

A Different Class?

Educational Attainment - the views and experiences of looked after young people.



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Acknowledgements

Who Cares? Scotland is committed to ensuring that the opinions of looked after young people are included in all consultations and discussions which affect their lives. To this end we were pleased to be commissioned by the Scottish Executive to establish what looked after young people themselves want from the education system, and to record their progress and ambitions.

I am indebted to the young people all over the country who took the time, yet again, to give the details of their lives. Thank you.

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Pauline O'Hagan

Introduction

Over many years, there has been a recognition that “...*the education of looked after children is not as good as it should be.*” (HM Inspectors of Schools & Social Work Services Inspectorate, 2001)

Thankfully, the Scottish Executive is committed to closing the opportunity gap for Looked after children in Scotland.

On 22 October 2001 The First Minister announced additional funding of up to £10 million to provide books, equipment and homework materials for every looked after child in Scotland. More than 11,000 children in care received between £500 and £2,500 worth of support.

The funding was intended to ensure that all looked after children are provided with an educationally rich environment. Ministers wanted the money to be targeted towards improving educational attainment by helping local authorities to implement the plans they had for the education of looked after children and enabling them to maximise their potential.

Who Cares? Scotland was commissioned to establish what looked after young people want from the education system. The aim of this consultation exercise was therefore to record the experiences of a large number of looked after young people from across the country. Through this record, we sought to provide baseline data on their self reported achievement, as well as qualitative information on their educational aspirations and motivation, to explore why these young people become disengaged from the education system, and whether they noticed any improvement from the £10 million investment in this area. Finally we sought the advice of the young people on how the educational attainment of looked after young people might be improved.

The report is therefore structured in sections according to the key aims of the consultation. For reasons of confidentiality, the comments of young people have been anonymised. The term “looked after” is used throughout the report and refers to young people who are, or have at one time been looked after and accommodated by the local authority. Equally the term “Young People” is the preference of the author and is used to describe all the children and young people who took part in the consultation, ranging in age from 7 – 18 years old. The terms official and unofficial school leaver were used to distinguish between young people who were of school leaving age and had legally left education, and those young people who legally should still be in full time education irrespective of their age.

Breakdown of Participants

The young people who took part in the consultation

This section aims to give an overview of the young people who participated in the consultation exercise which formed the basis of this report. It should be noted that whilst the young people answered questions relating to their type of care placement and length of time in care, they were not asked about their reasons for coming into care, or family backgrounds. Similarly the young people were asked to report their current educational placement and not their educational histories. None of the young people were asked questions regarding their ethnicity or level of disability.

In total 180 questionnaires were returned from young people, however 10 were returned too late to be considered in the full breakdown that follows.

Table 1:
Age Range of Respondents

Age	No. of Young people	Age	No. of young people
7	2	13	15
8	1	14	35
9	3	15	46
10	6	16	33
11	4	17	7
12	16	18	2

- 114 young people were aged 14-16 years old, representing 67% of respondents. The mean age for the group was 14.1 years.

Table 2:
Breakdown of respondents by Type of Care Placement and Gender

Gender	Foster Care	Residential unit	Residential School	Secure unit	Care Leaver	Supported lodgings	Total
Male	12	50	23	5	5	0	95
Female	18	43	5	4	4	1	75
Total	30	93	28	9	9	1	170

- 95 young people were male, representing 56% of respondents.

The high level of response from young people in residential units is reflective of the contact Who Cares? Scotland has with young people in this setting and is not reflective of the spread of looked after and accommodated young people in Scotland.

Table 3:

Breakdown of Respondents by length of time in care

Length of Time in Care	No. of Young people	% of Total
1-2 years	66	39
2-5 years	53	31
5 years+	46	27
No response	5	3

- 66 young people reported that they had been in care for less than 2 years, representing 39% of respondents.

Table 4:

Local Authorities Represented by Young people in the Report

Local Authorities Represented in Report		
Aberdeen City	East Renfrewshire	North Lanarkshire
Aberdeenshire	Edinburgh	Perth & Kinross
Angus	Falkirk	Renfrewshire
Argyll & Bute	Fife	Scottish Borders
Clackmannanshire	Glasgow	South Ayrshire
Dumfries & Galloway	Highland	South Lanarkshire
Dundee	Inverclyde	Stirling
East Ayrshire	Mid Lothian	West Dunbartonshire
East Dumbartonshire	Moray	West Lothian
East Lothian	North Ayrshire	

All mainland local authorities are represented in the report, unfortunately due to time constraints, and the current distribution of Who Cares? Scotland Young Persons Workers it was not possible to consult with young people from Western Isles, Orkney or Shetland local authorities.

Table 5:
Breakdown of Current Educational Placements by Type of Care

Educational Placement	Res. Unit	Res. School	Foster Care	Secure Care	Care Leaver	Supported Lodgings
Full time School	50	22	24	9	2	-
Part Time School	19	4	-	-	-	-
Not At School	8	-	2	-	7	-
College Placement	6	1	3	-	-	1
Tutor	2	-	-	-	-	-
I.T. Centre	1	-	-	-	-	-
Training Project	3	1	1	-	-	-
Employment Based Training	1	-	-	-	-	-
Alternative Education Project	2	-	-	-	-	-
Awaiting School Placement	1	-	-	-	-	-
Total	93	28	30	9	9	1

- 107 of the young people who took part in the consultation were receiving full time education, representing 63% of the sample.

In total 40 young people reported that they were not attending school either on a full or part time basis. This group can be further divided into 2 sub groups; official school leavers and unofficial school leavers. The findings relating to these young people will be discussed later in the report.

Working Towards...Achievement and Attainment

Achievement and Attainment

One of the key aims of the consultation exercise, and subsequent report was to provide the reader with baseline data on the self reported achievements of looked after young people. This section will present the data as related by the young people and explore the implications.

- Of the 170 respondents, 68 reported achieving qualifications representing 40% of the sample.

However this figure recognises a range of qualifications, incorporating practical skills awards and vocational subjects, across the age range of 7-18 years. It is important to acknowledge these achievements as well that of formal academic qualifications, as they reflect a great source of pride for the young people who participated in the consultation.

Table 6:

Breakdown of Range of Qualifications Achieved by Young People

Level of Qualification	No of young people
Standard grade, Access or Intermediate	39
SVQ	4
Practical Skill	18
Youth Award Scheme	4
Highers	1
5-14 curriculum	3

- Practical skills included certificates for swimming, life saving, Kayaking, cycling proficiency, football and dancing.

Interestingly if we reduce the sample to those young people aged 15 or over, who are therefore of an age to have achieved standard grades, the figures for attainment are not greatly improved.

- 88 young people involved in the consultation are aged 15-18, allowing us to interpret the 39 who achieved Standard grades etc as 44% of those eligible.

Like many of the findings from existing research, the consultation responses show that looked after young people are still falling below the national figures for attainment.

- The average number of standard grades for those young people achieving awards in the sample was 4, compared to a national average of 7.

Table 7:

Young people Achieving Standard Grades by Type of Care.

Type of Care	Total No. of Male Female aged 15-18		No. Achieving Standard Grades Male Female		% Achieving in Type of Care
	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Residential Unit	14	27	4	8	29%
Foster care	6	12	4	8	67%
Secure	5	1	2	1	50%
Residential School	13	1	7	1	57%
Care Leavers	5	3	1	3	50%

The data presented above, reveals a disparity between the percentage of young people achieving standard grades in residential units and those in other types of care settings. This is particularly evident when comparing the figures for residential units and foster care. This information reinforces previous research findings that young people living in foster care are likely to fair better educationally that their counterparts in residential units. (St Claire and Osbourne, 1987)

Whilst improving the educational attainment of all looked after young people is a key priority, central to this concern, must be a concerted effort to redress the balance between young people in differing types of care.

It is interesting to note from the results generated above that there is little difference in achievement by the two genders in residential units and foster care. That is to say, in residential units 30% of females achieved standard grades compared to 29% of males, and in foster care both sexes achieved a 67% success rate. Yet this does not appear to be the case in other types of care. In secure care, 100% of females achieved standard grades compared to 40% of males. Similarly of the young people in residential schools, 100% of females achieved, compared to 54% of males.

Working Towards....

Table 8:*Breakdown of Range of Qualifications Young People are Working Towards*

Level of Qualification	No of young people
Standard grade, Access or Intermediate	81
Highers	10
Practical Skill	4
Youth Award Scheme	1
SVQ	8
NC	1
5-14 curriculum	6

- 111 reported working towards qualifications, representing 65% of the sample.
- 46 of the 111 young people reported already achieving qualifications.
- The 111 young people ranged in age from 9-18, with only a small number below the age of 14.

Whilst the data highlights a majority of young people working towards qualifications, a significant number, 59 young people, reported not working towards any qualifications. This number however does include the full age range of the report, and therefore we must allow for some of the younger participants, who may have been unaware of the national curriculum they are working towards.

Of the 59 young people not working towards qualifications, 37 were in the sub group who reported not achieving any qualifications. Worryingly 35 of the 37, are in the 15-18 age bracket. As a result it appears they are likely to conclude their education as a further statistic which evidences that looked after young people are failing educationally. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the previous data, 65% of those young people live in residential units, compared to 10% living in foster care.

Conclusion

- More than half the young people eligible to sit formal academic qualifications report not having achieved any.
- The young people who do achieve do less well than the national average.
- Young people in residential units do less well than their counterparts in other care settings.
- In most care settings females outperform males, yet in residential units both sexes perform poorly.
- A significant number of young people, of an appropriate age, have achieved no qualifications and report not working towards any.

Aspirations and Motivations

The consultation exercise also sought to explore the educational aspirations and motivations of looked after young people and how this may vary according to age and gender.

Aspirations

In total 163 young people responded to the questions asked about their educational aspirations.

The majority, 56%, expressed their aspirations in terms of achieving academically.

“I want to pass all my exams” (male, 14)

“Getting good marks” (male, 10)

“A good education and good qualifications” (female, 15)

For many of the young people there was a clear link between educational success and successful employment.

“Qualifications to get a good job” (female, 16)

“Finish school to the end of 6th year, get all my highers and get a good job”
(male, 15)

“Qualification, good CV to help me get a job” (female, 15)

11 young people expressed their aspirations as including further or higher education, typically these young people were at the top end of the age range.

“To further my education either in university or college” (female, 18)

“I hope to achieve the rest of my grades to be able to go on to university next year” (female, 17)

“Qualifications for college” (male, 16)

Whilst the young people were representative of the different care settings, it is interesting to note that there appears to be very real gender differences. Of the 11 young people, 8 were female suggesting a higher level of young females aspiring to third level education. However, this difference appears to be even more pronounced when we consider that not one of the males aspired to university, all 3 referred only to progressing to college.

8 young people stated that making friends was their primary aspiration.

“Make friends” (male, 9)
“Pals” (female, 13)
“Making friends” (male, 14)

It is worth noting, that all of the young people for whom friendship was their key aim, were aged 9-14 and in the majority of cases living in a residential unit. This is perhaps unsurprising given the overwhelming need for a sense of belonging that is common at this age.

Similarly, the group of young people who expressed “nothing” as their aspiration were more likely to live in a residential unit, yet crossed a wider age range that of 12-17 years old.

From the data, another small group emerges that of young people who describe their educational aspiration in terms of their self esteem as summed up by this young person.

“A sense of achievement” (female, 16)

This group are spread across the different care settings, but typically are aged 14 – 16 years old.

Motivation

159 young people took the opportunity to describe their educational motivation. Broadly speaking, for many of the young people their motivating factor was the achievement of their aspirations thus similar groupings as previously mentioned are echoed in the motivational information. However additional factors emerged as key motivations. Firstly, many of the participants described their enjoyment of particular subjects as motivation to attend school. Equally a positive relationship with teaching staff was seen as a key motivation.

“Because I like English” (male, 15)
“Enjoy maths” (male, 9)
“I like the teachers, French and subjects” (female, 16)
“Get on well with teachers” (male, 15)
“I get on with my guidance teacher” (female, 16)

Many of the young people also expressed their understanding of the legal requirement for education as their motivation as illustrated by the following quote.

“Because the law says I have to” (male, 13)

For some young people, particularly those in residential units, education was seen as a means to escape from their living situation. Yet this did not figure predominantly for young people in other types of care settings.

“It gets me out of the unit” (female, 15)

“To get me out of the unit” (male, 14)

However, many of the young people across a wide age range and a variety of care settings talked of carers “making” them go to school as their motivating factor. Yet the young people acknowledged that without this push by staff they would lack the motivation to attend school.

“Because I am made to” (male, 15)

“I don’t go to school unless someone makes me” (female, 15)

A clear distinction in motivation arose for the majority of the younger children involved in the consultation. Many of the young people aged 7 -11 years old described their motivation as the need to learn.

“To learn more things” (male, 11)

“I need to learn” (male, 7)

“To learn to count, read and spell” (male, 10)

With regard to parental influences on educational motivation, it is interesting to note that not only were care leavers the only group to describe parents as impacting on them in this way, parents was the sole motivation for over one third of them.

“I want my mum to be proud of me” (female, 13)

“mum” (male, 16)

Conclusion

- More than half the young people responding expressed their aspiration to achieve academically.
- Few young people were aiming for third level education.
- Only females aspired to university.
- For younger children their aspirations lay in the social aspect of school life.
- Young people without educational aims were more likely to live in residential units.
- 14-16 year olds were the group most likely to be concerned with self esteem.

- For many young people their motivation equalled their aspirations.
- Positive relationships with teachers were a key motivation.
- Escape from their living situation was a key motivation for some young people living in residential units.
- Younger children are motivated by the need to learn.
- Care leavers acknowledged parental influence as a motivating factor.

Disengagement

A key focus for the consultation was to try to establish when and why some looked after young people become disengaged from the education system. As mentioned previously, 40 young people reported that they were not attending school either on a full or part time basis. This group can be divided into official school leavers and unofficial school leavers.

- 17 of the young people not at school described themselves as unofficial school leavers, 9 of whom were female, 8 were male. These young people represent 10% of the consultation participants.
- 14 of those unofficial leavers were aged 14-16 yrs old, representing 82% of all unofficial leavers.
- The mean age for unofficial school leavers varied significantly according to gender. The mean age for females in this group was 15.1 years, whereas the mean age for their male counterparts was 13.6 years.

Table 9:

Age range of young people describing themselves as Unofficial Leavers

Age	No. of Young people
7	1
12	1
14	3
15	9
16	2
17	1
Total	17

- 3 unofficial leavers reported receiving no other form of educational input. All 3 of these young people were living in residential units and have been in care for 1-2 yrs.
- 2 of the 3 were male.
- Worryingly 1 of the young people is 7 years old and has had no educational placement for 6 months.

The Timescales for non attendance given by the young people were varied, however they imply an acceptance by some that it is acceptable for young people in care to be without an educational placement for significant periods

of time. This is clearly not the case; the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 Regulations and Guidance -Volume 2 states that

“Children who are looked after should have the same opportunities as all other children for education, including further and higher education, and access to other opportunities for development”

The experience of these young people, and others like them, show that there is still progress to be made in reaching the target set in January 2002 by, the then Minister for Education and Young People, Cathy Jamieson, that all looked after children should receive full time education.

Table 10:

Timescales for non attendance for unofficial school leavers.

Timescales for Non attendance	No. of Young People
Mar 02	1
May 02	2
Dec02	1
Last year	1
Since Secondary*	1
Feb 03	2

* Timescale given by a 12 yr old, implying no education for the current school term.

- 8 of the young people who were unofficial leavers explained why they do not attend school.

Disappointingly, one of the most common reasons was due to exclusion; this was the case for 3 of the 8 young people, in their own words...

“Chucked out” (female, 15)
“Excluded from school” (male, 14)
“Not in school, I’ve been suspended” (male, 7)

A further 3 young people explained that their dislike of school was the main barrier to their attendance...

“Because it’s boring and annoying, I don’t like the work, but teachers are ok”
 (male, 15)
“Don’t like it” (female, 15)
“I hate it and can’t handle it” (male, 15)

The remaining young people provided insights into their non-attendance, which will be familiar to many, as described below.

“Because I’ve just moved back to [Area], and I have no school placement waiting for me” (male, 14)

This is not an insurmountable problem, many schools and local authorities manage to overcome such obstacles. Provision of transport to maintain school placements, or prioritising educational placements when a young person is moving, are obvious ways of overcoming problems such as these.

“Getting bullied, fighting with teachers and getting into trouble” (female, 15)

The description above of one young person’s non-attendance relates an all too common tale. It has been well documented that fighting is a frequent reaction to bullying, often incorporating verbal attacks on teachers, which further precipitates exclusion. Readily available support for young people experiencing bullying and further training for teachers on managing difficult behaviour are simple yet effective strategies in reducing levels of disaffection.

Whilst the young people who are disengaged from the education system represent a relatively small percentage of the total sample, the lessons we must learn from their experiences are extremely important. Further consideration must be given to apparent disparity between young people in residential units who become disengaged and those young people in other types of care.

Table 11:

Type of care placements for unofficial school leavers.

Type of Care Placement	No. of Young People
Foster Care	3
Residential School	2
Residential Unit	11
Supported lodging	1
Care leaver	-
Total	17

It is equally concerning that some young people living in residential schools do not describe themselves as receiving either full or part time education from that provision.

Conclusion

- The vast majority of all unofficial school leavers were aged 14 – 16 years olds.
- Male unofficial leavers were on average younger than their female counterparts..
- 65% of all unofficial leavers were living in residential units.
- Those unofficial school leavers receiving no further educational input were all living in residential units.
- Most of the young people who were out of school had been so for between six months and a year.
- Young people described familiar reasons for their disengagement including exclusion, lack of placement and bullying.

Improving the Education of Looked After Young People

What the young people tell us...

154 of the young people taking part in the consultation exercise responded to the question “What else could be done to improve education for looked after young people?”

The majority of recommendations made by the participants are applicable to all school settings; however some recommendations are specific to residential schools, as well as to individual young people. Looking firstly at the more general recommendations there is a broad level of consensus amongst the young people as to what needs to happen to improve their education.

The main areas for improvement as identified by the young people include,

- Increased number of teachers and support staff.
- Increased participation and choice by young people.
- Greater understanding from teaching staff of the difficulties faced by looked after young people.
- Smaller class sizes.
- Increased learning resources in the classroom.
- Financial rewards.
- Effective tackling of bullying.

The first key area identified by the young people is a familiar resource issue. 13% of respondents to this question recommended more teachers, tutors and support staff. The reasons behind the recommendations illustrate the different needs of individual young people as presented below.

“More teachers and assistants, so if there is a bad boy, they can take them to the head and the teacher stays with us” (male, 7)

“More tutors to help you catch up when you miss school” (male, 16)

“More classroom assistants” (male, 10)

“More tutors, one on one” (female, 16)

The young people for whom staff resourcing was an issue ranged in age from 7 – 17 years old and were representative of various type of care settings, indicating that this is not an issue specific to one group of looked after young people.

Interestingly increased participation and choice was an area of particular concern for young people aged 13 – 16 years old. This may be indicative of younger children accepting what they are told from people in authority, as opposed to having a say in their education. However the comments listed below reflect the level of frustration felt by young people who feel they have little or no say in an important area of their lives.

“They need to let you make your own decisions and stop treating you as if you’re daft” (male, 16)

“They could ask your own views” (female, 14)

“Being listened to” (female, 16)

14% of the young people referred to a lack of understanding on behalf of teaching staff of the difficulties faced by young people in care. This was therefore for those participants the key improvement required to better their education. The desire for an increased awareness of the issues by all staff was tempered only by a wish that within the school setting there was one key member of staff who was aware of a young person’s specific situation.

“Someone who understands difficulty when you’re in care” (female, 16)

“It would have helped if they could understand my problems and the things going on where I was living” (female, 13)

“Teachers with better attitudes” (male, 14)

“One teacher within the school should know about your care situation”
(female, 13)

“More support, more understanding. If I could have talked to one teacher who knew my situation instead of all the teachers knowing.” (female, 16)

An interesting aspect of this 14% of young people is that the majority describe themselves as not attending education. Throughout this section, and looking at all the recommendations made by the young people, it is only here that non attenders are in the majority. It could therefore be argued that the attitude of teaching staff has a greater correlation to disengagement than the other areas identified.

Significantly, a smaller class size was an area for improvement recommended by a majority of males living in residential units. In total 8% of the young people felt this would help their education.

“Smaller classes” (male, 16)

“Small class sizes” (male, 14)

“Less numbers in classes” (male, 16)

It is perhaps unsurprising that across the care settings, it is young people who manage to maintain full time education who recognise the need for extra learning resources in the classroom.

“Resources and materials being provided for lessons and funding for equipment”

(male, 15)

“School books” (male, 16)

“Materials for information stuff” (male, 16)

5% of the young people felt that financial rewards would help to improve their education. Whilst a few of these participants were aged 14 years their requests for money appeared to be related to their desire to wider opportunities, perhaps to be more like their friends.

“More money for us, for extra curricular activities” (female, 14)

However the remainder of the respondents were older and their requests for financial assistance mirrored assistance that *“other”* young people are entitled to.

“Should be entitled to a bursary as not entitled” (female, 17)

“Money for going to school” (male, 18)

The final general recommendation made by the young people was for more effective measures to reduce bullying. From the data, it is clear that bullying is more of an issue for young people aged 14-16 years old, however it may be that younger children feel that when they have a problem with bullying it is dealt with more effectively.

“Stopping bullying” (male, 14)

“Crack down on bullying” (female, 14)

From the information given by the young people it is clear that their insight is extremely valuable, and their recommendations for improvements are not beyond the scope of those in authority.

However, a number of the participants were unsure as to what improvements would make a real difference to the education of looked after young people. Equally a small number 5% felt there was *“nothing”* which could help. This group can be further divided into two sub groups; those for whom nothing was a positive statement and those for whom it was negative.

For example, one young person felt they had a positive educational experience and therefore that no improvements are required, as summed up below.

“Nothing, it’s all right” (male, 15)

Yet, for others the opposite is true. Such was their disillusionment with the education system that they saw no hope for improvement.

“Nothing they can do” (male, 13)

As previously mentioned, some of the recommendations by the respondents were specific to residential schools. The most common of these improvements relates to the quality and quantity of subjects and is described below.

“Bringing in the same subjects as mainstream” (male, 15)

“More standard grades in all residential schools” (male, 16)

“Harder work” (male, 14)

Perhaps, as one might expect there were a number of very individual comments made by young people which are nonetheless valuable for being individual. They are recorded here.

“I would like to have lunch all units [in the residential school] together. This would make it easier to get along when we could chat when having lunch” (male, 12)

“Counselling classes” (female, 15)

“Leaving support should be available” (male, 14)

“Old buildings into new buildings” (female, 13)

Some comments made by the young people are concerning as they indicate a willingness on their behalf to improve their educational opportunities and experience, yet it appears little regard has been paid to their wishes.

“Social work departments to get a scribe for young people to be allowed to sit exams, as I can’t read or write and wasn’t allowed the privilege” (male, 16)

“Being able to be at school full time” (male, 12)

“Not having to move placements” (female, 13)

If there is to be any value in exercises such as this consultation, we must start listening to the views of young people, and the value of listening to them must be appreciated at all levels of the care and education sectors.

Conclusion

- Young people's recommendations fell broadly into 3 categories
 - In the classroom*
 - Increase the number of teachers and support staff
 - Increase class resources.
 - Decrease class sizes.
 - In school*
 - Increase levels of participation.
 - Increase and improve understanding of issues faced by looked after young people.
 - Introduce effective measures to tackle bullying.
 - Strategic*
 - Alter eligibility for financial assistance.
 - Young people also recorded specific recommendations for residential schools.

Educational Attainment Money

Noticeable Improvement from the Recent Investment?

A key objective of the consultation was to establish whether looked after young people had noticed any improvement from the recent £10 million investment by the Scottish Executive. The resource allocation was based on the number of looked after young people in each local authority's area, with £500 allocated for each young person looked after in a community placement, and £2500 for young people in local authority or independent residential homes, residential schools or secure accommodation. In the distribution of the investment Local authorities were asked to adhere to the principle that the money should follow the child.

Whilst feedback from local authorities indicates that the investment was welcome and well spent, and information from carers and staff seems to support this, there is some question as to whether a random selection of young people feel the same.

Central to this point, is the issue of awareness of the investment. It is intrinsically difficult to recognise the benefit of an investment if you are unaware of it.

Table 12:

Awareness of Educational Attainment Money by Type of Care Placement.

Type	Total Number	Aware	Not Aware
Foster Care	30	14	16
Residential Unit	93	42	51
Residential School	28	12	16
Secure Unit	9	3	6
Care leaver	9	1	8
Supported lodgings	1	-	1
Total	170	72	98

- 58% of the respondents were unaware of the recent investment.

An important function of the recent investment was “to raise the educational attainment of looked after young people to meet their ambitions and abilities” “to close the opportunity gap” The majority of local authorities have reported (Improving the educational attainment of looked after children – Additional resources for 2001/2002, The Scottish Executive April, 2003) passing the funds directly to the residential school or home in question, or directly to carers after an application was submitted, as they would be best placed to decide how the money would be spent, ensuring that the spend catered to educational needs.

Local authorities have undoubtedly built on existing initiatives to develop a supportive infrastructure to improve the life chances of looked after young people. These actions have helped improve educational provision and increase the understanding and awareness of professionals of the particular difficulties faced by looked after young people. Whilst all of this is necessary and overdue in terms of individual needs and raising individual attainment, it is the case that the young people are well placed to have an input into how this can be achieved.

It appears that time constraints, placed on the distribution of funds, have restricted the level of consultation with young people on how they could best benefit from this investment. This is disappointing. The involvement of young people and their right to express their views on issues which affect them is enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Children (Scotland) Act 1995. The Standards in Scotland’s Schools etc Act 2000 describes the duty of education authority in providing school education. “...to secure that the education is directed to the development of the...young person to their fullest potential.” Section 2 (2) states “In carrying out their duty under this section, an education authority shall have due regard so far as is reasonably practicable, to the views (if there is a wish to express them) of the child or young person in decisions that significantly affect that child or young person, taking account of the child or young person’s age and maturity” It is clear from the data that the opportunity to involve all looked after young people in this way was not grasped.

Table 13:

Total numbers consulted on Educational Attainment Spend

Total No.	Say on Spend	%	No Say	%
170	38	22	132	78

If we look at the number of young people who had a say on the spending of the educational attainment money across the range of care settings, It is worth noting that the differences in levels of consultation do not vary considerably. This is particularly true when we consider the care settings which had a large number of young people represented in the sample. That is to say, if we look at the young people in foster care, residential units and residential schools, there is a consistency in the lack of consultation across these types of care.

The breakdown of numbers of young people consulted is detailed in the table below.

Table 14:

Young People consulted on Educational Attainment Spend by Type of Care

Type	Total No.	Say on Spend	%	No Say	%
Foster Care	30	6	20	24	80
Residential Unit	93	24	26	69	74
Residential School	28	6	21	22	79
Secure Unit	9	2	22	7	78
Care leaver	9	-	0	9	100
Supported lodgings	1	-	0	1	100
Total	170	38	54	132	46

Of the 38 young people reporting having a say on the spend, 34 confirmed the educational attainment money was spent in the way they had requested.

As previously mentioned, a key objective of the consultation was to establish whether looked after young people had noticed any improvement from the investment. The participants were therefore asked “Do you think this has helped you?” and “Do you think others have benefited from their money?” Looking firstly at whether the young people themselves felt any direct benefit, their responses are highlighted below.

Table 15:

Total Numbers Reporting Benefit from the Educational Attainment Investment.

Total No.	Yes	%	No	%
170	39	23	131	77

It is interesting to note that for some young people who felt no direct benefit themselves from the investment, there were still obvious benefits to others.

Table 16:
Total Numbers Reporting Benefit to Other Young People

Help to you	Total	Help to others	No help to others
Yes	39	26	13
No	131	18	113

- 44 young people felt that other young people had benefited from the investment, yet 18 of this number felt that they themselves had not benefited.

For those 72 young people who were aware of the investment, the majority, 51, were able to report what the money was spent on. More than half, commented that the money was spent on PC's, laptops and associated equipment, such as programmes, CD-ROMs, printers etc. The remaining young people described spending in 3 key areas; Specific lessons, practical resources and equipment and Educational trips. Examples of this expenditure are given below.

“Swimming Lessons” (male, 7)
“Horse riding lessons” (male, 10)
“New equipment, textbooks” (female, 15)
“French CDs” (female, 15)
“Calculators, spell checkers, dictionary etc” (female, 15)
“Educational Trip” (male, 15)

However, for some of the young people, the principle that the money should follow the child was clearly not adhered to. The young people in question were able to comment on the spending of the money, but reported disappointment as they appreciated that there would be no direct benefit for them, or in some cases, any other looked after young people.

“My £500 was spent on a laptop, which the school kept I only got to use it once before I moved school” (female, 12)
“Money was given to [Name] High School in April, which was the same time plans were made for me to leave this school” (female, 14)

Conclusion

- More than half the young people were unaware of the recent money invested in their educational attainment.
- Few of the young people were consulted with regarding how best to improve their education via the investment.
- Many of the young people report feeling no direct benefit of the investment.
- In some cases, the money will not “follow the child” or possibly any other looked after young person.
- Future research should be conducted on the impact of the £10 million investment.

Conclusion

The sum of it all...

This consultation exercise sought to record the experiences of a large number of looked after young people from across Scotland. Through this record, our aim was to provide baseline data on their self reported achievement, as well as qualitative information on their educational aspirations and motivations. To explore why these young people become disengaged from the education system, and whether they noticed any improvement from the £10 million investment in this area. Finally we sought the advice of the young people on how their educational attainment might be improved.

The views and experiences reported here do not paint a greatly changed picture from that which we have seen before. However we can be optimistic, the commitment to closing the opportunity gap between looked after young people and those living at home has rarely been so strong. But this commitment must be matched by a commitment to take forward the views of these young people.

The young people have told us they are not achieving as well as they could, they have told us what they want from education, they have told us why they feel “disengaged” from school, they have told us what can be done to help them and they have told us that, as yet, they feel little benefit from recent investments. So now we must move forward and action what we have been told.

It is not good enough that 37% of those asked are not receiving full time education.

It is not good enough that the majority of young people, who are out of school, have been so between 6 months and a year.

It is not good enough that a 7 year old child is without education.

It is not good enough that young people do not feel involved in decisions regarding key areas of their lives.

It is not good enough that only a few young people aspire to university.

Looked after young people sit in classrooms around the country, in schools the length and breadth of Scotland, yet for all intents and purposes they are in a different class. They are asking for help, for a say, for a chance to succeed and they must be answered. Our schools must become a classless society where there is equal opportunity for all young people. Or we will continue to fail them.

Appendix A

Educational Attainment Questionnaire

Educational Attainment Questionnaire

Inform the young person these details will remain confidential. 'Type' - Foster care, secure etc. 'Name*' - Not applicable for Foster care	1. Personal Details Name: _____ Age: _____ Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female <input type="checkbox"/> Local Authority: _____ Placement Type: _____ Name*: _____ How long have you been looked after? 1-2yrs <input type="checkbox"/> 2-5yrs <input type="checkbox"/> 5yrs or more <input type="checkbox"/>																																				
'Details' - include any other form of education pending or provided e.g. 'exclusion project', home tutor etc.	2. Attendance Are you attending school? Full-time <input type="checkbox"/> Part-time <input type="checkbox"/> Not at all <input type="checkbox"/> If 'Not at all' do you receive another form of education? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Details: _____																																				
This section should include all educational achievements so far - modules, standard grades, highers 'Grade' - e.g. credit, general foundation etc. 'Date' - approximate date is sufficient	3. Qualifications you have Achieved <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse; text-align: center;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="width: 50%;">Subject</th> <th style="width: 15%;">Level</th> <th style="width: 15%;">Grade</th> <th style="width: 20%;">Date</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> </tbody> </table>	Subject	Level	Grade	Date																																
Subject	Level	Grade	Date																																		
Include all educational achievements being worked towards - modules, standard grades, highers, national certificates etc. 'Grade' - e.g. credit, general foundation etc. 'Date' - expected date of completion	4. Qualifications you are Working Towards <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse; text-align: center;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="width: 50%;">Subject</th> <th style="width: 15%;">Level</th> <th style="width: 15%;">Grade</th> <th style="width: 20%;">Date</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> </tbody> </table>	Subject	Level	Grade	Date																																
Subject	Level	Grade	Date																																		
e.g. qualifications, confidence, work experience, making friends etc.	5. Educational Aims What do you want to get/did you want to get out of school/education? <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 100px; width: 100%;"></div>																																				

<p>If this question proves difficult as a prompt you could ask 'what they like about school?'</p>	<p>6. Motivation Why do you go to school?</p>
<p>Only to be completed if not attending school</p> <p>'Officially' means they were of school leaving age</p> <p>If 'Yes' go to question 8</p>	<p>7. Currently Not in Education Have you officially left school? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>If 'No', when did you stop attending? _____</p> <p>Why, in your own words, do you not attend school?</p> <p>What would help you to return to school?</p>
<p>Young people may not be aware of this funding, or the amount – any questions from the young person should be handled with sensitivity</p>	<p>8. Educational Attainment Money Did you know that your Local Authority was given money to spend on your individual education? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <hr/> <p>How was your educational attainment money spent?</p> <hr/> <p>Did you have a say in how the money was spent? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Was it spent in the way you wanted it to be? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Do you think this has helped you? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Do you think others have benefited from their money? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p>
	<p>9. Making it Better What else could be done to improve education for looked after young people?</p>
<p>This could include further/higher education, training, employment etc.</p> <p>'Hopes for the future' is in relation to education or employment</p>	<p>10. The Future What have you done since/would you like to do after leaving school?</p> <p>What are your hopes for the future?</p>
<p>Y.P.W. name</p> <p>Ref. No. for office use only</p>	<p>Completed by: _____ Date: _____</p> <p>Reference Number <input type="checkbox"/><input type="checkbox"/><input type="checkbox"/><input type="checkbox"/><input type="checkbox"/><input type="checkbox"/><input type="checkbox"/><input type="checkbox"/><input type="checkbox"/><input type="checkbox"/></p>