



CELGIS's response to the Scottish Government's consultation on National Improvement Framework - enhanced data collection for improvement

July 2022

CELGIS, the Centre for Excellence for Children's Care and Protection, is based at the University of Strathclyde and is a leading improvement and innovation centre. We improve children's lives by supporting people and organisations to drive long lasting change in the services they need, and the practices used by people responsible for their care. We welcome the opportunity to respond to this consultation, though are mindful of the complexity of change both underway, and proposed, in both the social care and educational landscape. Our response therefore maintains a sharp focus on the potential impact of any changes on children and young with care experience, both during their childhood and also any ongoing impact as they move through a trajectory into adulthood. Our response is based on research evidence, practice experience and feedback from our long-standing cross organisational networks.

Q1: Our proposals for the key measures of progress towards closing the poverty related attainment gap are based on a number of key principles set out above. Are there any other principles that should be included?

We are in broad agreement with the principles outlined in the consultation which seek to ground the re-calibration of data on human rights, the impact of data collection on the ethos of organisations and ensure the right 'basket of measures' provides the best context for real improvement.

The Promise of the Independent Care Review¹ and subsequent reports from The Promise Oversight Board² are consistent in the message about the need for a fundamental change in how Scotland views, collects and uses data about children's lives. Data collection must be about more than accountability and should focus on the things which matter most to children. We therefore welcome principles which echo the themes of the

¹ The Independent Care Review (2020). [The Promise](#). Independent Care review.

² The Promise Oversight Board (2022). [Report One](#). The Promise Scotland.

findings and conclusions of Independent Care Review on this and take children's feelings and experiences of education into account. We must strive to improve how systems support and help us to understand children's lives, particularly those for whom we have a moral and legal duty to support, as corporate parents. The Promise cautions against the dangers of simply adding more statistics to an already complex landscape. We therefore suggest including two additional principles:

- Firstly, acknowledging the complexity and uncertainty inherent with change, most notably potential fundamental changes to the framework itself, as we chart our way through both significant education (e.g., the [Morgan Review](#) and changes to the curriculum for excellence, qualifications and assessment proposed under the [Muir Report](#)), and broader reform (e.g., The Promise, the implications of a National Care Service, the inclusion of children's services within which has not yet been determined, and the incorporation of the UNCRC rights of the child into Scots Law).
- Secondly, data which enables an understanding of the stories that lie beneath the statistics must be prioritised; the challenges and opportunities that children and families are experiencing, and the provision and services being put in place by organisations to address a range of needs. This is particularly important for those with care experience. Data should be used and gathered to understand their experiences and trajectories through education from a holistic point of view.

Q2: Should the two sub-measures covering attendance and exclusion at secondary schools be promoted to key measures?

We agree that the two 'sub measures' should be promoted to 'key measures.' There is a compelling evidence base showing that a pre-requisite for a good education is access to the curriculum and regular school attendance.³ Learner's benefit from practicing skills daily, and educators can offer support, safety, and positively build relationships with the learners they see each day. It follows that all children who go to school regularly are more likely to succeed socially, emotionally and economically in later in their adult life. Whilst the majority of care experienced learners both want to, and do attend school, for some children and young people these indicators are problematic. Attendance and exclusion are already 'key metrics' within other data sets⁴, and we are aware that they do not capture the nuance of how children are experiencing education. Adding further sub-measures, without an

³ Scottish Government (2019). [Included, Engaged and Involved Part 1](#).

⁴ Scottish Government (2021) Education Outcomes for Looked After Children – 2019/20

understanding of inherent flaws in current data collection, and an understanding of the diversity of the cohort, may continue to perpetuate misunderstanding. For example, we do not know the extent of informal exclusion, yet anecdotally learners with care experience or additional support needs are disproportionately affected. Similarly, we know that specific groups, such as children who are 'looked after at home', or living some distance away and cross border placements, may not be accurately represented within headline data. Headline figures on care experienced learners as a whole can miss important and subtle differences between the individual needs and circumstances of children.

The Promise sets out the ambition to end both formal and informal exclusion of care experienced children from school by 2030. We welcome any measure that supports school attendance and reduces exclusion. Headline metrics such as attendance and exclusion can have a benefit in drawing attention early on to problems, issues or trends that require bespoke support. However, we again draw attention to the need for a focus on the development of data that provides a basis for a fuller picture of children's lives. There is a risk that we continue to promote quantifiable measures (e.g. 'did the child attend?') favoured by the system and lose sight of what matters to children and families (e.g. 'did children learn, have fun, feel safe?').

Q3: Should data on confidence, resilience, and engagement from the new Health and Wellbeing census be included in the basket of measures?

Metrics on health and wellbeing including confidence, resilience and engagement are useful and welcome indicators. However, it must be noted that there is not an agreed set of definitions of many of these terms either in research literature or in the education sector. These terms therefore mean different things to different people, in different settings, and in popular discourse. It follows that, for example, without a shared understanding and application of tools for the measuring wellbeing, there is no consistency in how this data is collected across local authorities and therefore how useful this would be for national comparison.

We welcome any move towards a consideration of how learners are experiencing education, and a focus on skills and experiences. We acknowledge that these may be harder to measure than 'traditional' metrics, but this should not be a barrier to developing an agreed and consistent method of capturing this important information about how children and young people are experiencing education.

The Scottish pilot of the [‘Bright Spots’ programme](#) demonstrates how an entire system approach can be taken to understanding wellbeing for care experienced learners in local authorities. In England, where the programme began, the views of children and young people are routinely gathered on a range of areas in their lives and provides regular ‘live’ feedback to schools and local authorities on issues that are important to that group at that time. Whilst in Scotland we are at a pilot stage, and as such, this data is not available in every locality, this is an innovation that points towards data that is gathered reflecting learner’s experiences and how this can be done.

Q4: At the moment, the measure of achievement in the senior phase is the National Qualifications achieved by young people at the point which they leave school (SCQF levels 4, 5, and 6 – 1 or more on leaving school). Do we need to add other measures to cover wider achievement and attainment?

Yes.

Q5: If you answered yes to Q4, some options for consideration are set out below. However, we would also welcome any other suggestions for additional measures:

Exams and qualifications are in the process of being reviewed.⁵ We agree with the aim of this process, to design a system that brings the vision of the Curriculum for Excellence in alignment with practice. During the course of this process, fundamental questions are being posed about the purpose of education, and how we prepare learners to be citizens. We welcome the debate and the consideration that is being given to accreditation which is more flexible and less prescriptive. We advocate an ‘assessment when ready’ approach, as opposed to one determined by age or stage. Care experience learners are a diverse group of children who would benefit, like all learners, from a range of options for accreditation. We would caution against assumptions that may encourage some learners through one specific route. Rather, there is a need for flexible pathways that can adapt and change according to learners needs. Our central message is one of ensuring that there is a parity in how qualification pathways (e.g. an academic versus a vocational route) are regarded, by young people, educators, future employers, and society.

We welcome the development of alternative accreditation, and we would point towards the need to contextualise any proposed changes in the framework as temporary, pending the ongoing process of developing a

⁵ Scottish Government (2022). [Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment: terms of reference](#).

curriculum and qualifications that are more fit for purpose for children in Scotland.

Q6: In terms of measuring progress beyond school, should the percentage of school leavers going to a “positive destination” on leaving school be included alongside the participation measure?

A compelling evidence base is bringing closer attention to the concept of the ‘life course’ and trajectory of learners through different stages of development as a frame. This is drawn on for care experienced learners to make the case for continued and sustained care.⁶ A narrower view focuses on phases of learners’ lives in isolation, and out of context of the broad aims of education as envisaged by the Curriculum of Excellence.

For learners with care experience, we would point towards research and practice evidence that considers the need for corporate parenting responsibilities and understanding of care experienced young people moving through ‘emerging adulthood’ as key, and a real measure of supporting successful citizens.^{7, 8} Understanding emerging adulthood invites us to consider a distinct, critical stage of development, often between the ages of 16-25, when young people continue to form their identity, are expected to contribute and function to society as adults but continue to benefit from greater social and familial support.⁹

We must view all proposed metrics through the lens proposed by The Promise, considering how we co-construct and map data and information which gives us insight into the lived experience of those we seek to support. Practice, such as encouraging schools to keep a young person on roll for a period of time until they have secured a positive destination, speaks to how corporate parents can continue to ‘hold’ and care for young people. There is a consistent message we hear from too many care experienced young people about the ‘cliff edge drop’ they experience in financial, relational and psychological support as they approach the end of their schooling. This must change.¹⁰ We welcome any approach that encourages the sector to consider the life course, and what support all learners need as they move into adulthood.

⁶ Singer, E. R., Berzin, S. C., & Hokanson, K. (2013). Voices of former foster youth: Supportive relationships in the transition to adulthood. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 35(12), 2110-2117.

⁷ Brady, E., & Gilligan, R. (2018). The life course perspective: An integrative research paradigm for examining the educational experiences of adult care leavers? *Children and Youth Services Review*, 87, 69-77.

⁸ McGhee, K., & Deeley, S. (2022). [Emerging Adulthood: Exploring the implications for care experienced young people and those who care for them](#). Scottish Journal of Residential Child Care, 21 (1).

⁹ Schwartz, S. J., Donnellan, M. B., Ravert, R. D., Luyckx, K., & Zamboanga, B. L. (2013). Identity development, personality, and well-being in adolescence and emerging adulthood: Theory, research, and recent advances.

¹⁰ Lough-Dennell, B., McGee, K., & Porter, R. (2022). [Continuing Care: An exploration of implementation](#). Glasgow, CELCIS.

Q7: What more do we need to do in order to ensure that a wider range of measures are in use across the education system, and that they are valued as equally as traditional attainment measures?

The need for measures and statistics to plan, monitor and evaluate progress is a feature of most organisations and systems. Attainment, progress and exclusion data and metrics have been hard-wired into the education system. A focus on, and comparison of, hard metrics can often portray an overly simplistic and negative narrative of the experience and outcomes of care experienced learners. The introduction of qualitative measures including, for example, wellbeing, resilience and confidence, will add richness and nuance to our understanding of the impact of education on broader outcomes and the trajectory into adulthood. We welcome this consultation, as one part the wider education reform underway in Scotland. We continue to draw attention to the risks of the “cluttered landscape”¹¹ and the need to allow space for much needed debate, and consultation, particularly with children and young people whose views historically have not been embedded from the earliest stages of change. There is little evidence to indicate that children and young people’s views have been taken into consideration on their exam diet, or what they consider to be key measures of success.¹² There is considerable potential for solutions to some of the questions posed by this consultation to emerge from the ongoing process, debate and consultation on the future of qualification and education reform, particularly by involving children and young people themselves in that process.

Q8: Are the existing wider data collections, and the new data developments enough to ensure that the National Improvement Framework reflects the ambitions of Curriculum for Excellence, national policy priorities such as health and wellbeing and confidence, and key priorities for COVID-19 recovery and improvement, as recommended by Audit Scotland?

The Independent Care Review concluded in 2020 with a promise made to care experienced children and young people about transformational change that will be delivered by 2030. We are in the midst of proposed wide-ranging [education reforms](#) that present an opportunity to design a universal, equitable education system.¹³ These numerous policy areas,

¹¹ The Promise Oversight Board (2022). [Report One](#). The Promise Scotland, p22.

¹² Stobart, G. (2021), "Upper-secondary education student assessment in Scotland: A comparative perspective", *OECD Education Working Papers*, No. 253, Paris, OECD Publishing.

¹³ Ibid.

changes and reviews are ongoing. The context into which proposed changes are made matters; attention must be paid to how these bold transformational plans are rolled out, sustained and embedded. Whilst the new data developments are fundamentally sound, these will need to be able to adapt to the changing context, and flex with emerging needs and priorities as plans develop. There is a risk of developing new measures out of context, which fail to address issues, or add complexity to the data systems that already exist. A consistent theme in the feedback from our networks is the inability of different systems being able to 'talk to each other', which hinders a holistic understanding of children's lives and needs. Members of our [Virtual School Head Teacher Network](#) are creating bespoke database to extract data from multiple sources in one place. Although this is time consuming, it is driven by a desire to respond quickly arising needs whilst holding an understanding of learners and families holistically. Practitioners need access to all of the data 'at their fingertips' so that they can focus on supporting learners and families. The Network has a vision for a database that incorporates both education and social care data which is live and in one place.¹⁴ Developing far greater connection between different data systems to enable a holistic understanding of children and families' lives must be a key priority across Scotland. Both the experience of the pandemic, and the central message from The Promise, demonstrate and call for the ability of systems and metrics to flex and adapt to the changing context, rather than people and environments changing to serve systems and metrics.

Q9: How can we make better use of data to focus and drive improvement activity at school, local, regional and national level?

The goal must be to improve how education is experienced by children and young people, as well as understanding and responding to factors impacting on those who care for and teach children. This requires attention to the challenge of implementing change and improvement at all levels: national, regional, and local. Reliance on enacting high-level standards and top-down communication, with little attention to the support required by practitioners to understand how to change in their day-to-day practice, would be wholly insufficient to secure meaningful change.

Concerted effort and activity is required to ensure the voices of children and young people are meaningfully heard, and that a rights-based approach informs thinking and becomes embedded into every aspect of the education system. Scotland has inherited an examination system

¹⁴ Bettencourt, M & McIver, L. (2021). [Joining the dots: Virtual School Head Teachers Network Summary of 2020-2021 Evaluation Report](#). Glasgow, CELCIS.

which is the product its historical culture and context. There is a remarkable consistency in recent reports (including by the Morgan Review,¹⁵ the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development,¹⁶ and the International Council of Education Advisers¹⁷) about the approach needed for Scotland's current context in the twenty first century. There are shared themes which place an emphasis on children's voice and their rights and relationships, as well as support for the workforce. These incorporate learning from the pandemic, and acknowledge opportunities presented by the development of significant technological innovations. Together, these papers make a case for adopting an asset-based focus on children, families and communities and listening closely to the views of those most impacted and at the heart of the education system: learners. The message is clear: to bring about improvement, we must listen to those impacted and allow them to inform what data and information they consider as definitions of success. There is an opportunity to shift the ownership of changes closer to our communities and education providers, and design systems that capture the complexity of lived experience. Whilst our focus in this response has been on children and young people, we also acknowledge the potential for the growth of data that considers the needs and wellbeing of those who live with, teach and care for them.

Q10: How can we make better use of data to help reduce variation in outcomes achieved by young people in different parts of the country?

Despite the lack of accurate, up to date figures, it is known that a significant minority of care experienced learners move and live at a distance from their home authorities.^{18,19} Some move to be closer to where their brothers, sisters or other family members live. Others move away temporarily as part of a plan, and then return home. A small proportion of children and young people may move to receive specialist care which may not be available in their local area. As well as the impact of these transitions on children's rights, and their access to consistent support and relationships, there are very real concerns about these children going 'under the radar' of data systems, with little being known about their educational needs and how these are being met, as they move from one area to another.

¹⁵ Scottish Government (2020). [Support for Learning: All our Children and All their Potential](#)

¹⁶ OECD (2021), [Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence: Into the Future, Implementing Education Policies](#), Paris, OECD Publishing.

¹⁷ICEA (2020). [International Council of Education Advisers Report 2018-20](#).

¹⁸ Care Inspectorate (2022.) [Report on distance placements](#) Dundee. Care Inspectorate.

¹⁹ Ofsted (2014). From a distance: [Looked after children living away from their home area](#). London. Ofsted

Virtual Schools are a relatively new development in Scotland. They are senior education leaders, who have responsibility for the education and wellbeing of all care experienced learners, including children who move away from, or into, their local authority area. Emerging evidence is pointing towards Virtual School Head Teachers (VSHTs) being a strong network of practitioners using data to forge relationships that cut across regional boundaries.²⁰ VSHTs routinely collect data about care experienced learners moving in and out of their local authority areas. In addition to traditional metrics, they also routinely gather broader information, including feedback from schools and families, and create case studies to demonstrate impact of this approach for children's education and wellbeing.²¹ Most are using bespoke approaches to combine 'hard data' and a narrative to develop a nuanced understanding and context of the learners and the communities they serve. Most VSHTs are new to role, and are agile in their practice, evolving their approach and the support they offer, and share and co-develop their practice through a [VSHT and CET network](#). As an aspiration, but also a pre-requisite for their work, VSHTs have articulated a vision for a national live database that incorporates key information on all care experienced learners. This would be a tool to underpin their work, allowing them to focus on delivery and learn more effectively what is working locally, and in each other's local areas, and match more closely the vision of using more meaningful data as envisioned and called for by The Promise of the Independent Care Review.

Thank you for providing us with this opportunity to respond. We hope the feedback is helpful; we would be happy to discuss any aspect in further detail.

CELCIS contact:

Michael Bettencourt

Education Consultant

michael.bettencourt@strath.ac.uk

²⁰ Bettencourt, M & McIver, L. (2021). [Joining the dots: Virtual School Head Teachers Network Summary of 2020-2021 Evaluation Report](#). Glasgow, CELCIS.

²¹ Bettencourt, M., Keenan, K., Gordon, L., Allen, E., McIver, L., Watson, G., & O'Neill, L. (2022) [Virtual School Head Teachers in Scotland: Practice Case Studies](#). Glasgow, CELCIS.

