CELCIS's Response to the Scottish Government's Consultation on the Equality Evidence Strategy 2023-25

October 2022

Introduction

CELCIS, 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 the Scottish Government's consultation on the Equality Evidence Strategy 2023-25, part of the Scottish Governments Equality Data Improvement Programme, which aims to strengthen Scotland's equality evidence base to ensure policy and service delivery are sound and inclusive.[1]

Data is an important resource that can provide insight into the wellbeing and experiences of children in need of care and protection, and how the services and systems that support them are functioning. However, the report into the findings of Scotland's Independent Care Review, The Promise, highlights that that much data gathered about care experienced children and young people reflects information that can easily be quantified in the 'care system, its processes and outcomes' rather than data prioritising our understanding about the experiences of the children and young people.[2]

CELCIS works together with individuals and organisations from across children's services to build a greater understanding of the role of data, and respond to emerging data challenges. By gathering, analysing and applying data, research and evidence, we work to ensure better local and national data is gathered and recorded, for the benefit of children, young people and their families.[3] We welcome the opportunity to respond to the Scottish Government's consultation on the Equality Evidence Strategy 2023-25, and as such, our response to this consultation is focused on improvements to equalities evidence pertaining to children and young people in need of care and protection. Gathering more nuanced equalities data is a key part in understanding need, and therefore crucial to realising and upholding children's rights.

Key messages
- There is a need for greater consistency across all children's datasets (including those outwith the initial scope of this consultation, most notable

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of which are the Pupil Census and the Early Learning and Childcare Census) in terms of the equalities characteristics and definitions collected. By mapping and appraising the data specifications for different data returns on the [Scottish Exchange of Data](), greater consistency could be achieved. For example, ensuring each return collects the same data and uses consistent indicator definitions relating to age, ethnicity, religion, gender, disability (including type of disability) and sexual orientation.

- To achieve this consistency, there needs to be detailed specification of each indicator, supported by sector consultation and/or training undertaken to ensure agreement and understanding of the indicators and their definitions.

- In the Scottish Government's pursuit of holistic and [Whole Family Support]() approach, consideration should also be given to recording and monitoring equalities information of parents and carers, as well as those of the children they care for.

Response to consultation questions

Section 1: Vision
In 2017, the Scottish Government set out our vision that: "Scotland's equality evidence base becomes more wide-ranging and robust, enabling national and local policy makers to develop sound, inclusive policy and measure the impact on all of Scotland's equality groups".

We would like to revisit this vision and gather views on whether the vision should be revised for the Equality Evidence Strategy 2023-25.

Question 1.1: **Do you think the Scottish Government should revise the vision developed in 2017?**

No.

Section 2: Proposed actions
The Equality Evidence Strategy 2023-25 will specify and define individual projects required to fill the gaps that have been identified. We have identified a number of proposed actions, as set out above as 'Proposed Actions to Improve the Equality Evidence Base'.

Question 2.1: To what extent do you think that the proposed actions would adequately deliver on our ambition for a robust and wide-ranging equality evidence base?

Partially.

Question 2.2: Please set out your reasons for your answer:

Whilst the actions would enable some improvement, from a children's data perspective, the data sources within the consultation's current scope are too narrow. Important datasets, namely the Pupil Census; the Early Learning and Childcare Census; and the official statistics produced by the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (SCRA) are not included. The rationale for their exclusion is not clear as changes to the 'Children Looked After Statistics' (CLAS) and Child Protection returns (both of which are dependent on local authority-provided data) will likely present the same level of difficulty as making changes in the other children's datasets.

Question 3.1: From your perspective, what are the most important actions outlined in the draft improvement plan? Please select up to five.

Actions 1, 2, 3, 12 and 33.[4]

Question 3.2: Please set out your reasons for your answer.

Actions 1, 2 and 3: From a children's data perspective, these are the actions most relevant to improving the evidence on the characteristics and needs of children, given they are the three datasets within the scope of this work which focus on children (CLAS; Child Protection; and Growing Up In Scotland (GUS)).

Regarding Actions 1 and 2, there are particular improvements which can be made in relation to data items such as disability (discussed further in our response to Q4.2 and Q5.2), and also the consistency in the ways some of the protected characteristics data are being collected. Indeed, we are aware of significant variations in local practices currently. For example, some local authority social work systems have, and continue to use, legacy disability fields dating back prior to 2015-16 when the Scottish Government's Children's Social Work Statistics return required Additional Support Needs categories to be recorded, whereas some do not.

Rather than collecting additional data, there are improvements to be made in how the current data collected is presented and broken down. Within the Child Protection dataset, cross-tabulations have already been done, for example, between disability and concerns at registration (see Table 4.4 of the additional tables of the [2020-21 Children's Social Work Statistics](#)). Similar enhancements could be made to support understanding of equalities information for 'looked after' children. For example, it would be helpful to cross tabulate data about children's ethnicity, religion or age with their 'placement type', to identify and explore any trends.

Action 12: Enhancing the equalities data in the 'Family Resources Survey: Food Security Data' is a priority action from a children's data perspective, given the

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association between poverty and child abuse and neglect[5], and the importance of food to children's development. The current cost-of-living crisis further exacerbates the need to understand children's circumstances in this regard. Better equalities data could give a sense of whether this issue is affecting some families more than others.

Action 33: In relation to 'Scotland's Census 2022', data collection cannot be changed at this point, but disaggregation and cross tabulation of the data collected, in a more enhanced way, could further our understanding of equalities across different groups. For example, the Census is a key source of information on the prevalence of kinship care arrangements, some of which is not captured in other datasets. Information about kinship families' ethnicity, gender, disability and age is valuable in understanding the range of experiences and needs in order to inform planning and ensure services and supports available are diverse and inclusive.

Question 4.1: Are there any proposed actions that you think should be revised?

Yes.

Question 4.2: If you responded 'yes' to Q4.1, please tell us which actions should be revised and how.

Actions 1 and 2:
Action point one (religion) **–** There is a need to work with data providers and stakeholders to understand the importance and use of data on religion, and gain greater consistency in terms of what is gathered in different datasets. We note that the Pupil Census does not gather information on religion other than whether or not the child attends a non-denominational school. The additional rationale for gathering and publishing this data in the CLAS and CP collection is not clear.

Action point two (ethnicity) – We fully support this action, to improve the completeness and enhance the disaggregation of ethnicity data. We suggest enhancements are made to data collection in order to identify potential differences for the range of ethnicities which may be represented by the current category 'White'. For example, 'White Scottish', 'White British', 'White European' (this is established practice elsewhere, such as in Scotland's Census), in order to understand such diversity and inform service provision.

Action point three (disability) – We strongly agree that there is a need to explore the development of more granular data on disability. Using the Scottish Government's Data Collection and Publication – Disability guidance as a format to underpin data collection across all data sets would enable a more consistent

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[5] Bywaters, P, et al., (2016) *The relationship between poverty, child abuse and neglect: an evidence review*, York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation; Scullin, K & Galloway, S (2014) *Challenges from the frontline: Supporting families with multiple adversity at time of austerity*, Barnardo's & NSPCC.

and detailed understanding of the prevalence and impact of the range of types of disability on children's lives. In developing data on disability, consideration should be given to the Washington Group/UNICEF Module on Child Functioning which, consistent with the (biopsycho)social model of disability, focusses on capturing data on the presence and extent of functional difficulties, rather than on medical conditions or physical/bodily structures. This model allows for fuller consideration of children's experiences, and the impact of any disability on their daily lives and their participation.

If the Early Learning and Childcare Census and the Pupil Census were in scope of this strategy, it would also be important to consider the distinction between data related to disability, versus data related to additional support needs (ASN). The returns for these censuses indicate that 1-2% of children have a disability, while up to 38% of children have additional support needs. However, based on a UNICEF (2021) global estimate that 10% of all children have a disability, it would appear that there is an under-reporting of disability in Scotland as professionals record this data under additional support needs categories.

Question 5.1: *There are many costs and challenges to collecting, analysing and reporting equality data. The benefits of improved equality data are clear, but unfortunately data collection is expensive and every question that is added to a survey or to an administrative data collection will have a cost. That cost will be in financial programmes, staff resource in carrying out collection and analysis, cost of training and learning necessary to implement a new collection and understand its impact on service development and also, importantly, in the burden on respondents. The proposed actions in the draft improvement plan are achievable within existing resource constraints.* **Are there any additional improvement actions that you think should be considered that are achievable within the 2023-25 time period?**

Yes.

Question 5.2: If you responded 'yes' to Q5.1, please tell us what additional improvement actions we should consider, and the reasons why these actions are important. For example, the groups who would benefit, or what information needs these actions would address.

There is a need to widen improvement actions across additional datasets, namely the Pupil Census, and the Early Learning and Childcare Census. These two sources provide whole population baseline data, which is vital to understanding if there are distinct or disproportionate features to be seen and understood within the Child Protection and CLAS datasets. For example, there appears to be a narrow view of disability collected within these wider returns, alongside a broad view of additional support needs (ASN). Yet the CLAS and CP return does not capture additional support needs at all. Conversely around religion, CLAS and Child Protection returns collect this to some detail, yet the Pupil Census and the Early Learning and Childcare Census do not. Without

consistency between the information gathered for all children, and that gathered within specialist data sets, it is not possible to fully understand the data in each context.

Additionally, to holistically understand and meet the needs of families, it would be advantageous to consider the equalities characteristics of parent(s) and carers when gathering data about children. For example, parents with disabilities or grandparents who are kinship carers may have specific needs to understand and meet. In taking a whole family approach to care and support, having this information will only add to understanding families' needs, and inform how services are designed. This may not require additional data collection if the potential of data linkage with data already held about the parent(s) or carer could be utilised, while also ensuring data protection regulations are upheld and no identifiable personal data is shared. Examples of such data could include individuals' electronic health records via their Community Health Index (CHI) number, and Adult Support and Protection data recorded by local authority social work departments.

Question 6.1: *The Scottish Government cannot take sole responsibility for providing information to address everything stakeholders would like to know. The range of interests, perspectives and expertise require different ways of collecting and accessing data and information by the public sector (e.g. Scottish Government, local authorities), academic institutions, the third sector (e.g. charities, social enterprises, think tanks) and from within the involved communities themselves. The Scottish Government welcomes collaboration with stakeholders to improve the equality evidence base.* **Would you or your organisation like to collaborate with the Scottish Government on any of the proposed actions?**

Yes.

Question 6.2: If you responded 'yes' to Q6.1, please tell us which actions you would like to collaborate with the Scottish Government on (including the action number) and how.
We look forward to continuing to work with the Scottish Government on the development of the CLAS and Child Protection data returns in relation to the actions set out here, and more broadly across actions 1, 2, 3, 12 and 33 as appropriate.

Question 7.1: Are you aware of any other organisations, networks or individuals the Scottish Government should collaborate with to improve the equality evidence base?

Yes.

Question 7.2: If you responded 'yes' to Q7.1, please tell us who the Scottish Government should collaborate with and, if applicable, on which of the proposed actions.

The [Children's Care and Protection Data Community Scotland,](#) hosted by CELCIS on the [Knowledge Hub,](#) has approximately 200 members with a range of expertise including local authority, health and third sector data officers, and other colleagues with a data interest. This community can be a key resource and source of collaboration in consideration of equalities data particularly relating to children and families. For example, the Knowledge Hub is a forum within which partners can share approaches to equalities data collection, and for discussion that can lead to agreed indicators and definitions.

The Disabled Children Child Protection Network is a Scottish stakeholder group with a keen interest in data related to children with disabilities, and would be a key forum to work alongside.

The Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (SCRA) is an official statistics provider relating to the Children's Hearing System. We understand they are in the process of reviewing their equalities data collection, and as such collaboration with them would appear to be timely.

Public Health Scotland publish children's health datasets, for example CAMHS data, and it may be beneficial to explore with them opportunities to collect and/or publish more equalities data.

The Care Inspectorate collect data directly from care providers, including child care providers. As such they would be an important stakeholder to collaborate with.

Section 3: Use of equality evidence
'Equality evidence' refers to statistics and research across different themes for age, disability, race/ethnicity, sex/gender, religion, sexual orientation, transgender status, pregnancy and maternity and marriage and civil partnership, plus "intersections" between these characteristics (e.g. younger women; minority ethnic disabled people; older trans people etc.).

Question 8.1: How often do you or your organisation use equality evidence?

Occasionally.

Question 8.2: If you responded 'often' 'occasionally' or 'rarely' to Q8.1, which equality evidence sources do you or your organisation use?

The core datasets used within CELCIS are the CLAS and Child Protection returns. From an equalities data perspective, as is, the evidence relating to breakdown of children's ages, gender and disability status are most useful/relevant for identifying specific trends. With improvements, these sources could be more useful to our understanding of the needs and experiences of children across the

range of equalities characteristics, and it would be likely that they would be used much more within our data and research work.

Question 8.3: If you responded 'often' 'occasionally' or 'rarely' to Q8.1, how do you or your organisation use equality evidence?

Predominantly, we use equalities evidence to identify trends by different equalities characteristics, and use this information to inform our and our wider partners' work. For example, over half of children subject to child protection registration are under the age of 5, and this highlights the need for support to be available for families at the earliest point, and with children of the youngest ages.

If the datasets were improved, and consistent definitions were used across datasets, we would use equalities data in other ways. For example, in our Bright Spots programme we would be able to make more meaningful comparisons across different populations of children in different parts of Scotland, and we could make more use of data linkage. We would also be able to better understand key (sub)groups of children whose characteristics and needs may be hidden in the existing data. For example, are children with specific types of disability more likely to experience particular forms of harm or have different types of care arrangements (foster care, residential care, etc.)? Similarly, there would be the potential to better understand the educational outcomes of children who share specific characteristics. This level of understanding will consequently enable more tailored and effective supports to be put in place for children.

Question 8.4: If you responded 'often' 'occasionally' or 'rarely' to Q8.1, how do you or your organisation usually access equality evidence?

Mainly via published datasets, and occasionally through direct contact with Scottish Government data colleagues in the Children and Families Analysis Division during the course of our day-to-day work. For example, we may have access to unpublished local data as part of our improvement work. Additionally, we have put in specific requests for access to information to Scottish Government's Children and Families Analysis Division where (based on the data specifications published on the Scottish Exchange of Data) we believe Scottish Government hold data that is not contained in national publications. For example, we have recently requested the breakdown by placement type of 'looked after children' with a disability as this was not in the national publication.

Question 9.1: Do you face any barriers to using equality evidence?

Yes.

Question 9.2: If you responded 'yes' to Q9.1, please tell us about the barriers you have faced (e.g. difficulties accessing the equality evidence you require, available equality evidence not being relevant to your needs, insufficient sample size for the statistics you require)

There are variations in how the different equalities characteristics are understood and represented within different datasets (see our response to Q5.2). This is due both to differing specifications for different datasets, and the limits to consistency of understanding by those gathering data at source. For example, individual social workers may have differing understandings of what constitutes a disability, and thus record this information in a different way to their colleagues. The young age of many of the children involved adds a further layer of complexity, for example, when recording the religion of a very young child, what extent does this reflect the religion of their caregiver, as opposed to their own identity? These are complex questions which will be interpreted and answered differently by different individuals.

In terms of potential gaps, all children's datasets collect disabilities data via a 'yes/no' binary question. In contrast, in England, the Children In Need Census, and in Wales, the Children Receiving Care and Support Census, both break down different types of recorded disability. This breakdown enables greater understanding of children's needs and experiences than can be represented by information from a binary question.

Question 10.1: **Are there any decisions you are unable to make because of a lack of equality evidence? (For example, Equality Impact Assessments (EQIAs), policy development, service delivery)?**

N/A

Question 10.2: If you responded 'yes' to Q10.1, please tell us which questions you are unable to answer and why those questions are important to answer (e.g. what policies or practices could be informed by answering those questions').

Though we are not a service provider or funder, we clearly recognise that without a robust equalities evidence base, it is not possible for national and local agencies to make fully informed decisions about policy, service delivery and practice for children who are most in need of care and support. If Scotland is to meet its ambition to Keep The Promise, as set out by the Independent Care Review, improvements to data and availability of evidence, including equality evidence, are crucial.

Section 4: Equality evidence collection

Question 11.1: Do you or your organisation produce any equality evidence sources? For example, do your organisation involve stakeholders in finding out what issues they think are important through surveys or focus groups, pull together or carry out your own analysis of existing information, or commission independent research and analysis.

Yes.

Question 11.2: If you responded 'yes' to Q11.1, which equality evidence sources do you or your organisation produce?

Whilst we do not produce equalities evidence (in terms of protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010) as a matter of routine, we do so occasionally. For example, we are currently finalising a review of Scotland's statistics on children with disabilities, and would be happy to share this with any interested parties. Please contact Alex McTier, CELCIS Evidence and Evaluation Specialist (alex.mctier@strath.ac.uk) if you would like further information about this.

Question 11.3: If you responded 'yes' to Q11.1, are there any barriers to you or your organisation collecting more equality evidence?

No.

Question 11.4: If you responded 'yes' to Q11.3, please tell us about the barriers facing you or your organisation in collecting more equality evidence

N/A

Thank you for providing us with this opportunity to respond, we would be happy to provide further information in respect to any of the areas discussed here.

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