

Building Brighter Futures Together

Our strategy 2025-2030

Welcome

All children, young people and their families can face challenges in their lives, and the world today exacerbates the continuing necessity to ensure that the rights to support, care and protection are upheld and met. It is in this context that the work of CELCIS remains vital. We exist to challenge and address how this is done and to support improvement in the quality of help that children and young people receive. We do this by facilitating and enabling change, based on best practice.

Engagement with local, national and international partners holds the key to the possibilities before us all. CELCIS's work and approach shows us time and again how working together results in real change. This is essential to our delivery on The Promise of Scotland's Independent Care Review, and to embedding children's rights, and reshaping support for children, young people and families in need of care and protection. Our new strategy will further take forward this important work for the next five years, continuing CELCIS's unique contribution now and in the future.

Professor Alexis Jay OBE
Chair of CELCIS Strategic Advisory Board and Visiting Professor,
University of Strathclyde



At CELCIS, we continue to develop an understanding of both the challenges and solutions to addressing the needs and realising the rights of children and young people in need of care and protection, and the support that families, carers and all those working to help children and families need. Our multi-disciplinary approach and steadfast commitment to generating and sharing evidence-based learning offers real opportunities for transformational change through our work with partners across Scotland and further afield.

Our new CELCIS strategy has been developed with our colleagues, our consultants with lived experience, our stakeholders, and reflects the important role CELCIS can continue to play in improving outcomes for children, young people and their families. We share the ambitions of practitioners, policy makers, campaigners and many others, while also recognising the resources, skills, investment and leadership required.

Through this strategic approach and our commitment to collaboration, I know we have the right way forward to enable CELCIS to address existing and new challenges and we welcome the opportunities that lie ahead.

Claire Burns
Director, CELCIS



Our ambition and purpose

We are a leading improvement, innovation and research centre for children and young people's support, care and protection, based at the University of Strathclyde.

We believe every infant, child, young person and family should not only feel safe and supported but should have the opportunity to thrive. We exist to make that a reality by working hand in hand with the workforce and the organisations who care for and protect them.



Our vision:

All children, young people and families who need support, care and protection have the help they need to navigate life and to thrive

We see the workforce as everyone who has a paid or unpaid role, working with or caring for children, young people and their families. The workforce includes everyone working in statutory and non-statutory services in the public, third and private sectors: across social work, health, early learning and childcare, education, youth justice, the police, housing and in many more places and sectors.

Through our engagement with the workforce, we help build confidence, resilience and capability, ensuring that people who support children, young people and families are empowered to create real, lasting change.

We challenge inequality; we believe the pressures which families and the workforce face because of

poverty should not be inevitable. We bridge the gap between the reality of what children and young people, families and carers experience and what they need to flourish. And we push for cultural changes and systems that work with and for them - not against them.

Like everyone, the lives of children, young people and families are complex. The services and systems designed to support them are complex too. We help people and organisations cut through this complexity; providing independent and rigorous research, practice insights and practical tools they need to drive change to make things better. We turn knowledge and evidence into action, ensuring decisions are rooted in what matters to children and their families and what truly makes a difference.

The power of relationships

Human connection is at the heart of everything we do. Children and young people are more likely to thrive when they are loved, valued and understood. Meaningful, trusting relationships between children, young people, families and the people who support them provide the foundation for a brighter future.

For us, real change happens when people come together with compassion, courage and a shared purpose. How we show up is key to building strong and authentic relationships: we actively listen, engage with openness, respectfully challenge and together work through different experiences, power dynamics and perspectives. Our approach builds trust, enables collaboration, encourages learning, and allows us to work alongside the workforce and people with lived experience to create brighter futures for children, young people and families.



How we make our ambitions a reality

We are a trusted partner, and through our collaborative approach we bring independence, rigour and compassion to all of our work.

By combining our specialist skills and in-depth knowledge of policy and practice across children's services, we provide holistic support to help navigate and address the complexities and challenges of the systems and services that support children, families and the workforce.


We have three interconnected roles: we are a research, data and learning partner, an influencing and advocacy partner, and a change and improvement partner. Each of these roles inform and strengthen each other. For example, what we know from our research shapes our influencing role and improvement role, and what we learn from our work alongside practitioners and decision makers identifies gaps in research and learning needs.



A research, data and learning partner

Our work is rooted in research and data, listening to and involving people with lived experiences of support, care and protection services, and listening to and involving practitioners. As a research, data and learning partner, we produce and share knowledge that is vital and actionable to make improvements for children, young people and families by:

- Undertaking independent research and rigorous analysis of evidence and data from Scotland, the UK, and internationally to understand and share what works best for children, young people and families.

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- Providing distinct data knowledge and expertise, utilising different forms of data to influence service design, delivery and practice improvements.
 - Facilitating safe and collaborative spaces to identify and share research, learning and innovation, and promote new ideas and good practice, supporting the integration of this into everyday work and practice.
 - Telling the story of what works and deliver a range of learning and communication initiatives to exchange knowledge and bring together local, national and international research, policy and practice insights and ideas.

An influencing and advocacy partner

Building on our strong foundation of understanding evidence and diverse voices and experiences, we shape the environment that enables and supports the workforce and organisations to meet the needs and rights of children and young people by:

- Challenging the status quo and advocating for change at local, national and international levels.
- Shaping national policies and legislation in Scotland and assisting others in understanding how to apply and align these policies locally and nationally.
- Laying the groundwork for change by working with people across strategic, operational, and practice levels to ensure organisational readiness for implementing legislation and policies.
- Bringing people together, sharing insights and making connections alongside ensuring continuous improvement in policy and practice through strong feedback loops.

A change and improvement partner

We collaborate with national and local organisations, using evidence-informed approaches to transform systems, services, and practices designed for children and young people who need support, care, and protection. By working closely with leaders, managers, and practitioners, we provide placed-based and practical support to make positive changes happen by:

- Building leadership capacity and developing leaders' skills through coaching, mentoring, and collaboration in order to guide and sustain improvements.
- Facilitating and fostering collaborative spaces and nurturing relationships amongst professionals within and across organisational boundaries to identify and implement priorities for change.
- Helping local and national partners generate and use data and evidence to inform decisions and make improvements.
- Enhancing the ability and skills of the workforce to manage change and improvement.



Strategic context

Children, young people and families - in Scotland, across the UK and around the world - are living with both long-standing and new pressures and challenges. Inequalities shaped by economic hardship and wealth inequity, conflict and the fast-moving digital and technological revolution, mean that any child, young person, family or community may need help at some point in their lives. More and more people are feeling the strain of poor mental health and growing income inequality. At the same time, basic rights to access safe, warm and stable homes – places where people can feel secure and fulfilled - are increasingly under threat.

It is against this backdrop that CELCIS carries out its work. We understand how vital social care is, where supportive relationships and high-quality support can make all the difference in people's lives.

We navigate international, national, and local policy frameworks, aligning and contributing to these shared ambitions, and actively shaping and challenging these – helping to better meet the needs of children and young people, realise their rights and create opportunities to thrive.

At an international level, we contribute to the delivery of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children, and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), ensuring global commitments also translate into meaningful action in Scotland.

At home, we contribute to the Scottish Government's commitment to eradicate child poverty and reform public services. We also play a critical role in implementing key frameworks including Getting it right for every child, the UNCRC, and the National Guidance for Child Protection. We are dedicated to delivering on the aspirations of The Promise of the Independent Care Review, and we help corporate parents to understand and fulfil their duties to ensure their attention and resources safeguard and promote the wellbeing of children and young people with experience of care.



Strategic priorities

We are persistent in our pursuit of better outcomes and experiences for children, young people, families and carers. Our priorities set a bold direction for achieving change we all want to see for them, focusing on where we believe we can make the greatest difference.

We have three strategic priorities and two cross-cutting priorities. Our cross-cutting priorities - embedding the voices and experiences of people with lived experience and supporting workforces and leaders - are fully integrated into everything we do and deliver on.

Protecting children and supporting families

Driving improvements for care experienced people

Strengthening the infrastructure for children, families, and the workforce

Underpinned by two cross-cutting priorities

Embedding the voices and experiences of children, young people and families

Supporting the workforce and leaders

While we remain steadfast in our purpose and priorities and the value and expertise we bring as a centre for excellence, we are also agile and responsive – continually evolving to meet the changing needs of children and young people, their families and carers, and the people and organisations who support them.

Protecting children and supporting families


Every infant, child and young person has the right to grow up safe, in nurturing environments and free from harm. But for some families, persistent challenges - like poverty, poor mental or physical health, substance use, domestic violence or inadequate housing - when combined, can intensify and create overwhelming stress and increase risks to children's wellbeing. Understanding how these pressures intersect is crucial for the workforce and services to provide effective support at the earliest opportunity, before matters escalate into crises.

Every family is unique. In our work to support families, we see families as the people who can love, care for, and support children and young people – this includes birth families, adoptive families, kinship and foster families, blended families and all who take on a parenting role.

What's needed:

- Early help and the right support at *any stage* in a child or young person's life, can prevent struggles from becoming crises, keep families together where it is safe and possible, with minimal intervention.
- When families cannot stay together, decisions about children's futures must be made with compassion, minimum delay, and care.
- Seamless, multi-agency support, with services working together to provide the right support at the right time. This requires strong partnerships and relationships, shared understanding, and policies and investment that prioritise prevention and early help.
- All organisations taking a proactive, comprehensive approach to respond to fast-paced technological advances, which bring new opportunities as well as significant risks, particularly in protecting children from harm.
- CELCIS continuing to build on our trusted partnerships with national and local government, the workforce and local multi-agency partnerships.





Our Goal: With partners, we will protect children and young people by supporting the workforce to identify, assess and respond to the risks and harms affecting them. We help keep families together by enabling services to work safely, creatively and in partnership with families to provide support for as long as it is needed.

To achieve this, we will focus on:

- Supporting the children's services workforce to provide early help to infants, children, young people and families to build safe and supportive environments in which all children can thrive.
- Strengthening the knowledge, skills and practices of the workforce to confidently and competently identify and respond to risks, emerging issues and protection concerns for children and young people.
- Partnering with leaders to design and deliver effective services to meet the evolving needs of children, young people and families in their communities.
- Shaping national and local policy and practice developments to drive meaningful improvements in the lives of children, young people and families in need of support and protection.


Driving improvements for care experienced people

When living with their birth parents is not possible, it's vital that children and young people have the opportunity to grow up feeling safe, valued and loved in ways that reflect their individual needs and experiences, living with their brothers and sisters in a stable home, for as long as needed. This is essential for all children and young people's development and wellbeing.

What's needed:

- Trusting relationships and trauma-informed care, which are a foundation for children, young people and adults to feel safe and valued.
- The educational opportunities and aspirations of children, young people and adults with care experience supported and enabled at all stages, as education and learning are key to shaping their futures.
- Corporate parents being ambitious for all children and young people and providing the right support to help them overcome any challenges and flourish.
- A skilled and well-supported workforce, with confidence in supporting increasingly complex needs, including neurodiversity and additional support needs.
- Young people having the right to return to care and have access to ongoing support as they transition into adulthood. Stability, including access to safe housing, is essential.
- Children's rights at the heart of all decisions, ensuring these are fully supported and upheld.
- CELCIS continuing to build on our significant expertise working alongside the workforce and leaders to ensure all children and young people receive the stability, care, and opportunities they need to thrive.





Our Goal: With partners, we will work to ensure children, young people and adults with care experience have a loving, stable home, nurturing relationships and high-quality learning.

To achieve this, we will focus on:

- Collaborating with the workforce and organisations to embed consistent high-quality practice, with an emphasis on supporting children and young people to thrive.
- Working alongside the workforce and corporate parents to improve how the needs and rights of care experienced learners are fulfilled to have positive learning experiences.
- Developing and enhancing the skills and practices of leaders and the workforce, along with improving the systems and processes that support them, to ensure quality care for children, young people and adults.
- Advocating for and shaping policy and legislation to address deep-rooted barriers and inequalities that have an impact on the lives of children, young people and adults with care experience.


Strengthening the infrastructure for children, families and the workforce

The infrastructure of support for children, families, and the workforce, is the foundation for making change possible and building brighter futures for every child and adult. The concluding report of our [Children's Services Reform Research](#) study, conducted in 2023, provides a blueprint for strengthening the infrastructure around children's services.

What's needed:

- Effective and co-ordinated legislation, policies and ambitions which are fully implemented and are adequately resourced.
- Local, high-quality and long-term funded service provision that is non-stigmatising and responsive to the wide range of needs of children and young people, families and communities.
- Structures and processes that support feedback loops and insight between communities, practitioners, and leaders to enable continuous improvement and positive change.
- Data and evidence to support change, decision-making and better understand the experiences of children, young people, families and the children's services workforce.
- Multi-agency planning and collaboration, built on trusted relationships, with greater capacity and co-ordination across national government, leaders, and multi-agency partners to drive transformational change.
- The creation of optimal conditions to recruit, retain and support a compassionate and caring workforce.
- An understanding of and strategic response to the evolving role of technology and artificial intelligence, recognising risks, potential benefits and implications for rights, relationships and practice.
- CELCIS continuing to build on our significant experience and specialist skills: we are uniquely placed to work alongside national and local partners to strengthen the foundations that underpin lasting improvements in the lives of children, young people and families.





Our Goal: With partners, we will improve support systems and build the context necessary to enable the workforce to realise children's rights and provide the support needed for children, young people and families to thrive.

To achieve this, we will focus on:

- Collaborating with national and local leaders in Scotland to influence the future design and delivery of services and drive the improvements in line with what children, young people and families, carers and practitioners tell us they need.
- Building the knowledge, skills and practices of leaders and the workforce to use evidence-informed approaches in delivering complex change.
- Supporting national and local leaders at all levels and the workforce to develop and maintain strong multi-agency relationships, and strong feedback loops for policy and practice improvement.
- Advocating for and influencing policy and practice developments, and legislation where needed, to address deep-rooted barriers and inequalities and support the implementation and resourcing of children's services policy.
- Driving data improvements nationally and locally to ensure Scotland collects and uses meaningful data to support changes, decision-making and understands the experiences of children and young people and their families.

Our cross-cutting priorities


Embedding the voices and experiences of children, young people and families

There has been significant progress in embedding the voices, experiences, and participation of children, young people, and families into decision-making in Scotland. But there is still a significant shift needed to realise children's rights and to ensure that all voices and experiences — especially young children, children with a disability or additional needs, parents and caregivers — are heard, understood and valued.

What's needed:

- Considerable effort and resources to implement a rights-based approach in ensuring the participation of children, young people, families and carers with lived experience is meaningful and inclusive.
- A supportive environment, investment and additional resources for the workforce to realise children's rights. While we know there is a strong appetite and willingness within the workforce, practitioners require a supportive environment to make this a reality.
- At CELCIS, strengthening our ongoing commitment to embed voice and experience as a key influence across our work, both through our direct contributions to policy and practice and by modelling inclusive approaches within our own organisational culture.





Our Goal: With partners, we will empower the workforce to ensure each child and young person is involved in decisions about their life, and has the opportunity to shape and improve services.

To achieve this, we will focus on:

- Embedding the insight and expertise of people with lived experience of support, care and protection services to help shape the development and delivery of CELCIS's work.
- Generating creative and innovative ways to capture and act on the voices and experiences of people with lived experience of support, care and protection services.
- Influencing leaders to meaningfully involve children and young people, their families and carers in the design and delivery of services that work for them.
- Strengthening how the workforce and organisations listen, respond to and integrate the views of children, young people and families and carers into assessment, planning and decision making, especially for very young children or children with a disability or additional needs.

Supporting the workforce and leaders


The workforce is a foundation of quality support, care, and protection for children, young people, and their families. The ambitions to better support families, protect children, and realise children's rights are dependent on a resilient and compassionate workforce.

In Scotland, the workforce is passionate and committed but it is also in crisis. Existing systemic pressures, worsened by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis, have led to burnout, staff shortages and unmanageable workloads – all of which are putting immense strain on the delivery of services and support.

What's needed:

- The workforce must feel heard, valued and supported as they work to deliver consistent, high-quality support that is relational, trauma-informed, supportive and aspirational for children and families.
- Urgent co-ordinated national action and investment are needed to address recruitment and retention, the complexities of the policy landscape and the implementation gap.
- Strong and effective leadership from both Scottish and UK Governments is essential; it is only with the right support and investment, can national and local leaders working across agencies collectively create the nurturing, well-supported environments the workforce needs to succeed.
- CELCIS continuing to be known as the trusted place for support, knowledge and guidance, ensuring the workforce has access to research, tools and insights to inform their practice, and for their voices and experiences to inform future policy and practice developments.





Our Goal: We will work alongside national and local partners responsible for supporting and developing the workforce to drive meaningful change and ensure the workforce has the support, resources and recognition it needs to grow and develop.

To achieve this, we will focus on:

- Advocating for the needs and rights of people working with and caring for children, young people and families, including a focus on how different roles and disciplines are valued and compensated.
- Influencing national agencies, structures, policy and guidance to best support the workforce, and to help address a range of enduring workforce challenges.
- Building capacity among leaders at all levels and across organisations to enable the cultural and behavioural changes required to more effectively support the workforce.
- Equipping the workforce with high-quality and innovative learning for their work with and care of children, young people and support for families.

Investing in the CELCIS workforce

As a multi-skilled centre for excellence with a passionate group of colleagues, we are deeply committed to our purpose and bring a unique blend of knowledge, skills and experience from a range of fields and disciplines: social work and social care, research and data, facilitation and training, education and psychology, legal and policy development, communications and leadership.

We are supported to learn, develop and innovate so that our individual and collective strengths are maximised. And we prioritise our relationships with each other so that we can work and learn alongside others to play a lead role in building brighter futures for children, young people and families.



Our values and ways of working

Our values align with those of the University of Strathclyde, where we are based, and were developed with our colleagues to strengthen our commitment to an inclusive environment of collaboration, integrity, and innovation.

PEOPLE-ORIENTED

We are dedicated to building trusting relationships with each other, our consultants with lived experience, partners, and the children's services workforce.

We approach our work with compassion and care, always valuing and responding to the voices and experiences of those we support.

BOLD

We advocate for the needs and rights of children, young people, their families, carers, and the workforce, and challenge the status quo.

Our persistence, dedication, and commitment drive us forward, bolstered with intentionality and reflection. We are confident and purposeful in our actions, always striving to learn and improve.

INNOVATIVE

We generate, share and apply knowledge and evidence that makes a real impact.

We encourage curiosity, creative thinking, and new ideas, valuing a wide range of evidence from national and international research, practitioner insight, and the lived experiences of children, young people, their families, and carers.

COLLABORATIVE

We work together, both internally and externally, with integrity and respect.

By building strong partnerships, we expand our skills, expertise, and impact. We are reflective, responsive, and adaptable to the ever-changing context of our work.

AMBITIOUS

We aim for positive change for children, young people, families, and carers through our collaboration with people and organisations.

We support the ambitions of our organisation, harnessing the strengths of our colleagues, our consultants with lived experience and all our partners.



Over the course of the next five years in delivering our strategy, we will focus on:

- Investing in our own committed workforce so that we are connected, supported in our learning, empowered to challenge and be challenged, listened to and valued, and have the knowledge, skills and expertise to have the greatest impact.
- Improving how we work across CELCIS, strengthening collaboration and effective ways of working across our teams, and to support creativity, innovation, and multiple perspectives to deliver on our goals.
- Continuing to consider, apply and reflect trauma-informed principles in all our work and with everyone we work with.
- Continuing to invest in our offer of paid and employment opportunities to people with lived experience.
- Striving for operational excellence; further aligning our planning, decision-making and reporting to our strategic priorities, and improving how our internal ways of working facilitate the delivery of our strategy.
- Exploring the ethical use of Artificial Intelligence to add value to our internal ways of working.
- Diversifying our funding in ways that are aligned to our remit and add value and impact to the delivery of our work.
- Further growing our partnerships with universities and researchers, improvement organisations and change makers.



Progress and learning

We use robust evidence to support decisions about the work we do and how we approach this. We are informed by the experiences of children, young people and families and carers; draw from a wide range of our own and others research, evidence and data; and harness the insight and expertise of those who work within children and adult services, both in statutory and non-statutory services.

We will continue to track progress and learn from our work to ensure it is having the intended impact, and that we are delivering this work in the most effective way.

We will seek feedback from our stakeholders and partners and report on the extent to which our work has been valuable and impactful to them.

Driving impact with accountability and sustainability

CELCIS is primarily funded by the Scottish Government, alongside a blend of grants and other funded activities, all aligned with our vision, purpose and priorities. We are unwavering in our commitment to delivering high-impact, high-quality, value-for-money work while ensuring robust financial governance.

Through strategic planning, ongoing monitoring, and the diversification of funding streams, we will maintain financial sustainability and accountability, driving both innovation and impact for children, young people, and families.