am the senior development officer for Carers of West Lothian.

Gordon Lindhurst (Lothian) (Con): I am an MSP for Lothian.

The Convener: I thank everyone for coming along. We have an hour or so for a discussion on the consultation on the young carer grant.

Alison Johnstone will begin the first line of questioning.

Alison Johnstone: I am pleased that we are having this discussion. A young carer grant was a Scottish Green Party manifesto commitment, so we were delighted when the First Minister was swiftly and whole-heartedly supportive of it. There

is cross-party agreement that the issue is something that we want to get right.

Do the witnesses think that £300 is the correct amount for the grant? More generally, is the package of support for young carers in Scotland adequate?

The Convener: Who would like to start on that? Do not be shy.

Fiona Collie: Some good options have been put into the wider support package in terms of the cash amount and the additional support through the Young Scot card and concessionary travel, when it comes. The support needs to be seen as part of the package of support through the Carers (Scotland) Act 2016 and the education maintenance allowance. Although young carers can get support through that allowance, there is still some inconsistent application of the guidance around young carers' ability to perhaps not have perfect attendance or have some lateness.

Young carers have pointed out that £300 is not a huge amount for the grant. It pales in comparison to carers allowance, which is nearer £4,000 a year. However, there has to be a bit of a balance because the young carer grant should not provide a perverse incentive for young people to have inappropriate levels of caring.

Lauren Baigrie: The grant amount is a good starting point; young carers have had nothing, so giving them something is definitely welcome. Young carers do a job, because they are, in essence, working. However, someone who is working full time as a carer would earn a lot more than young carers do, especially those who are 16, 17 or 18 and could get a job. Sometimes young carers cannot get a job because of their caring responsibilities.

After a year or so, the feedback from young carers should be looked at to see what they have to say. Everyone round the table can say that the amount is or is not right, but no one round the table will get the money, so no one can safely say whether it is the right amount.

The Convener: The grant is welcome, but it is a starting point.

Lauren Baigrie: Yes.

Louise Morgan: We agree that the amount is a good start, and we are very supportive of the young carer grant, but the 16-hour eligibility criterion and how much is paid per hour should be looked at. A payment of £300 is only 36p per hour. What does that say about how we value our young people? Doubling the proposed amount to £600 would cost the Scottish Government an additional £500,000, and would bring the total to £1 million. The Scottish social security budget is £2.7 billion.

We think that we could maybe be a bit more generous to our young people.

How the money might be paid could also be looked at. I do not know whether members want to go into that at the moment.

The Convener: We will consider that in due course and you should feel free to come back in on that point. You are saying that the grant is a good starting point, but it is just a starting point.

Louise Morgan: It is a good starting point.

Wilma Murray: The young people whom we have worked with agree that the proposal is good and that it is good that people are thinking about them now. They feel that they are sometimes left on their own and that the grant is a good starting point, but they ask how it will be paid and what the criteria will be. They think that the criteria are quite narrow and that some might miss out on the opportunity to access the grant.

In West Lothian, we have been trying to get free transport for young carers, because our young people are passionate about that. I think that that will be introduced in 2020-21. The young people think that that will be a bit too late for people who need it now.

Allan Lindsay: I want to pick up on what Lauren Baigrie said about the importance of young carers having a say. From our perspective, that is really valuable in respect of the wider package.

Young Scot is working with the young carers vision panel to look at how the Young Scot card can be utilised to offer bespoke entitlements for young carers.

On the wider package, in the process of engaging with young carers we are asking them for their initial thoughts on the issues and barriers that they face and how the Young Scot card can be used to help them to access opportunities to overcome some of the challenges. We are gathering initial information from young people, and it is really valuable to give them that opportunity, because they are the ones who know their experiences and who can really speak about what they need and what is currently lacking.

From our perspective, the Young Scot card is brilliant because it can allow us to do stuff that is universal for all young people who have it. We can also tailor it using the technology in the card to make it bespoke and remove some of the stigma that young carers feel there is with being a young carer; something can be put on the card that can help them to access opportunities without having a big sign attached that says, "I'm a young carer." That is really valuable.

There is still a lot of work for us all to do on the wider package, but it is promising that our current

engagement with young carers is informed by their day-to-day and real-life experiences.

Alison Johnstone: The comments have been helpful. Lauren Baigrie suggested that we need to look at the grant after a year. That was a well-made point. We should use the grant as a starting point, see what difference it has made, and consider how much more of a difference more cash might make. Obviously, we would not want anyone to think that their efforts are worth 36p an hour. I take on board the point that there is a feeling that awareness is being raised and that there is recognition that we are now discussing young carers.

Fiona Collie made a point that was brought home to me strongly when I visited the young carers group in Edinburgh; it was about young carers arriving late, and that being understood in class or at school. That is about having conversations and ensuring that the adults who young carers engage with understand the young carers' family backgrounds. I met a couple of young carers who had almost been put off attending school because, as a result of their caring responsibilities for parents and others in the morning, they sometimes found it difficult to get in on time. There is far more to the issue than money, although that is what we are discussing today.

Fiona Collie: The level of awareness in schools is critical. At the carers parliament last month, we heard feedback from young carers and from families with a young carer about identifying and supporting young carers in schools. That is linked to an issue that arose with the education maintenance allowance; the guidance was changed, but it is not being applied consistently. Schools must have full awareness of young carers and must support them.

Louise Morgan: I will say a little more about identifying young carers in schools and about young carers self-identifying. We worry about the eligibility criteria for the grant. I know that we will come on to that, but it is important to mention that the definition of young caring for the purposes of the grant does not go into the detail for young people who look after someone who has an addiction or a mental health issue.

Such young carers are more likely to be hidden and less likely to self-identify, and they might be the ones who worry about coming in late. Walking into a room when everyone else is already sitting there makes them visible and might make people ask, for example, why they are doing that when their mum does not look as if she has a physical disability or anything wrong with her. There is a lot of worry about young carers who need the grant having to self-identify.

The Convener: Will you say more about the eligibility criteria? You mentioned them previously, so it might be helpful to set out clearly your concerns. What is good and what are your concerns?

Louise Morgan: At the carers parliament, the feeling was that the age range—from 16 to 18—is narrow and that all 18-year-olds should be eligible, not just those who are in school. I know that the criteria are to go hand in hand with the definition of young carers in the Carers (Scotland) Act 2016, but we feel that they are narrow. A lot of young carers have said that the grant will be no good to them at this point in their lives and have asked how having a grant for two years will support them.

How will the 16 hours be assessed? We totally understand why the figure has been chosen, as it is consistent with the eligibility criteria for other benefits, but how will the hours be measured? We hope that that will be done sensitively and sensibly.

Another issue is getting verification from the cared-for person. People with addictions or mental health issues who are supported by young carers might not realise that the young people are supporting them to that degree or at all, and they might not want their child to be called a young carer. Other people will have more to say about that.

The Convener: Lauren Baigrie was nodding while you spoke, so I ask her to put some of her thoughts on the record.

Lauren Baigrie: I will not say too much, because I know that eligibility will be discussed later. The tasks that someone has to undertake to qualify for the grant will miss out a large group—especially those who care for someone who has a condition such as multiple sclerosis. People with MS push themselves to work for as long as possible before they are not able to. When they come home from work, they cannot do anything because they are exhausted, which is when the young carer steps in. What is not taken account of is that even if young carers do not have to undertake physical tasks for someone, such as feed them or help them dress, they still give emotional support to people with, for example, addictions or MS.

There is not a one-size-fits-all definition for what young carers do. Many people forget that caring is not just about undertaking physical tasks. There is a lot more to caring than, for example, helping mum in the shower, feeding someone or helping someone get dressed, which is the old-school idea of what carers do. A lot of the time being a carer is about just listening to what someone has to say,

because they have no one else to talk to about things.

09:15

Fiona Collie: I back those points wholeheartedly. I do not understand why the definition of caring for the young carer grant is different from the definition of caring for the carers allowance, which simply talks about the hours of care and the cared-for person having to have a qualifying benefit. The young carer grant will still require someone to have a qualifying benefit, but it will also require details about perhaps pretty intimate care by a young person. However, the definition misses out that whole group of young carers who Lauren Baigrie talked about.

I do not understand why the definitions around the qualifying criteria are different for the carers allowance and the young carer grant. I understand why the hours are different, but I do not understand why the criteria are different.

The Convener: It would help the committee if you could be a bit more explicit about the type of young carer who might miss out on the grant because of the current eligibility criteria; Lauren Baigrie referred to that, too.

Fiona Collie: There are those who care for people with addictions and people with mental health issues. However, for quite a lot of young carers, part of the caring is about emotional support. In fact, a lot of caring in general is about emotional support and being there for someone. I would point in particular to those who care for people with addictions and mental health issues, but what young carers do in general is a lot wider.

Louise Morgan: To back up what Fiona Collie said about emotional support, research has shown that 82 per cent of young carers say that emotional support is part of their caring role. That is a huge percentage, and emotional support is sometimes the most difficult type of support to give.

The Convener: I do not see other witnesses disagreeing with that point. It is helpful that that is now on the record.

Dr Allan: I realise that we might consider education later, but I am interested in what has been said about young carers' experience of school. Given Lauren Baigrie's role in representing young carers, I wonder whether she can give us anecdotal evidence of what young carers say about their experience of school, and teachers' awareness and understanding of the job that carers do.

Lauren Baigrie: I am more than happy to give anecdotal evidence, because I am very open about my experiences. However, my experience is

very different from many others' experiences because I was lucky to have a fantastic support system at my school. I had a guidance teacher who fully understood what a young carer was and how best to support them. She was in touch with my local young carer centre and she knew that, regardless of what was going on, all she had to do for me was be a listening ear when things were difficult.

One experience in particular happened the day before my higher modern studies exam in sixth year, when my mum had an anaphylactic reaction in the car driving home. She was taken to hospital 13 hours before the exam was to start. I was supposed to go home and revise, but I had three younger siblings in the house and I was like, "Whoa—okay." It was about 5 o'clock at night, but I phoned my school on the off-chance that my guidance teacher would be there, and she was. I told her what had happened and she said, "Okay. Don't worry. Just get some sleep tonight and we'll sort it in the morning."

I went in on the morning of my exam and my guidance teacher—luckily, she was also a modern studies teacher—and my modern studies teacher sat with me before the exam while I just spilled out to them what I knew and they helped fill the gaps. They made me feel confident about going into the exam and they broke questions down for me if I did not understand, because they knew that the night before I had not been able to look over my notes. That is what I always do; I cram the night before to give myself a bit more knowledge.

I have always had a positive experience at school, but that is not the case for a lot of the people I represent. They do not like to tell people that they are young carers, and they feel that not all teachers listen if they tell them. They feel that they cannot access things out of school, such as notes, homework or extra support. Many people feel that schools just do not listen or understand, or that they are not aware, and they feel that they cannot talk to anyone. I hear that all the time, and I am sure that others have heard the same thing. It is like hitting your head off a brick wall; no one understands, and the young carers do not want to say anything because they know that people will not understand.

The Convener: Our papers give us a range of issues to explore. Should I go through them, or would one of my MSP colleagues like to take the line of questioning?

I thought that my colleagues had been stunned into silence, but I see that Mark Griffin has a question.

Mark Griffin: We have touched on the number of young carers who will not be eligible for the grant. The figures that we have suggest that there

are 11,000 young carers in Scotland, but that only 1,700 will be eligible, which is only 15 per cent. What are your views on such a small percentage of young carers being eligible for the grant?

The Convener: Of course, another aspect of that question is who is missing out on the grant? It would be really helpful to know.

Lauren Baigrie: Think about those 1,700 people who are eligible, and then think about how many of those who are eligible will actually have the confidence or knowledge to apply for the grant. You have already limited who can apply for it with the criteria, but you have to think about who knows how to apply for it and who has the confidence in themselves and recognises themselves as a young carer enough to apply for it. That narrows the numbers down even more. Not all of the 1,700 who are eligible will apply for the young carer grant.

Louise Morgan: There could be two young carers of that age in a family looking after the cared-for person, but the regulations talk about only one of them being eligible at any one time. That point also came up at the carers parliament. A 16-year-old could possibly go for two years without being recognised as a young carer. Why should we value their caring role less than that of their older sibling? There is a body of people who could miss out on the young carer grant because of the eligibility criteria.

Fiona Collie: I think that 18-year-olds in full-time education should be included. It is a key transition point and it is a time when they cannot claim carers allowance and, because they are at college, they are too old to claim the grant. Carers allowance is not yet fully devolved and there are on-going discussions about whether there could be changes to the full-time study rule. Lauren Baigrie made a point about reviewing the grant in a year's time. Extending the grant to ensure that it covers 18-year-olds in full-time education is something that we could test again in a year's time, when we see where we are with carers assistance.

I echo Louise Morgan's point about families with two young carers. I should also mention that there are cases where someone else in the family is receiving carers allowance. The regulations, however, do not necessarily recognise the complexity of families. There may be a primary carer—perhaps another parent—in the household, but life for a young person in that family is different and the things that they have to do are different from what other young people have to do. I know from experience that those young people will still have a significant caring role. Think about the fact that carers allowance is for 35 hours a week. There are a lot of other hours in the week when a young person may be supporting a cared-for

person, despite there being someone else in the family who is receiving carers allowance.

The Convener: Do you want to comment on that, Allan?

Allan Lindsay: Not particularly. Our work on the Young Scot national entitlement card and the additional support for young carers is closely aligned to the work around the grant, but it runs parallel to it and is not on the grant itself. We have not been engaging with young people on that specifically.

Mark Griffin: According to the Government consultation, the purpose of the young carer grant is

“to provide support during a key transition period in young carers’ lives to help improve their health and education outcomes as they move into the adult world.”

That purpose would seem to apply to all 11,000 young carers. We have already set out some of the restrictions, which limit eligibility to just 15 per cent of those carers. In a year's time, or if we consider it before we roll out the grant, we will need to recognise that the purpose of the grant would apply to all 11,000 young carers. That is something that the committee should consider when we respond to the Government.

The Convener: Who are the young carers who will not qualify? We know about the 16 and 17-year-olds who might not qualify because of the criteria, as well as the 18-year-olds in full-time education but not at school. Are there other groups that we have not yet spoken about who will not be reached by the young carer grant?

I want us to be clear. Are carers who are younger than 16 part of the group that is missing? Who are we not reaching? As Mark Griffin has said, there are an estimated 11,000 young carers and the majority of them will not get the financial support. Just so the committee can be clear about it, which other young carers will not get the financial support?

Louise Morgan: The eligibility criteria say that the cared-for person must be in receipt of a disability benefit, which does not include the groups that I spoke about before, such as people with addictions or with mental health issues that may not have been formally identified. In those cases the young person's caring role is sometimes much more onerous, because they do not have the support in the community for the person that they look after, yet they are definitely young carers. That accounts for a substantial number of young carers. If we look at our young carer services, and the number of young carers who come from a home where there is a disability benefit going in, there will probably still be a substantial number of young people attending our services.

The Convener: I did not want to put anyone in a difficult position by asking that question. I just wanted to ensure that the committee properly understood where the gaps are and who the individuals are that we are talking about.

Michelle Ballantyne: My great concern is that the majority of young carers who I have worked with or come across do not have parents that have a registered disability that would allow the young people to qualify for the grant. Many of them are in touch with carers organisations and get support, but there are others who are not in touch with anyone.

What do you feel about that and about where we stand on that? Those young carers are often the ones who are in the most difficult position, because those carers whose parents have been identified get more wraparound support already and their parents are being supported in some way.

I also want to touch on the emotional side. Emotional support is given, but for the young carers with whom I have had contact, what they feel is the emotional drain—even if they are not physically doing anything. Some days, those young carers are almost paralysed at school because they are terrified about what they are going to go home to: will their parent still be alive, or perhaps lying on the floor unconscious? Living with that worry day in, day out is exhausting for many of those young people.

I am wondering about two things. The first point is about qualifying for the grant and the conversations that we need to have about that.

The second point is that what is proposed is a lump sum—a one-off annual payment, to support transition. I would like to hear a little about what the witnesses think about a lump sum, as opposed to a weekly payment. I have had feedback from people who said that the trouble with getting a lump sum is that there is a tendency to go out and spend it all on something that we want. As it says in our papers, the problem for young carers is often that they do not have money for the bus fare or lunch, perhaps because they do not want to take money off their parents.

09:30

Lauren Baigrie: On the lump sum idea, I do not think that the £300 should be spent on things like bus fares and lunches; it should enable the young person to be a young person, because they will not have had the time or resources to be a young person. There are things as simple as going to the cinema and paying for driving lessons—things that every young person should have—that young carers cannot have, because of their caring role.

Also, if young people get a lump sum, the money will often go back into the family in some way—it is a new source of money. A lump sum is not the best idea, because the £300 might go straight into the family pot. If the money is given over a period of time, the young carer will have an opportunity to do things more regularly. If the money comes in monthly instalments, it will mean that, rather than just go out once or twice, the young person can do something with their friends every month—or have a driving lesson, go to the cinema, go out for lunch or do something else that they would not usually do. If a lump sum of £300 is paid, it might go straight into the family pot and the young person might not see any of it.

Louise Morgan: I want to pick up on what Michelle Ballantyne said about young carers at school being terrified about what they might come home to. That takes me back to the point about identification. When a young carer comes from the kind of background that we have been talking about, they can be terrified of being identified as a young carer. There is a population that is missing out, because the young people are terribly afraid to come forward and say that they have a caring role.

Fiona Collie: On the qualifying criteria and the cared-for person needing to be in receipt of a qualifying disability benefit, there is a balance to be struck between an approach that is relatively simple—if we can say that about any social security system—and more complex approaches. Receipt of a qualifying benefit is a clear identifying point; there are potentially other ways to identify young carers, such as through young carers services and schools, but there is still an issue with hidden carers remaining hidden.

It is a difficult balance to strike, and I do not know whether we would be able to identify all the hidden young carers who would benefit. We might do so over time. That might be another piece of work to carry out in schools and further education, in the context of the Carers (Scotland) Act 2016. As I said, it is about simplicity versus complexity and whether another approach would reach hidden carers.

Wilma Murray: I agree with Louise Morgan and Fiona Collie. We are a lot better at raising awareness of young carers than we were 10 or 15 years ago, but we still have a long way to go. There needs to be training for staff in colleges and universities and for school staff and nurses. There is some training, but it is not consistent throughout universities and colleges, and there should be more.

There are a lot of good young carers projects out there that are doing good work to raise awareness, but we seem to be just chipping away at things and finding that the same people are

referring young carers for help. Some teachers do not think that it is important for them to have information about pupils' caring roles—that is my experience.

In West Lothian we are working in all the high schools, but it is difficult to get the top people to listen—it is the guidance teachers and the teachers on the ground who are aware of us and who always refer pupils to us. We need to reach the teachers who do not refer, so that we can identify some of the hidden young carers who we are talking about.

Louise Morgan: Carers Trust Scotland now has a project that involves work with all the universities and further education institutions in Scotland to support them to have a recognising student carers award. That work has begun, and we hope that we will help to raise awareness among staff in further and higher education institutions and help them to identify student carers, to make the institutions carer friendly, and to develop policies to identify people and support in education institutions. We hear from staff in colleges and universities that there are bursaries for cared-for and looked-after students, for instance, but there is nothing specifically for student carers, and we think that that probably needs to be addressed. That may not be an issue for today's conversation, but perhaps it can be noted.

Allan Lindsay: The young carers we have engaged with on the additional package have mentioned some of those things. There is often not the understanding that there should be in education, in the workplace or socially. Often, that is not the fault of other people, but they do not take young carers seriously or do not understand them.

On the monetary side of things, some young carers have mentioned education issues; I think that Louise Morgan touched on that. Sometimes it can be about basic things that cost money, such as stationery resources and textbooks—stuff that we all probably take for granted. There is a barrier there for young carers in accessing basic things that they need, which perhaps has a knock-on effect on their education.

Lauren Baigrie: I want to touch on Louise Morgan's point about universities and colleges. I fully understand that we are talking about the young carer grant and aligning with the criteria for a young carer. One of the questions in paper 2 is whether young carers in full-time further and higher education should be entitled to the grant. As a young adult carer in full-time further or higher education, I think that we should be entitled to the grant. I am 19, at university, a full-time carer who works part time, and I do not have a social life. There is nothing for me to claim as a young person who cares while in full-time education. I

cannot claim carers allowance, and I would be too old for the young carer grant. There is no specific bursary from the Student Awards Agency for Scotland that I am entitled to as a student carer. There is an adult dependants grant, but it is very difficult to claim. People are entitled to it only if the cared-for person depends on them financially. It is not a matter of the level of care that a person provides, it is all about financial dependence.

I fully support something further for those of us who are working our way through university. Last year, I dropped out because things were too difficult. The university course was difficult, and I was managing a caring role from the other side of the central belt. I was working, things just got too much, and I could not do it, so I moved back home, and I have started again at a different university. A year of SAAS funding for me was wasted because I was not correctly supported.

I still find being at home difficult because I am doing more caring and I still have to work. Nothing can relieve that pressure.

Although it is great that you are starting with this age group of young carers and that they would get something when they were at school, when they went into further or higher education at the age of 18, 19 or 20, they would be back to having nothing and to struggling their way through education. You would be surprised at the drop-out rate of student carers at universities. It is staggeringly high.

The Convener: Thank you for sharing your experience, which will apply to other people throughout the country. It is important that you have put that on the record.

Fiona Collie: I support what Lauren Baigrie has said. As a minimum, the grant should be available to people who are 18 and in full-time education.

There is a bigger point about supporting young adult carers who are in university or college—and, indeed, all carers—to develop their skills, knowledge and aspirations. That relates to my point about carers allowance being fully devolved in time. What changes can we make to improve the situation for young adult and adult carers? Within that, it would be good to look at an interim solution for young people who are older than 18.

Shona Robison (Dundee City East) (SNP): I want to explore what Lauren Baigrie said a little further. You make a compelling case, and there appears to be a bit of a gap with regard to student carers. In principle, you believe that the young carer grant should be extended to student carers, and I understand the reasons why. How much support do young people in your position get when they are making life choices? How much discussion is there? You needed to juggle full-time caring, a job and moving to another town for university. Did you get much support prior to

making those decisions? Would that support have been helpful?

I know that the young carer grant is the focus of our discussion, but should we be looking at anything else beyond that? Should there be more structured support for young carers who are making that transition? It sounds as though you were almost set up to fail. Through your own resilience, you have managed to get back on track, but it sounds as though it has been quite a challenging experience for you.

Lauren Baigrie: That is a difficult question. I would not say that I was set up to fail, because I received a lot of support prior to going to university and while I was at university, through my young carers group. The group has known me since I was 8, because I was identified quite early. From that age, I have always said that I want to go to university and be the first person in my family to get a degree. That was, and still is, a big push for me.

It is not that I was set up to fail; it is more that the challenges that occurred during my first year at university pushed me back. I had great support, but I made the decision not to return on the basis of what was best for me. I was supported to try to stay and was told that there would be more support for me at university, but, at the end of the day, I felt that it was right for me, in my role, to leave. It is not the case that I was set up to go to university and then all the support left; I made a personal decision, and I truly believe that I made the right one.

People do not realise what crops up during the year. It could have been a great year. My freshers week and my first three months were amazing. I had the best time. I was a proper student and enjoying a life that I had never had before. I thought, "Wow! I'm going out on a Tuesday night." I was living.

However, things then happened and got out of control. It became really busy at home and I was not at home to deal with the situation. I started to freak out because I thought, "Hang on. I'm not at home to deal with this. Who's dealing with it?" As a young person, I made the decision to take responsibility and take that role back on, even though I was miles away. It is not that I was set up to fail; it is about personal choice.

Shona Robison: It sounds as though you made the right choices for yourself at that time. Generally, young people who leave home and go to college or university face similar challenges but, in addition to those challenges, you had pressures and worries at home.

You said that you got some support as a student carer. Comments have been made around the table about whether student support is structured

enough and whether every student carer would have the same experience. Do you think that student support needs to be more structured to ensure that every college and university offers the same support? Currently, the decision might be made that it is not possible for a student to be supported, but there might be a different outcome if support was structured properly

09:45

Lauren Baigrie: I believe that every college and university should have the same structure of support so that there is not a postcode lottery of support. Students should get the same support regardless of what institution they go to—that should be a given. There should not be a better level of support in, say, Stirling or Aberdeen. Everyone should be entitled to the same amount of emotional support in their role as a carer. I cannot imagine it not being like that; that would just seem unfair.

One of the biggest issues is financial support. If someone is living away from home, they have their accommodation fees paid—that is what their SAAS funding covers—but they are left with literally nothing, so they have to work. If that situation was alleviated, they would have more time to do things as a young person.

A few weeks ago, I helped to pass a motion in the Scottish Youth Parliament that stated that the Scottish Youth Parliament believes that carers allowance should be extended to young adult carers aged 16 to 25 who are in full-time education, which is something that, for sure, should be given. Just because someone is in education, they should not be made to choose between wanting to better themselves and ensuring that the right support is available at home. Financial support should go hand in hand with emotional support to ensure that they can still provide the support that is needed.

Young carers should be able to better themselves and break what I call the cycle of care, which is when a young carer goes into a care-related job because care is what they know well. They go into jobs such as nursing or teaching even if they are a full-time carer, because that is all they know. They must be able to explore other options so that they can be a scientist, an artist or anything else. The fact that they are a carer does not mean they have to stick to that lane when there are more things for them to branch out into. With emotional support and financial support going hand in hand, they can achieve that.

The Convener: That is a really fascinating discussion.

Michelle Ballantyne: Convener—

The Convener: I apologise, Michelle—I will let you speak in a wee second.

This is maybe not an issue for this committee to consider, but I know through constituency casework that SAAS will give only so many years of public funding for degrees, which can lead to people having to self-fund in future years. I have had to make representations on behalf of constituents for exceptions to be made and discretion to be shown so that additional years of public funding for university degrees and the like can be taken into account.

When you decided that it was right for you and your family for you not to progress with your degree because of your caring responsibilities and everything else, did SAAS indicate at any point that it was aware of why you took that decision? Was there a process that you could go through to indicate that you did not complete that particular year at university because of caring needs and responsibilities? Otherwise, you would be told in your senior honours year that you had had four years of funding and would therefore have to self-fund that year. In that case, I hope that you would go to your MSP and ask for help to have discretion shown so that you would not have to self-fund.

Did you get any guidance or support on such issues?

Lauren Baigrie: I was lucky. I was determined that I would finish that first year, so I used the full year's funding and got a relative qualification. I have used one year of funding, which means that in my current degree I am not going to go for the full honours; I am just going to get the 360-credit degree. Eventually, I want to be a teacher even though I am saying that young carers should break that cycle. I am going into a science, technology, engineering and mathematics-related subject because I want to be a computing teacher and empower females to get into that field. I am more empathetic about that because of my role as a carer. I feel that having been a young carer would allow me to make more of a difference in the education field as a teacher, and I do not need to do a full honours degree to get a teaching degree; I just need the 360 credits. That is what I am going to do, purely on the basis of the funding and time.

The Convener: I suspect that you will do incredibly well, but the committee might have to signpost wider SAAS issues for young carers to the Education and Skills Committee or others. It is helpful for us to understand the barriers and how you cope with them.

I apologise for cutting off Michelle Ballantyne.

Michelle Ballantyne: Lauren Baigrie talked about extending the grant to young carers who are aged 18 to 25. Would that mean extending it to anyone who is a young carer or only to people

who remain at home with a parent and continue caring? You talked about what happened when you first went away and were not living at home.

Lauren Baigrie: People in the 18-to-25 bracket are not classed as young carers. I am in that bracket and I like to make it clear that we are young adult carers. That distinction is often misunderstood—we are often seen as either young carers or adult carers. I have nothing against what you say, but I make that point because that group involves a completely different case load and completely different needs—everything is different from the situation for young carers.

The grant should be given to everyone. Even if someone moves away, they can still engage in their caring role, especially if it is an emotional caring role. If someone's mum is on the phone at 9 o'clock at night, having a breakdown because of what is going on, the young adult carer listens to her even though they are not at home. If someone's brother is on the phone, confused and unsure about what to do, and he needs someone to talk to, the young adult carer is still there for him even though they are not at home.

The caring role does not stop just because someone is not at home; it is constant. Even if we are not at home, we still worry about and think about the person we care for, and we still do little things to help. We go home as often as possible.

It should not be the case that only a certain number of young people can claim the grant; there should be a blanket entitlement for everyone, who should be able to claim it in the same way. There should not be picking and choosing between those who care enough and those who are not seen to care enough, those who live at home and those who do not live at home, or those who care for only 10 hours and those who care for 25 hours.

The grant should be universal. The fact that it is not universal means that some young carers are asking why one person can get it and another cannot although they have similar roles. That sparks off questions among young people about what makes one different from another although they are the same and are both young carers. Opening up that wider conversation among young carers is not helpful.

Michelle Ballantyne: That leads me nicely to questions about siblings and more than one person being entitled to the grant. You mentioned that you have three younger siblings. I presume that, as they grow up, they are taking on caring roles.

Lauren Baigrie: No.

Michelle Ballantyne: Well, in some families, the role might be split. I ask everybody on the

panel how the grant should apply when multiple young people in a family have caring roles. Will they all get a grant? Will they split it? That will be an issue for some families.

The Convener: I am conscious that the last 10 or so questions have been directed to Lauren Baigrie. I ask others to comment first and give her a chance to get her breath back, because I feel as if I have thrown questions constantly at her.

Fiona Collie: I see no reason why more than one young carer in a household could not receive the grant—it would not need to be split. As an individual, each young carer would fulfil a caring role. As long as they did that, that should be enough.

In the experience panels, some young carers talked about splitting the grant. I am not entirely sure about that, but examples exist of having a larger pot—for instance, a range of winter fuel payments depend on people's age and circumstances. Such an approach could be taken but, if more than one sibling provided care, it would be a lot less complex to pay each young carer than to split payments. Paying each individual would be easier and simpler for the system.

The Convener: Do you have any idea how many people might be in such a situation? Any social security system wants certainty and clarity for budgeting purposes. Do we know how many households that might involve? Maybe that is a question for us to ask the Government.

Lauren Baigrie: When I said that my younger siblings do not take on a caring role, I meant that they do not take a role on the same terms as I do. They do little things to help, and, if I am not there, the responsibility trickles down to the next eldest. If they are not there, it trickles down again. However, we also collectively care for one of our siblings. One of my younger siblings has autism and we all fulfil a caring role.

I am not entitled to the grant, but even restricting it to my brother, who would be entitled, would mean saying, "Your sister already provides care, so you're not a primary carer." That would just not be fair. It would be almost like a postcode lottery in our own house. It would be like saying that only I could get the grant because I do the most and I am the eldest, even though there are two younger siblings who are dealing with more than they should for their age. The grant should be given to everyone on a blanket basis.

The Convener: We are coming towards the end of our evidence session and there is one specific question that we have not yet asked. In an earlier discussion, we spoke about the £300 lump sum. Irrespective of whether that is enough, Lauren Baigrie suggests that it might be more meaningful

to get a smaller amount more regularly—£25 a month rather than a lump sum—because if £300 appeared in the household it might be mopped up by family debts or other issues, whereas the smaller amount could be used to go for a night out or whatever. Does it have to be one or the other, or should the young carer be given a choice of receiving a lump sum of £300 or a monthly payment?

Another issue is that you could be given £25 once a month to go to the pictures with your pals and for a burger afterwards—does £25 even cover that these days?—but you would need to be sure that mum or dad, or your wee brother or sister at home, was okay or you would not go out in the first place. There must be connectivity with local carer services such as respite carers coming into the household to support the young carer or the cared-for person, to allow the carer to go out and use that relatively small amount of money to enjoy being a young person.

There are two questions. First, should there be a choice of whether you take the lump sum or a monthly payment? Secondly, should there be co-ordination with local services to allow young people to use the money in a meaningful way?

Fiona Collie: Ideally, young people should have the choice of what works for them. How we connect with carers services is also important. It is early days in terms of the Carers (Scotland) Act 2016, but the young carer's statement plans for breaks for young people. Some carers centres have time-to-live funds, and young people can apply for a grant to enable them to take breaks or pursue other opportunities. In some areas, that funding has been used for spot purchasing, but the links need to be strong to create a real purpose and improvement in life for young people.

One thing that is a little concerning is how many young people do not have a bank account or credit union account for the grant to be paid into, whether as a lump sum or monthly. That issue needs to be explored, particularly as there is less uptake and understanding of banking and accounts among the most disadvantaged households. There is a balance to be struck in ensuring that young people have information about how to open an account, and we may need to look at third-party carer services supporting those young carers who do not have bank accounts.

The Convener: That is helpful. Does anyone else have something to add?

Louise Morgan: I do not really have anything to add, but I support what Fiona Collie has said. Ideally, we would like young carers to have a choice about how the payments are made. I return to my first point: we would like the sum of money

to be larger, possibly with two annual payments of £300, and administered in the same way as the carers allowance supplement. There could be a payment in the summer, when people are likely to want some money, or when people are going off to university, leaving university or changing their life in some way. A payment around Christmas might also be helpful.

10:00

The Convener: That point is well made. Before we move on to Alison Johnstone's questions, are there any other comments?

Lauren Baigrie: I have a comment about respite. Every young person should be given the chance to go out, even if that means getting respite from someone coming in to help. That is an issue for both the £300 payment as a lump sum or in monthly payments. Regardless of whether someone wants to go out, they will need some initial support in the household.

On the lump sum, I do not think that young carers are likely to spend that as well as they would spend a monthly payment. They would know that the £300 was all that they had, so they would try to make it last as long as they could. A monthly payment system would let them know that they have a payment coming in every month, so they can do something at once, or save it and do something every few months. Give them the choice. You should not make that decision for them. It is for them to make the best decision for them.

Allan Lindsay: The main focus today has been on the grant, as it should be. I highlight the importance of the additional package of entitlements that is being worked on. Non-monetary support for young carers is really important, whether it is discounts to enable the money to go further, access to opportunities or further information to help young carers make informed decisions about what they want to do and what they want to access.

Valid points have been made about bank accounts. The wider package provides an opportunity to share information on that with young carers and to utilise such things as the Young Scot card, which can be used to help open bank accounts. Young people do not always have the necessary documentation such as passports to be able to open a bank account or something official of that sort.

The wider package is really important. I do not think that the two things stand alone; they support each other. It is important that we continue to involve young people in those discussions to make sure that the entitlements are things that they will

actually use, not just things that we think would be good for them.

Alison Johnstone: I want to make a couple of other points, one of which is about respite. Even if the funding is in place, if you want to go out for the night and you do not have siblings or others who can take on your responsibilities, you cannot go. Is there a need to fund respite properly? Earlier you spoke about barriers. You said that there are 11,000 young people who are caring, but that only 1,700 would be eligible for the grant. How many young carers are claiming? I dealt with a case yesterday in which someone is no longer getting carers allowance because the person for whom they care is no longer deemed eligible for the disability benefit that they were getting—even though their condition remains fairly serious. Has any of that been discussed among young carers? In some cases, the people for whom you are caring might be facing reductions in their benefits.

Lauren Baigrie: Respite should be properly funded, because it is respite for the young person to get away or to be able to go out in their community. They do not get any opportunity to be a young person. They cannot interact with their peers as well as everybody else in their class can. It is important that we see them as a young person first, before we see them as a young carer. They should be entitled to the same things that every other young person is entitled to, such as free time.

I wish that, during my secondary school years, I had gone out more. I did not really do that, but my younger brother can now. He goes out a lot, and I see how much fun he has and the interactions that he has with his peers, which I did not have. If I could tell my younger self to go out more, I definitely would do so. Interacting with your peers as much as possible is so important for personal growth.

I will touch on your second question, which was about barriers. For a young person, the benefit that the cared-for person receives is always a worry, because that is money that is coming into the family. That has an added effect on them, because they are worried about it. Their not being able to claim carers allowance because of that is somewhat irrelevant, because of their age and their education status. They could not claim carers allowance if they were in education, so there would be no knock-on effect there. However, the cared-for person's benefit might affect the young person being able to claim the one-off benefit that is the young carer grant. If that does not affect them at the time of claiming the grant, they will still get the money, since—at the moment, anyway—the young carer grant is not a monthly payment. It is my understanding that if, at the time of claiming the young carer grant, the cared-for person still

receives the benefit that is required to claim the grant, that should not affect the young carer.

Alison Johnstone: I am very pleased to hear that the Scottish Government is focusing on ensuring that people who are entitled to any benefit get it, because we know that a lot of benefit in the United Kingdom goes unclaimed. If we were to focus on one way of reaching young carers, what do you think that it should be?

Lauren Baigrie: What do you mean by that?

Alison Johnstone: Some people will not know that there is even such a thing as a young carer grant. How can we ensure that people understand their entitlements and that we give them better help to access them?

Lauren Baigrie: At the end of the day, it is just about education. The issue with that just now is that you will not want to overeducate people, because you will just find too many gaps where they cannot claim. You could educate all young people about the grant, and tell them that it is amazing and that they have not been able to receive it before. However, you would then have to tell them that some will not be able to claim it while others might and others definitely will. It is just about looking at the criteria and educating people to the right extent, if you know what I mean—not overselling it by suggesting that everyone will be able to claim it, but saying enough so that there is a general understanding that it exists.

A lot of that work will come through carers' centres across Scotland. They work directly with most of the young people—if they attend the service—who will qualify. Those centres should be your first port of call, because they will know which of the young people they deal with will be entitled. You should build a stronger network with people such as Louise Morgan at the Carers Trust Scotland. It is a partnership with loads of carers' centres across Scotland, with the best people to tell you how they engage with young people and who to engage with. If you were to go about it the wrong way, you would just have a lot of young people who would be disappointed—and you would not want that.

The Convener: Okay, so it is pretty clear that there should be a targeting of education to ensure that we are not saying to everyone, "Look, there is a new young carer grant" and so raising the expectations of those who will not meet the criteria.

In our notes there is a question that I would like to ask, just for completeness. One of the issues that the Scottish Government had with the best start grant, which we are not here to talk about today, was whether it was able to give that to people who had no recourse to public funds. In particular, that would mean those without full

residency rights in this country. The Scottish Government has also grappled with that a little bit in relation to the young carer grant. Our notes tell us that if a young person is in a family whose immigration status is uncertain, seeking to give them cash could put their residency in the country at risk.

I will just ask the question that I have down here, so that we can get on the record people's views on whether the Scottish Government should seek an exception to the no recourse to public funds requirement for the young carer grant, as it is hoping to do with the best start grant. Young carers whose immigration status in this country is uncertain will not currently be covered by the grant. Should they be? Should the Scottish Government ask for such an exception, in the way that it is doing with the best start grant? Putting something on the record on that would be very helpful.

Fiona Collie: Yes. Caring transcends nationality and immigration status. An exception needs to be sought because the last thing that we want to do, by trying to do something good for young carers in that situation, is to risk their immigration status. The Government should try to get an exception.

Lauren Baigrie: I have said quite a few times that the grant should be a universal thing. Obviously, we need to make sure that it will not affect someone's immigration status, because the last thing that I want is for someone not to be able to be anywhere because they have claimed money. If we take that aside and look at them as young people who have responsibilities, they should not be denied the grant because of their immigration status. They should be given it in the same way that I, or the next person, will be given it.

Carers in general help to save, I think, £100 billion annually, which is the cost of a second national health service. Although someone's status in the country is not secure, they still help the country to save that money. They are still a cog in that wheel. They still provide emotional support and physical care. They should not be targeted because they are not yet fully safe in the country. That would not be fair.

The Convener: I see nodding heads. Does any witness disagree with that? Feel free to put something on the public record if you wish. As no one does, we will just note that there is general agreement.

Our time is almost up. We have had good value from our discussions this morning. If any witness has something that they want to say but has not felt able to say it yet because of the way that the discussion has developed, they should feel free to

put something on the record. You are more than welcome to do so.

Fiona Collie: Thank you. I know that I am not backward about coming forward.

I want to put on the record the issue of concessionary travel, which is linked only to receipt of the young carer grant. I think that it should be linked to the Young Scot card criteria. For example, quite a lot of schools have said that pupils do not get free transport unless they live more than 2 miles away. However, if a young carer with a low family income is trying to get back home because they have a caring responsibility, they might not be able to afford to get the bus to speed up getting home. Concessionary travel should be available more widely and not just to those who are in receipt of the young carer grant.

The Convener: That is helpful. Lauren Baigrie, do you want to add to that?

Lauren Baigrie: Yes. I will make a quick point, again by referring to the Scottish Youth Parliament's policy. Concessionary travel is something that is very close to my heart. I should not be made to pay a £13 return ticket every time that I need to get home, given the number of times that I need to do so. I should not be made to pay a train ticket that costs me two or three hours' work because I have to go home.

In October 2017, the SYP, here in this building, agreed a motion that I lodged, that

"The Scottish Youth Parliament believes that concessionary or free transport should be provided for young and young adult carers".

It should not be restricted to just young carers. The motion passed, with 96 per cent of the Scottish Youth Parliament backing it. That means that 96 per cent of Scotland's young people support that policy. That is too loud a voice to ignore; it should be a given. Again, there should not be a postcode lottery. Concessionary travel should be given to everyone, not just a select few.

The Convener: Our time is probably now up. I can indulge people further if they are desperate to put something else on the record. I am not looking at Fiona Collie at all. [*Laughter.*]

Louise Morgan: Shona Robison mentioned the services that support young adult carers. The national carers strategy has a chapter specifically on young adult carers, but there is not really anything specific in the Carers (Scotland) Act 2016. That was disappointing for young adult carers in Scotland. I understand why that was the case; there were issues around the legal definition and there is a cut-off.

There were previously young adult carer services in Scotland that would have been able to

support Lauren Baigrie in the situation in which she found herself. She could have been given advice and guidance when she was making decisions about what would be good for her at that time, given that she has always wanted to go to university. However, through lack of funding, those services have dwindled, so there are now not so many dedicated support services for that age group. We should look at that as part of the package.

The Convener: I am not going to make the same offer again. It is really important to have that point on the record, but, unfortunately, at some point we need to close this evidence session. I wanted to maximise your opportunity to put things on the public record—I am pretty sure that you have been able to do so. I thank all our witnesses.

We move to agenda item 3, on the Scottish Government's consultation on the young carer grant, which we have previously agreed to take in private.

10:16

Meeting continued in private until 10:33.

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