

Response from Who Cares? Scotland to the Education and Culture Committee's call for evidence on the educational attainment gap – Involvement of Parents



About Who Cares? Scotland

Who Cares? Scotland supports young people who have care experience up to 26 years of age, by providing on-going support and independent advocacy. We are the only organisation in Scotland to provide this service. Who Cares? Scotland aims to provide looked-after young people in Scotland with knowledge of their rights and strives to empower them to positively participate in the formal structures they are often subject to solely as a result of their care experience. At Who Cares? Scotland we utilise the voice of the care experienced population to inform everything we do as an organisation. Most recently we have published research that sought to ascertain care experienced young people's interpretation and views of the new Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014. 87 care experienced young people contributed to the research. This research can be accessed [here](#) and we would encourage the Committee to read the report in full.

Background

Who Cares? Scotland has already responded to the Committee's call for evidence on the educational attainment gap part 1 which sought information on the Commission for Developing Scotland's Workforce. Within our previous response, we acknowledged some of the poor education outcomes of the care experienced population and we would encourage the Committee to refer to this information for context.

This call for evidence focuses on the involvement of parents in addressing the educational attainment gap. However the care experienced young people we work in partnership with have often been subject to statutory intervention as a result of inadequate or unwilling parenting. These young people often progress through education with little support or input from their biological parents – something which we as an organisation believe is an important area for the Committee, and those working in education, to be mindful of. We do believe however, that corporate parents, as identified within the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, should help in mitigating against the deficit in support from parents that this particular group of young people may experience.

- *Do schools always explain clearly to parents how children learn throughout their school years and how parents could help their development (e.g. with reading and wider literacy approaches)?*

Our experience of providing independent advocacy informs us that schools are inconsistent in how they inform carers and support staff on how care experienced young people learn throughout their school years. Care experienced young people have required state intervention in their lives as a result of deficits in their needs. The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, will ensure that corporate parents will be required to work in a multi-disciplinary manner to ensure care experienced young people are best supported. Partnership working is essential in ensuring that the young person is supported in a holistic way and this support has to be effective enough to ensure looked after children and young people are able to achieve their full potential in education.

Schools should know of how many of their pupils are care experienced and should actively pursue building good professional relationships with those placed in charge of caring for the young person out of school hours. Efforts should be made to ensure that a young person's accommodation placement is provided with sufficient guidance to enable them to assist in the educational and personal development.

It is imperative that those working in education should be able to advocate clearly the educational needs to all those supporting young people. It is common for care experienced young people to have multiple placement moves during their care journey. Education staff should ensure that disruption to schooling is as limited as possible. In the event of a young person's living placement changing, in a planned or emergency basis, then education staff must ensure that new carers and support staff are made aware of how to best support the young person in education as quickly as possible.

Additionally, in the event that a home placement move results in the young person having to move to another school, the transfer of data related to the young person should happen effectively and in a timely manner. This will ensure that disruption to the young person is limited, and that professionals are aware of the needs of the young person.

In 2014, Who Cares? Scotland responded to the Equal Opportunities Committee's follow up inquiry into 'Having and Keeping a Home'. This response sought the direct views of care experienced young people on what it is like to leave care and manage independent living. The young people we spoke to in this spoke at length about the impact of multiple placement moves and the disruption that this can bring. In order to better understand how this can impact on those with care experience, we would urge the Committee to read the short report which can be accessed [here](#).

- *The extent to which schools offer particular support to the parents of pupils from the most disadvantaged communities, in order to improve the attainment of those pupils.*

Education is a protective factor that we should all be able to achieve. It provides us with the soft skills required to function in the workplace, expands on our academic knowledge and provides a place to learn how to socially interact with others appropriately. The care experienced child, and those at risk of becoming care experienced, must too be able to achieve this protective factor.

We at Who Cares? Scotland are aware from our advocacy experience that it can be difficult at times for those delivering education to effectively build good working relationships with parents

living chaotic lifestyles. It is essential however, that schools are accessible to all parents, regardless of situation, in order for all children to have the best chance of achieving in education. Where contact and engagement is difficult to achieve with parents or carers then we believe that a multi-disciplinary approach should be taken. Parents need to be provided with insight and knowledge of how to support their child, in order to address the educational attainment gap.

The care experienced population are subject to many formal processes which involve a range of professionals, from a variety of disciplines. In order for the young person to achieve in education, despite other factors out with their school career, teaching staff must have the courage to advocate strongly on how to best enable the young person to achieve in education. When attempting to meet the holistic needs of any young person, it is important that the educational needs are not neglected.

Through the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 and the duties now placed on 24 specific corporate parents, we will be better enabled than ever to provide care experienced young people with well rounded support and opportunities. Those providing education services must be aware of their duties as corporate parents, as well as the duties placed on others, to ensure that this Act is able to deliver on its intention. With all corporate parents being encouraged to work alongside each other, and hold each other to account, we can attempt to ensure that looked after young people and care leavers can be provided with a better experience growing up. Where there is a lack of biological parental support in a child's life, we must understand how to use this legislation to improve their education experiences; and ultimately their future life chances.

If you wish to discuss this further please contact:

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