

## EVIDENCE FOR THE EDUCATION AND CULTURE COMMITTEE INQUIRY ON THE EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT GAP

### Consultation 2: Role of the third sector and the private sector in improving attainment and achievement for all school pupils, particularly those whose attainment is lowest

#### Introduction

Established in 2011, CELCIS is the Centre for excellence for looked after children in Scotland. Our remit is to work with service providers (such as schools and colleges) to improve the experiences and outcomes of children and young people who are (or have been) ‘looked after’ by local authorities. For this reason our responses to the questions posed by the Committee are framed in consideration of the particular circumstances of looked after young people and care leavers.

**Question 1: What is the scale of the third and private sectors’ involvement in schools, in terms of improving attainment and achievement, and what is the appropriate dividing line between their role and the role of education authorities?**

Due the relative autonomy of schools, and the range of national and local community groups relevant to education, establishing an accurate estimate of the scale of third and private sector involvement in mainstream schools will be challenging. However, as Education Scotland concluded in its report on the use of ‘external experts’ in schools, published in November 2012, their involvement is definitely widespread.

*“In a review of recent inspection evidence, reference is made to external experts and/or partners in almost all secondary school records of findings and in the majority of those from primary schools.”<sup>1</sup>*

The Education Scotland report defines ‘external experts’ broadly, to include college and local authority staff, and concentrates on the contribution of external experts in working alongside teachers, in and beyond the school setting.<sup>2</sup> The focus of the Committee’s question is on third and private sector partners, but even

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<sup>1</sup> Education Scotland (November 2012) [The Involvement of External Experts in School Education](#) (online resource), p.3

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.4

with this more restricted group the scale of involvement is likely to be considerable. Much of the involvement of third and private sector partners may be linked to the provision of ‘extra-curricular’ and ‘pastoral’ activities, rather than direct ‘subject’ delivery (e.g. maths), but in line with Curriculum for Excellence such activities should not be seen as unrelated to a school’s plan for improving attainment and achievement. In fact for vulnerable and disengaged pupils, whose attainment is often lowest, we believe the provision of alternative educational opportunities (such as sport or the creative arts), combined with high-quality pastoral support within schools, is essential to improving attainment levels.

As a growing body of educational and biological evidence attests, an individual’s capacity for learning (and by association ‘attainment’) is contingent on their emotional wellbeing.<sup>3</sup> For children who are experiencing instability at home, or who have suffered trauma, loss or neglect, activities and opportunities which help them to build relationships and regulate emotions are essential precursors to any meaningful engagement in learning. This demands a whole school approach, with class teachers suitably knowledgeable and skilled to respond to the needs of such children. However, third and private sector organisations can (and do) make a vital contribution, such as through the provision of physical activity options (e.g. Youth Sport Trust and Outward Bound Trust), mentoring (e.g. MCR Pathways), counselling services (e.g. Place2Be) or personal and skills development (e.g. Skills Force and The Princes Trust). Others also play an important role in upskilling the school workforce to meet the needs of vulnerable learners who may present (from the teacher’s point of view) challenging behaviour in the school setting.

A UK government report on third sector innovation<sup>4</sup> identified a range of personalised education and learning services offered by third sector organisations to children and young people, including:

- providing alternative education for young people who have been excluded from or who are disengaged with mainstream education;
- supporting learners to maintain engagement with mainstream education;
- working with schools and colleges to offer out-of-school learning opportunities as part of a learning “package” for learners;
- working in schools on one-off or ongoing personalised learning projects; and
- providing advice and support to schools which are moving to more personalised learning provision.

The third sector was noted as being particularly important when it comes to reaching vulnerable groups and identifying unmet needs that may otherwise

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<sup>3</sup> For a summary of relevant literature, please see: Geddes, H (2005) Attachment in the Classroom: The links between children’s early experience, emotional well-being and performance in school: A Practical Guide for Schools, Worth Publishing

<sup>4</sup> McGuire, A. (2010). The role of third sector innovation: personalisation of education and learning services: recommendations. Cabinet Office Advisor on Third Sector Innovation [http://www.turning-point.co.uk/media/24071/the\\_role\\_of\\_third\\_sector\\_innovation.pdf](http://www.turning-point.co.uk/media/24071/the_role_of_third_sector_innovation.pdf)

remain unnoticed as it has developed expertise in working with the most disengaged and hardest to reach children and young people.

The scale of the third and private sectors' involvement in delivering such services (and therefore in improving the attainment and achievement of school pupils) is likely to be a reflection of limited financial resources in schools, and an appreciation by school leaders of the value such organisations can bring in terms of new opportunities, people and perspectives. But in respect of vulnerable pupils, the use of third and private sector organisations may also be driven by a scarcity of necessary skills among school staff (particularly teachers). 'Attachment aware' and 'trauma sensitive' approaches to teaching and school management are not yet embedded as mainstream practice, so where school leaders have realised such skills are necessary to securing the engagement of vulnerable learners, third or private sector organisations are 'commissioned' to provide enhanced pastoral and education support (such as through nurture bases, school-based counselling and teaching assistants).

This leads us onto the second part of the Committee's question, about the appropriate dividing line between third and private sector providers and education authorities. In respect of looked after children, it is important to note that some third and private sector agencies are education providers in their own right, operating residential and day school services. In its submission to the Committee's earlier inquiry (2013) into the attainment of looked after children, the Scottish Children's Services Coalition said that, in its view, there had been 'inconsistent and inadequate implementation' of the recommendations of the 2010 Audit Scotland report [Getting it Right for Children in Residential Care](#).<sup>5</sup> We think it is important to know, five years later, whether the Audit Scotland recommendation that '*councils, in partnership with providers, identify intended outcomes for all children in residential placements, specify these in individual care plans and set out the actions required in a clear SMART44 action plan against which progress can be monitored*' has been satisfactorily implemented.

In relation to mainstream schools, we think the issue is not so much about 'dividing lines' and demarcation (which implies that education authorities contract out services), but rather about how we can encourage more 'co-production' between schools, local authorities and third / private sector organisations. In such a model all partners would work together to design, deliver and evaluate a service in response to a particular issue. The ownership and learning from such projects would accrue to all involved (rather than being retained just in the third / private sector provider), and initiatives would be less susceptible to sudden cuts in funding. Moreover, according to research by the University of Edinburgh, an

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<sup>5</sup> Scottish Children's Services Coalition (2013). Education and Culture Committee Inquiry into the educational attainment of looked after children.  
[http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4\\_EducationandCultureCommittee/Inquiries/Scottish\\_Childrens\\_Services\\_Coalition.pdf](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4_EducationandCultureCommittee/Inquiries/Scottish_Childrens_Services_Coalition.pdf)

important feature of co-production in public services is involvement of users in the design stage.<sup>6</sup> In this respect third sector agencies have a particular advantage, because of their expertise in engaging with young people and families.

An interesting example of co-production is the 'Inclusion Plus' partnership formed between Dundee City Council, Includem, Apex Scotland and Skillforce, aimed at young people in secondary schools who are at risk of exclusion.<sup>7</sup> The interim findings of this study by the Robert Owen Centre at the University of Glasgow reported a 36% fall in exclusions; a final report is due in summer 2015. In the area of further and higher education the Scottish Funding Council has played a critical role in facilitating the involvement of third sector organisations, enabling Buttle UK to work alongside colleges and universities, and the Who Cares? Trust in the development of resources designed to help care leavers access further and higher education.

**Question 2: Have their approaches been particularly successful in improving achievement and attainment for school pupils? If so, could their methods be more embedded in the curriculum?**

In its recent (2014) report on school education, Audit Scotland notes that a range of factors are important for improving attainment.<sup>8</sup> The report identifies factors within the control of schools and local authorities (teacher quality, leadership and systems for tracking pupil data), and also factors where schools could collaborate with partners: increasing parental involvement, and developing pupil motivation and engagement. The third sector has particular strengths which can be harnessed in seeking to improve these latter factors. We are aware, for instance, of positive evaluations of the Place2Be model of pupil support, an approach which could be more embedded in the curriculum and mainstream school practice.<sup>9</sup>

Schools often find it difficult to engage with parents who do not respond to traditional methods of reporting and monitoring pupils' progress (e.g. at parents' evenings). Given the importance of the home in consolidating learning, schools could exploit the trust with which third sector agencies are regarded, particularly in approaches which help parents and carers to support learning at home. For instance evaluations of 'paired reading' schemes involving carers have been shown

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<sup>6</sup> Osborne, S., and Strokosch, K. (2013) It takes two to tango? Understanding the co-production of public services by integrating the services management and public administration perspectives. *British Journal of Management*, 24.

[http://www.research.ed.ac.uk/portal/files/12492845/OSBORNE\\_It\\_takes\\_two\\_to\\_tango\\_Understanding\\_the\\_co\\_production\\_of\\_public\\_services\\_by\\_integrating\\_the\\_services\\_management\\_and\\_public\\_administration\\_perspectives.pdf](http://www.research.ed.ac.uk/portal/files/12492845/OSBORNE_It_takes_two_to_tango_Understanding_the_co_production_of_public_services_by_integrating_the_services_management_and_public_administration_perspectives.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.includem.org/content/inclusionplus/>

<sup>8</sup> Audit Scotland (2014) *School Education*. Accounts Commission. [http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/docs/local/2014/nr\\_140619\\_school\\_education.pdf](http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/docs/local/2014/nr_140619_school_education.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Lee, R et al (2009) 'The Place2Be: Measuring the effectiveness of primary school based therapeutic intervention in England and Scotland', *Counselling and Psychotherapy* Vol 9, Issue 3, pages 151-159

to be effective in improving literacy rates and engagement in education.<sup>10</sup> These are methods which could be more widely integrated into mainstream practice, with the support of third sector organisations.

Motivating pupils who have already disengaged poses particular challenges for schools and education authorities. The third sector has two particular strengths in helping to respond to this: specialist knowledge of the circumstances of children and families dealing with a diversity of difficult circumstances, and the capacity to tailor responses which suit individual children and their families. For instance Who Cares? Scotland has direct knowledge of the barriers looked after children face in education (both at a population and individual level), but also some of the solutions, having worked with many schools and colleges over the years. Other examples of relevant work include the Barnardo's *16+ At Home Project* in Edinburgh, and Includem's *Intensive Support Service for Vulnerable Young People*.

Finally, an example of long-term collaboration between a local authority and a third sector agency, which attempts to realise aspects of the curriculum for certain sub-groups of learners, is the residential outdoor learning programme provided by Outward Bound Loch Eil and North Lanarkshire Council. Research by the University of Edinburgh examined the role of residential outdoor learning in raising pupils' achievement in the context of Curriculum for Excellence.<sup>11</sup> The findings reported are equivocal in establishing conclusively whether pupils who participated in a residential experience improved in 'life effectiveness skills (e.g. achievement motivation) compared to control groups, but the qualitative findings in this study were more encouraging.

Our observation is that the most important aspect of this partnership is the willingness of the partners to develop a model which meets the needs of certain children, accepting that traditional school-based approaches to learning are not always appropriate. Robust evaluations of such initiatives should be undertaken and made available, including those of small-scale school-based activities. The work of the Scottish Government's Raising Attainment for All (RAFA) team, supporting schools to develop 'tests of change', is relevant in this respect.

### **Question 3: Is the full potential of the third and private sectors in helping to improve children's attainment and achievement being realised?**

Unfortunately the answer is probably 'no'. Through our work across Scotland we have observed that the potential of the third and private sectors is not always

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<sup>10</sup> Osborne, C., Alfano, J. and Winn, T (2010) 'Paired reading as a literacy intervention for foster children', *Adoption and Fostering* 34: 4, 17-26

<sup>11</sup> Christie, B., Higgins, P. and McLaughlin, P. (2013) "Did you enjoy your holiday?" Can residential outdoor learning benefit mainstream schooling? *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning*.

[http://www.research.ed.ac.uk/portal/files/15163540/Did\\_you\\_enjoy\\_your\\_holiday\\_Jan\\_2013.pdf](http://www.research.ed.ac.uk/portal/files/15163540/Did_you_enjoy_your_holiday_Jan_2013.pdf)

realised by national and local government, and positive examples tend to be associated with schools where individuals (or groups of key staff) have developed good relationships with the third and private sectors.

The failure to realise the full potential of the third and private sectors is linked to a number of issues. First among these is the way in which initiatives are funded. Short-term (1 or 2 year) funding arrangements, tied to broad objectives, put the sustainability of initiatives at risk. The 'Reading Rich' programme, involving the Scottish Book Trust and NCH Scotland, is a good example of this. The evaluation published by Scottish Government highlighted many positive features of the programme, but the programme was not sustained beyond the initial grant funding (although a number of local authorities have established similar programmes of their own).<sup>12</sup> A better approach to maximising the potential of the third and private sectors in education would be to 'commission' services (rather than 'procure' or 'grant fund'). Schools, having a clear understanding of what their school population needs, are often best placed to do this, and are in position to work alongside the external partners to develop and deliver a service over the long term.

A second reason why the potential of the third and private sectors is not realised relates to the attitudes of school staff. Where there is a suspicion about the role of third sector providers (interpreting their involvement as either unnecessary or a challenge to their day-to-day practice), or where support for 'inclusive education' is not widespread, the result can be a school environment uninterested (or even hostile) to certain forms of external involvement.<sup>13</sup> Many looked after children require significant additional support if they are to engage with and succeed in school. Often managing considerable internal distress, some looked after children can present challenging and disruptive behaviour (particularly if teachers do not have an understanding of the impact of trauma, or use strategies for responding to its manifestations). The result can be, as we have recorded in our work with schools, staff attitudes that some young people are 'unteachable', only able to manage a limited 'flexible' timetable (sometimes just a few hours a week) or full-time support in a residential school. While it is certainly the case that some children (including some looked after children) require the intensive, specialist support provided away from mainstream schools by third sector or private providers, we believe that mainstream schools could do much more to learn from (and integrate into practice) the attitudes, techniques and approaches utilised by external partners. In doing so, many of our most vulnerable learners (most of whom remain full-time in mainstream schools) would benefit from what the third and private sector have to offer.

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<sup>12</sup> Finn, M. (2008). Evaluation of Reading Rich: NCH Scotland's Reading Rich Programme delivered by the Scottish Book Trust. The Scottish Government.

[http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/publications/e/publication\\_tcm4534928.asp](http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/publications/e/publication_tcm4534928.asp)

<sup>13</sup> Avarmidis, E & Norwich, B (2002) 'Teachers' attitudes towards integration / inclusion: a review of the literature', *European Journal of Special Needs Education* Vol 17, Issue 2

**Question 4: How successful have schools been in reporting on pupils' wider achievements (i.e. not just examination results) such as those the third sector helps to deliver? Are such achievements valued by parents, employers and learning providers' as much as formal qualifications?**

In view of the fact that Scotland's political discourse continues to privilege 'attainment' (and exam results especially), it is very challenging for schools (or local authorities) to report on the wider achievements of pupils. As the UK Parliament's Children, Schools and Families Select Committee noted in 2009:

*'the data currently available is heavily weighted towards academic attainment, and while data which places pupil and student attainment and progress into context [...] is published by the Government, it is typically not reported by the press, or given much lower prominence than "raw" attainment scores.'*<sup>14</sup>

The predominance of 'attainment' over 'achievement' may be a reflection of wider parental and societal attitudes. For instance reports from the Association of Accounting Technicians (2013) and others suggest that parents do not understand or value apprenticeships, favouring paths which lead from school directly to University.<sup>15</sup> In this context, efforts by schools to publicise their work around 'wider achievement' (often delivered in partnership with third and private sector organisations) may be met with limited enthusiasm by the public. Indeed for some sceptical parents a school's focus on 'achievement' may seem like an effort to distract from poor performance in respect to 'attainment'. Our contacts who work with young people, carers, teachers and families, report that it is not uncommon to hear the view that 'achievement' is related to a lower tier of education, reserved for children unlikely to obtain academic qualifications.

On a related point, Audit Scotland has highlighted the lack of information on overall pupil performance at both a local and national level.<sup>16</sup> Current measures focus on attainment of secondary pupils at S4-S6 level, and there are no comparable measures of wider achievement (or the performance of pupils in P1-S3) available either at local authority (with some exceptions) or national level. As such, existing measures do not fully capture a pupil's performance throughout their time at school, and this weights the national debate towards school-assessment based attainment scores. The achievements of pupils who take vocational courses at local colleges, for instance, are not typically captured by existing attainment measures, an omission which could be addressed if the Wood

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<sup>14</sup> House of Commons Children, Schools and Families Committee (2009) School Accountability. House of Commons London: The Stationery Office Limited

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmselect/cmchilsch/88/88i.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> AAT (2013) [Two thirds of parents don't understand apprenticeships](#) [website accessed on 11 March 2015]

<sup>16</sup> Audit Scotland (2014) *School Education*. Accounts Commission. [http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/docs/local/2014/nr\\_140619\\_school\\_education.pdf](http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/docs/local/2014/nr_140619_school_education.pdf)

commission's recommendation on developing school-college partnerships is accepted.

Audit Scotland also found that there are increasing opportunities for pupils to participate in activities that aim to improve 'soft skills' and employability skills such as confidence, and to help them develop the skills required as they leave school and move into employment, training or post-school education. We agree with Audit Scotland that schools and local authorities should ensure that they can scrutinise the outcomes of these activities to ensure that they meet the needs of pupils.

An example of an approach to assessing wider achievements gained through life experiences (often referred to as 'recognition of prior learning') is the My Skills My Future toolkit developed by the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) partnership. The toolkit, linked to SCQF level descriptors and Curriculum for Excellence 'experiences and outcomes,' represents a way to recognise the wider achievements of learners who are at risk of leaving school with no or few qualifications. CELCIS piloted the toolkit with looked after young people in West Lothian and East Renfrewshire.<sup>17</sup> More recently, the approach has been utilised with looked after young people in Stirling / Clackmannanshire, and with vulnerable learners in East Renfrewshire. Findings suggest that the approach can lead to increase in resilience and engagement, and better recognition of skills and awareness of career choices.

#### **Question 5: Given the strong policy focus on the early years, have the third and private sectors been able to work equally effectively with pupils of all ages?**

We agree that a concerted focus on the early years is vital to raising the attainment of all school pupils. The third and private sectors play a very significant role at these stages, as providers of nurseries and other pre-school opportunities, and government (at all levels) must work collaboratively with these sectors to ensure quality is high across the country, and the needs of disadvantaged children adequately met.

In respect of school age children, transitions are particularly sensitive times, particularly for looked after children. Like the early years, it is important to focus efforts (including work with the third and private sectors) at these life stages too. For example, on average, fewer looked after children move on to post-school education than their peers in the general population. Compounding this issue is the fact that some widening access programmes only target students from low-income

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<sup>17</sup> Hennessy, A. and Connelly, G. (2012) Recognition of Prior Learning and Looked After Young People. Research Briefing. CELCIS.  
<http://www.celcis.org/media/resources/publications/Recognition-of-Prior-Learning-Research-briefing.pdf>



households who have a high likelihood of attaining the required grades to go to college or university.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, the transition between primary and secondary school can be the start of a process of disengagement from education (which leads, for some, to becoming ‘looked after’). However support for vulnerable children at this transition is limited, and although some schools collaborate effectively to reduce risk, the statistics (on attendance and exclusions at early secondary stages) suggest that the needs of many children go unnoticed until it is too late. Enhanced involvement of the third and private sectors, offering ‘follow-through’ mentoring or therapeutic support, may reduce the anxiety and difficulty of such transitions, and have a positive impact on pupils’ engagement and educational achievement.

**Thank you for this opportunity to contribute to this important inquiry. We would welcome any further discussions with Committee.**

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<sup>18</sup> Sosu, E., & Ellis, S. (2014). Closing the attainment gap in Scottish education. *Joseph Rowntree Foundation, York*. <http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/education-attainment-scotland-full.pdf>