

**'JOINING UP THE DOTS':  
A SCOPING STUDY ON A CENTRE FOR  
EXCELLENCE FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN  
AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

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# **1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

## **1.1 Background**

The Scottish Government commissioned a consultative scoping study into the potential role of a Centre for Excellence for looked after children and young people in Scotland. This project was carried out between March 2010 and June 2010 by an independent consultant with support provided by the Scottish Institute for Residential Child Care (SIRCC).

The scoping study follows on from the work of the National Residential Child Care Initiative (NRCCI) which reported at the end of 2009<sup>1</sup>. The findings of the NRCCI project emphasised the importance of collaboration between all those working with looked after children.

The scoping study involved a range of stakeholders from across different sectors and interests. Activities included initial meetings of a stakeholder steering group, consultative meetings, interviews and an online survey. Who Cares? Scotland and the Debate Project of the Scottish Throughcare and Aftercare Forum facilitated discussions with young people.

## **1.2 Main findings**

Participants expressed wide interest in a proposal for Centre for Excellence for looked after children and young people. There was some concern expressed about whether funding would be available in the current economic climate and how a Centre could be adequately resourced.

There was support for a focus on looked after children and young people across their looked after experiences including those looked after in residential care, foster care, kinship care, those with experience of moving on from care and those looked after at home. Attention was drawn to the needs of disabled children and young people and unaccompanied children and young people.

A Centre was seen to have benefits in raising the profile of looked after children and young people, putting the needs of children and young people at its heart, providing a place for innovation and leadership and bringing a commitment to working across professional interests and sectors.

There were also challenges. These included the difficult funding situation, the importance of a Centre having an impact on outcomes and the need to have 'buy-in' from different sectors and interests. A Centre's activities would have to be prioritised because of its extensive remit.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.sircc.org.uk/nrcci/news/higher aspirations lauch>

Those with an interest in residential child care did not want the residential child care sector to lose the resources which were currently provided by SIRCC. Support was widely expressed for the work of SIRCC.

There was wide commitment to children and young people's engagement and participation. Young people sought to have meaningful involvement with opportunities for their expertise to be appropriately and well used.

Participants highlighted the importance of appropriately engaging kinship carers and family members.

It was emphasised that a new Centre should avoid duplication with existing organisations such as MARS, IRISS, SIRCC and national organisations such as BAAF, the Fostering Network and the Scottish Throughcare and Aftercare Forum. A Centre should work closely with organisations delivering services to children and young people who were looked after.

A range of potential areas of work were identified. These included dissemination and sharing good practice and provision of online tools and resources. Workforce education and training was valuable if linked with other provision and also involved opportunities to work across professional groups. Practitioners and managers across all sectors should be engaged. There was considerable interest in co-ordination, dissemination, and collaboration on research. Having a Centre could provide an impetus for strategic approaches to research and strengthen the links between policy and practice.

It was emphasised that establishing a Centre for Excellence was only worthwhile if it influenced better outcomes for children and young people. It was, however, acknowledged that it could be difficult to identify what were positive outcomes for children and young people. The Scottish Government's high level outcomes provided an overarching framework. It was also suggested that the work of the inspectorates and the Care Commission provided valuable information which could be used for establishing outcomes. Outcomes needed to be measured across services as well as aligned with children's services objectives.

The overwhelmingly majority believed that a Centre should be funded by the Scottish Government although funding should also be accessed elsewhere. Many respondents did not have a view of how a Centre could be governed but generally thought that different sectors and professional interests should be reflected in the work of the Centre.

Examples of other Centres for Excellence in Scotland, the UK and internationally worked in diverse ways and had a range of organisational models such as consortia, charitable organisations and membership bodies. The majority had some form of link to a university, received substantial funding from national government and had a focus on sharing good practice, knowledge exchange, research and policy.

### **1.3 Issues for further consideration**

Taking into account concern about the current economic climate, the Scottish Government and other stakeholders should consider if there are additional benefits or roles associated with establishing a Centre such as taking a national overview of existing expertise, identifying cost efficient approaches to services and facilitating dissemination and exchange of good practice.

There was strong interest in a Centre which could focus on all children and young people who were looked after including children and young people who were looked after at home. A Centre could play a valuable role in initially scoping existing practice and research in this and other strategic areas (such as kinship care and the needs of disabled children and young people) in order to identify what works and to map out future activities.

It would be important to identify strategic tasks in order to ensure that a Centre could impact on outcomes for children and young people. A Centre would have to be closely aligned with associated strategic national areas of work such as the work of the Looked after Children Strategic Implementation Group (LACSIG). A new Centre for Excellence would have to work closely with other Centres in Scotland in order to identify and share expertise in areas such as knowledge exchange mechanisms and workforce training and education.

There was considerable emphasis on the potential for a Centre to support inter-professional and cross sectoral activities and a strong commitment to the involvement of children and young people, foster carers, kinship carers and families. A Centre for Excellence should have a powerful underpinning ethos which focuses on inclusiveness and be astute at engaging this wide group of stakeholders.

There were a number of suggestions of different models which could be considered for a Centre. These included a consortium, a charitable organisation or a charity which also was a membership organisation. Some participants suggested that extending the remit of an existing Centre such as SIRCC might be appropriate. The experience of other Centres suggests that a link in some form to a university would be helpful. Other governance models and organisational structures could be considered in addition to these examples.

In conclusion, the scoping study found that there was wide interest in a proposal for a Centre for Excellence and that there were opportunities to develop innovative and interesting work in this area. Responses from participants demonstrated an informed commitment to supporting ways of improving the outcomes of children and young people who were looked after away from home.

## **2 INTRODUCTION**

### **2.1 Background**

The Scottish Government commissioned a consultative scoping study into the potential role of a Centre for Excellence for looked after children and young people in Scotland. This project was carried out by an independent consultant between March 2010 and June 2010. Additional administration support and facilitation was provided by the Scottish Institute for Residential Child Care (SIRCC).

This study follows on from the work of the National Residential Child Care Initiative (NRCCI) which reported at the end of 2009<sup>2</sup>. The findings of the NRCCI project emphasised the importance of collaboration between all those working with looked after children. The scoping study has explored the potential for a Centre for Excellence for looked after children and young people which could support greater collaboration.

## **3 METHODOLOGY OF SCOPING STUDY**

### **3.1 Objectives of the study**

The scoping study had the following objectives:

- to explore the potential role of a Centre for Excellence for looked after children and young people
- to consider how the outcomes of a Centre of Excellence could be measured
- to identify any challenges that might be associated with a Centre for Excellence for looked after children and young people
- to explore stakeholders' views on governance and funding
- to identify the strengths and weaknesses of a range of existing and potential models of Centres for Excellence.

The overarching questions that were explored with participants were:

- What is the role of a Centre for Excellence?
- What are the expectations of a Centre for Excellence for looked after children and young people?
- What should be its main activities?
- How might it serve current and future policy needs?
- How might a Centre for Excellence improve outcomes for children and young people who are looked after?

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.sircc.org.uk/nrcci/news/higherinspirationslauch>

- What are the challenges associated with a Centre for Excellence for looked after children and young people?
- What relationship should it have with other organisations at national and local level? To other Centres for Excellence?
- Should there be an equality of focus on all types of looked after children and young people?
- What should be the role of a Centre for Excellence in relation to child protection issues?
- What governance arrangements would be appropriate?

### **3.2 Approaches to the scoping study**

The consultative scoping study involved a range of stakeholders from across different sectors and interests. The Scottish Government held initial stakeholder steering group meetings with representatives from national organisations to explore the remit of the scoping study.

Consultative meetings were held in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Stirling with approximately thirty national organisations invited to attend. The aim was to involve organisations and interests with a specific interest in looked after children and young people. Individual meetings or telephone interviews were undertaken with representatives of national organisations who were not able to participate in consultative meetings.

A consultative meeting was also held in Glasgow with representatives from residential child care as this sector has had specific experience of participating in the activities of SIRCC, an existing Centre for Excellence. An online survey was circulated to a wider range of organisations based on the mailing list for the Looked after Children Strategic Implementation Group (LACSIG).

Young people participated in discussions facilitated by Who Cares? Scotland and the Debate Project which is supported by the Scottish Throughcare and Aftercare Forum. Desk based research was undertaken on other Centres for Excellence in the UK and internationally.

### **3.3 Participating organisations**

The aim was to involve organisations and interests with a specific interest in looked after children and young people. Organisations which participated in the initial steering group, consultative meetings and individual meetings included:

- ADSW, ADES, BAAF, Barnardos, the Care Commission, Children 1<sup>st</sup>, CoSLA, For Scotland's Disabled Children, the Fostering Network, HMIE, Includem, Kibble, LAC nurse service, NHS Lothian, SCRA, Scottish Commissioner for Children and Young People, SIRCC, Scottish Social Services Council, Scottish Throughcare and Aftercare Forum, SWIA,

academics from the Universities of Glasgow, Stirling and Edinburgh, Who Cares? Scotland.

There were 77 responses to the online survey with 49 respondents completing all questions. The breakdown of organisations that responded to the consultation was:

- 33.8% (24) responses from local authorities
- 21.1%(15) from voluntary organisations
- 11.3% (8) from independent organisations (not voluntary organisations)
- 26.8% (19) from Health Boards
- 1.4% (1) from a national agency
- 7% (5) further or higher education.

Respondents identified themselves as having the following interests:

- residential child care including secure care (15)
- child protection, kinship care, care leavers and looked after and accommodated children (18)
- fostering and adoption (2)
- children's services (16)
- social work education (1)
- residential education (5)
- health of looked after children and young people (4)
- mental health needs of children and young people who are looked after (2)
- children's rights and participation (1)
- throughcare and aftercare (3)
- children with ASD, learning disabilities and additional support needs (5)
- covering all of these areas (7)
- children's panel (1)

Responses have not been attributed to organisations or individuals. The report indicates where a substantial number of responses supported a particular viewpoint.

## **4 FINDINGS FROM SCOPING STUDY**

### **4.1 Focus of a Centre for Excellence**

The scoping study considered what groups of looked after children and young people could be included in the focus of Centre for Excellence. Initial discussions with the stakeholder steering group suggested that this could include children and young people who are looked after at home, in kinship care, looked after away from home in foster care and residential care, young people who have moved from care, those accessing respite/shared care and unaccompanied children and young people. Other suggestions were made during the course of the study about other groups of children and young people that could be included in the work of a Centre and these are explored in the report.



## **4.2 Proposal for a Centre for Excellence**

Participants were asked for their views on a Centre for Excellence. Although participants did not have the opportunity to consider a proposal in advance of the face to face consultations, they expressed wide interest in the concept of a Centre for Excellence for looked after children and young people.

In the online survey, 68% (32) of participants who answered this question thought that the proposal was a good idea with only one not agreeing with the proposal. A quarter needed to know more and a further 13% thought that it depended on a variety of factors.

There was some concern expressed about whether funding would be available in the current economic climate and how a Centre could be adequately resourced. Participants also raised the issue of whether there would be any duplication or overlap with the work of other agencies. These two points are explored in the following sections.

A small number of participants were uncertain what a Centre for Excellence was and what was the definition of 'excellence'.

## **4.3 The benefits of a Centre for Excellence**

Participants were asked to consider 'what are the benefits of establishing a Centre for Excellence?'

Many pointed out that there were benefits in joining up thinking and approaches to children and young people who are looked after across their different care experiences. Some stated that a Centre could take a long term view of the needs of looked after children and young people. It was emphasised that a Centre could only be truly 'excellent' if it had a vision beyond the point of young people 'leaving care' and supported fully integrated throughcare and aftercare.

It was suggested that a Centre for Excellence for looked after children and young people could put children and young people at the heart of its activities, focusing on their care and life journeys more effectively. As part of this emphasis, it could facilitate the participation of children and young people. Several participants pointed out that a Centre should be a 'child-centred' rather than a 'child-focused' resource. As such, it could have a role in changing outdated views of children and young people. Overall, there was considerable support for children and young people's engagement in a Centre for Excellence.

Many participants thought that a Centre could provide a strong focus on the needs of looked after children and young people as well as an opportunity to develop a common vision for services. It could provide inspirational leadership, adding 'clout' to debates on the needs of looked after children and young people. In line with the views of a significant number of responses, one respondent suggested that a Centre could signal that the needs of looked after children and young people were 'an

important issue worthy of special attention'. It could be a voice of authority on issues relating to children and young people who are looked after. At the same time, a Centre could take a facilitative role, bringing together different ideas which could be explored in a supportive environment.

There was widespread support for the Centre to underpin all its activities with a commitment to inter-professional and cross sectoral working. It was emphasised that social work, health and education interests should be core to a Centre. The benefits of having different professional groups 'round the table in one room' were seen to be significant. The Centre could have a central role pulling together different sectors, interests and professionals.

There was a widely held view that a Centre could be a means by which best practice could be shared and disseminated, providing a hub for information and a lever for collaboration and coordination. It was suggested that a Centre could provide the impetus for setting standards and establishing expectations for services to children and young people who were looked after.

A Centre was viewed as having a role in enhancing the skills and expertise of the workforce, providing networks for sharing and exchanging practice as well as education and professional development opportunities. It could co-ordinate and develop research where gaps had been identified.

The remit of a Centre would also link to areas of policy and practice beyond that primarily concerned with looked after children and young people including GIRFEC, early years and supporting children and young people's additional support needs.

A Centre which was underpinned by a child and young person centred approach was seen to have the potential to provide an environment in which children and families' engagement could be supported and developed. It also needed to take account of the needs of kinship carers and foster carers, providing opportunities for participation across the Centre's activities.

#### **4.4 The challenges of a Centre for Excellence**

Participants were also asked to consider 'what are the challenges in establishing a Centre for Excellence?' It should be noted that some issues which were regarded as benefits were also seen to be challenges.

There was a widely held view that a Centre for Excellence had to have an impact on the outcomes of children and young people. It had to be purposeful with clear objectives. A Centre had to confidently challenge policy and practice relating to children and young people while working closely with stakeholders including the Scottish Government. The barriers to implementing good practice in organisations were not fully understood and the Centre had a role in unpacking this further. Significantly, children and young people had to be at the centre of its activities and this commitment should be reflected in its underpinning principles.

Many commented on the need to avoid duplication with the work of other national agencies, research centres and representative bodies. This included the Multi Agency Resource Centre (MARS) and the Scottish Child Care and Protection Network (SCCPN) at the University of Stirling, the Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services (IRISS), SIRCC and national voluntary organisations such as BAAF, the Fostering Network and the Scottish Throughcare and Aftercare Forum. It was emphasised that a new Centre had to relate to other current developments while also providing a unique resource which was seen to be valuable and meaningful across sectors and professional interests. It was highlighted by one participant that it was challenging to change practice where it was not good enough and that a Centre needed to know what was not happening as well as what was in place. Another participant asked 'what aspects of services could be improved?'

Most participants suggested that the difficult economic situation could impact on the viability of a proposal for developing a Centre due to the lack of financial resources. The timing for developing a Centre was seen to be difficult for this reason. There was some concern that funding for a new Centre could be taken away from other agencies or existing priorities. Several commented that a Centre had to be sustainable and properly resourced to ensure it could deliver on its objectives.

It was emphasised by many that it was extremely important but also challenging to get different agencies and sectors to work together. Taking this further, the right partners needed to be involved in a Centre for Excellence. There needed to be agreement on common goals between different interests and across sectors.

Multi-agency working and 'buy-in' was regarded as essential to the effectiveness of a Centre with social work, education and health all contributing. Other children's services such as child protection and youth justice needed to be involved. Corporate parenting was seen to be a role which required support and input but where responsibility had to be shared across organisations and sectors. A Centre for Excellence for looked after children and young people had to be relevant to everyone.

Several participants highlighted the importance of ensuring geographical coverage and appropriate engagement in a Centre from across Scotland. As one response to the survey stated 'all areas of Scotland' had to 'feel part of this initiative, value it and 'buy' into the idea'. A Centre had to be accessible to those who were based in remote areas.

It was noted that there were challenges in ensuring meaningful participation from children and young people as users. A Centre had to have a role tackling stigma associated with being a looked after child or young person. There was not any extensive discussion about the involvement of families including kinship carers as well as foster carers but the nature of this involvement needs further exploration.

Those in the residential child care sector questioned what a new organisation could achieve if it was separate to SIRCC. Concern was expressed, particularly by those organisations that worked closely with SIRCC, that its work should not be undermined as it made a valuable contribution to the residential child care sector.

## 4.5 Focus on looked after children and young people

The majority of those that took part in the study thought that a Centre for Excellence for looked after children and young people should focus on the following groups of children and young people:

- children and young people who are looked after at home, in kinship care, looked after away from home in foster care and residential care, young people who had moved on from care, children and young people who had accessed respite/shared care and unaccompanied children and young people.

The online survey asked 'which groups of children and young people should a Centre for Excellence include?' with participants asked to tick all those groups that should be included in a Centre. Responses were as follows:

- children and young people in residential care (97.9%)
- children and young people in foster care (93.8%)
- separated and unaccompanied children and young people who are looked after (89.6%)
- those looked after in kinship care (81.3%)
- young people who have moved on from care (79.2%)
- looked after at home (70.8%)
- children accessing shared and respite care (66.7%)
- sons and daughters of foster carers (39.6%).

Additional suggestions for groups of children and young people to be included within the remit of a Centre were:

- children and young people currently within the children's panel system
- children and young people who are privately fostered
- care leavers with no experience of after care
- young people with disabilities
- children and young people who have been adopted
- any child or young person whose welfare is at risk
- young carers
- children and young people suffering from mental ill health
- siblings of those in care
- families.

Although families were mentioned as an additional category in the online survey, parents were not suggested as an individual group. This may be because of the focus of the Centre. It may also suggest ambivalence to working with parents in a Centre for looked after children and young people.

A small number of participants suggested that all children were looked after in different ways either by their own parents, in nurseries or schools or in private boarding schools. According to this perspective, the Centre should therefore cover all children and young people whether they were formally looked after or not. A

similarly small number of responses suggested that a Centre could have a broad remit for children's services as many of the issues affecting children and young people were linked.

Children and young people who are looked after at home were mentioned by most organisations as important for a Centre for Excellence to consider. This group was seen to be particularly in need of attention because of poor outcomes for children and young people looked after at home in education, the lack of information and research on this group and the perception that services did not adequately provide for children and young people's needs or give support to families. There was no detailed discussion on how a Centre could take forward the needs of this particular group, suggesting that this area might need some further consideration.

The importance of meeting the needs of disabled children and young people was highlighted particularly as there was a perceived lack of information and little research on their needs.

It was suggested that foster care had been largely overlooked as an area for inputting national level resources and that a Centre for Excellence offered an opportunity to complement existing work on foster care undertaken by organisations such as the Fostering Network. The group of children and young people placed in foster care were often younger than those in residential child care and this had implications for services and for the work of the Centre.

The experience of vulnerable young people in transition was highlighted as was the experience of young people in their 20s who had moved on from care. Young people could be parents and need support in their role. Generally there were unacceptably poor outcomes for young people leaving care. At the other end of the life cycle, babies and very young children required appropriate attention.

One participant mentioned the importance of 'stickability', a commitment to ensuring that children and young people were supported throughout the experience of care. There needed to be equality in recognising the needs of children and young people across all age groups as well as the diversity of care experiences.

The majority of respondents therefore thought that the work of a Centre should include children and young people in residential care, foster care and kinship care, unaccompanied children and young people and young people who had moved on from care and those looked after at home. There were a number of other suggestions of children and young people who could be included such as sons and daughters of foster carers. It was highlighted that not enough was known about the needs of disabled children and young people.

#### **4.6 Activities of a Centre for Excellence**

Organisations were asked 'what should be the main activities of a Centre for Excellence for looked after children and young people?' The following section highlights the main activities that were highlighted by participants.

### ***Prioritising the work of a Centre***

There was a general view that a Centre for Excellence for looked after children and young people would have a huge remit. It was therefore important to prioritise the Centre's activities as it would not be able to undertake everything relating to looked after children and young people. A Centre did need to have an understanding and role in relation to child protection although it was recognised that other agencies such as MARS worked in this area.

Working effectively with leading organisations and other centres for excellence or national agencies was essential. At the same time, the Centre needed to be an 'intellectual powerhouse' according to one participant.

### ***Good practice exchange***

The dissemination and exchange of good practice was regarded as a priority for a new Centre by the majority of participants. In a context where funding resources will be restricted, sharing practice and knowledge exchange was seen to be particularly beneficial for service providers.

There was substantial interest in the potential of a Centre to be a knowledge 'bank', 'hub' or 'portal'. It was suggested that both practitioners and managers needed to know more about good or effective practice and that there needed to be high quality dissemination and knowledge exchange approaches. A Centre offered a way of bridging a gap between theory and practice. In order to do this, it needed to have a high quality online presence with IRISS mentioned as an example of an organisation which provided an effective resource in wider social services.

It was suggested that the development of a 'community of practice' for looked after children and young people would support exchange of expertise and skills between services and sectors. It would also provide support for the corporate parenting role. However, there also needed to be ways of identifying what was good practice and how this practice impacted on outcomes for children and young people. It was stated that institutional barriers to good practice were not generally fully understood.

It was thought that there were many benefits in linking across the UK and internationally, providing a two way approach to sharing experience and ideas. Links to Europe were viewed as being helpful to explore the potential of social pedagogy.

### ***Co-ordinating and developing research***

Many participants highlighted that the Centre could have a vital role in research. This role could include co-ordinating, facilitating, informing and disseminating research. A Centre could both commission and undertake high quality research.

It was pointed out by many participants that there was not enough research on looked after children and young people in Scotland. There was an absence of longitudinal studies which considered the outcomes for children and young people who were looked after into young adulthood. Having an audit of research would help to identify what was available, the applicability of its findings and how research could be developed to fill the gaps that were identified.

A number of participants suggested that research could be practitioner led and based on action research approaches rather than research which was predominantly theoretical. Support to practitioners in developing research skills was flagged up as an area for potential development in order to support this activity.

The means of accessing knowledge about research could be linked to the work of other Centres such as IRISS, MARS and SCCPN.

### ***Supporting workforce development***

A Centre for Excellence could provide a place for workforce development. It could provide a symbolic statement of status for those working in services related to looked after children and young people. Some participants suggested that there needed to be an ambitious training agenda around workforce development.

There was a view that a Centre could model good collaborative practice in its activities and ensure that practitioners, managers and strategic planners of services had access to its resources. This was particularly important for corporate parents where there had to be the right balance of skills to deliver this corporate responsibility.

Multi agency training would provide an opportunity to bring together different service providers. SIRCC conferences were highlighted as a positive example of providing informal learning and development opportunities to share experiences across sectors and professional interests. At the same time, accredited courses could use blended learning using on online and face to face approaches to share workforce training and education. There could be links to early years education and training including degree level courses such as the BA in Childhood Practice.

Particular groups of professionals were mentioned as needing access to training including foster carers and social workers who required ongoing training and support. Collaboration in training around kinship care would be helpful. It was suggested that social pedagogy may offer a valuable contribution to the skills and expertise of professionals learning together across a range of looked after children services.

Professional development activities would provide an opportunity to explore risk in the context of looked after children and young people. This was mentioned by several participants.

### ***Involving children and young people***

There was a general view from the majority of participants that children and young people should be at the heart of a Centre for Excellence. A Centre provided an opportunity to focus on the journey of the child and young person who was looked after.

Young people from Who Cares? Scotland and the Debate Project, which is supported by the Scottish Throughcare and Aftercare Forum, contributed their views to the scoping study. The Fostering Network was interested in facilitating the participation of children but the challenges of engaging younger children on a complex topic in a tight timescale made this participation unfeasible on this occasion.

The young people who took part pointed out that an underpinning principle of the Centre should be that it *acts* on the expertise of young people rather than just *listens* to them. Senior professionals needed to be committed to young people shaping the work of the Centre. Young people mentioned the positive approach to young people's involvement in SIRCC through Who Cares? Scotland.

Young people thought that the Centre was generally a good idea, stating, for example, that:

It makes sense that all young people are heard not just those that are in residential units.

They thought that being respected was important and that professionals who cared should be working with children and young people. Working across different parts of council services would be helpful in informing those work with looked after children and young people.

Young people who had moved on from care emphasised that throughcare and aftercare should be part of the Centre's activities from the start and not just an afterthought. A Centre needed to be more involved with children and young people from the outset and should not be too 'clinical' in its approach. It should provide a meeting place for looked after young people to meet care leavers and for professionals to meet young people. The activities of the Centre should be co-designed with young people as well as involving them in recruitment and at board level. It was suggested that young people could provide training for professionals and that events could be designed and hosted by young people.

Young people suggested that consultation methods needed to change and that there should be a number of different ways to communicate with young people including a newspaper, social networking sites, texting as well as social events and activities. Online media including podcasts could be used for profiling young people's stories and in helping get messages about young people's experience to the right people.

### ***Linking policy and practice***

There was a general view that a Centre for Excellence should take a leadership role in monitoring, contributing to and analysing policy. It could also effectively link with other areas of current policy including GIRFEC, the early years strategy and in statutory commitments related to additional support needs. The Centre could keep an overview of relevant policy relating to looked after children and young people. Linking to research and practice based activities, the Centre could promote evidence based policymaking.

A Centre needed to be recognised as an independent and neutral resource, providing a safe place to explore policy and ideas which could influence policy. The parameters of its role in relation to that of the Scottish Government and national agencies would need to be clearly established so that there was clarity about the extent of its responsibilities. It needed to be sensitive to any differences in perspective between national and local government.



Existing policy on looked after children and young people should be monitored so that it was used effectively. As one participant suggested, policy should not become 'dusty reports sitting on a shelf'. At the same time, the Centre had a role in ensuring that the policy agenda could be influenced by children and young people as service users.

Some participants suggested a number of areas where policy could be scrutinised including permanence planning, policy relating to younger children who were looked after, placement decisions and the early intervention strategies.

Generally, sharing good practice and research, training and education for different professional groups and linking across the different sectors and interests were seen to be the main areas of interest for a Centre.

#### **4.7 Improving the outcomes of looked after children and young people**

Participants were asked 'how might a Centre for Excellence improve outcomes for children and young people?' Responses focused on the impact of Centre's activities as well as more detailed discussion on how outcomes for children and young people could be established and measured.

In terms of the impact of the Centre's activities, some suggested that raising aspirations and increasing the confidence of the workforce would improve outcomes for children and young people. One survey response stated that a Centre could improve outcomes by ensuring:

A greater confidence on workers' part that they are doing the right things and understand better the complexities facing the children and young people with whom they work.

Other areas which were suggested as potentially improving outcomes included:

- informing policy and practice
- promoting multi agency working
- keeping children and young people at the centre of professional practice
- giving a high profile to the needs of looked after children and young people
- ensuring that children and young people received the same services regardless of where they live
- providing those working with children and young people with access to the best possible research
- enhancing national strategy
- dissemination of good practice
- ensuring that those working with children and young people have an understanding of attachment, trauma and resilience
- supporting more detailed communication across agencies and sectors
- developing the skills and expertise of the workforce
- care packages being designed which are informed by research and proved practice

- having a practical focus on what works.

It was emphasised in several responses that establishing a Centre for Excellence was only worthwhile if it influenced better outcomes for children and young people including those who had moved on from care. It was acknowledged that it was difficult to identify what the positive outcomes for children and young people should be. The Scottish Government's high level outcomes would provide an overarching framework. It was also suggested that the work of the inspectorates and the Care Commission provided valuable information which could be used for establishing outcomes.

Responses highlighted that there needed to be more known about what children and young people needed in order to achieve better outcomes. This should be matched by finding out from children and young people their views and experiences on the progress that had been made and what difference interventions had made. These needed to be tracked over time. It was pointed out that it was difficult to have the same outcomes for all children and young people, recognising that children and young people have different experiences. Outcomes needed to be measured in relation to health and education as well as aligned with children's services objectives.

Several participants did identify areas where there should be better understanding of the outcomes for children and young people. These included:

- how many times children and young people moved placement
- the length of the time taken to achieve a care plan
- benchmarking permanence
- the importance of sustaining relationships.

A number of participants emphasised that the outcomes for children and young people at home were poor. There were challenges in identifying what would make a qualitative difference to children and young people who were looked after at home. As one participant suggested, there was a 'need to shine a light on this area' and to have dialogue to explore what should be the outcomes for children and young people looked after at home.

#### **4.8 Stakeholders in a Centre for Excellence**

Working across sectors and professionals groups was seen to be essential to the effective working of a Centre for Excellence. Participants were asked 'who are the key stakeholders in a Centre for Excellence?'

The involvement of social work, health and education were regarded as core to a Centre's success in influencing policy and practice relating to looked after children and young people. It was emphasised that a Centre should not be led solely by social work but should be truly cross-sectoral and inter-professional. A set of working principles should be put in place to support this partnership working. However, it was acknowledged that integrated training and communication could be a challenging area for a Centre.

It was noted by a range of organisations that ongoing political leadership from the Scottish Government would be strategically essential to the development and ongoing sustainability of a Centre. There should be support and engagement from across government departments and interests including community safety, youth justice and health.

The support of national voluntary organisations that had specialist expertise and knowledge in the area of children and young people who were looked after was also seen to be necessary. This included those organisations which provided children's services as well as those in the residential child care sector. It was also noted that a Centre needed support from local organisations and services with high level champions at local level. Foster carers should be engaged in the work of the Centre.

In addition, participants mentioned a number of other agencies and sectors that should be involved in a Centre including children's hearings panels, youth justice and justice research centres as well as courts, youth workers, housing departments and agencies, advocacy bodies, and campaigning and lobbying groups in the voluntary sector. In areas of specialist expertise, it was important to link with organisations with a focus on disability.

At national level it was necessary to work closely with a wide range of organisations which had a role in the delivery of services to children and young people who are looked after including CoSLA, the new inspection bodies, Learning Teaching Scotland (LTS), Scottish Social Services Council, the Care Commission and NHS Health Scotland. ADSW and ADES were key organisations which provided leadership on engagement for senior managers and were therefore strategically important.

A Centre needed to work closely with other centres such as MARS, SIRCC and IRISS to avoid duplication and provide complementarity. Links with universities and those both teaching and researching in areas relevant to looked after children and young people were regarded as important to the effectiveness of a Centre.

It was emphasised that children and young people were key stakeholders. This commitment was reflected in support for children and young people's participation in a Centre. In addition, families including kinship carers and adoptive parents needed to be involved in some way as stakeholders. Taking this engagement seriously would encourage greater exploration of preventative approaches.

#### **4.9 Governance and resourcing**

##### ***Resourcing of a Centre***

Participants were asked how a Centre for Excellence could be resourced.

Participants in the online survey were asked to tick possible sources of funding for a Centre. The overwhelming majority of respondents (97.8 %) in the online survey thought that a Centre should be funded by the Government. A considerably smaller proportion of respondents thought that funding should also come from local

government or charitable funding although 40% of responses stated that resources should also come from income generating services.

It was emphasised by many participants that resources needed to be spent in the right way, particularly because of the current funding constraints. Although concern about resourcing in a difficult economic climate were highlighted, some participants suggested that there was also a high cost if action was not taken to support looked after children and young people appropriately.

### ***Governance of a Centre***

Many organisations did not have a view on what was the best model for governance of a Centre. There was a view, strongly expressed by some organisations, that the scope of the work of SIRCC could be enlarged to take on the wider remit of a Centre for Excellence for looked after children and young people.

A very small number of respondents thought universities might not be flexible enough in their structures to host a Centre and that there might be other models of governance which were more appropriate for supporting professional practice. However, it was also recognised that having close relationships with universities was beneficial for accreditation of courses and for research.

It was seen to be important that a Centre demonstrated some discrete successes relatively soon after it was established. A number of organisations asked about the relationship between a Centre for Excellence and the recent established national LACSIG group. It was emphasised that a Centre for Excellence needed to be strategically aligned with other developments.

## **5 EXAMPLES OF CENTRES FOR EXCELLENCE**

### **5.1 Examples of Centres of Excellence**

The study undertook a short desk review of examples of Centres of Excellence in Scotland, the UK and internationally in order to consider if the work programme and organisational structures of other Centres for Excellence could inform a proposal for Centre for Excellence for looked after children and young people. The following section provides summary details on each Centre for Excellence and identifies useful learning for this proposal. Information was gathered from organisations' websites and may not reflect up to date information.

The desk research looked at four specific groups of Centres for Excellence:

- Those that are currently funded by the Scottish Government and have been established specifically to improve workforce skills in key sectors in social services. This includes: the Criminal Justice Social Work Development Centre for Scotland (CJSW); the Scottish Institute for Residential Child Care (SIRCC); the Scottish Learning Disability Consortium (SCLD); and STRADA (Scottish Training on Drugs and Alcohol).

- Other Scottish Centres which are relevant to the focus of this study, the Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services (IRISS) and the Multi Agency Resource Centre (MARS).
- Examples of other Centres for Excellence from elsewhere in the UK. This study looked specifically at the Centre for Excellence and Outcomes for Children and Young People (C4EO) in England.
- International examples of centres which could be identified as Centres for Excellence. These were not necessarily similar in structure and purposes to centres in the UK but are helpful examples. Centres in Australia, Canada and the US were considered. This is not an exhaustive sample.

## 5.2 Scottish Centres with a focus on workforce skills

The four Centres that are specifically funded by the Scottish Government with a remit to improve workforce skills in key sectors in social services variously undertake roles in:

- championing the interests of the workforce and the sector they represent
- improving practitioners' skills through basic awareness to highly specialist programmes
- disseminating cutting-edge evidence and research of what works to inform practice
- supporting national policy development and implementation.

**The Criminal Justice Social Work Development Centre for Scotland (CJSW)** is an independent resource based at the University of Edinburgh for those working in criminal and youth justice social work services<sup>3</sup>. It works in partnership with services providers from the statutory and voluntary sector and with central government. It aims to 'identify, promote, develop and disseminate good practice and management, based on the best available evidence' (see CJSW website). The CJSW provides online resources and an electronic library, runs regional practice network events, and hosts a number of sites for members as well as providing themed resources. It has eight national champion development groups which enable practitioners across sectors and professional interests to share expertise.

**The Scottish Institute for Residential Child Care (SIRCC)** was established in 2000<sup>4</sup>. It is a partnership of the University of Strathclyde (where it is based), Langside College, the Robert Gordon University and Who Cares? Scotland. It aims to ensure that residential child care workers in Scotland have access to the skills and knowledge they require to meet the needs of children and young people looked after away from home. Core objectives are to:

- provide learning and development opportunities

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.cjsw.ac.uk/cjsw/41.html>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.sircc.org.uk/>

- support organisational development and workforce planning
- establish a sound evidence base which incorporates the views and experience of young people.

Its main activities include education and training for those working in residential child care, information provision, undertaking research and policy activities, providing consultancy and advice, holding events and conferences and ensuring that the views and experiences of children and young people inform its work.

SIRCC led on the work on the National Residential Child Care Initiative (NRCCI) which reported in November 2009 and which led to the establishment of the Looked after Children Strategic Implementation Group (LACSIG) in 2010.

**The Scottish Learning Disability Consortium (SCLD)** works in partnership with people with learning difficulties and family carers<sup>5</sup>. It is a charity formed with partners from 12 different organisations including voluntary organisations and universities and aims to share good practice and challenge discrimination. SCLD provides training and undertakes consultancy research.

It undertakes a variety of specialised areas of work including projects on data collection, working with parents, promoting and supporting changes in social care and citizen leadership. It has an online library and a national development team that supports local area co-ordination.

**STRADA (Scottish Training on Drugs and Alcohol)** is based at the University of Glasgow<sup>6</sup>. It is a partnership between the University of Glasgow's Centre for Drug Misuse Research, the Department of Adult and Continuing Education and DrugScope. STRADA has a focus on workforce development supporting those who work in the field of drug and alcohol misuse across the areas of health, social care and criminal justice and works with both statutory and non-statutory organisations. It has an online resource which aims to provide a place for those working in area of substance misuse 'who would like to learn more, discuss more, and practice better' (see STRADA website).

In addition, two other Scottish Centres were considered. These were IRISS and MARS which have a focus on social services and child protection respectively.

**The Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services (IRISS)**, previously known as SIESWE, is a charitable company limited by guarantee. Its founding members are the nine Scottish universities involved in the teaching of social work.

IRISS aims to promote positive outcomes for users of social services by enhancing the capacity and capability of the social services workforce to access and make use of knowledge and research for service innovation and improvement' (see IRISS website). It focuses on four specific areas of activity; evidence informed practice, knowledge management, service innovation and improvement and maintains an archive of previous projects. It provides a library of online resources as well as

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.sclد.org.uk/>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.projectstrada.org/v1/>

holding events, such as its 'what works' programme for those working in social services.

**MARS (Multi-agency Resource Service)** aims to support those working in child protection 'by developing communities of expertise and sharing practice knowledge across Scotland'.<sup>7</sup> It is based at the University of Stirling and provides a child protection hub with a focus on child neglect and abuse. MARS puts organisations in touch with each other in order to facilitate the transfer of knowledge and support which might include the commissioning of external individual and services. It aims to build 'communities of expertise' which can support professionals and local authorities to either share knowledge or to find out information.

MARS works closely with **Scottish Child Care and Protection Network (SCCPN)** which is also based at the University of Stirling<sup>8</sup>. SCCPN promotes the use of evidence in practice. It supports a collaborative network of academics and those working in child care and protection and works across agencies and provides online information about research and publications.

### 5.3 Examples from outside Scotland

In England, the scoping looked at the work of one centre, **the Centre for Excellence and Outcomes for Children and Young People (C4EO)**<sup>9</sup>. This organisation, which was established by the previous UK Government, aims to provide services to local authorities. It uses academic research along with practice to identify what works and provides support for practical solutions.

The Centre's work covers a wide range of themes such as disability, poverty, early years, families, parents and carers. It provides research reviews on these topics and interactive maps which provide up to date high quality evidence of good practice that is both emerging and current. It also has online communities of practice which have the aim of sharing experience and expertise and provides regional workshops, tailored support and access to sector specialists.

The study also looked at Centres for Excellence in three different countries, Canada, Australia and the US. Their activities and purposes do not necessarily replicate the work of Centres for Excellence in the UK but all have a strong focus on sharing good practice, linking professionals and sectors and providing an impetus for policy and research.

The **Child Welfare League of America** is a large national coalition of organisations committed to child welfare in the US<sup>10</sup>. It aims to advance public policy, promote sharing of practice and evidence in order to ensure the well being of children and young people. The focus is on children who have experienced 'neglect, abuse or

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.mars.stir.ac.uk/>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.sccpn.stir.ac.uk/about.php>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.c4eo.org.uk/default.aspx>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.cwla.org/>

family disruption' (see Child Welfare League of America website). It also focuses on the 'families, caregivers and communities that care for and support these children'. It works across a wide range of practice areas, with specific programmes on extensive issues including adoption, permanency planning, kinship care and child welfare standards of excellence. Work in these areas including identifying critical public policy areas, developing standards, consultations and events. It has a research to practice programme which includes regularly reviewing research in key areas, supporting and promoting 'well evaluated' programmes and collaborating with research communities to promote rigour in research.

In Canada, four **Centres of Excellence for Child Wellbeing** were established in 2000 with a focus on child welfare, early childhood development, special needs and youth engagement<sup>11</sup>. Although funding from the Public Health Agency of Canada ended in March 2010, the Centres have continued in some form. The Centres have aimed to support collaboration on children's issues with professionals working across sectors and interests in order to ensure that there is better policy and practice across Canada. The work of the Centres has been targeted at policymakers, academics, practitioners, voluntary organisations and service users. Similar to Centres of Excellence in the UK, these Centres have aim to provide knowledge exchange opportunities which are accessible and credible.

The **Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare** covers the state of Victoria, Australia<sup>12</sup>. It provides services for 93 organisations in child, youth and family services with a focus on representation, professional development, research, policy and practice support, publications and resources. Its operation is similar to that of a membership body such as Children in Scotland, and it also provides a knowledge exchange programme which links to a research centre at the University of Melbourne<sup>13</sup> which focuses on the themes of family support, out of home care, early intervention and research utilisation. It states that its KnowledgeXchange programme is a 'means of delivering means of delivering current, relevant and accessible, evidence-informed information'.

All these Centres worked in diverse ways and had their own particular focus. They had a range of organisational models. Some of the organisations were consortia of organisations while others were charitable organisations with some charities having a formal membership structure (such as the Child Welfare League of America). The majority of the Centres had some form of link to a university. Most received substantial funding from national government.

Some Centres were more research orientated while others were more centred on workforce development. All, however, had common elements. They provided extensive online resources and support to workforce training, education and development. There was a substantive focus on sharing good practice and knowledge exchange and cross sectoral and inter-disciplinary working. There was

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<sup>11</sup> [http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/dca-dea/allchildren\\_touslesenfants/centres\\_main-eng.php](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/dca-dea/allchildren_touslesenfants/centres_main-eng.php)

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.cwav.asn.au/Default.aspx>

<sup>13</sup> <http://research.cwav.asn.au/KX/default.aspx>



considerable interest in maximising the opportunities for, and findings from, research and a commitment to advancing and influencing policy.

## **6 CONCLUSIONS**

### **6.1 Summary of main findings**

This section summarises the findings from a Scottish Government commissioned consultative scoping study into the potential role of a Centre for Excellence for looked after children and young people in Scotland. The scoping study follows on from the work of the National Residential Child Care Initiative (NRCCI) which reported at the end of 2009<sup>14</sup>. The findings of the NRCCI project emphasised the importance of collaboration between all those working with looked after children.

The scoping study involved a range of stakeholders from across different sectors and interests. Activities included initial meetings of a stakeholder steering group, consultative meetings, interviews and an online survey. Who Cares? Scotland and the Debate Project of the Scottish Throughcare and Aftercare Forum facilitated discussions with young people.

Participants expressed general support for a Centre for Excellence for looked after children and young people. There was some concern expressed about whether funding would be available in the current economic climate and how a Centre could be adequately resourced.

There was support for a focus on looked after children and young people across their looked after experiences including those looked after in residential care, foster care, kinship care, those with experience of moving on from care and those looked after at home. Attention was drawn in particular to the needs of children and young people looked after at home, disabled children and young people and unaccompanied children and young people.

Establishing a Centre was seen to have a number of benefits. It could raise the profile of looked after children and young people, put the needs of children and young people at the heart of its activities, be a place for innovation and leadership and bring a commitment to work across professional interests and sectors.

There were also challenges associated with having a Centre including the difficult funding situation, the importance of a Centre having an impact on outcomes for children and young people and the need to have 'buy-in' from different sectors and interests. A Centre's activities would have to be prioritised because of its extensive remit.

Those in the residential child care sector or with knowledge of this sector did not want the residential child care sector to lose its voice or resources which were

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<sup>14</sup> [http://www.sircc.org.uk/sites/default/files/NRCCI\\_Overview\\_web.pdf](http://www.sircc.org.uk/sites/default/files/NRCCI_Overview_web.pdf)

currently provided by SIRCC. Support was widely expressed for the work of SIRCC and its important role in relation to residential child care.

There was wide commitment to children and young people's engagement and participation. Young people stated that a Centre was a good idea and sought to have meaningful involvement with opportunities for their expertise to be appropriately and well used. Participants also highlighted the importance of appropriately engaging kinship carers and family members.

It was strongly emphasised that a new Centre should avoid duplication with existing organisations including other Centres such as MARS, IRISS, SIRCC and national voluntary organisations such as BAAF, the National Fostering Network and the Scottish Throughcare and Aftercare Forum. It was necessary for a Centre to work closely with a wide range of organisations which had a role in the delivery of services to children and young people who were looked after.

The study identified a range of potential areas of work for a Centre. Dissemination and sharing good practice were seen to be very important. Good online tools and resources were required with innovation supported. Workforce education and training was seen to be valuable particularly if it linked with other provision and could also involve opportunities to work across professional groups. It was important to involve practitioners and managers at all levels and across all sectors. There was also considerable interest in the potential for a Centre to co-ordinate, disseminate, and collaborate on research. Having a Centre could provide an impetus for strategic approaches to research and strengthen links between policy and practice.

It was emphasised that establishing a Centre for Excellence was only worthwhile if it influenced better outcomes for children and young people. It was, however, acknowledged that it could be difficult to identify what were positive outcomes for children and young people. The Scottish Government's high level outcomes provided an overarching framework. It was also suggested that the work of the inspectorates and the Care Commission provided valuable information which could be used for establishing outcomes. Outcomes needed to be measured across services as well as aligned with children's services objectives.

The overwhelmingly majority believed that a Centre should be funded by the Scottish Government although funding should also be accessed through other sources. Many respondents did not have a view of how a Centre could be governed but generally thought that different sectors and professional interests should be reflected in the work of the Centre.

Examples of other Centres for Excellence in Scotland, the UK and internationally were considered in order to consider if the work programme and organisational structures of other Centres for Excellence could inform a proposal for a Centre. All these Centres worked in diverse ways and had a range of organisational models such as consortia, charitable organisations and membership bodies. The majority had some form of link to a university and received substantial funding from national government. There was a substantive focus on sharing good practice and knowledge exchange with considerable interest in research and policy.

## 6.2 Issues for further consideration

The scoping study found that there was wide support for a proposed Centre for Excellence for looked after children and young people. At the same time, participants were concerned about the economic climate and its impact on funding. Taking this factor into account, the Scottish Government and other stakeholders may wish to consider if there are additional benefits or roles associated with establishing a Centre. For example, a Centre could take a national overview of existing expertise, identify cost efficient approaches to services and facilitate dissemination and exchange of good practice in order to support service providers at a time of financial constraints.

There was strong interest in a Centre which could focus on all children and young people who were looked after. Although this included children and young people who were looked after at home, participants did not identify particular programmes of work in this complex area. This suggests that a Centre could play a valuable role in initially scoping existing practice and research in this and other strategic areas (such as kinship care and the needs of disabled children and young people) in order to identify what works and to map out future activities.

The findings suggest a wide list of potential activities for a Centre for Excellence for looked after children and young people which would involve the exchange of good practice, workforce development, networking and policy and research activities. It would be important to identify strategic tasks in order to ensure that a Centre could impact on outcomes for children and young people and that there would be some initial activities that would produce benefits for children and young people who are looked after. A Centre would have to be closely aligned with associated strategic national areas of work such as the work of LACSIG.

The scoping study found that participants were concerned about overlap and duplication with other agencies. However, no other Centre in Scotland had a focus on looked after children and young people or provided the range of activities that were suggested for a Centre for Excellence. A new Centre for Excellence would have to work closely with other Centres in order to identify and share expertise in areas such as knowledge exchange mechanisms and workforce training and education.

There was considerable emphasis on the potential for a Centre to support inter-professional and cross sectoral activities. This would involve those working across a range of roles in social services, health and education and engagement from the public, voluntary, independent and education sectors. In addition, there was a strong commitment to the involvement of children and young people, foster carers, kinship carers and families. This indicates that a Centre for Excellence has to have a powerful underpinning ethos which focuses on inclusiveness and is astute at engaging this wide group of stakeholders in appropriate ways.

There were a number of different models which could be considered for a Centre, drawing on the experience of other Centres for Excellence. These included a consortium of different partners and interests, the establishment of a charitable

organisation or setting up a charity which also was a membership organisation. Some participants suggested that extending the remit of an existing Centre such as SIRCC might be appropriate. The experience of other Centres suggests that a link in some form to a university would be helpful in order to support research interests. Other governance models and organisational structures could be considered in addition to these examples.

In conclusion, the scoping study found that there was wide interest in a proposal for a Centre for Excellence and that there were opportunities to develop innovative and interesting work in this area. Responses from participants demonstrated an informed commitment to supporting ways of improving the outcomes of children and young people who were looked after away from home.