



CEL CIS Education Forum: Full details of the March meeting

A big 'thank you' to everyone who attended the March meeting - and sorry to those who weren't able to get a place. We had a packed agenda (and an unscheduled break for a fire alarm!) but thanks to the enthusiasm and engagement of Forum members we managed to have meaningful discussions on every item.

Education (Scotland) Bill - following a presentation from Ben Farrugia (CEL CIS), Forum members discussed the benefits of including looked after children as a discrete group within the legislation. This would require local authorities to plan and report on the actions necessary to close the attainment gap for care experienced young people. The debate raised concerns about the focus on labels, rather than needs, and potential duplication with other plans (such as the Corporate Parenting Plan). Others felt naming looked after children as a discrete group gives them some protection and emphasis, particularly when it comes to budgets. Links were made to the Additional Support for Learning Legislation, and the need for a range of high quality services to be available, in order to help close the attainment gap.

Interaction of Named Person and Designated Manager - an issue brought up by a Forum member from South Lanarkshire. Discussions highlighted the importance -particularly within secondary schools- for communication and coordination between the two roles (if they are held by different people). There was a feeling that Designated Managers could do with more information and support around this and other issues. We asked how the Forum could assist Designated Managers and encourage them to become members of the Forum.

Improving transitions between primary and secondary school - Dr Alison Hennessy (formerly of CEL CIS and now with the Winning Scotland Foundation) presented on a project to improve looked after children's transition from primary to secondary. The project was undertaken in a North Lanarkshire school cluster.

Additional support for learning (ASL) - the Forum heard from two great speakers. Iain Nisbet (then of the Govan Law Centre) and Sally Cavers (Children in Scotland/Enquire).

Iain presented on data he'd compiled on ASL assessments and the number of coordinated support plans prepared for looked after children. There were

significant discrepancies between local authorities in how the legislation was being interpreted. The data (provided through FOI requests) confirmed that no looked after child had appealed their assessment decision. Forum members asked questions about the Scottish Government's response to what appears to be inconsistent interpretation and implementation of the ASL legislation. We considered what the Forum could do to improve practice at local level (one suggestion was to assist social workers to better understand the ASL duties and advocate for looked after children).

[Sally](#) gave us an insight into the use of mediation in disputes over ASL. She explained that it is legal requirement for all local authorities to make available a mediation service for ASL, and there has been a significant increase in referrals for mediation in recent years. Sally also noted that Enquire, Scotland's national information service for ASL, doesn't receive many enquiries about looked after children's ASL entitlements. The Forum discussed why this might be (including a lack of awareness by staff), and concluded with a debate on why the ASL provisions didn't seem to be working as intended for all looked after children. Lack of resources, lack of advocacy on children's behalf, and poor guidance were suggested as potential reasons.

[Online evaluation results](#) - feedback from everyone who attended the 8 March meeting was really positive, with 100% agreeing the format works and the session was informative and useful. Most members would like more time for discussion, maybe in smaller groups, but appreciated the challenge of limited time. Many Forum members would like more staff from mainstream schools to join the discussions. The facilities were rated as average, a good location but affected by too much background noise.

[Ideas for future meetings](#) - through the online evaluation, members identified a number of ideas for future Forum meetings including:

- Inter-authority moves (out of area placements)
- Use of Coordinated Support Plans
- Use of data to monitor and track looked after children's outcomes
- Improving attendance at school
- Attachment aware schools

[A special 'thank you' to Graham McCann](#)

[At the last Forum meeting we had the opportunity to say 'thank you' to Graham McCann](#) - one of the founding members -and principal organiser- of the Looked After Children Education Forum, who has now retired. CELCIS' Dr Graham Connelly had some kind words to share:

'I have learned a lot from Graham – about the education of looked after children, about politics, and about life. He was a regular guest speaker on the course I ran on the education of looked after children, and later I had the great fortune of working with him at CELCIS.

His contribution to the sector and to looked after children has been significant; indeed, his name became so synonymous with the WCAMDB programme that it was known in Scottish Government circles as 'McCann and McMust'.

But Graham is perhaps best known to many of you as the founder of the Looked after Children Education Forum. The Forum, which began essentially as a peer support group for practitioners involved in pioneering work, has made an important contribution to the development of services in local authorities across Scotland and many young people will have cause to be grateful for its quiet work, though they won't know it. I hope, Graham, that you feel some pride in the fact that your creation is continuing, supported by CELCIS, and by people who carry the memory of its history. It's a terrific legacy and your successors will try very hard not to mess it up. Keep in touch.'