

Response to Education and Skills Committee inquiry on Attainment and achievement of school aged children experiencing poverty - March 2018

CELCIS (Centre for excellence for looked after children in Scotland), based at the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow, is committed to making positive and lasting improvements in the wellbeing of Scotland's children living in and on the edges of care. We welcome this opportunity to highlight how experiencing poverty affects vulnerable children and young people at school, including their attainment and their achievement, and consider what can be done to further support children and their families.

Poverty and children in and on the edges of care

A 2016 Joseph Rowntree Foundation evidence review on the relationship between poverty, child abuse and neglect found a strong association between families' socio-economic circumstances and the chances that children will experience child abuse and neglect.¹ The review highlighted that poverty is overlooked as a factor contributing to children who become looked after, and that being looked after as a child can have a sustained impact on a number of socio-economic outcomes (including lower socio-economic status, reduced educational attainment, homelessness and unemployment).

Over 15,000 children are 'looked after' by Scottish local authorities; and whilst there are many reasons why compulsory measures of care are required, a significant number of children will have experienced abuse and neglect.² In 2016, approximately 2,700 children were 'at risk of significant harm' thus on a Child Protection Register.³ Research indicates that children in the most deprived 10% of small neighbourhoods in Scotland are nearly 20 times more likely to be 'looked after' or on the child protection register than children in the least deprived neighbourhoods.⁴ CELCIS analysis of Scottish Government child poverty statistics and the Children's Social Work statistics indicate a correlation between the proportion of looked after children and levels of child poverty in Scottish local authorities. The chart in Appendix 1 illustrates that the percentage of 0-17 year olds who are looked after generally rises as the percentage of children in poverty increases.

Education and looked after children

The biggest driver of future poverty is the educational attainment of children when they leave full-time education.⁵ Educational outcome indicators show that the gap between looked after children's attainment and achievement in school, and that of all children, remains unacceptably large.⁶ Looked after children are more likely to leave school at the earliest opportunity (73% leave school aged 16 or under, compared to 27% of all pupils); and, taken as a whole group, obtain lower qualifications than all school leavers. Children who are looked after 'at home' (those who continue to live with their birth parent(s) under compulsory social work supervision) experience some of the poorest outcomes, with 26% leaving school with no qualifications (compared to 2% of all children). Outcome indicators also give insight into the experiences of looked after children in school, for example, children who are looked after are excluded from school at a rate eight times higher than the whole school population.⁷

Children in and on the edges of care must be of critical consideration in this inquiry. They are acutely vulnerable, being both at increased risk of experiencing deprivation, and without the same positive outcomes and experiences in education as all children.

Question 1: *How has your work supported the educational attainment of children and young people? What has worked well and what barriers have there been to success?*

CEL CIS Education Team support the implementation of policy, legislation and evidence in a range of education settings, this work is informed by evidence of what is effective in improving educational experiences and outcomes for children and young people living in and on the edges of care.⁸ Engagement with parents and carers, supporting teachers, and ensuring teachers and other staff have an understanding of attachment, trauma and resilience are essential areas of focus. This complex work requires a nuanced understanding of the challenges that exist for vulnerable children, young people and their families. Initial Teacher Education (ITE) does not, as part of the core curriculum, have any input on needs and vulnerabilities specific to looked after children, which is incompatible with the skills required to support these children to fully access their education.

Our '[Addressing Neglect and Enhancing Wellbeing](#)' and '[Transforming Pathways](#)' programmes seek to mitigate the effects of poverty on children and families lives, in turn supporting educational attainment. Working closely with local areas, and using evidence on what it takes to effect sustainable and scalable practice change in systems, the ambition of these programmes is to shift practice within universal services from crisis (or reactive) intervention, to consistently ensure access to early help for families.⁹ For children to be ready to learn in the classroom, they must have the opportunity for optimal development from birth and through infancy. Therefore, improving practice and services focussed on the foundations of child development, and the building blocks that will have subsequent effects on educational and employment opportunities children will be able to access, is imperative.¹⁰ An additional priority identified in each local area is strengthening families' access to resources and support to meet children's basic needs. Many families living with poverty experience hunger, limited resources for clothing (such as P.E kits, coats and shoes), poor housing conditions, and a lack of community resources. Local practitioners are acutely aware that without addressing these fundamental needs, children experience barriers to accessing the curriculum, including stigma, and the impact of family stress on concentration, behaviour and attendance.

A key enabler to this work has been taking a broad perspective which looks beyond individual parts of the public service system (e.g. schools only) and considers how the whole system interacts to produce conditions and opportunities which can enhance children's wellbeing in local neighbourhoods and communities. The shared language and framework of [Getting It Right For Every Child](#) (Girfec) has been helpful in this context. Barriers we have observed to the consistent integration of early intervention approaches include the devolvement of decisions about expenditure in schools. Where short timeframes exist for expenditure and investment in supports linked to schooling (e.g. the Pupil Equity Fund), opportunities to carefully appraise what is likely to bring the strongest improvements for children and families, and ensure this is sustainable, are limited.

Question 3: *If you work with schools/local authorities/others to address school attainment and wider achievement, what makes collaboration on this issue easy/difficult?*

The Education Team have worked with two local areas to support the implementation of a parent/carer and community engagement project '[Parents in Partnership](#)' targeted to

families living in SIMD deciles 1 and 2. Parents In Partnership utilises collocation of supportive community services, and through a trusted point of contact allows parents and carers to experience a day in high school life, and also provides inputs from community partners to promote access to existing services. Success of the project is attributed to leadership at all levels in schools, willingness to work collaboratively with community partners, and commitment to providing time and training for staff involved. In schools which have sustained the programme, collaboration and coproduction have been crucial in establishing and maintaining parental engagement.

In the 'Addressing Neglect and Enhancing Wellbeing' and 'Transforming Pathways' programmes, a number of factors have been seen to enhance collaboration. Namely: shared values and goals held by all stakeholders; interdisciplinary professional respect and role clarity; motivation to support families; growing awareness of the need to *holistically* address families' needs; and spending purposeful time with other stakeholders to focus on issues and solutions. Factors impeding collaboration include: differing perceptions of success (competing agendas tied to professional roles rather than holistic wellbeing); confusion and uncertainty about sharing information on the basis of wellbeing; difficulties translating multi-agency assessment and planning into practice (where each agency's role is clearly understood and regularly reviewed); and the complex legislative and policy context, in which national and local accountability and responsibility is not always clear.¹¹

Question 4: *What else could be done to support the attainment /achievement of children and young people from families affected by poverty?*

Addressing structural inequalities

In listening to the challenges that families are experiencing and that public services are attempting to address, the need to address the underpinning causes – the structural inequalities that exist within society and communities in Scotland – is apparent. Without attending to this, we can only mitigate, rather than address, the profound effects of those inequalities (the health and wellbeing, educational and employment outcomes), on adults and children who are living within circumstances that are compounded by multiple disadvantages. There is a limitation in using only income-related measures for understanding poverty. Children and families' experience of poverty will be broader than this and, as articulated in Scottish Government's [Child Poverty Strategy](#) (2014-2017), include underlying social and economic determinants of poverty, the circumstances in which children grow up, and the physical, social and economic environments in communities.

Implementing Change

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation report '[Closing the Attainment Gap in Scottish Education](#)' (2014, p5) highlights the need to draw on the evidence base of 'what works, for whom, in which contexts, and why' to enable implementation of effective change to narrow the attainment gap. The report features key recommendations for stakeholders at all levels of the system. Consideration of progress against these recommendations in the period since the report's publication may highlight the need for further concerted implementation support.

Holistic understanding and workforce skills

To narrow the attainment gap, policy must focus on factors which affect children's educational outcomes, rather than the outcomes themselves, such as respect, dignity,

understanding, inclusion and participation within school.¹² Educational leaders and the teaching workforce require a holistic understanding of the causes and impact of poverty on a child's experience of education and their wider world, and of the interventions that schools can use to reduce the impact. To contribute to this, this subject matter should be included in ITE, alongside commitment to creating space within existing structures for ongoing meaningful coaching, formal support and supervision of teachers. Educational attainment is strongly correlated with a teacher's skills, including how to adapt and modify their approach in response to the varied needs and learning styles of different children.¹³ These skills require both an adaptive and technical understanding of how to engage with children, some of whom will have experienced trauma, which shapes their engagement and interaction with the world, including school. A teacher must be able to connect with all children, and utilise their skills to nurture the child's learning.

Early Learning and Childcare

The Poverty and Equality Commission's [Advice to the Scottish Government's Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2018](#) highlights that the poverty related attainment gap has already opened up prior to children starting school, and link this to the importance of quality early learning and childcare provision. Whilst the take-up of funded provision is high for 3 and 4 year old children (of whom all are eligible), only 10% of 2 year old children are accessing funded provision.¹⁴ Two year old children are eligible for funded provision if their parents are in receipt of qualifying benefits, or if they are looked after by a local authority, are the subject of a kinship care order, or have a parent-appointed guardian. This is 25% of all two year olds. Many parents (22%) cite the reason they are not accessing early learning and childcare as being unaware of their child's eligibility, suggesting a need to raise awareness and improve accessibility for vulnerable families.

Nurturing ethos

Embedding an ethos which emphasises nurture in schools (with both children, and their wider families) may enhance early access to the right help at the right time for families. Parents and children experiencing a systematically inclusive and nurturing environment may reduce barriers to seeking help, and strengthen the relational aspects of school staff interaction with parents. As with the successful implementation of any change, embedding a nurturing approach requires sufficient attention to a number of factors in order to be effective, for example teacher supervision, coaching and mentoring.¹⁵

Targeting resources

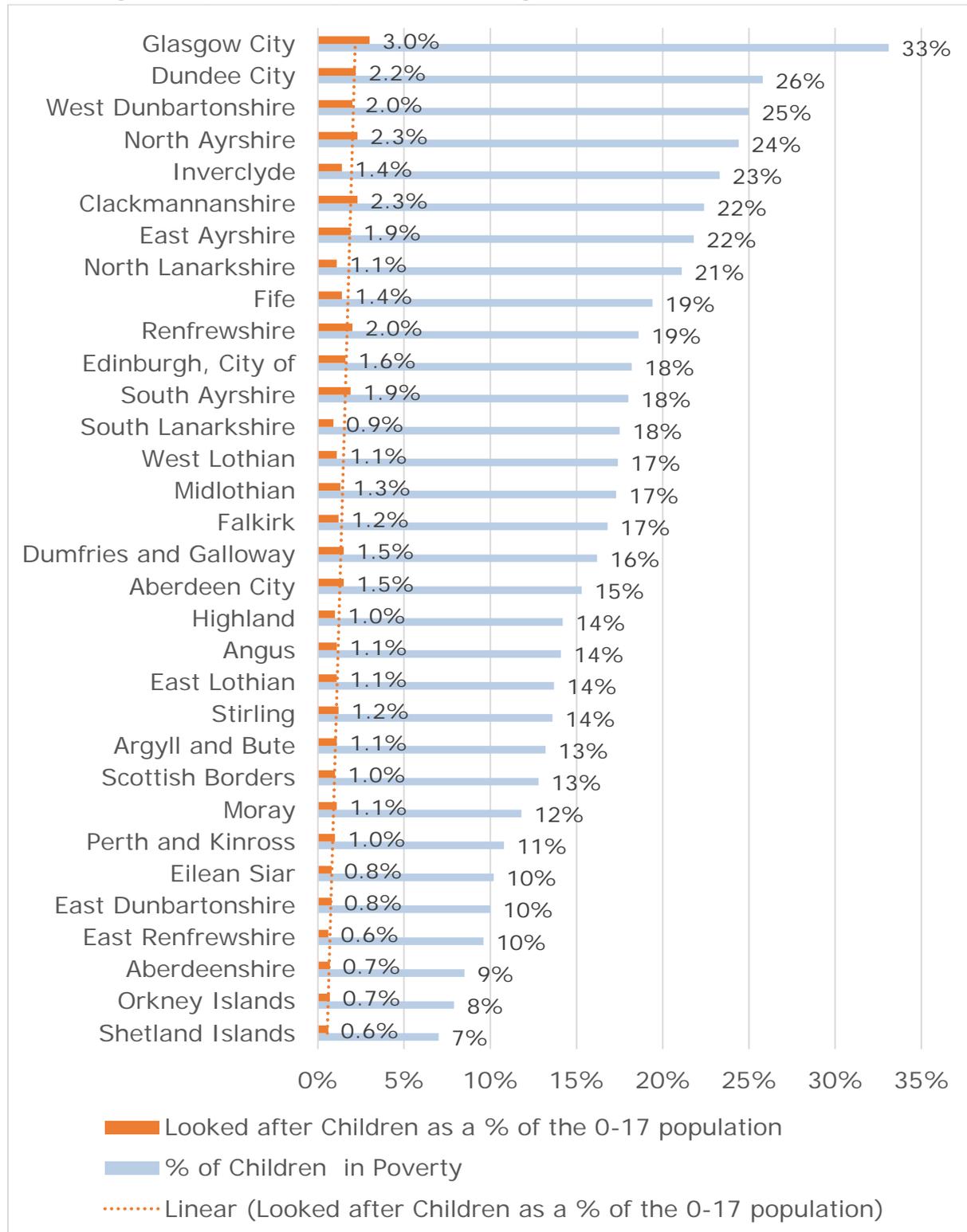
The effects of criteria used to allocate resources should be considered. Allocations based on SIMD classification can be problematic. Whilst the poverty related attainment gap is a significant visible challenge within Scotland, and research has shown that targeting funding towards children from the most deprived areas will have an effect on attainment¹⁶, we urge caution in focusing additional resource solely on this group. A concerning attainment gap exists for looked after children, and whilst many children living in and on the edges of care also reside in areas of high deprivation, some do not, a simple example being those children who are looked after and accommodated in kinship or foster care in areas of low deprivation. SIMD classification should not be used as the sole determinant of any targeted funding.

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.

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Appendix 1: % of Children in Poverty compared to % of LAC, by Local Authority Area, 2015-16, as of 31st July 2016^{a, b}



^a Scottish Government (2012) [Local authority Level Child Poverty data from HMRC](#)

^b Scottish Government (2017) [Children's Social Work Statistics Additional Tables 2015-16](#); Table 3.1: Children starting and ceasing to be looked after, by local authority, 2015-16

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- ¹ Bywaters, P, et al., (2016) The relationship between poverty, child abuse and neglect: an evidence review, York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Pg.3
- ² Scottish Government (2017) Children's Social Work Statistics Scotland 2015/16, Edinburgh: Scottish Government.
- ³ Ibid.
- ⁴ Bywaters, P. et al. (2017) Identifying and Understanding Inequalities in Child Welfare Intervention Rates: comparative studies in four UK countries. Briefing Paper 4: Scotland
- ⁵ Barnard, H. et al (2017) UK Poverty 2017, York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation
- ⁶ Scottish Government (2017) Education Outcomes for Looked After Children 2015/16, Edinburgh: Scottish Government
- ⁷ Scottish Government (2016) Education Outcomes for Looked After Children 2014/15, Edinburgh: Scottish Government
- ⁸ CELCIS (2015) Looked After and Learning: Improving the learner journey of looked after children, Glasgow: University of Strathclyde
- ⁹ Fixsen, D. L., Naoom, S. F., Blase, K. A., Friedman, R. M. & Wallace, F. (2005). Implementation Research: A Synthesis of the Literature. Tampa, FL: University of South Florida, Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute, The National Implementation Research Network (FMHI Publication #231).
- ¹⁰ Conti G., Heckman J.J. (2014) Economics of Child Well-Being. In: Ben-Arieh A., Casas F., Frønes I., Korbin J. (eds) Handbook of Child Well-Being. Springer, Dordrecht
- ¹¹ Brock, J. (2016) The Brock Report: Safeguarding Scotland's vulnerable children from child abuse: A review of the Scottish system, Edinburgh: Children in Scotland
- ¹² Treanor, M. (2017) Can we put the 'poverty of aspiration' myth to bed now?, Edinburgh: Centre for Research on Families and Relationships
- ¹³ Hattie, J. (2011). Visible Learning for Teachers: Maximizing Impact on Learning. New York, NY: Routledge.
- ¹⁴ Scottish Government (2017) The Expansion of Early Learning and Childcare: Evaluation Report 2017, Edinburgh: Scottish Government
- ¹⁵ Boorn, C., Hopkins Dunn, P., & Page, C. (2010). Growing a nurturing classroom. Educational and Behavioural Difficulties , 15(4), 311–321.
- ¹⁶ OECD (2015) Improving Schools In Scotland: An OECD Perspective
<http://www.oecd.org/edu/school/improving-schools-in-scotland.htm>