



## Education Reform

### Overview of themes from Who Cares? Scotland

November 2021

#### Introduction

Who Cares? Scotland is the leading national voluntary organisation, working with and on behalf of Care Experienced people across Scotland, whose vision is a lifetime of equality, respect and love for Care Experienced people. WC?S delivers individual, group and collective advocacy services; training and support to Corporate Parents and organisations; campaigning; and policy and research work across Scotland.

WC?S has worked with, and supported, Care Experienced learners from early years through to postgraduate study and as a result, has gained an insight into where the learner journey is significantly challenging for this group. We have prepared evidence to inform the review of education, and this is coming from the perspective of what we know about:

- The full learner journey for Care Experienced people
- The changes that are necessary to enhance the experiences and outcomes of current and future learners
- The impact of a whole school approach to make positive change for Care Experienced people
- What a Care Experienced learner needs in order to thrive

Please see the additional evidence submitted (listed at the end of this paper) for further information on each of the above.

Whilst we recognise the scope of Prof. Muir's remit, and what education reform is intending to achieve, we also believe it is important to provide detail on what we know about the wider context for Care Experienced people and how other changes in education could enhance the experiences and outcomes for Care Experienced learners.

#### The Vision

*“Schools in Scotland must be ambitious for care experienced children and ensure they have all they need to thrive, recognising that they may experience difficulties associated with their life story.”*

(The Promise, p.71)

Care Experience is truly taken into consideration during the reform process and is given the time, space and thought that is deserved. The Blueprint for Fairness from the Commission on Widening Access and its consideration of Care Experience could be looked to as an example – it was known that Care Experience would be explored as part of their work but through meaningful engagement with Care Experienced people it was recognised that specific recommendations were required for this group. Education reform now has the opportunity to make a real difference to the schooling and



progression of Care Experienced learners by listening to them, taking the context in which they learn into consideration, embedding a human rights based approach and ensuring the right to education is truly realised.

### Evidence of inequality in education for Care Experienced children

(Scottish Government, 2021 - [Education Outcomes for Looked After Children 2019/20](#))

- Latest figures show that Care Experienced school leavers continue to have lower attainment than other school leavers. In 2019/20 64% of all school leavers had 1 or more qualification at SCQF level 6 or better, whereas **only 14% of school leavers looked after within the last year had qualifications of that level.**
- Care Experienced school leavers are also **more likely to leave school with no passes at SCQF 3 or better**, with 13% of school leavers looked after within the last year being recorded with no passes, compared to 2% of all school leavers.
- Care Experienced children and young people leave school earlier than their non-Care Experienced peers. **In 2019-20, 43% of all school leavers who were looked after within the year left school in S4 or earlier**, compared with just 11% of all school leavers.
- Care Experienced children are **less likely to be in positive destinations nine months after leaving school**. Figures from 2019-20 show that 75% of school leavers looked after within the last year were in positive destinations. This is compared to 92% of all schools leavers.
- The **rate of exclusions among pupils looked after within the year is much higher** than in the general school population. The rate of exclusions among pupils looked after within the year was 152 per 1,000 pupils in 2018/19. This is around seven times higher than the rate of 22 per 1,000 pupils for all pupils. However, **the overall number of looked after pupils being excluded continues to fall year on year.** (Scottish Government, 2020).
- Children in residential accommodation and at home with parents tend to have higher rates of exclusions than those looked after in foster care and with friends or relatives. (Scottish Government, 2020).
- Care Experienced children are automatically deemed to have additional support needs, unless otherwise assessed. Despite this, **around half of Care Experienced children have not been assessed** for a coordinated support plan, even though they are entitled in law (Govan Law Centre, 2015).

### Key Themes

“Scotland must ensure that in being ambitious for achievement and opportunity, there is also recognition that schools provide an important place for care experienced children to enjoy stable, nurturing relationships that prepare them for life beyond school.”

The Promise (p. 71)



# WHO CARES? SCOTLAND

WC?S believes that the following must be considered in order to make positive change for Care Experienced people through education:

- The specific context in which Care Experienced learners go through schooling and college
- The importance of robust meaningful relationships between teacher and pupil/student in a Care Experienced person's life
- All teachers should know and understand their Care Experienced pupils
- In reforming two Corporate Parenting bodies (SQA and Education Scotland) – we need to be clear on where Corporate Parenting duties will lie in the new bodies that are formed
- Embedding a child/human rights approach across education

## The Promise

“Care experienced children and young people will receive all they need to thrive at school. There will be no barriers to their engagement with education and schools will know and cherish their care experienced pupils.

School improvement plans will value and recognise the needs of their care experienced pupils with robust tracking of attendance and attainment so that support can be given early.

Care experienced young people will be actively participating in all subjects and extracurricular activities in schools.

The formal and informal exclusion of care experienced children from education will end.

Schools will support and ensure care experienced young people go on to genuinely positive destinations, such as further education or employment.”

The Change Programme One, A Good Childhood, The Right to Education (p.28)

The Communities that Care model that WC?S has developed to work in, and with, schools is an example of how we can achieve [A Good Childhood](#) and in particular, the right to education.

Schools are an ideal setting to improve attitudes, understanding and perceptions of Care Experienced people amongst the next generation. School pupils will grow up to become adult community members; they are the future employers, workforce and Corporate Parents. Creating school environments which are more supportive and inclusive provides an opportunity to improve education outcomes for Care Experienced pupils, which are disproportionately poor compared with their peers ([Education Outcomes for Looked After Children 2019/20](#)).

In particular, the practice of formal and informal exclusion must end for Care Experienced pupils. Care Experienced people should not have their timetable reduced to below their 30 hour entitlement to such an extent as to exclude them in all but name.

## Human-rights and equalities approach

“In order to ensure that care experienced children are fully included and supported, schools in Scotland must have a clear understanding of the rights of children and how to uphold them.”



The Promise (p.71)

Reform to education must look at how existing duties to Care Experienced people, alongside human and child rights approaches can be embedded, in particular:

- Transparency for learners in decisions made about curriculum/other education choices
- Clear ways to seek redress – complaints/feedback of views on new education set-up/assessments.
- Pro-active work from schools and new education bodies to understand student experiences, particularly those most disadvantaged
- Utilise the [PANEL principles](#)
- Ensuring existing equalities duties must be considered in education reform. Although not a protected characteristic, care experience should still be covered by wider equalities duties that public bodies in Scotland must adhere to – SQA interpretation should have taken this into account.
  - For example, [the Fairer Scotland Duty](#), set out in Part 1 of the 2010 Equality Act, places a legal responsibility on particular public bodies in Scotland to actively consider ('pay due regard' to) how they can reduce inequalities of outcome caused by socio-economic disadvantage, when making strategic decisions. Many Care Experienced children and young people will be covered by that duty – and should be a particular group considered when assessing this new duty.

### Curriculum and Assessment

*“Schools in Scotland must ensure that pupils and parents understand ‘care experience’ as part of their communities and as another type of family. Teachers and school staff must be supported to be aware of the issues facing care experienced pupils so they can best engage and encourage.”*

The Promise (p.72)

WC?S believes that to ensure the four capacities of Curriculum for Excellence are realised, consideration must be given to what is missing from the curriculum. Through WC?S work in schools it has been recognised that there is little understanding of care – both by pupils and teachers. This has also been reflected in the interactions we have had when invited to provide inputs to student teachers, who made it clear how impactful they found the sessions and how surprised they were that learning on Care Experience and Corporate Parenting was not a mandatory part of teacher training. WC?S believes that learning about relationships, trauma informed principals of engaging learners and statutory Corporate Parenting responsibilities should be a fundamental part of teacher training and their ongoing continued professional development.



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### **Call to Action**

The needs and views of Care Experienced learners should not just be looked at when mistakes are made or negative practice raised in inspection of education, but should pro-actively be considered when planning, budgeting and making strategic decisions about the future of our education system. This ensures any education reform meets public sector equality law, continues to improve on and respect Corporate Parenting duties set out in the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 and pro-actively embeds a human/child rights approach – pre-empting the incorporation of the UNCRC.

### **Evidence Submitted to Education Reform**

1. Jeanette’s learner journey – a case study
2. Josh’s learner journey – a case study
3. Leanne’s learner journey – a case study
4. Rebecca’s learner journey – a case study
5. Communities that Care – project overview
6. Communities that Care – impact report
7. Supporting Care Experienced people with certification and appeals – SQA

For further information about Who Cares? Scotland’s work in education and with education reform, please contact:

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