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Education, Children and Young People Committee

Education, Children and Young People Committee - Session 6 Legacy Report



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Education, Children and Young People Committee

To consider and report on matters falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills and matters relating to the Historical Abuse Inquiry, redress and languages falling within the responsibility of the Deputy First Minister.



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Introduction

1. This report sets out how the Education, Children and Young People Committee has conducted its business in Session 6 and the key issues the Committee has considered. It also suggests a way forward for our successor committee, outlining issues that could meaningfully be explored in the early days of Session 7.
2. In this Parliamentary session, the Committee's work has primarily focused on scrutinising legislation and carrying out proactive inquiries. It has also undertaken a number of responsive sessions, designed to explore topical issues in a more immediate way.
3. A recent example of this is the work the Committee undertook in relation to the financial sustainability of Scotland's universities, specifically sessions to explore financial difficulties and potential job losses at the University of Dundee and the University of Edinburgh. The Committee has found that these types of session can be helpful in building the public's perception of the Committee's role in holding key organisations to account.
4. The Committee recommends that its successor committee in Session 7 continues to build time into its work schedule to allow for urgent and emerging issues to be addressed.

Overview of the Committee's Work in Session 6

Remit

5. The Education, Children and Young People Committee was established in June 2021. Its remit focused on:
 - schools, colleges and universities
 - additional support for learning
 - early years and childcare
 - Children's Hearings
 - child protection
 - the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry and Scotland's Redress Scheme
 - languages
6. The work this Committee has undertaken in relation to our remit is explored in more detail throughout this report.

Engagement

7. In its day to day work, the Committee has been keen to ensure that it hears from a wide range of witnesses when taking evidence. In doing so, it has recognised that a diversity of witnesses leads to a much more rounded scrutiny, highlighting issues that might otherwise be overlooked.
8. It therefore asks organisations to consider this when identifying people to speak to the Committee. However, it recognises that there is also work for the Scottish Parliament to continue to do in building links with more diverse groups, and the Committee appreciates the input of the Parliament's Participation and Communities Team in helping to facilitate this aspect of the Committee's work this session, particularly in relation to informal engagement work.
9. As a result of this work, the Committee has been able to hear directly from children and young people, parents/carers and practitioners on a wide range of topics. Working in partnership with organisations with existing relationships with those stakeholders has helped build trust and allowed the Committee to engage in a way that works not just for us, but also for them.
10. There are times where the Committee is also aware that sharing views can be extremely challenging. For example, this might occur when a teacher wants to speak openly about working practices in their school, but needs to balance this against any risk to their future career opportunities.

11. This session, the Committee has sought to work in a way that allows those views to be shared and offers maximum reassurance to witnesses, including offering informal evidence sessions, where views can be recorded anonymously.
12. The Committee is extremely grateful to those who did speak candidly this session, as this greatly enhanced our understanding of many issues under our remit.
13. As part of the evidence gathering on the Schools (Residential Outdoor Education) (Scotland) Bill, for example, the Committee heard from teachers on how they currently manage outdoor education trips, who currently benefits from outdoor education and what changes are required to make outdoor education more accessible to all children.
14. For its work on The Promise, the Committee heard directly from practitioners working for local authorities and third sector organisations about whole family wellbeing and early intervention projects that aim to keep children and young people with their families.
15. As part of its work on the Disabled Children and Young People (Transitions to Adulthood) (Scotland) Bill, the Committee held informal private engagement sessions with Divergent Influencers who have experienced the transition from child to adult services; and parents and carers whose children have been through the process.
16. The Committee also recognised that it was important for those young people to hear how their input had made a difference. Members ensured that they regularly mentioned in public sessions what they had learned from speaking to children and young people (without attributing this to any individual).
17. The Committee also sought to make some of our materials more accessible, including producing accessible summaries of our Stage 1 reports. Examples of this work can be seen in relation to our work on the [Disabled Children and Young People \(Transitions to Adulthood\) \(Scotland\) Bill](#) and the [Children \(Care, Care Experience and Services Planning\) \(Scotland\) Bill](#).
18. Another approach that worked well this session was writing to care experienced young people who had been involved in an event jointly organised by the Committee and Who Cares? Scotland earlier in the session to let them know how their views had made a difference. This set out a number of actions taken by the Committee as a direct result of the young people's input. The Committee's letter led to Who Cares? Scotland producing a story on Social Media which shared the information with their whole membership.
19. In addition to holding a formal evidence session with Members of the Scottish Youth Parliament, which took place as part of a formal Committee meeting, the Committee also heard from pupils, students and practitioners from a range of backgrounds in relation to its inquiry on widening access to higher education.
20. Where information has been provided informally, the Committee has always agreed a note of the key points arising from those sessions, which is then published on the Committee's webpage.
21. In other scenarios, the Committee has sought to work in partnership to ensure that children, young people and adults can be heard on the issues that are of

importance to them. For example, the Committee worked closely with Who Cares? Scotland to explore particular elements of the Promise, over the Parliamentary session, most recently meeting with around 40 people aged 11 to 40+ in relation to the Children (Care, Care Experience and Services Planning) (Scotland) Bill.

22. The Committee recommends that its successor committee should continue to work with the Participation and Communities Team to ensure that the evidence it hears is diverse in nature and provides a rounded exploration of legislation and policy affecting education, children and young people.
23. The Committee recognises that there is a delicate balance to be struck between gathering evidence in formal settings "on the record", versus creating more informal spaces where people can speak openly about the challenges facing them, without fear of being identified or targeted as a result of expressing those views. However, our experience this session is that informal evidence has greatly enhanced our scrutiny, and has also allowed those who might otherwise have struggled to speak out, to have an input. These informal sessions have also had a lasting impact on the Committee and greatly enhanced our understanding of key issues.
24. The Committee also suggests that our successor committee should continue to be thoughtful about the accessibility of the reports it produces, and the feedback it provides to those engaging with the Committee, to ensure that stakeholders are fully able to recognise how their input has made a difference.

Committee Visits

25. This session, the Committee has carried out a number of Committee visits to inform its work.
26. As part of the Committee's inquiry on the Scottish Attainment Challenge, Committee Members visited Sidlaw Primary School, Barnardo's Centre in Greenock and St Roch's Secondary in Glasgow.
27. In relation to the Disabled Children and Young People (Transitions to Adulthood) (Scotland) Bill, the Committee visited Buchanan High School in Coatbridge, meeting senior school pupils who were about to leave school; and the some of the transitions team who were supporting them, including teachers, social workers and the Home Link Education Officer.
28. The Committee also visited Polmont Young Offenders Institution (YOI) as part of its scrutiny of the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Bill.
29. One of the Bill's key aims was to remove all 16 and 17 year olds from YOIs and to place them instead in secure accommodation. The Committee toured the facilities at Polmont and spoke to staff about the current challenges in meeting the needs of 16 and 17 year olds. The Committee also visited a number of secure accommodation settings, including Rossie and St Mary's Kenmure.
30. The Committee visited Broomlee Outdoor Centre in West Linton as part of its scrutiny of the Schools (Residential Outdoor Education) (Scotland) Bill and Donaldson's school in Linlithgow, as part of its work on the Restraint and Seclusion

in Schools (Scotland) Bill.

31. All of these visits have proved extremely helpful in ensuring that Members have a clear understanding of the current state of play, and how any new proposals/legislation might alter that in future. The Committee is grateful to those who took the time to participate in those visits.

32. The Committee recommends that its successor committee continue to undertake Committee visits, where appropriate, to help inform its scrutiny of key issues.

Legislation

33. The Committee has undertaken scrutiny of a large number of Bills throughout Session 6, including both Scottish Government and Members' Bills.

34. These included:

- Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Bill
- Disabled Children and Young People (Transitions to Adulthood) (Scotland) Bill
- Education (Scotland) Bill
- Schools (Residential Outdoor Education) (Scotland) Bill
- Scottish Languages Bill
- Children (Care, Care Experience and Services Planning) (Scotland) Bill
- Restraint and Seclusion in Schools (Scotland) Bill
- Tertiary Education and Training (Funding and Governance) (Scotland) Bill

35. Some of what we learned from our scrutiny of these Bills is explored in more detail later in this report.

Potential for Post-Legislative Scrutiny

36. A number of the Bills scrutinised by the Committee (now Acts) in Session 6 potentially lend themselves to post-legislative scrutiny later in Session 7.

37. These include the Schools (Residential Outdoor Education) (Scotland) Act 2026, the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act 2024, the Education (Scotland) Act 2025 and the Scottish Languages Act 2025.

38. The Committee is also aware that the Children (Care, Care Experience and Services Planning) (Scotland) Bill, should it become law, has a number of provisions that will require secondary legislation to implement. Our successor committee will have a role in scrutinising these.

39. The successor committee may wish to consider post-legislative scrutiny of the operation of the Schools (Residential Outdoor Education) (Scotland) Act 2026.
40. This could pick up on some of the concerns raised in the Committee's [Stage 1 report](#), including in relation to the accessibility of outdoor education to children and young people with additional support needs, any other potential barriers to accessing outdoor education and any impacts the Act has had from a staffing perspective. The successor committee may also wish to examine how outdoor learning is being developed more broadly by the Scottish Government.
41. The successor committee should consider at an early point in the Parliamentary session how it will ensure that progress in relation to the Promise can continue to be made, ahead of the 2030 deadline (further detail of the Committee's work relating to the Promise is outlined later in this report). Successor committee Members may also find it helpful to familiarise themselves with Audit Scotland's report [Improving Care Experience: Delivering the Promise](#), which was published in October 2025.
42. Should the Children (Care, Care Experience and Services Planning) (Scotland) Bill pass, our successor committee may also wish to ensure that any secondary legislation arising from this takes into account the issues raised by stakeholders in our [Stage 1 report](#).
43. In relation to the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act 2024, it would potentially be interesting for our successor committee to carry out a short inquiry, looking at which elements of the Act have come into force and which remain outstanding. It is worth noting that several aspects of this Bill, also feed into work to fulfil the Promise.
44. The successor committee may also wish to look at how Qualifications Scotland is operating in practice, following the passage of the Education (Scotland) Act 2025, specifically:
 - The extent to which there has been a culture change within Qualifications Scotland, since it replaced the Scottish Qualifications Authority.
 - The extent to which the Act has contributed towards HMIE being better able to report on the Scottish education system's performance.
 - Whether, as a result of changes brought in by the Act, Education Scotland is able to provide support on a regional and national basis, and how this can best be assessed?
45. In relation to the Scottish Languages Act 2025, our successor committee may wish to keep a watching brief on the reporting duties under this legislation, including progress relating to the National Gaelic Language Strategy and the Scots Language strategy. Given the reporting cycles for these, this is likely to be a topic for later in Session 7.

Inquiries

46. This session, the Committee has undertaken inquiries into:

- The Impact of Covid-19 on Children and Young People
- Scottish Attainment Challenge
- Colleges regionalisation
- Widening Access
- Additional Support for Learning

Impact of Covid-19 on Children and Young People

47. At the beginning of this session, the Committee was keen to consider the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on children and young people, particularly on those with additional support needs, who were care experienced, or who were from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The Committee agreed to undertake a short inquiry to look at this.

48. The evidence received, perhaps unsurprisingly, confirmed that the impact of the pandemic had been most profound on those who were most disadvantaged and already required additional support. You can read the Committee's report [here](#).

Scottish Attainment Challenge

49. The Scottish Attainment Challenge was launched by the Scottish Government in 2015 and was funded by a number of programmes including Pupil Equity Funding. A total of £750m was spent in the five years to 2021. The Scottish Government said it would continue the fund and increase the amount of funding to £1bn over five years from 2021 to 2026.

50. The Committee decided to carry out an inquiry to establish whether Scottish Attainment Challenge funding was making a difference on an organisational and individual level.

51. The Committee took evidence over a number of weeks from academics and Third Sector organisations, trade unions, Directors of Education, Education Scotland attainment advisors and the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills.

52. The Committee also undertook extensive engagement to inform its work on the inquiry, hearing from primary school pupils, care experienced young people, parents and teachers.

53. The Committee published its [report](#) in August 2022, with the Scottish Government issuing [its response](#) shortly afterwards.

54. The Committee took evidence from the Scottish Government later in Session 6 to follow up on progress that had been made on the recommendations made in its report.

55. The successor committee may wish to return to the issue of pupil attainment in Session 7. This could explore how effective efforts to close the attainment gap have been since the Committee last reported on this topic.
56. There may also be scope to explore challenges arising from the lack of reliable and up to date Free School Meal registration data, particularly in relation to Pupil Equity Funding.

Colleges Regionalisation Inquiry

57. In February 2012, Scottish Ministers announced changes to the college landscape as part of wider reforms introduced by the Post-16 Education (Scotland) Act. This led to the formation of 13 college regions. During this time, college mergers reduced the number of colleges from 41 in 2011 to 26 currently. The majority of these colleges sit within the 13 regions.
58. Reviews by the Scottish Funding Council recommended more changes to the way multi-college regions were run and closer collaboration between colleges and universities.
59. The Committee wanted to look at what had been learned over the past decade of colleges regionalisation and how this might inform future change within the sector.
60. The Committee held a Call for Views which sought views on the following topics:
 - What has worked well in the college sector in the years following regionalisation?
 - How might the sector further improve in the years ahead?
 - How might colleges adapt in light of current challenges such as those resulting from COVID-19?
 - What should be the priorities of the college sector in the years ahead?
61. The Committee held an informal engagement session with senior figures from Developing the Young Workforce and published notes from the meeting. The Committee also held a number of formal evidence sessions.
62. The Committee published [its report](#) of the College Regionalisation Inquiry on 22 March 2023 and received [a response](#) from the Scottish Government.
63. The Committee's work on colleges regionalisation provided helpful background for its later work on colleges funding and the Tertiary Education and Training (Funding and Governance) (Scotland) Bill.

Widening access to Higher Education inquiry

64. The Committee undertook a short inquiry into progress on widening access to

higher education in February 2025.

65. Widening access aims to make higher education more accessible to people from under-represented groups.
66. At the time of the inquiry, universities were working towards a target to widen access. It was expected that, by 2030, students from the 20% most deprived backgrounds (SIMD 0-20) should represent 20% of full-time, first-degree entrants to higher education.
67. The interim target was for 18% of full-time, first-degree university entrants to be from SIMD 0-20 backgrounds by 2026.
68. There were no specific targets to increase representation of disabled students, students from minority ethnic backgrounds and students with care experience.
69. The Committee's inquiry explored the following issues:
 - What was needed for colleges and universities to meet the next interim target
 - What access initiatives were showing success
 - What impact widening access was having on other SIMD groups
 - Whether the work of the Scottish Government and partners to introduce additional data measures was progressing, and when and how this might be incorporated into targets
 - What access challenges existed for disabled, minority ethnic and care experienced students outside SIMD 0-20 areas, and what could be done to address those challenges.
70. The Committee's recommendation to include free school meals as a measure of widening access has since been taken forward by the Scottish Government via an amendment to the Tertiary Education and Training (Funding and Governance) (Scotland) Bill at Stage 2, giving Scottish Ministers a regulation-making power in relation to data-sharing about learners.

71. As part of its Widening Access inquiry, the Committee highlighted the importance of introducing a Unique Learner Number (ULN) to track students' educational journeys and allow a better understanding of what works regarding transitions in the longer term. In its response to the Committee's report, the Scottish Government committed to undertake further work in respect of the ULN. This could usefully be followed up by our successor committee in Session 7.

Additional Support for Learning

72. [Between November 2023 and May 2024, the Committee undertook an inquiry](#) into additional support for learning which focused on the following themes:
 - the implementation of a presumption of mainstreaming, meaning that, where

possible, children and young people with additional support needs should be educated in mainstream schools alongside other pupils, rather than in special schools

- the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on additional support for learning
- the use of remedies as set out in the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 - these are dispute resolution options that are used when someone wants to dispute whether the provision put in place is adequate to support their child's additional support needs.

73. The Committee's report was published on 15 May 2024 and included recommendations around the provision of education in special schools and units. Recommendations included:

125. The Committee was concerned to hear that pupils with ASN [Additional Support Needs] do not always have access to adequate specialist school provision near them. Pupils with ASN should be able to obtain appropriate support, ideally in their local area, without the need to travel long distances to and from school each day. The Committee urges local authorities to assess what specialist provision is currently in place and to address any gaps in provision as a matter of urgency. This will ensure that the needs of all pupils can be met.

74. The Committee also made recommendations around how different parts of the public sector work together to meet the needs of pupils with complex needs and how placing requests to specialist provision work in practice.

75. In relation to the recommendation in paragraph 125 of the report, the [Government's response](#) suggested that this is a matter for local authorities and did not comment. [COSLA's response](#) stated:

” Local Authorities do give careful consideration to the provision that is available locally for individual pupils and for the whole school population. For individual children and young people an assessment will be made by staff to determine what support is required and where it can best be provided. ... Some specialist provision is commissioned from independent providers and can involve travel for learners. It may be highly specialised, and it may not be possible to provide it locally.

All local authorities have Learning Estate Strategies, and some have recently opened, or will soon open new special school provision, whilst others are assessing special school provision. Building or commissioning more specialist provision would incur significant costs and there is significant inflation in building costs at present.

76. The Government convened a [National Strategic Commissioning Group](#). This group appears to still be in operation, although the last minutes on the website are from 2024. This Group led on a 10 year strategy, [The right help at the right time in the right place: strategy for the learning provision for children and young people with complex additional support needs 2017-2026](#), which was first published in 2017 and then amended and republished in 2019. The aim of this strategy is:

“To improve outcomes for children and young people with complex additional

support needs through strategic commissioning of services; with a particular focus on the provision of education.”

77. It also said:

“Our aim is that by 2026 Scotland will be a world leader in relation to providing the highest quality education to children and young people with complex additional support needs. An outcome review in 2026 should be expected to evidence a well-developed history of proactive collaborative working between national government, local authorities, independent providers (3rd Sector), national and international training providers (Universities, Education Scotland, SCEL etc). The central objective will be to secure enhanced and sustained attainment and achievement outcomes for children and young people with complex additional support needs. The enhanced provision will be developed by a process of robust commissioning.”

78. In early 2025, Audit Scotland published [its latest report](#) on additional support for learning, which suggested that the Scottish Government should "fundamentally rethink how they plan, fund and staff additional support for learning as part of core school education in Scotland."

79. The successor committee may wish to assess progress since the ECYP Committee published its [ASL inquiry report](#). This might include exploring whether there has been progress in taking into account the needs of pupils with ASN in designing the school estate.

80. The successor committee may wish to explore the role of special schools in Scotland, including how sustainable they might be, in light of many pupils with Additional Support Needs now being supported in mainstream schools.

81. The successor committee may also wish to hear evidence from Audit Scotland and the Scottish Government, in relation to Audit Scotland's [most recent report](#) into Additional Support for Learning.

Petitions

82. The Committee considered a total of four petitions this session. These petitions are outlined below.

83. PE1548: National Guidance on Restraint and Seclusion in Schools, in the name of Beth Morrison, called on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to

1. Introduce National Guidance on the use of restraint and seclusion in all schools; this guidance should support the principles of:

- Last resort - where it is deemed necessary, restraint should be the minimum required to deal with the agreed risk, for the minimum amount of time;
- Appropriate supervision of the child at all times, including during “time out” or seclusion;

- Reducing the use of solitary exclusion and limiting the time it is used for (e.g. maximum time limits);
- No use of restraints that are cruel, humiliating, painful and unnecessary or not in line with trained techniques;
- Accountability of teaching and support staff for their actions; this should include recording every incident leading to the use of seclusion or restraint and monitoring of this by the local authority;
- Regular training for staff in how to avoid the use of restraint;
- Where restraint is unavoidable training in appropriate restraint techniques by British Institute of Learning Disability accredited providers and no use of restraint by untrained staff.

2. Appoint a specific agency (either Education Scotland or possibly the Care Inspectorate) to monitor the support and care given in non-educational areas including the evaluation of the use of restraint and seclusion of children with special needs in local authority, voluntary sector or private special schools.

84. This petition later formed the basis of a Member's Bill by Daniel Johnson MSP, the Restraint and Seclusion in Schools (Scotland) Bill.
85. PE1668: Improving literacy standards in schools through research informed reading instruction, in the name of Anne Glennie, called on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to i) provide national guidance, support, and professional learning for teachers in research-informed reading instruction, specifically systematic synthetic phonics; ii) ensure teacher training institutions train new teachers in research-informed reading instruction, specifically systematic synthetic phonics.
86. PE1692: Inquiry into the human rights impact of GIRFEC policy and data processing, in the names of Lesley Scott and Alison Preuss on behalf of Tymes Trust and Scottish Home Education Forum, called on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to initiate an independent public inquiry into the impact on human rights of the routine gathering and sharing of citizens' personal information on which its Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC) policy relies.
87. PE1747: Adequate funding to support children with additional support needs in all Scottish Schools, in the name of Alison Thomson, called on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to provide adequate funding to support children with additional support needs in all Scottish Schools (Primary, Secondary and Special).
88. The Committee later launched its inquiry into Additional Support for Learning.
89. All of the petitions the Committee considered were closed in the course of this Parliamentary session.

Other Areas of Work

Alternative Certification Model

90. At the beginning of this session, the Committee undertook in-depth scrutiny of the Alternative Certification Model which was used to award qualifications when pupils were unable to sit exams due to the Covid-19 pandemic.
91. The Committee heard informal evidence from young people on their experience of the 2021 Alternative Certification Model and focused on what lessons could be learned from the experience.
92. The Committee took formal evidence from the Scottish Qualifications Authority, the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland, the Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS), NASUWT Scotland and the Scottish Secondary Teachers Association (SSTA).
93. Members also heard young peoples' ideas on how assessment arrangements could be improved in the coming years.
94. This informed the Committee's later work on education reform, and in particular, the work undertaken in relation to senior assessment, which is explored later in this report.

The Promise

95. The Promise sets out how the findings of the Independent Care Review should be implemented.
96. The Independent Care Review was commissioned in February 2017, with people with experience of the care system representing half of the review group's co-chairs and working group members. Over 5,500 care experienced children and adults were consulted during the review.
97. The Independent Care Review's findings were published in February 2020. The findings set out the steps Scotland could take to embed significant change in the care system.
98. The Committee has taken evidence across this session designed to assess the progress being made towards keeping the Promise.
99. This session, the Committee deliberately took a more strategic approach towards its scrutiny of the Promise, recognising that the Promise affects a wide range of Scottish Government and Local Authority services. With this in mind, the Committee revisited Promise-related issues (e.g. Social work workforce) regularly, and sought to integrate scrutiny of the Promise across its work, ensuring continued scrutiny of progress being made towards the 2030 target.
100. In addition to considering legislation in the latter stages of the Parliamentary session, the Committee has carried out ongoing scrutiny of a wide range of issues, ensuring that the Promise, and the needs of care experienced children and young

people were explored. As previously stated, the Committee has also sought to engage with care experienced children, young people and adults.

101. The Committee has also carried out a number of dedicated evidence sessions, including one involving Social Work professionals, regulators and rights-based bodies in relation to understanding issues including how the Promise was being embedded across public bodies, the pace of change and whether stretch targets remain achievable, alongside examining whether care experienced young people themselves were noticing a difference in the care they were receiving.
102. The Committee also examined the impact of social work staff recruitment and retention on organisations' ability to deliver the Promise, as well as holding another dedicated session on Whole Family Wellbeing, involving Local Authorities and children's sector organisations.
103. The Committee ended the Session by considering the Children (Care, Care Experience and Services Planning) (Scotland) Bill at Stages 1 and 2.
104. It is likely that further Promise-related legislation will be brought forward in Session 7, ahead of the 2030 target to "Keep the Promise".

105. With this in mind, in Session 7, the successor committee may wish to continue to take a more strategic approach towards examining issues relating to the Promise, and ensure that work undertaken by the Committee continues to examine issues from the perspective of care experienced children, young people and adults.
106. The Committee has found the input of care experienced children, young people and adults to be invaluable to steering its work on the Promise. Our successor committee may wish to continue this approach in Session 7.
107. The successor committee may also wish to consider holding an informal event with social work staff to gain an understanding of the issues they are facing.

Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland

108. The Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body is responsible for supporting people who have been appointed to public positions as independent officeholders. These independent officeholders are often called 'commissioners'.
109. Scottish Parliamentary committees play a crucial role in overseeing officeholders and commissioners. They examine how officeholders carry out their duties on behalf of the Parliament.
110. The Education, Children, and Young People Committee scrutinises the work of the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland (CYPCS). In the past, this work had generally focused on the Commissioner presenting their annual report to the Committee.
111. However, this session, the Committee also sought to gain a greater understanding of how the Commissioner sets her strategic priorities, holding two evidence

sessions on this topic.

112. The Committee also heard from the Commissioner's office regularly in respect of the Committee's inquiries and scrutiny of legislation (e.g. responding to Call for Views and/or providing oral evidence to the Committee).

113. In Session 7, our successor committee may wish to consider how best to scrutinise the work of CYPCS, including via regular evidence sessions throughout the Parliamentary session.

114. The successor committee may also wish to explore other opportunities to form closer links with the Commissioner's office, without compromising the Commissioner's independence in relation to operational matters. For example, the Committee may wish to seek regular written updates relating to the Commissioner's work, in order to gain an understanding of emerging issues impacting on children and young people.

Education Reform

115. Early in this Parliamentary session, the Committee scrutinised the Scottish Government's response to the [OECD review of the Curriculum for Excellence](#).

116. Following the publication of the report, the Scottish Government stated that it would:

- move the role of inspection out of Education Scotland in a way that maximizes impact and helps to balance the dual need for local flexibility of provision alongside national consistency in outcomes
- consider replacing the SQA with a new, specialist agency responsible for both curriculum and assessment to ensure alignment in these functions.

117. [The Committee also considered a further report from the OECD: Upper-secondary education assessment in Scotland: a comparative assessment.](#)

118. Following on from this work, the Committee started [scrutinising the independent reviews of qualifications and assessment, and skills delivery.](#)

119. The Scottish Government appointed Professor Muir as an Independent Advisor to Scottish Government, to take forward these actions. Professor Muir's report [Putting Learners at the Centre: Towards a Future Vision for Scottish Education](#) was published on 9 March 2022. These publications and proposals were factored into the Committee's scrutiny.

120. The Committee has also examined education reform from a broader perspective, such as funding to maintain teacher numbers, class contact time and challenges for newly qualified teachers in securing longer-term employment.

Independent Reviews of Qualifications and Assessment, and

Skills Delivery

121. The Scottish Government commissioned two independent reports to outline how its approach to qualifications and skills could be improved.
122. [‘It’s Our Future - Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment’](#), also known as ‘The Hayward Review’, was published by Professor Louise Hayward in June 2023. It recommended several changes to qualifications and assessment in Scotland.
123. [‘Fit for the Future: developing a post-school learning system to fuel economic transformation’](#), also known as ‘The Withers Report’, was published by James Withers in June 2023 and recommended changes to the planning and funding of skills delivery in Scotland.
124. Our successor committee may wish to explore what progress has been made in relation to education and skills reform since the publication of these reports.
125. Our successor committee may also wish to hear from the Centre for Teaching Excellence, which was launched by the Scottish Government in September 2025.

University and College Funding

126. University and colleges funding and financial sustainability have formed a key thread across the Committee’s work in the latter part of this Parliamentary session. This includes the Committee’s pre-budget scrutiny in both 2025-26 (where it formed part of the Committee’s scrutiny) and 2026-27 (where it was the main focus). It has also been highlighted in the context of the Committee’s work around colleges regionalisation and in relation to the Tertiary Education and Training (Funding and Governance) (Scotland) Bill.
127. The Committee has also explored financial difficulties at specific institutions, and carried out more in-depth scrutiny of the situation at the University of Dundee, where significant job losses were being proposed, as a result of a large shortfall in the university’s finances.
128. The Committee also heard evidence in relation to the University of Edinburgh, Scotland’s Rural College and the University of Highlands and Islands, as well as hearing from Trade Union representatives representing staff across four major institutions.
129. The Committee heard that there were concerns about the funding model for colleges, which did not offer the same level of flexibility as that available to universities. Significant concerns were also raised about the college estate, with many buildings falling into disrepair.
130. The Committee believes that college and university funding will be a topic which will continue to be of interest to our successor committee.
131. In December 2025, the Minister for Higher and Further Education announced the

launch of the Framework for the Sustainability and Success of Scotland's Universities. This piece of joint work with Universities Scotland is designed to explore options for ensuring the sustainability of Scotland's higher education institutions until 2045. A steering group has been created to develop the Framework.

132. In the early days of Session 7, our successor committee may wish to engage with the work of the steering group to gauge progress in establishing the Framework for the Sustainability and Success of Scotland's Universities. It may also wish to hear directly from the Scottish Government to hold it to account, in relation to progress.
133. Our successor committee may also wish to check on progress being made to create a College Infrastructure Investment Plan, and potentially organise an evidence session in the event that this is published. The Committee may also wish to undertake further work in relation to college funding more generally.
134. The successor committee may also wish to keep a watching brief on the implementation of the Tertiary Education and Training (Funding and Governance) (Scotland) Bill/Act.
135. The successor committee may also wish to look at Scottish specialist institutions, e.g. Glasgow School of Art or the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, which have not been looked at recently.

Transitions

136. As previously highlighted, the Committee considered the Disabled Children and Young People (Transitions to Adulthood) (Scotland) Bill this session. This was a Member's Bill, introduced by Pam Duncan-Glancy MSP, which aimed to improve opportunities for disabled children and young people as they grew up. This Bill considered children to be under 18 and young people to be between 18 and 26.
137. The Bill sought to require:
 - the Scottish Government to have a strategy explaining how they were going to improve opportunities for disabled children and young people
 - a Scottish Government Minister to be in charge of improving opportunities for disabled children and young people moving into adulthood
 - local authorities to have plans for each disabled child and young person as they moved into adulthood
138. The Committee issued a Call for Views and heard oral evidence from a wide range of stakeholders. As previously stated, the Committee also undertook some engagement work with disabled young people, parents and professionals.
139. The Committee heard that young people and their families were not always being listened to by professionals. Some young people told the Committee that their

transition was often built around what other people thought was right for them, rather than what they wanted to do. There could also be poor communication between children and adult services, meaning that plans were not followed, and young people were often left feeling unsupported. The Committee also heard that professionals did not always involve young people and their families in making plans.

140. At the same time, the Committee heard some good examples of where transitions were working well for disabled children and young people. The Committee said that these examples should be shared across Scotland, so that others could learn from them.
141. The Committee also heard that there are many current laws and policies which are meant to make transitions work well, but these are often complicated, confusing and difficult to navigate. It is also often unclear who should take the lead on transitions. This means that young people and/or their parents regularly have to advocate for themselves to make transitions happen. Resources are also problematic. A good transitions plan can be undermined by a lack of local services, staff time or money.
142. Disabled young people said transitions worked best when:
 - Transitions planning was built around them as an individual. Young people spoke warmly about the people who had gone above and beyond to help them. They said that this often led to better results for them.
 - Transitions planning started from the point of view of the young person's hopes and wishes – rather than what adults thought they were capable of, or what was easily available.
 - Transitions planning was flexible – allowing a disabled young person to change their mind, and to set new goals at any point in their transitions journey.
143. The Committee recognised that the Bill was attempting to address some very serious issues being experienced by disabled young people transitioning into adulthood. The Committee heard that the current situation was complex, with different plans already being put in place/created for young people. However, the Committee was not convinced that introducing a new law would necessarily sort out the problems disabled young people had identified when transitioning into adulthood.
144. The Committee therefore recommended that the Bill did not progress beyond Stage 1. In doing so, it recognised that the Bill had highlighted that there remained very serious issues with how transitions were operating for disabled children and young people.
145. The Scottish Government published its National Transitions to Adulthood Strategy for Young Disabled People in June 2025. Our successor committee may wish to look at how this strategy is impacting on disabled young people's lived experiences, and what progress, if any, is being made towards addressing the concerns raised by disabled young people, parents and professionals in the context of the Disabled Children and Young People (Transitions to Adulthood) (Scotland) Bill.

Early Learning and Childcare

146. The Committee held a one-off evidence session on the implementation of the policy to provide 1,140 hours of early learning and childcare.
147. This session heard evidence from COSLA, Early Years Scotland, the National Day Nurseries Association and the Scottish Childminding Association.
148. The Committee heard that there were challenges in implementing the expanded Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) offer, including in relation to:
- The need for flexibility of provision to accommodate parents'/carers' working patterns - sometimes local authority provision was unable to deliver this flexibility;
 - The pay differentials between ELC workers in Local Authority and Private, Voluntary and Independent settings and the impact this was having on the workforce;
 - Difficulties in ensuring take up of ELC places for eligible 2 year olds.
149. The Committee had originally planned to return to Early Learning and Childcare as part of its pre-budget scrutiny in 2026-27. However, work on the financial sustainability of colleges and universities was taken forward instead.
150. However, the Committee believes that there is merit in our successor committee looking at this topic early in the new Parliamentary session.
151. Our successor committee may wish to carry out an evaluation of how 1,140 hours of funded early learning and childcare (ELC) is working in practice.
152. It may also be helpful for the new committee to examine any future expansions to pre-school and wrap-around childcare.

Future Topics for Exploration

153. In addition to the topics suggested earlier in this report, there may also be scope to explore the following issues early in Session 7:
- The updated Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood Guidance, which has recently been published by the Scottish Government.
 - Progress in relation to the provision of Free School Meals.
 - Progress in relation to securing better school attendance.
 - Work to limit the use of restraint in a wide range of settings, including in residential and secure care.
 - Work in relation to profit limitation in residential child care (linked to the Committee's scrutiny of the Children (Care, Care Experience and Services

Planning) (Scotland) Bill

Membership Changes

154. The Committee notes the findings of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee's Inquiry into Committee Effectiveness this session, particularly with respect to Committee Membership.
 155. Frequent changes to membership of the Education, Children and Young People Committee this session have made it more challenging for the Committee to follow through key topics over time, to gauge the extent to which progress has been made, and where it has stalled. As one of the Parliament's largest committees, the level of membership turnover has felt particularly acute.
 156. The Committee also recognises that the ECYP Committee is one of the largest committees in the Scottish Parliament. Having ten members can make it more difficult to explore issues in depth, as the focus is often on ensuring every member can participate.
 157. The Committee also notes that there has been a marked decline in the diversity of Committee Membership over this session, particularly in relation (but not limited) to, gender balance.
158. In Session 7 of the Scottish Parliament, it would be helpful to ensure that a higher proportion of committee members is retained for the full session, or at least for a significant proportion of it.
 159. Consideration should be given as to whether the successor committee should be smaller in Session 7.
 160. Where at all possible, political parties should also consider gender balance, when appointing or removing members from the Committee, in line with the findings of the Scottish Parliament's Gender Sensitive Audit.ⁱ Wider diversity factors should also be taken into account.

ⁱ A Parliament for All: Report of the Parliament's Gender Sensitive Audit, Scottish Parliament, March 2023.

Conclusion

161. The remit of the Education, Children and Young People Committee in Session 6 has been broad and hugely complex.
162. What has helped us navigate this brief has been the input and support of so many children, young people, parents/carers and professionals with knowledge of the sector, and insight into how systems impact on individuals.
163. If there is one message that we would like to pass on to our successor committee, it is this: your work will be hugely enhanced by continuing to meet with, listen to and take on board the recommendations of these stakeholders.
164. We would also urge our successor committee to build on our efforts this session to provide meaningful and accessible feedback to those who have engaged with us, in whatever format works best for them, whether that be via social media, accessible summaries of reports or via face to face feedback.
165. We end this Parliamentary session at the mid-point towards the Scottish Government's aim to meet the Promise by 2030. There remains significant scope for further change to policy, practice and legislation. Recognising that it is not the role of care experienced children, young people and adults to design this change, our hope is that they will continue to play a vital role in helping our successor committee scrutinise and assess whether the changes being proposed are appropriate, acknowledging in doing so that the care community itself is rich and diverse in thought.
166. We wish our successor committee all the best for Session 7.

