



Centre for excellence
for looked after children in Scotland

RESEARCH BRIEFING

Recognition of Prior Learning and Looked After Young People: A follow-up study

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Following on from a pilot and research evaluation in 2012, use of the SCQF's 'My Skills My Future' (MSMF) toolkit was rolled out in East Renfrewshire in 2014. Training was provided by CELCIS, and feedback for the process was provided by the senior educational psychologist responsible for initiating the roll-out.

The toolkit was used with any young people regarded as 'vulnerable', whereas the earlier pilot had focused solely on looked after children. The 30 professionals who received training were drawn from different agencies, including social work, education and third sector organisations. Feedback was largely positive, with many professionals reporting that they valued the toolkit; however, timing was said to be crucial, and summer term was not an ideal time for work to take place in schools. Use of the toolkit is continuing to be promoted and monitored by the local authority.

Background

A pilot and research evaluation of an early version of the MSMF toolkit was conducted by CELCIS for Education Scotland in 2012 (Hennessy and Connelly, 2012). The toolkit, which was developed by SCQF Partnership, Skills Development Scotland and Glasgow Caledonian University's Learning Enhancement and Academic Development team, was found to be appropriate for use with looked after young people. Advisors and young people worked with the toolkit over three sessions, focusing on skill recognition, benchmarking their skills against the SCQF level descriptors, and discussing the next steps. Taking part in RPL profiling with an advisor was found to increase the resilience of looked after young people, as well as raising their awareness of skills and possible careers. Following on from the pilot and other feedback, SCQF developed the toolkit, and launched it in 2013. SCQF provides regular free training to practitioners in the use of the toolkit¹, and recently introduced 'Train the Trainer' sessions, whereby professionals who have already received training in the use of the toolkit can train others in their organisation. SCQF also currently provides copies of the toolkit free of charge to those who have undergone training. One of the authors (AH) attended the trainer training before delivering training in East Renfrewshire.

¹ <http://www.scqf.org.uk/content/files/MSMF%20Flier.pdf>



Rolling out the MSMF toolkit

The toolkit was rolled out in East Renfrewshire in the spring of 2014. Training in the use of the toolkit was delivered to a group of 30 professionals. These included social care professionals, educational staff and staff from third sector organisations. The session was organised by a senior educational psychologist who had been involved in the original pilot in 2012. The toolkit was rolled out in an attempt to support the employability skills of young people within the local authority, with these young people being viewed as the parents of tomorrow. This was in line with the focus on early years within the local authority.

The senior educational psychologist described the plans for the toolkit:

I certainly see the toolkit being used with young people who are in transition, who are maybe in S3 and upwards. It could be used within that age range where young people are either considering leaving school, or (who have) just left school, to help them prepare them for that transition. The legislation is clear ... that educational establishments should be organised in preparing young people, particularly with additional support needs, for making that transition.

Advisors were asked to work with one young person each. Their experiences were described by the psychologist in a research interview a few weeks later.

Interview Feedback

The psychologist felt that the training had been received well by the advisors, although he reflected that introducing the toolkit in the summer term was not ideal, as some of the advisors, especially teaching staff, had not been able to try it out with a young person. Those who had had the opportunity to use it saw its potential, when used with the right young person. Advisors reflected that it could be counter-productive if used with someone who was not ready for a discussion about their future. Overall, most reported that they liked the toolkit, and the SCQF reported a significant increase in the number of schools from East Renfrewshire contacting them about training in the MSMF toolkit.

The local authority plans to continue to use the toolkit in schools and to enhance the employability of young people, for example using it with young people who are participating in activity agreements. According to the psychologist:

I would say that the 'My Skills My Future' toolkit is a very good resource that has provided staff with a tool to engage and work with young people with additional support needs; vulnerable young people, and recognise their prior learning. It's been shown to have some impact. I think the challenge for us is to... roll it out through staff training, and see if we can sustain the impact of the toolkit...(while) trying to record further use of it if we can.

The key challenges appear to be achieving implementation by practitioners on top of other pressures, and sustainability over time. The psychologist plans to address these challenges by continuing to monitor the process and provide support to practitioners. The toolkit continues to be actively promoted and monitored within the local authority.

References

Hennessy, A., Connelly, G. (2012). *Recognition of Prior Learning and Looked After Young People*. Retrieved from: www.celcis.org/media/resources/publications/Recognition-of-Prior-Learning-Research-briefing.pdf

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About CELCIS

CELCIS is the Centre for Excellence for Looked After Children in Scotland. Together with partners, we are working to improve the lives of all looked after children in Scotland. We do so by providing a focal point for the sharing of knowledge and the development of best practice, by providing a wide range of services to improve the skills of those working with looked after children, and by placing the interests of children at the heart of our work.

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