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Enterprise and Lifelong Learning

Entitlement to Learning Scoping Study



ENTITLEMENT TO LEARNING SCOPING STUDY

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2. Organisations involved in this research either to recruit young people and/or to participate in stakeholder interviews included¹: Barnardo's, Blue Triangle, City of Edinburgh Council, Careers Scotland/Competitive Edge, Dean and Cauvin, Fairbridge, Funding for Learners Division of the Scottish Executive, Glasgow Social Work Department, John Wheatley College, Looked After Children and Youth Work Division of the Scottish Executive Positive Futures (Leaving Care Services), Prince's Trust, Project 20/20, Scottish Funding Councils for Further and Higher Education, Scottish Through Care and After Care Forum, Streetwork, the big step (Social Inclusion Partnership), Through Care and After Care, Edinburgh, Who Cares Scotland?

¹ Organisations were asked to provide their views on the issues. This does not mean that the organisations listed in any way endorse or have been consulted on, or have any view on the report and its findings.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Findings are presented of research undertaken by York Consulting Limited on behalf of the Scottish Executive to conduct a scoping study into learning entitlement for young care leavers (YCL) and young people not in education employment or training (NEET).
2. The need for research to investigate the concept of learning entitlement emerged from the Lifelong Learning Strategy for Scotland “Life Through Learning; Learning Through Life” published in February 2003 and the commitment outlined in the Lifelong Learning Strategy update, published in November 2004. Under a proposed system of learning entitlement, funding for fees and maintenance support would not be discretionary, but guaranteed. Individuals who met the requirements would be guaranteed support through learning, for example, by giving everyone a number of credits to be ‘spent’ on learning whenever and however individuals wished.
3. Whilst recognising the potential benefits of a system of learning entitlement, the challenges of implementing such a system have been acknowledged by Ministers. As a result the Scottish Executive commissioned a scoping study to further explore the concept with two vulnerable groups of young people.

The Research Project

4. The aims of the research were fourfold to:
 - investigate the views towards post compulsory education of a) young care leavers (YCL) who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) and b) young people who are NEET but who have no experience of care
 - investigate these young people’s understanding and views of the current system of funding and those of the individuals who influence them
 - investigate these young people’s views of entitlement and those of the individuals who influence them
 - explore whether entitlement alone is sufficient to encourage educational re-engagement.

Methodology

5. A qualitative approach was selected for the study and comprised of four main elements:
 - **a scoping and accessing phase** – to engage stakeholder groups and organisations that represented the two groups of young people to be consulted
 - in-depth qualitative interviews with two key groups of young people- Care leavers, aged 16-21 and NEET young people with no experience of care aged 16-21
 - in-depth qualitative interviews with individuals who work with the two groups of young people

- telephone interviews with strategic stakeholders and support organisations – statutory, voluntary and charitable organisations
6. Fifty-four young people took part, thirty from the care leaver group and twenty-four from the NEET group. Sixteen influencing stakeholders took part (defined as those supporting young people at ground level and fifteen strategic stakeholders (defined as high level staff representing views from an organisational perspective)).

Key Findings

The Young People: Characteristics and Views of Post Compulsory Education

7. Few young people did well at school. Most left school early with low levels of educational attainment. Many of the young care leaver group had experienced frequent placement changes that disrupted their education. Several from both groups had health problems or additional support needs. Over half of the women in the care leaver group were pregnant or young mothers.
8. Housing instability was a strong feature of the care leaver group. Several were in temporary or hostel accommodation. Most across the two groups had experienced periods of employment, education or training since leaving school but, in the main, these were not sustained.
9. In the main, school had been a difficult experience for those consulted. Many had exhibited disruptive behaviour in school and several had experienced exclusions. Most had negative attitudes towards school and teaching staff. Lack of confidence and motivation were common features of those interviewed.
10. Despite negative experiences at school, views regarding post-compulsory education were mixed. Whilst some had deep-rooted views that they would not re-engage, others felt education was important and something they would aspire to and return to in the future. Positive aspirations to re-engage with education altered with age.

Knowledge of Post 16 Funding

11. Knowledge of the current system of funding varied but was generally poor. Careers advice and support varied and tended to be delivered on a reactive rather than proactive basis. Being largely dependent on personal motivation to access advice, careers provision appears not to be reaching many of the young people in the NEET or YCL groups.
12. Of the few young people who did know something about the current system of funding, views were mainly negative. These included concerns that levels of funding were too low; uptake would result in loss of benefits (particularly housing benefit); the system was overly complicated and bureaucratic; and that it was inequitable and unclear. Others felt that the system of funding was not the main barrier to re-engagement.

Barriers to Post 16 Participation

13. Multiple barriers to participation in post compulsory education were highlighted. These included:
- **financial concerns** – for example, loss of benefits, threat of homelessness as a more pressing priority, cost of transport
 - **personal and circumstantial problems** - such as attitudes to self and education; motivation, health problems, parenting responsibilities, special needs, fear of failure and educational establishments, problems with behaviour management
 - **institutional constraints** – for example, competition for course places, lack of suitable courses, limitations in support (e.g. mentoring, additional support for literacy and numeracy), learning styles.
14. Often it was a combination of these factors rather than a single issue that was affecting young people's participation in post-compulsory education.

Views of a Proposed System of Learning Entitlement

15. There was widespread support for the *concept* of learning entitlement amongst all respondents, but despite this, few felt it was the answer to improving the educational engagement of the two groups concerned.
16. Interviewees were concerned about how it would or could operate in practice and whether, in real terms, it constituted anything different to the current situation. The main concern was that entitlement to funding was just one small part of the jigsaw. To encourage educational re-engagement, a multitude of other barriers would need to be addressed.
17. Solutions would need to be multifaceted and more 'joined up' to provide a holistic approach to the complex issue of securing educational re-engagement among the two groups consulted. The need to sustain engagement (retention) as well as to encourage entry (recruitment) was considered crucial.
18. Other issues highlighted that would need to be considered alongside any proposed system of entitlement to encourage post 16 participation amongst the two groups included:
- the need for early intervention so that young people do not become disengaged with education in the first place
 - a need to change attitudes in order to switch young people on to learning
 - increase self-motivation
 - provide ongoing support at a variety of levels such as careers advice, benefits advice, provision of positive role models, learning support and help with life skills/ emotional support

- tackle purported institutional barriers such as competition for course places and ‘institutionalised’ low expectations of the two groups concerned
- assess the opportunity costs of promoting participation in learning as opposed to participation in employment or training options.

Conclusions and Recommendations

19. Young people from both groups face multiple barriers to re-engaging with post compulsory education for which there is no ‘one size fits all’ solution. Whilst the notion of learning entitlement is generally considered valuable in principle, few felt it was the answer to increased participation amongst the target groups. Rather, it was one part of a complex jigsaw.

20. Despite the conclusion that participation in post compulsory education is not likely to be increased if tuition and maintenance support was offered on an entitlement basis rather than a guaranteed or discretionary one, it is not suggested that the concept of learning entitlement necessarily be abandoned.

21. There is a need to better define the intended policy scope of the proposed entitlement - i.e. as a policy to promote lifelong learning for all, or, as a policy to re-engage young care leavers and NEET groups of young people in education - in order to draw firm conclusions.

22. Since this piece of research focussed on a narrow band of care leavers and NEET young people aged 16-21, it is recommended that any future research on the concept of entitlement with these groups should focus on exploring:

- whether the responses to entitlement change with age (i.e. older more likely to engage?)
- how barriers to re-entering education have been overcome by consulting YCLs and NEET young people who have made a successful transition to post 16 education
- the likely completion and attainment rates of young people if they were successfully engaged i.e. to assess opportunity costs of education over employment and training opportunities.

CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

1.1 This report presents the findings of research undertaken by York Consulting Limited (YCL) to conduct a scoping study into learning entitlement on behalf of the Scottish Executive.

Background

1.2 The need for research to investigate the concept of learning entitlement emerged from the Lifelong Learning Strategy for Scotland “Life Through Learning; Learning Through Life” published in February 2003 and the commitment outlined in the Lifelong Learning Strategy update, published in November 2004.

1.3 When the Lifelong Learning Strategy was published in 2003, Ministers were interested in the notion of entitlement which had been put forward by the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee of the Scottish Parliament in its report on Lifelong Learning². The report did not envisage that the concept of entitlement would replace existing entitlements which learners already experience. Rather, it would secure entitlement shared by all, and would be designed to ensure that those not covered by existing entitlements would be supported in their engagement in lifelong learning. This entitlement, it was proposed, would bring the following benefits:

- empower the learner and create a system of provision which is more learner-led
- promote equality of opportunity for all learners across the range of lifelong learning routes and pathways
- make it easier for people from disadvantaged backgrounds to enter into learning
- generate more flexibility in lifelong learning with learners being able to engage in episodes of learning throughout their lives
- encourage non-traditional patterns of learning with learners able to make lateral and vertical progression across the learning and qualification structure
- foster parity of esteem between different types of learning

1.4 Whilst recognising the potential benefits of a system of learning entitlement, Ministers acknowledged challenges with proposals for entitlement, such as the extent to which its implementation is dependent on how it can be resourced. As a result, it was agreed to undertake further research into the concept.

² Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee (ELLC) 9th Report 2002 Final Report on Lifelong Learning.

1.5 Research was therefore commissioned to undertake a scoping study to explore the potential affects of introducing a system of entitlement on the participation of two vulnerable groups of young people:

- care leavers and
- those not in education, employment or training

The Research Project

1.6 The study aimed to explore whether participation in post compulsory learning by care leavers and other young people not engaged in learning would be increased if tuition and maintenance support was offered on an entitlement basis rather than a guaranteed or discretionary one.

1.7 The main objectives of the research were to:

- investigate the views towards post compulsory education of a) young care leavers (YCL) who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) and b) young people who are NEET but who have no experience of care
- investigate these young people's understanding and views of the current system of funding and those of the individuals who influence them (henceforth referred to as 'influencing stakeholders')
- investigate these young people's views of entitlement and those of the influencing stakeholders
- explore whether entitlement alone is sufficient to encourage educational re-engagement

Structure of the Report

1.8 The remainder of the report is structured as follows:

- **Section 2** outlines the study method
- The circumstances of the young people interviewed are presented in **Section 3**, together with their experiences of school and views of post compulsory education
- **Section 4** sets out views of the current system of funding and barriers to participation
- Views of a proposed system of entitlement are outlined in **Section 5**, together with perspectives on what else may need to be provided to encourage these groups of young people to engage with post compulsory education
- **Section 6** summarises the main findings and explores their implications for policy and practice, as well as suggesting areas for future research into learning entitlement

CHAPTER TWO METHOD

2.1 A qualitative approach was selected for this study to explore in depth views of entitlement and the potential effect on participation in post compulsory education.

2.2 The methodology for this evaluation comprised of four main elements

- **a scoping and accessing phase** – to engage stakeholder groups and organisations that represented the two groups of young people to be consulted. These organisations played a critical role in accessing and recruiting the young people who took part in this research
- in-depth qualitative interviews with two key groups of young people:
 - Group 1 = Care leavers, aged 16-21 who are not engaged in education, training or employment (NEET)
 - Group 2 = NEET young people with no experience of care aged 16-21
- **in-depth qualitative interviews with individuals who work with the two groups of young people** – for example, key workers, project workers, social/youth workers, careers advisors, professionals in Further Education (FE) /school
- **telephone interviews with strategic stakeholders and support organisations** – statutory, voluntary and charitable organisations – e.g. Who Cares Scotland, Careers Scotland, Scottish Throughcare and Aftercare Forum, Local Authorities, Scottish Executive policy staff

2.3 The interviews were conducted using semi-structured topic guides and two stimulus cards. The first card gave a simple illustration of the current system of funding for post compulsory education. The second outlined in broad, basic terms the proposed system of learning entitlement.

Definitions of Cohort Group

NEET

2.4 The way in which the NEET group is defined as a category has important implications, since it is well documented that the NEET group is not homogeneous. In sampling NEET young people to take part in this research, definitions of NEET followed those outlined in the Scottish School Leavers Survey. The focus was on disadvantaged youngsters. More privileged young people – those who are ‘positively’ NEET - who are able to exercise choice in the way they manage their lives for example by taking a gap year or having an extended break to pursue other interests, were not included³.

³ Scottish School Leavers Survey

Young Care Leavers

2.5 Similarly, young people who have been in care are not a homogeneous group. Care leavers will have very different experiences. There are those who have spent all or part of their lives in care centres, others who have been looked after at home under a supervision order, and those who are placed in residential schools or foster care. The term ‘care leaver’ needs to be interpreted with some caution. Although the tendency is for children to leave care between the ages of 16 and 18, they may still receive support through the looked after system via throughcare and aftercare services.

2.6 For the purposes of this report, the term ‘young care leavers’ (YCL) is used to refer to young people who have had experience of the care system and who have reached the leaving age for compulsory schooling.

Young People Interviews

2.7 Young people were recruited by statutory and voluntary organisations that work with them according to the sample criteria set out in **Table 2.1**.

Table 2.1 Sample Criteria

Group 1 Care Leavers not engaged in learning	Group 2 Young People not through care system not engaged in learning
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• care leavers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• not care leavers
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 16-21	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 16-21
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• NEET	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• NEET
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• residing Glasgow or Edinburgh	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• residing Glasgow or Edinburgh

2.8 The approach to consulting young people (focus groups, 1-1 or paired interviews) was tailored according to the needs of young people. The young people were interviewed in venues recommended by the agencies recruiting them, for example at college, project venues or community centres.

2.9 The target number of interviews to be conducted was forty: twenty from each group. In the event, fifty-four young people were interviewed, thirty from the care leaver group and twenty-four from the NEET group (see **Table 2.2** for further details).

2.10 The sample in each group showed a relatively even gender distribution, although there was a slightly higher proportion of males in the care leaver group.

2.11 Young people ranged from 16 to 22 years of age. Five of the young people who stakeholders recruited took part exceeded the sample age range. At 22, these young people were just one year older than sample criteria, and were included in the research. The average age within the care leaver group was 18 and the most common age was 17. For the NEET group, the average age was 16 and the most common age was 18.

2.12 In both groups, a greater proportion came from the Glasgow as opposed to the Edinburgh area.

2.13 Across both groups, the length of disengagement from learning ranged from one to over five years. For both the care leaver and NEET groups the average duration they had been away from learning was two years, with the most common being two years.

Table 2.2 Young People Characteristics

Number in each	Care Leaver Group N = 30	NEET Group N = 24
Gender	17 = Male 13 = Female	12 = Male 12 = Female
Age	3 = 16 years old 12 = 17 years old 6 = 18 years old 0 = 19 years old 6 = 20 years old 0 = 21 years old 3 = 21+ years old Missing data = 0	5 = 16 years old 2 = 17 years old 8 = 18 years old 1 = 19 years old 1 = 20 years old 0 = 21 years old 2 = 21+ years old Missing data = 5
Location	21 = Glasgow 9 = Edinburgh	15 = Glasgow 9 = Edinburgh
Length of Disengagement from learning	7 = 1 year 14 = 2 years 1 = 3 years 4 = 4 years 2 = 5 years Missing data = 2	6 = 1 year 10 = 2 years 1 = 3 years 1 = 4 years 1 = 5 years Missing data = 5

Stakeholders

2.14 Thirty-one stakeholders took part in this research. Stakeholders interviewed fell broadly into two groups:

- **Influencing stakeholders:** 16 influencing stakeholders took part. These were defined as operational staff who tended to work with and support young people at ground level on a day-to-day basis
- **Strategic stakeholders:** 15 strategic stakeholders took part. This group included more high level staff who could represent views from an organisational or policy perspective

Interpreting Qualitative Research

2.15 Qualitative research is an interactive and iterative process between the individuals carrying out the research and those being researched. It provides a means of probing the attitudes, perceptions and beliefs of participants, and obtaining an understanding of the issues. Qualitative research is a valuable means to explore, in depth, the reasons behind participants' attitudes that could not be covered in the same detail through a structured questionnaire. The interview process is flexible to allow issues to emerge rather than being pre-determined. Participants are therefore able to define their own issues and raise their own concerns.

2.16 Therefore, it must be remembered when interpreting the findings reported that they are not based on quantitative statistical evidence. Being based on a small sample size the findings must be considered as illustrative rather than statistically representative.

2.17 In this report, to give a sense of the scale of themes emerging we use terms such as ‘most’, ‘many’, ‘some’ and ‘few’. The terms ‘most’ and ‘many’ are consistently used to indicate issues or insights that were raised by a lot of the stakeholders consulted. The terms ‘some’, ‘several’ and ‘a number’ are used to refer to themes indicated by several but not the majority of participants. The terms ‘few’ or ‘one’ are used when reporting minor or ‘one-off’ issues.

Limitations

2.18 This research focused on young care leavers and NEET young people from two Local Authority areas (Glasgow and Edinburgh). The personal experiences, knowledge and support of the two groups outlined in this report might therefore be indicative of service provision within these areas, rather than the population of care leavers and NEET young people per se.

2.19 Non-probability sampling strategies were utilised as these tend to be more effective to enable access to hard to reach groups. However, the research findings cannot therefore be considered to be representative of the population of care leavers and the NEET group as a whole. This also relates to the feedback given by stakeholders.

2.20 Furthermore, this research focused on “the idea” of a system learning entitlement. The full detail of what such a learning entitlement would comprise had not been developed. Some caution should therefore be exercised when interpreting the findings. Responses to a hypothetical notion of learning entitlement may differ to those given if entitlement existed.

Anonymity

2.21 All names in this report have been changed to preserve anonymity.

CHAPTER THREE YOUNG PEOPLE: CHARACTERISTICS AND VIEWS OF POST COMPULSORY EDUCATION

Introduction

3.1 In this section, the characteristics of the young people who participated are presented, together with their experiences of school and attitudes toward post-compulsory education.

Table 3.1 Key Findings

- Few young people did well at school. Most left school early with low levels of educational attainment. Many of the young care leaver group had experienced frequent placement changes that disrupted their education
- Several from both groups had health problems or special needs
- Over half of the women in the care leaver group were pregnant or young mothers
- Housing instability was a strong feature of the care leaver group. Several were in temporary or hostel accommodation
- Most across the two groups had experienced periods of employment, education or training since leaving school but, in the main, these were not sustained
- In the main, school had been a difficult experience. Many had exhibited disruptive behaviour in school and several had experienced exclusions. Most had negative attitudes towards school and teaching staff. Lack of confidence and motivation were common factors
- Despite negative experiences at school, views regarding post-compulsory education were mixed. Whilst some had deep-rooted views that they would not re-engage, others felt education was important and something they would aspire to and return to in the future. Positive aspirations to re-engage with education altered with age

Characteristics⁴

Educational Achievement

3.2 In general, the young people interviewed had poor levels of educational achievement. Many young people had left school at age 16 or even earlier with limited or low level qualifications. Nevertheless, some young people had made significant achievements in school in spite of difficult circumstances and had attained some Standard Grades or Higher Level qualifications. This indicates that, whilst poor attainment was commonplace, this was by no means universal among the target groups for the study.

⁴ The characteristics outlined in this section are based on those young people who took part. In view of the limited sample size and lack of supporting background data (for example on qualifications), quantification has not been possible or practicable.

3.3 Many of the young people consulted had experienced gaps in their education. Some chose not to attend school and several had been excluded for disruptive or violent behaviour.

3.4 A number of the young care leavers had moved schools due to changing care placements. This had a negative effect on their educational achievement and views towards school, since the association between disrupted 'home' lives was often synonymous with negative education experiences. Some young care leavers struggled to keep up with the curriculum, whilst others felt stigmatised resulting in reduced motivation and self-esteem. For many young care leavers, it was the frequency of their placements and the challenges that these presented that led to their early detachment from education.

Health Issues and Special Needs

3.5 Several of the young people from both the young care leaver and NEET groups had health issues such as drug/alcohol abuse or mental health problems and/or had a history of offending.

3.6 A number of young people from both groups stated that they had dyslexia⁵ which, in their view, affected their perspective of education and willingness or confidence to engage.

Parenthood

3.7 A significant number of the females consulted were pregnant or young mothers. Of the 25 women participating, 1 from the NEET group and 7 from the YCL group were pregnant or had a child. This equates to 8% of the women in the NEET group and 53% of the female YCLs consulted. This finding reflects figures reported in the literature that a quarter of young care leavers have a child by age 16 and nearly one half are mothers within 18-24 months of leaving care (SEU, 1998)⁶.

Housing

3.8 Several of those interviewed from the young care leaver group were in hostel or temporary accommodation. Many had experienced periods of homelessness in the last two years or had failed tenancies. Research has shown that the living circumstances surrounding the young care leavers' transition to independence play a significant part in influencing future success (Allen 2003⁷).

Activity Since Leaving School

3.9 Since leaving school most of the young people (in both the NEET and YCL groups) had experienced some periods of employment, training or education (for example, on a

⁵ References to special needs such as dyslexia were self-reported by young people. The proportions of those who had been diagnosed and tested is not known.

⁶ Social Exclusion Unit. (1998). Rough Sleeping. The Stationary Office: London.

⁷ Allen, M. (2003). Into the Mainstream: care leavers entering work, education and training. Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

voluntary basis or because they were mandated to do so as part of benefit requirements). In the main, such experiences tended to be short-lived. Inability to sustain activity due to the chaotic or unstable nature of their lives emerged as a recurring problem for both groups.

Employment and work-based learning

3.10 For many of those interviewed, their experience of the labour market was restricted to low level, low paid, transient jobs. Interviewees were involved in a range of jobs such as gardening, shop or call centre work. Many spent less than six months in employment with the main reasons for leaving being:

- casual/temporary work
- dismissal
- travel problems
- health problems
- bullying at work
- disliking the line of work

3.11 A number of the young care leaver group were not actively seeking work. Securing housing or coping with accommodation changes were their main considerations. In this sense, the young care leavers could be considered to be further from the labour market and education than their NEET counterparts who had no experience of the care system, although instability through accommodation or other issues was not alien to the NEET group.

'Learning'

3.12 A number of the young people interviewed had spent some time in learning since leaving school. In the main, this tended to be life skills or 'get ready for work'-type programmes, as part of mandatory New Deal provision, for example.

3.13 Several young people had attempted a college course (such as childcare, food technology, Standard Grade courses or basic Computing, English or maths courses) but most dropped out in the early stages.

3.14 To provide an illustration of the nature of the learning experiences amongst the groups consulted, examples of young people's involvement in post 16 education are given below. Caution should be exerted in interpreting the findings presented. The extent to which such experiences are typical or transferable to the groups of care leavers and NEET young people consulted as a whole is not known. This is because not all respondents provided information regarding their learning experiences in the same way due the qualitative nature of the research.

Table 3.2 Examples of Involvement in Post 16 Education

In this table, information is presented regarding the post 16 learning experiences from two of the focus group consultations conducted. The first group comprised of 16 care leavers and the second 6 NEET young people. Given the small number of those consulted in each group, the findings can only be considered illustrative and are by no means statistically representative or a feature of those consulted overall. The findings presented could be a feature of the type of provision from which these young people were recruited rather than a feature of the tendencies amongst YCL and NEET young people with regards to experiences of post 16 education per se.

Approximately, 7 of the 16 (44%) YCLs and 3 of the 6 (50%) NEET group had attended college post 16. Of those who attended college, there was a 100% non-completion rate of courses. The type and level of courses studied varied across both groups and included:

- Basic computing
- Beauty therapy
- Intermediate certificate in engineering and mechanics
- NVQ in accounting
- Highers.

Around two-thirds of the young people across both groups who had failed to complete a college course stated that they would like to return to college at some point in their lives, typically to repeat the original course they had undertaken. The types of course young people aspired to undertake varied. However, some ‘tendencies’ emerged:

- several female young care leavers who expressed a preference to study at college indicated they would like to train to become care workers or hairdressers
- enlisting in the army and undertaking army-based training courses and entering the building trade via vocational courses at college were the preferred occupations for many of the males.

Experience of Education

3.15 Most of those interviewed had had a negative experience of school. Several factors contributed to their dislike of education or reluctance to stay on at school, post 16:

- **Exclusion:** A large proportion of those interviewed had been excluded from school for disruptive behaviour. Several young people were sensitive to the tone and language used by teachers and reacted negatively to them. This resulted in a cycle of poor behaviour and dislike of authority. Many had become disengaged with education from an early age
- **Labelling:** Many felt that teachers in school had negative attitudes towards them. Young people who had experienced exclusions from school felt that they were then always considered a ‘problem pupil’. Several young care leavers felt they were stereotyped because they were in care, by both staff and peers
- **Post 16 was not an option:** Some young people from both groups felt that they did not have a choice to go back to school post-16 because ‘the teachers’ would not let them due to a history of poor behaviour and/or poor attendance. Despite their negative experiences, these young people often wanted to go back to the same school post 16. This, in the view of one stakeholder, was because that was what they knew and therefore, felt comfortable with
- **Peer pressure:** A number of young people had disengaged with education due to negative peer pressure

- **Lack of self-esteem:** Low self esteem in relation to learning was a recurrent theme. A number commented that they struggled at school and some were embarrassed to ask for help because they had dyslexia
- **Low motivation:** most of the young people interviewed had low motivation to learn or stay on at school post 16 because of past negative experiences. However, levels of motivation towards continuing education often changed with age. Among the older young people interviewed, several commented that they felt they had ‘grown up a bit’ and were now more ready to engage with learning and education

3.16 Additional factors in relation to the care leaver group included:

- **Placement moves:** unsettling placement changes were a common feature of the care leaver group. Negative attitudes to education were compounded by frequent placement moves as young care leavers struggled to adjust, keep up with the curriculum or form positive friendships in school
- **Lack of secure accommodation post 16:** invariably, care leavers were too preoccupied with the need to secure a safe and stable home environment to give education options much consideration. One stakeholder working with young care leavers commented that YCLs were encouraged to leave care at age 16 to ‘free up beds’. This inevitably meant the focus was on securing and sustaining accommodation rather than staying on at school
- **Lack of encouragement and support:** for some care leavers the lack of an individual who showed an interest in their educational progress was a salient factor. Several felt that teachers did not push them enough and had low expectations of them. Some reported that they found it hard to study in care homes. One respondent commented that residential care staff changed frequently and ‘didn’t care’ about educational progress
- **Desire for independence:** Some stakeholders felt that young care leavers made a considered choice to work rather than stay on at school at 16. For some, this was the first time in their lives they had responsibility for themselves and some independence away from authority. At that time in their lives it was difficult to persuade them to stay on at school
- **Weaknesses of residential provision:** Some felt residential schooling did not offer enough choices for learning. Some young people stated that they found it hard to concentrate on their schoolwork due to pressures and distractions from peers and the care environment

Table 3.3 Experiences of Education

NEET
Afsala (not her real name) is 20 and living with her parents. She left school at 15 with low level qualifications. After leaving school, Afsala enrolled on a SVQ level 2 course through which she was on work placement for 5 months. She later started work in a call centre but did not like the work. She is currently unemployed.
Andrew was expelled from school at 13 years of age because he was disruptive in class and aggressive towards other pupils. He was subsequently placed in a day centre where he began studying for an intermediate certificate in engineering. Andrew left the course when he was sent to prison for assault. He has not worked since leaving school but says he enjoyed learning. It was the ‘people I didn’t like’ He now wants to get his life back on track and would like to go to college.
Nicholas is 18 and unemployed. He left school with 8 Standard grade qualifications. He has mental health problems. He left home two years ago and is currently in supported accommodation.
Care Leavers
Mark is a 17 year old young care leaver. He entered care at age 12. He was expelled from two primary schools for poor behaviour. Although he enjoyed his first two years at secondary school, he encountered problems in his third year, primarily bullying by fellow pupils. At the end of his third year he transferred to an education centre where he achieved standard grade passes in English, a science, Maths and Social Education. He eventually left school at age 15. Upon leaving school he had a number of jobs (fast food chain, supermarket). He also embarked in a Get Ready for Work course that he did not complete.
Leanne is 17 and has been in care most of her life. She left school at age 14 with no qualifications aside from two SVQ modules. Since ‘disappearing’ from school, Leanne has tried a variety of education, training and employment opportunities, none of which were sustained. Her focus at the moment is sorting out her tenancy arrangements.
Liam did not enjoy school. He struggled to concentrate and his learning suffered. He fell in with a ‘bad crowd’ and was expelled from school at age 14. He then went to a residential school where he achieved basic level Standard grades in English, Maths, Modern Studies and Computing. After leaving school, Liam went on a Gateway to Work programme (as part of New Deal). He left after two months because of problems with his accommodation.
Julie is 17 and had a negative experience at school. After attending three different secondary schools, she was eventually placed in a residential school for disruptive pupils. Julie left school at 15 with no qualifications.

Views of Post Compulsory Education

3.17 Views of post compulsory education were mixed in both groups. Some young people in the NEET group and the care leaver group had strong views that they would not go back into education. These young people felt very let down by the system and were adamant that they would not re-engage.

Table 3.4 Views of Post Compulsory Education – Would Not Go Back

A Care Leaver
Jack is 22 and was taken into care from a young age. He had a number of educational placements and spent the latter years of his education in a residential school. Jack had a very negative experience of school and felt his care workers had resigned him to failure. Jack left school at 16 with no qualifications. He suffers from dyslexia which was diagnosed when he was older, the implications of which were never explained to him. Jack thinks education is good but not for him. He finds the learning environment stressful and lacks the confidence to try it for fear of failure and that people will judge him. He doubts he will ever go back into learning.
A NEET Young Person
Lila is 17 and stopped attending school from around age 14 when she was expelled for disruptive behaviour. Lila hated school and the way the teachers ‘treated and talked’ to her. Lila was not given any advice on her options post 16 but she is vehement that school or education is not an option. She does not want to go back into education but feels that even if she did ‘the teachers wouldn’t let’ her because of her behaviour.
Stakeholder Views
<i>“For some young people, you could run courses on their doorstep and they would not attend.” Strategic Stakeholder Care/NEET</i>
<i>“Many of them are simply disaffected with education full stop.” Influencing Stakeholder Care/NEET</i>

3.18 Other young people from across the two groups interviewed had more positive views towards post-16 learning. There was some evidence that as the young people got older, they started to change their views of education and saw it as something they would aspire to in the future. Several had been influenced by motivational or life skills programmes run by charitable and voluntary organisations. Such programmes had given them a different experience of learning. Several mentioned that they would go to college in the future because of the perception that they would be treated like adults in college, unlike their school experiences.

3.19 The finding that several of the young people in this study aspired to go back into education at some point in their lives reflects that of previous research. The Scottish School Leavers Survey (SSLS) found that NEET and non-NEET young people had similar orientations to future participation in education and the labour market. The vast majority in the SSLS research felt that a career or profession was important to them and that they wanted to work throughout their adult lives. They wished to go on learning new things throughout their adult lives (SSLS, 2003⁸).

3.20 Willingness to engage in education was therefore mixed. Regardless of whether young people have aspirations to participate, making the transition to enter education is clearly a complex issue. This mainly relates to previous gaps in education and/or previous negative experiences of the compulsory education system.

Summary of Views by Respondent Type

3.21 The views presented in this chapter by respondent type (YCL, NEET, stakeholder) are summarised in Table 3.5 below.

⁸ Scottish School Leavers Survey.

Table 3.5 Summary Table Key Characteristics and Views of Compulsory Schooling⁹

Theme Emerging	Type of Stakeholder Reported by
Low level educational achievement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Care leaver group • NEET group • Strategic stakeholder • Influencing stakeholder
Other Issues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health Issues (e.g. drug/alcohol, mental health problems) • History of Offending • Special Needs (e.g. dyslexia) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Care leaver group • NEET Group • Strategic Stakeholders • Influencing stakeholders • Care leaver group • NEET Group • Strategic Stakeholders • Influencing stakeholders • Care leaver group • NEET group
Engaged in employment, training or education activity since leaving school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Care leaver group • NEET group • Influencing Stakeholders
Negative experience of school <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exclusion • Labelling Problem Pupil • Care stigma • Post 16 not an option 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Care leaver group • NEET Group • Strategic Stakeholders • Influencing stakeholders • NEET • Influencing Stakeholders • Care leaver group • Influencing stakeholders • Strategic stakeholders • Care leaver group • NEET • Strategic stakeholders
Peer pressure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic stakeholders • Influencing stakeholders
Low self –esteem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Care leaver group • NEET Group • Strategic Stakeholders • Influencing stakeholders

⁹ This table presents an overview of the key issues by the type of stakeholder consulted. The information presented in the table must be taken alongside the findings reported in the text. Where a particular stakeholder type is not represented – this may not necessarily mean that that the theme was not present for that participant group. Rather, the theme was not particularly prevalent amongst this group, or they did not comment about it specifically during interview i.e. the theme did not present itself as an emerging issue in the interview.

Theme Emerging	Type of Stakeholder Reported by
Low motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Care leaver group • NEET Group • Strategic Stakeholders • Influencing stakeholders
Placement moves	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Care leaver group • Strategic Stakeholders (Care only) • Influencing stakeholders (Care only)
Lack of secure accommodation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Care leaver group • Strategic Stakeholders (Care only) • Influencing stakeholders (Care only)
Lack of encouragement and support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Care leaver group • Strategic Stakeholders • Influencing stakeholders
Desire for independence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Care leaver group • Strategic Stakeholders (Care only) • Influencing stakeholders (Care only)
Weak residential provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Care leaver group • Strategic Stakeholders (Care only) • Influencing stakeholders (Care only)
View of post compulsory education <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would consider going back • Would not consider going back 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Care leaver group • NEET group • Care leaver group • NEET group

3.22 The following Chapter explores young people's knowledge of the funding available to them post 16 and the barriers to participation.

CHAPTER FOUR VIEWS OF THE CURRENT SYSTEM OF FUNDING AND BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION

Introduction

4.1 This section begins by exploring interviewee knowledge and views of the current system of funding post 16. Barriers to participation are then outlined.

Table 4.1 Key Findings

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Knowledge of the current system of funding varied but was generally poor• Careers advice and support varied and tended to be delivered on a reactive rather than proactive basis. Being largely dependent on personal motivation to access advice, careers provision appears not to be reaching many of the young people in the NEET or YCL groups• Of the few young people who did know something about the current system of funding, views were mainly negative. These included concerns that levels of funding were too low; uptake would result in loss of benefits (particularly housing benefit); the system was overly complicated and bureaucratic; and that it was inequitable and unclear. Others felt that the system of funding was not the main barrier to re-engagement• Multiple barriers to participation were highlighted. These included:<ul style="list-style-type: none">— financial concerns – for example, loss of benefits, threat of homelessness as a more pressing priority, cost of transport— personal and circumstantial problems - such as attitudes to self and education; motivation, health problems, parenting responsibilities, special needs, fear of failure and educational establishments , problems with behaviour management— institutional constraints – for example, competition for places, lack of suitable courses, limitations in support (e.g. mentoring, additional support for literacy and numeracy), learning styles• Often it was a combination of these factors rather than a single issue that was affecting young people’s participation in post-compulsory education

Funding

Knowledge of Funding

4.2 Young people and the influencing stakeholders who worked with them or represented them were asked what they knew about the current system of funding for learning post compulsory schooling. Views of funding were mainly confined to funding available within Further Education, since this was perceived to be the most attainable route to re-engaging with learning, as opposed to Higher Education.

4.3 Knowledge of the current system and what is available was mixed but, in the main, tended to be poor, or limited in detail.

4.4 The extent of knowledge of stakeholders and project staff fell into two categories:

- **Informed** - some knew in detail the funding options available for young people. This is because it was a specific element of their job role to inform young people about the funding they could apply for and to assist them to access it;
- **Uninformed** – a significant proportion did not know what young people could access in terms of funding.

4.5 The knowledge of young people similarly varied:

- **High level awareness** - Some young people had in-depth knowledge of funding for learning and had explored the implications of how their choice to re-enter learning, or otherwise, would affect their benefit entitlement, for example. Several of the care leaver group had high levels of awareness. This could potentially be because young care leavers, in theory, have access to a more formal network of support than the NEET group (e.g. through support workers, Pathways co-ordinators)
- **Limited level awareness** – Other young people had more limited awareness. They had heard of, or knew that they could apply for funding such as bursaries or an Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA¹⁰), for example. For some, although they had heard about funding, their expectation was that staff who worked with them would sort out what they were eligible for
- **No/low level awareness** – Some young people interviewed knew little or nothing about funding for post compulsory schooling and had never really thought about it

Careers Support and Advice

4.6 Knowledge of funding is also linked to the careers support and advice provided for young people. Careers advice was variable. Some young people across both groups consulted were positive about the support they received from careers advisors, initiatives such as Positive Futures¹¹, and professional staff such as social workers and project workers. However, several young people were negative about careers advice, believing there was ‘not much out there’ or they were unsure where to go.

4.7 In the main, careers advice tended to be **reactively** rather than **proactively** provided. This tended to operate in two ways. Either young people received support because they actively sought out advice themselves, (and when they did so, found it was readily available), or young people were offered careers support and advice as a part of other programmes (e.g. transition programmes or leaving care services provision). In other words, young people had to go out and find it, or be ‘in the system’ to be offered it.

¹⁰ While this source of support was mentioned by a few young people, it should be noted that those who have formally discontinued their schooling would not be entitled to receive an EMA.

¹¹ This service is based in Glasgow and operates as a partnership between Glasgow City Council Social Work Services and Careers Scotland, for young care leavers. Funding has also been received from *the big step* social inclusion partnership for young care leavers.

4.8 The groups involved in the study tended not to mention family, friends or peers as a source of careers support and advice. Young people who did mention this form of support were in the NEET group.

4.9 Some stakeholders interviewed felt that although careers advice had improved in recent years, there was still some way to go in making services wholly effective. It could be argued that careers advice is still too heavily targeted towards the mainstream. Although the opportunity for advice and support is available, it is heavily dependent on personal motivation and therefore, arguably, less accessible for the two groups of young people involved in this research. One stakeholder and a young care leaver felt that there was a need for careers advice to be more proactive in its approach to ‘get to’ hard to reach or disengaged young people where ‘they are at’.

4.10 Inadequacies of careers advice for the NEET group are supported by previous research. In a recent study of the Education Maintenance pilots, it was found that the NEET group had fewer sources of advice and had received information from teachers and careers officers less often than other groups of young people (Rennison et al. 2005)¹². However, the one-to-one key worker support and advice service developed through the Careers Scotland Beattie Inclusiveness projects to address post-school transition barriers faced by young people with additional support needs was positively evaluated following the 3-year pilot phase. Findings showed key workers were having a positive influence in helping these young people progress towards further education, training and employment. Careers Scotland has now mainstreamed this approach within the services it offers, with a young person having been assessed as needing a key worker being assigned one.

4.11 Several young people and the stakeholders who represent them felt that careers advice and support needed to be better marketed and proactive/creative in approach to reaching young people.

“You don’t see it (careers information) on TV or places where I go.” Care Leaver

“Adequacy of careers advice... how can I answer that. You know when you used to get a report card and it used to say ‘could do better? It (careers advice) could do better. It all depends on the relationship the personal adviser has with voluntary services.” Strategic Stakeholder Care/NEET

Views of Funding

4.12 Views of the current system of funding were mixed but mainly negative. Negative concerns regarding funding included the following:

¹² Rennison, J., Maguire, S., Middleton, S. and Ashworth, K. (2005). Young People not in Education, Employment or Training: Evidence from the Education Maintenance Allowance Pilots Database. DfES Research Report 628.

- **Insufficient funds available:** a number of stakeholders and young people felt that the current system did not provide sufficient finance for young people to engage (either to get them ‘through the door in first place’ or persuade them to stay long term). Some felt EMAs and bursaries also offered insufficient funding and did not take into account the reality of young people’s situations. For one young person in the NEET group, although she knew she could get a bursary, she felt that that it did not compensate her enough. She felt that it assumed a level of financial support was already in place through, for example, her family. Like many others in her position, such support was not available. Financial concerns were particularly pertinent for young care leavers. Several had deep-seated concerns about how funding for post 16 learning would affect benefits, particularly housing benefits. For some, the perceived lack of parity between funding for learning and benefit entitlements was the major barrier to participation

“I’d have to get more than £60 per week to make it worthwhile.” Care Leaver

“You’d have to pay me to make me go.” NEET

“I can rely on my JSA (jobseeker allowance) for £89 a fortnight. I don’t reckon FE money will be as good as this.” Care Leaver

- **That it was complicated:** several stakeholders commented that the current system was too complicated for young people to understand. As a result young people either did not consider it or would have to rely on professionals to sort it out for them
- **That it was bureaucratic:** some young people from both groups disliked the process of applying for funding, feeling that they had to “jump through hoops” to evidence that they “were poor”. For one NEET individual, this was a sufficient deterrent to even bother to apply. Some young people had tried to apply for funding but experienced difficulties in providing the relevant proof such as birth certificates and family income
- **That it was inequitable and lacked transparency:** some young people felt the current system was inequitable and there was a lack of transparency in decision-making. Some cited examples of where one of their peers had received money and another had not, despite the perception that their circumstances were the same
- **That it was short-term:** the current system of funding for some learning follows the course which can mean that young people are unaware about the financial implications of their long-term educational goals. One young care leaver had begun to re-engage with education and had a long-term vision of where she wanted to be and the courses she needed to do to get there. However, although she had been offered a bursary for the first year, she did not know whether and what funding she would receive in subsequent years
- **That it did not acknowledge differing financial concerns of young people leaving care:** the need for funding to take account of the financial circumstances (particularly the housing situation) of care leavers was a persistent theme. The fear of loss of housing benefits was a prime concern. This was because a stable home life was considered key to entering and sustaining educational engagement

- **That it provided finance during term-time only:** some stakeholders commented that funding for maintenance support did not cover vacation periods. This was considered a particular concern for young care leavers who do not have family support to fall back on
- **That the process of applying for funding might serve to perpetuate the stigma surrounding their circumstances:** especially for young care leavers, it was noted that ‘interviews’ and the completing of application forms served to highlight their personal and accommodation circumstances (e.g. living in a unit) and that this was off-putting. This group was also concerned about being ‘singled out’ due to their status in the event that they did secure a place at college and of feeling ‘different’ from other students

4.13 However, not all of those consulted felt that the current system of funding was the central issue. Some young people had not considered the financial implications of entering education. For them, other issues featured more prominently as barriers to educational engagement. Others felt strongly that if they were really motivated to enter learning they would ‘find a way’. For many, the significance of the funding system appeared to be related to their distance from educational engagement and readiness for entry – i.e. the more interested and proactive young people had been in re-engaging with learning, the more likely they were to express views on funding. Those who appeared less interested in re-engaging with learning had significantly less to say about the funding system. This is partially to do with lack of knowledge and understanding.

4.14 One stakeholder commented that it could not be the system of funding that was affecting decisions, since young people could only apply for maintenance support once they had secured a place on a course. Hence, the decision to participate had already been made and therefore the *process* of applying for funding was not a barrier to entry.

4.15 For some then, the current system of finance plays a crucial part in decisions to engage with post compulsory schooling, whilst for others, it is not the salient factor.

4.16 This finding is supported by other studies of the NEET group:

“It seems that for young people not in full-time education, financial constraints may not have been a primary reason for not staying on in fulltime learning, although they may have played a part” (Rennison et al., 2005)¹³

4.17 Analysis of the feedback from this study suggests that young people’s views on the extent of interplay between finance and entry to post-compulsory education can be broadly categorised into six groups. These are summarised in Table 4.2.

¹³ Rennison, J., Maguire, S., Middleton, S. and Ashworth, K. (2005). Young People not in Education, Employment or Training: Evidence from the Education Maintenance Allowance Pilots Database. DfES Research Report 628.

Table 4.2 Relationship Between Entry into Post-16 Education and Funding

Group	Consideration to engage Post-compulsory Education	Consideration of Funding Barrier
Group 1	have considered re-engaging with learning	AND funding would be a barrier
Group 2	have considered re-engaging with learning	AND funding is not a barrier (i.e. think they can get funding; not put off by funding)
Group 3	have considered re-engaging with learning	AND funding is not the main barrier (i.e. more pressing concerns such as housing)
Group 4	have not considered re-engaging with learning	BUT funding would be a barrier
Group 5	have not considered re-engaging with learning	BUT funding would not be a barrier (i.e. think they would be able to get funding, not put off by funding)
Group 6	have not considered re-engaging with learning	BUT funding would not be the main barrier (i.e. more pressing concerns such as housing)

4.18 In the main, the views of the young people consulted in this study tended to fall into groups 1, 3 and 6.

4.19 Regardless of their position on the importance of finance in influencing decisions to re-engage with learning, interviewees felt there were a range of other issues that constituted barriers to participation.

*“The current system isn’t a turn-off. There are much deeper issues to address.”
Influencing Stakeholder Care*

“There is much more to it than cash.” Strategic Stakeholder Care

Summary of Views of the Current System of Funding by Respondent Type

4.20 The views of the current system of funding presented in this section by respondent type (YCL, NEET, stakeholder) are summarised in Table 4.3 below

Table 4.3 Summary Table Views of the current system of funding¹⁴

Theme Emerging	Type of Stakeholder Reported by
Knowledge of funding <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes • No 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Care leaver group • NEET Group • Influencing stakeholders • Care leaver group • NEET Group • Strategic Stakeholders • Influencing stakeholders

¹⁴ This table presents an overview of the key issues by the type of stakeholder consulted. The information presented in the table must be taken alongside the findings reported in the text. Where a particular stakeholder type is not represented – this may not necessarily mean that that the theme was not present for that participant group. Rather, the theme was not particularly prevalent amongst this group, or they did not comment about it specifically during interview i.e. the theme did not present itself as an emerging issue in the interview.

<p>Careers Support and Advice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective • Ineffective 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Care leaver group • NEET Group • Strategic Stakeholders • Influencing stakeholders • Care leaver group • NEET Group • Strategic Stakeholders • Influencing stakeholders
<p>Concerns about funding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insufficient funds • Over complex • Over bureaucratic • Inequitable and lacking transparency • Short-term • Not acknowledge financial concerns of YCLs • Finance limited to term-time • Process of application perpetuates stigma • Process not a barrier 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Care leaver group • NEET Group • Strategic Stakeholders • Influencing stakeholders • Influencing stakeholders • Care leaver group • NEET Group • Influencing stakeholders • Care leaver group • NEET Group • Care leaver group • Care leaver group • Strategic Stakeholders (Care only) • Influencing stakeholders (Care only) • Influencing stakeholders • Care leaver group • Strategic Stakeholders (Care only) • Influencing stakeholders (Care only) • Strategic Stakeholder (One person)

Barriers to Participation

4.21 Individual reasons for non-participation varied considerably and stakeholders highlighted the lack of homogeneity within and across the two groups of young people in terms of their barriers to participate. Barriers to participation have been classified under the three key headings of financial concerns, personal and circumstantial factors, and institutional factors. The ‘financial concerns’ section below is different from that described above. The exploration, above, of financial barriers relates to actual participation in learning. The financial concerns noted below relate to the wider system and environments within which these young people operate and the financial pressures which they present. However, it should be noted that financial constraints – whether at actual participation stage or as a more encompassing element of a young person’s life – are not mutually exclusive and often exist in tandem. Indeed, for many of those interviewed, it was a combination of these financial factors rather than a single issue that was affecting decisions to participate.

Financial Concerns

4.22 Financial concerns influencing participation included:

- **The Benefits Trap:** a major barrier, for some, to participation in post-compulsory learning was being caught in a benefits trap where they would be worse off in education (i.e. benefits providing a known and relatively reliable route to financial ‘safety’)
- **Threat or experience of homelessness:** mainly for the young care leaver group, the lack of stable accommodation presented a significant barrier to participation. As one stakeholder commented *“Young care leavers need rent support on a continuous basis. Most care leavers have left home at the age of 16 which is 6 years younger than the national average leaving age of 22.”* Previous research has shown that care leavers are more likely to stay in education if they have help with other pressing issues they face such as stable housing and financial security (Allen, 2003)¹⁵
- **Other Financial Constraints:** some young people and stakeholders cited other financial barriers to education. These included travel expenses, money for food, books, other course materials and support for appropriate childcare. Stakeholders for the care leaver group also highlighted that young people needed advice on budgeting their finances since many struggled to efficiently manage their income. This was also verified by some care leavers, expressing the need for such support:

“I need money for transport. Even if you get a bus pass, you can’t use it before 9.30 am.” Care Leaver

“I know I would spend my bursary too quickly.” Care Leaver

“Money for food at lunchtimes would be good.” NEET

“You need money for other stuff too, books and buses.” NEET

“The biggest concern for many young people is ‘will this affect my benefits?’” Strategic Stakeholder Care

Personal and Circumstantial Factors

4.23 Personal and circumstantial factors affecting the take up of post compulsory education included:

- **Attitude To Self:** low self-esteem and lack of personal agency or motivation were common barriers. Research has shown that self-esteem is an important prerequisite for learning, yet many of the young people interviewed expressed fears of failure and lacked self-confidence to put themselves in a situation where they had previously struggled (either in a compulsory schooling setting or a post compulsory education setting). Others lacked motivation to enter education

¹⁵ Allen, M. (2003). Into the Mainstream: care leavers entering work, education and training. Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

- **Attitude Towards Education and School:** as outlined in Chapter Three, many young people had negative attitudes towards school that were deeply entrenched and acted as a major obstacle to educational re-engagement. Several stakeholders identified the need to remove or reverse negative attitudes first in order to influence young people to engage
- **Perception of Limited Benefits of Education:** many young people did not see the benefits of education and did not make the link between learning and the potential for improved economic prosperity. Some stakeholders highlighted that education was not necessarily a means to improve the circumstances and outcomes of young people. This tended to stem from a view expressed by some stakeholders that too much emphasis was being placed on learning re-engagement, to the detriment of other options, such as training or finding a job. Indeed, some stakeholders noted that the interests of young people would be better served by entering the labour market, especially where the young people are motivated to secure employment and a stable form of income
- **Behaviour/Anger Management Difficulties:** a small number of young people felt that they were not wanted at school anymore because they had previously been disruptive in the classroom. A number of young people felt that a college environment would be more positive than school. Perceptions of college were that it was very different to school and young people were treated ‘more like adults.’ However, as the experiences of some of the young people were testament, some had difficulties in managing their behaviour which resurfaced in college in a similar way to the behaviour problems experienced in school. One stakeholder felt that there was a need to consider how to help young people to ‘change their language’ so that they experienced less confrontation with FE staff
- **Unrealistic Expectations:** some of the young people interviewed appeared to have unrealistic expectations about education and what it would involve. Having gained a different experience of learning through less formal transitional programmes, several young people expressed a desire to go to college, though often with improbable expectations of what it would be like, based on their experiences of very flexible and informal styles of learning during transition programmes. These expectations extended to class size, extent of informality, level of academic expectation and amount of support available

“Disruptive youngsters find it hard to get down to college work. Their horizons are often set too low and there is often very little realism. Young people assume the college will simply be an extension of school and therefore behave in the same way at college as they did at school.” Influencing Stakeholder Care/NEET

- **Fear of Entering an Institution:** older young people, who had not been in education for some years, expressed fear of going to college. For several, this was due to a desire to avoid replicating past experiences or failures, as well as a suspicion or uneasiness about the role and value of college ‘institutions’

- **Fear of being Stigmatised:** as stated in the preceding Chapter, some young people described barriers presented by teaching staff. These concerned issues of negative stereotyping either because the young people had been excluded from school for behavioural reasons or because of a lack of understanding of what it meant to be in care. Some young care leavers also feared negative stereotyping by peers because of being in care or because of their prior low levels of attainment
- **Health Problems:** some young people in both groups had other issues to contend with such as mental health problems or drug or alcohol dependency. Stakeholder staff working with the young people interviewed felt that for education to be a realistic option, such barriers needed to be confronted first. However, as one stakeholder pointed out, it was also important that educators were aware of and sensitive to the issues young people were facing when they were beginning to make a positive change in their lives (such as a move into education). For example, one instance was cited of a young person who had entered a college course, and was subsequently excluded because his tutor thought he was inebriated when, in fact, he was on a methadone programme
- **Parenthood:** one of the NEET group and seven care leavers were expectant or teenage mothers. In their view parenting responsibilities prevented them from engaging in education in the immediate future. However, many expressed the intention to return to education in later life

Table 4.3 Care Leaver Experience

Louise is a 20 year old care leaver living with her husband. Prior to finding out she was pregnant she had applied to college to undertake Highers. This has now been postponed but she is motivated to try again once the baby is born. Ultimately, she'd like to do a social work course so that she can use her experience of foster care to help others. She feels she will get the Highers required to get a place on a social work course and is prepared, if necessary, to attend evening classes to realise her ambition.
Haley is an expectant mother and is waiting to hear if she has been allocated a Local Authority flat. She is keen to go to college but doesn't feel she will be able to do this until after the baby is born. She's not sure yet what she wants to study. Her concern at the moment is to sort out stable accommodation. She worries about how her benefits will be affected if she goes to college, especially how she will pay her rent and bills.

- **Additional Support Needs:** some young people were anxious about learning because they had struggled at school. Fear of failure, poor basic skills (literacy and numeracy) and dyslexia often impeded their willingness to give education 'a go'.

Institutional Factors

4.24 Institutional barriers centred around:

- **Competition for Places:** there is some evidence that even if young people wish to engage with education, they can experience difficulties securing a place. Having low levels of attainment can make it hard for them to compete with better qualified and, in some cases, more highly motivated equivalents. Several young people and support staff gave examples of young people being placed on waiting lists for a course place. For young people on the threshold of engagement this could have negative implications for self-esteem, motivation and, where they were not successful, could reinforce a sense of failure and distrust of the system. This also impacts upon the ability to 'strike while the

iron is hot’ and build on existing motivation and momentum being expressed by the young person. Some young people perceived that their past histories (such as offending, substance abuse, erratic attendance in school) would be considered unfavourably by FE and that they would be unable to obtain a place. The current system therefore does not appear to favour non-traditional entrants (i.e. less well-qualified school leavers)

- **Availability of Appropriate Courses:** the need for an appropriate supply of courses was a recurrent theme cited by stakeholders interviewed. Several highlighted the fact that courses tended to be supply-led rather than consumer-based. To engage young people effectively, it was highlighted that courses needed to be both interesting to young people and beneficial/relevant to their future training and employment prospects. However, it should also be noted that young people’s expectations of the types of courses they can take up were often not realistic – i.e. based on a lack of knowledge and understanding about course availability and the competition for such places. This point also relates to the need – noted earlier – for effective careers advice
- **Inflexibility of College Intake:** the current college intake system was not considered flexible enough to meet the needs of the non-traditional learner. This relates to the point noted above about ‘*striking while the iron is hot*’. Both stakeholder and young people intimated that young people need to be able to start on programmes at points when their lives are stable and the motivation is high. Such times might not necessarily coincide with typical academic start dates
- **Learner Image:** the evidence collected in this study suggested that many young people do not feel learning is for them because they do not conform to what they perceive to be the image of a traditional learner. The traditional learner was perceived to be someone from a supportive family background, with strong academic credentials
- **Limited Understanding of Needs:** several commented on the need for FE to be more flexible in terms of approach to dealing with young people and accepting the difficulties they face, (e.g. that problems in their home lives might prevent them from attending college for a period). It was highlighted that some college staff did not always understand or were not well equipped to deal efficiently with such complex needs

NEET Experience
Having recently completed a transition programme, Liam (NEET, aged 18) had embarked on an outward bound course at college. He was really motivated and had set clear goals for himself after the course. When he first applied to the college, Liam was put on a waiting list for a place. He was accepted because someone else dropped out. Had he not been accepted, he wasn’t sure what he’d have done instead. It was course content that was motivating him. He wasn’t interested in other courses like maths or IT.
Care Leaver Experience
One group of care leavers stated that places were limited on their preferred courses such as painting and decoration, hairdressing and joinery courses. “ <i>There aren’t enough spaces on courses we’re interested in</i> ”. Care leaver
Stakeholder Perspective
“ <i>Colleges find it difficult to accept that commitment from care leavers is difficult. They need to be more accepting of failure and encourage re-applications to build up a value system among young people.</i> ” Support Worker, Influencing stakeholder, Care

- **Lack of Adequate Support:** the need for support featured on a number of levels. As demonstrated previously, deficiencies in careers advice and support acted as a barrier for some young people in exploring possible learning options. In addition, many in both groups lacked support from family and peers, although this was typically more so for young care leavers. Lack of ongoing support once young people began to re-engage with education was also considered a significant barrier. This issue is explored later in Chapter 5, however, deficiencies in learning support, mentoring and life skills support were identified as key constraints to sustaining engagement
- **Learning Styles:** a small number of young people considered learning structures and styles as a barrier to engaging in education. They perceived that approaches to learning would be the same as those they had experienced in school. This view tended to be more pertinent to older young people who had not engaged in education for some years, and whose educational experiences tended to have been ‘chalk and talk’, traditional experiences in large classes.

Summary of Views of the Barriers to Participation by Respondent Type

4.25 The emerging themes regarding barriers to participation presented in this section (YCL, NEET, stakeholder) are summarised in Table 3.5 below by respondent type.

Table 4.4 Summary Table Views of the Barriers to Participation¹⁶

Theme Emerging	Type of Stakeholder Reported by
Financial Concerns <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benefits trap • Homelessness • Other financial Constraints 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Care leaver group • NEET Group • Strategic Stakeholders • Influencing stakeholders • Care leaver group • Strategic Stakeholders (Care only) • Influencing stakeholders (Care only) • Care leaver group • NEET Group • Strategic Stakeholders • Influencing stakeholders
Personal and Circumstantial <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attitude to self • Attitude towards education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Care leaver group • NEET Group • Strategic Stakeholders • Influencing stakeholders • Care leaver group • NEET Group • Strategic Stakeholders

¹⁶ This table presents an overview of the key issues by the type of stakeholder consulted. The information presented in the table must be taken alongside the findings reported in the text. Where a particular stakeholder type is not represented – this may not necessarily mean that that the theme was not present for that participant group. Rather, the theme was not particularly prevalent amongst this group, or they did not comment about it specifically during interview i.e. the theme did not present itself as an emerging issue in the interview.

Theme Emerging	Type of Stakeholder Reported by
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceived limited benefits of education • Behaviour problems • Unrealistic expectations • Fear of educational establishments • Fear of stigmatisation • Health problems • Parenthood • Additional support needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influencing stakeholders • Strategic Stakeholders • Influencing stakeholders • Care leaver group • NEET Group • Strategic Stakeholders (NEET only) • Influencing stakeholders (NEET only) • Care leaver group • NEET Group • Strategic Stakeholders (NEET only) • Influencing stakeholders (NEET only) • Care leaver group • NEET Group • Strategic Stakeholders • Influencing stakeholders • Care leaver group • NEET Group • Strategic Stakeholders • Influencing stakeholders • Care leaver group • NEET Group • Strategic Stakeholders • Influencing stakeholders • Care leaver group • NEET Group • Strategic Stakeholders • Care leaver group • NEET Group
<p>Institutional</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competition for places • Availability of appropriate courses • College intake • Learner image • Limited understanding of needs • Lack of support provision • Learning styles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Care leaver group • NEET Group • Strategic Stakeholders • Influencing stakeholders • Strategic Stakeholders • Influencing stakeholders • Care leaver group • NEET Group • Strategic Stakeholders • Influencing stakeholders • Care leaver group • NEET Group • Strategic Stakeholders • Influencing stakeholders • Care leaver group • NEET Group • Strategic Stakeholders • Influencing stakeholders • Care leaver group • NEET Group

CHAPTER FIVE A PROPOSED SYSTEM OF ENTITLEMENT

Introduction

5.1 Views of a proposed system of learning entitlement are presented in this section. Consideration is also given to the extent to which a system of learning entitlement would be sufficient to encourage educational re-engagement.

Table 5.1 Key Findings

- There was widespread support for the *concept* of learning entitlement, but despite this, few felt it was the answer to improving the educational engagement of the two groups concerned
- Interviewees were concerned about how it would or could operate in practice and whether, in real terms, it constituted anything different to the current situation
- The main concern was that entitlement to funding was just one small part of the jigsaw. To encourage educational re-engagement, a multitude of other barriers would need to be addressed
- Solutions would need to be multifaceted and more ‘joined up’ to provide a holistic approach to the complex issue of securing educational re-engagement among the two groups consulted. Strategies to sustain engagement as well as to encourage entry were considered crucial.

A System of Learning Entitlement

5.2 Young people and stakeholders were asked for their views on a proposed system of learning entitlement. The definition of learning entitlement followed that proposed by the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee (2002)¹⁷, that everyone should have an equal chance to take advantage of the education opportunities regardless of how or when they wish to access them and that this should be a legal right for all individuals.

5.3 Therefore, under the proposed system, funding for fees and maintenance support would not be discretionary, but guaranteed. Individuals who met the requirements would be guaranteed support through learning. This could be by giving everyone a number of credits (for example, 720 Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework (SCQF) credits) to be ‘spent’ on learning whenever and however individuals wished.

Views of Learning Entitlement

5.4 In principle, the majority of those consulted from both the NEET and the young care leaver groups as well as stakeholders felt that a proposed system of learning entitlement was a good idea. Support for the concept of entitlement centred on the following points:

¹⁷ ELLC 9th Report into Lifelong Learning, October 2002.

- **That is was flexible and not time-bound** – the notion of being able to ‘spend’ learning entitlement in different ways and at different times throughout life was positively received. This is because it gave young people an option to re-enter education when they felt ready and did not mean they would miss out because they chose not to go to college straight away at 16. Stakeholders consulted felt that this was important for the care leaver group who may struggle to cope with education at the same time as leaving care – i.e. too many life-changing experiences at once. Some project workers for the NEET group felt that this flexibility was important because as young people grew older their attitudes to education changed. Several spoke from personal experience, having been ‘NEET’ themselves at a younger age. They were therefore interested in the concept from a personal perspective as well as from a young person perspective
- **Equitable** – several young people felt that this approach would be more equitable as everybody would be offered the same. This was important as some perceived the current allocation of bursaries, for example, to be inequitable
- **Guaranteed** – similarly, the fact that funding was guaranteed was considered important that ‘you had a right to it’ and that ‘you would get it’, that it ‘wasn’t someone else’s decision’
- **Non-bureaucratic** – some young people were positive about the concept of being ‘entitled to funding’ if that removed the barrier of form-filling or the need to ‘jump through hoops’ to get funding

“It makes you seem like you’re allowed to have it.” Care Leaver

“It would take away the college making a judgement about you.” Care Leaver

“It is better if the young person knew they had a ‘right’ to funding. It would make a difference because then decisions based on hard evidence could be made and it would remove any suggestion that it would be discretionary.” Strategic Stakeholder Care

“Some young people start to think more seriously about post-compulsory learning in their twenties. So the idea you can pick it up in later life is a good one.” Strategic Stakeholder Care/NEET

5.5 Despite widespread support for the notion of entitlement across all respondents, few felt it offered the complete ‘answer’ to increasing educational re-engagement for the two groups concerned.

“In principle it’s a good idea, but it is unlikely that it would have much of an impact in the short term on the type of young people we are talking about. It must be coupled with measures to address attitudinal issues, motivation, and fear of establishments.” Influencing Stakeholder NEET/Care

“Only a small percentage would take up education if it was easier to access from a financial point of view.” Influencing Stakeholder Care

“It wouldn’t make any difference to those who are disengaged.” Influencing Stakeholder Care

“Those that are motivated will do it anyway, and for those that aren’t, it is not because of financial bureaucracy.” Influencing Stakeholder NEET

5.6 Many of those interviewed qualified their response as being dependent on the detail of what any system of learning entitlement would comprise. Others supported the notion but with the caveat that additional strategies be introduced alongside it to tackle other barriers. These issues are considered separately below.

Operational Considerations

5.7 For many of those consulted, support for the concept of learning entitlement was dependent on how it would operate both in terms of design and delivery. For example:

- **Eligibility** – several issues were raised with regards to eligibility. Concerns were expressed about who was eligible and whether entitlement to funding would be dependent on the types and levels of courses studied and the pattern of learning (full or part-time). Stakeholders felt this was an important area for consideration in relation to the two groups concerned for three key reasons:
 - **Lack of adequate basic skills:** a prior history of low attainment meant that some young people had poor basic skills. Entitlement would therefore need to cover a wide range of basic or low level courses
 - **A need for courses to be learner-led:** a key concern among stakeholders was that courses need to be interesting and relevant to young people to attract them into learning. Therefore any such system of learning entitlement would need to cover courses that young people could be encouraged to undertake. Examples cited included hairdressing, construction, orienteering, outdoor pursuits and childcare
 - **A need for horizontal as well as vertical progression:** some stakeholders highlighted the need to recognise the value of non-academic courses as first steps to learning and the benefits of ‘sideways’ as well as upward progression. Some young people may go through a cycle of entering education, dropping out and re-entering before they have sufficient confidence or stability in their lives, to move on
- **Level of Financial Support:** some young people and the support staff who represent them highlighted the need to ensure levels of funding were sufficient. Several young people would not be prepared to enter education if that was at the risk of losing benefits. One stakeholder felt that for education to be attractive to young people, the amounts provided would have to exceed that of benefits. Although the opportunity to resume basic education in later life was attractive, some stakeholders commented that circumstances would have changed too and therefore the extent of financial barriers faced may be different (for example, individuals may have families to support, a

mortgage to pay, a lifestyle to sustain). For care leavers, concerns centred on how this would affect entitlement to housing benefit and thereby stability. This raises an important question. Should the financial support for care leavers be different to that for those who have not been through care? The need to provide adequate levels of financial support for young care leavers to take up education in later life has been highlighted in previous research. Allen (2003¹⁸) recommended that financial support for care leaver education should be at an equivalent level to that which they would have received when they were in the education system. This research also suggested that *“benefits and training allowances should reflect the additional costs associated with living independently compared to a young person living in the home environment.”* Whilst the need to take account of the living circumstances of care leavers was acknowledged by several stakeholder organisations, some of the NEET group highlighted that it could not always be assumed that just because they were living at home, NEET young people were supported financially by their parents

- **Demand:** some stakeholders were anxious as to the affect of learning entitlement on demand for courses. There was concern expressed as to how the supply side would cope not just with offering places but with additional support requirements (such as mentoring, literacy and numeracy)
- **Process:** many interviewees questioned how the system would operate. Would entitlement be criteria based? Would young people still have to fill in forms to get it? Would places on courses be restricted (for example, by entry requirements or limitations in place numbers?) If the answer to such questions is yes, then how is entitlement different from current arrangements? How then would it encourage participation differently to the current system? One stakeholder felt that if entitlement were implemented, applications for maintenance support would probably need to be processed centrally. It was highlighted that such an approach would take away the support that is currently provided locally by colleges to help young people complete the relevant paperwork and other forms of local support provided at pre-engagement stage. One college stakeholder felt that under the current arrangements colleges were not given enough local discretion to respond to individual needs. As such, any further ‘centralisation’ might further hamper a college’s ability to provide personalised and tailored support to the young people from the two target groups in question
- **Defining credits:** similarly some stakeholders questioned how a system of credits to spend on learning would operate. What would count as a credit? When is a credit considered spent? What happens if people drop out? How many times can someone drop-out and re-engage? These are important areas for consideration given the fact that many of those interviewed had tried post 16 education but had dropped out. For vulnerable young people such as those interviewed, the opportunity to try again is important. Difficulties in one area of their lives can tip the balance in terms of whether or not they can cope with education

¹⁸ Allen, M. (2003). Into the Mainstream: care leavers entering work, education and training. Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

- **Cost and Deadweight:** concerns were levied regarding resource implications i.e. that entitlement would be expensive to implement. However, one stakeholder dismissed this argument, highlighting that there would always be a cap on costs regardless of how funding was distributed. Another stakeholder felt that there was ‘huge potential for deadweight’ as many young people who would qualify for entitlement would have entered education anyway. This suggests the need for very clear eligibility criteria.

Summary of Views of the Views of Learning Entitlement by Respondent Type

5.8 Views of learning entitlement are summarised in Table 5.2 below by respondent type (YCL, NEET, stakeholder).

Table 5.2 Summary Table Views of learning entitlement¹⁹

Theme Emerging	Type of Stakeholder Reported by
Support for concept of learning entitlement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Care leaver group • NEET Group • Strategic Stakeholders • Influencing stakeholders
Reasons why concept supported	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexible and not time-bound 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic Stakeholders • Influencing stakeholders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equitable • Guaranteed • Non-bureaucratic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Care leaver group • NEET Group • Care leaver group • NEET Group • Care leaver group • NEET Group • Strategic Stakeholders • Influencing stakeholders
Not the answer to educational re-engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Care leaver group • NEET Group • Strategic Stakeholders • Influencing stakeholders
Operational considerations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eligibility <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Lack of adequate basic skills ○ Need for learner-led courses ○ Need for horizontal AND vertical progression • Level of financial support available 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Care leaver group • NEET Group • Strategic Stakeholders • Influencing stakeholders • Strategic Stakeholders • Influencing stakeholders • Strategic Stakeholders • Influencing stakeholders Strategic Stakeholders

¹⁹ This table presents an overview of the key issues by the type of stakeholder consulted. The information presented in the table must be taken alongside the findings reported in the text. Where a particular stakeholder type is not represented – this may not necessarily mean that that the theme was not present for that participant group. Rather, the theme was not particularly prevalent amongst this group, or they did not comment about it specifically during interview i.e. the theme did not present itself as an emerging issue in the interview.

Theme Emerging	Type of Stakeholder Reported by
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demand 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influencing stakeholders • Strategic Stakeholders (NEET only)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influencing stakeholders (NEET only) • Strategic Stakeholders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defining credits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influencing stakeholders • Strategic Stakeholders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Costs and deadweight 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influencing stakeholders • Strategic Stakeholders

Is Entitlement Alone Sufficient to Encourage Educational Re-engagement?

5.9 Few felt that entitlement was enough to encourage educational re-engagement. The evidence suggests that for both groups of young people, participation in post compulsory education is about far more than money. There are a range of other issues that also need to be tackled. The general consensus was that entitlement alone would not be sufficient to encourage educational re-engagement and that it was just one piece of a complex jigsaw.

“It is not just about funding education. (For care leavers), it is also about financing living costs.” Strategic Stakeholder Care

“Money does make a difference but if that’s the sole motivation young people won’t stay in education.” Influencing Stakeholder NEET

5.10 To effectively promote participation, policies would need to address the multitude of other barriers facing young people (personal, circumstantial and institutional barriers, as well as the vast array of financial constraints presented in Chapter 4). Solutions and strategies which merit consideration alongside a system of entitlement are presented below.

Start Young: The Importance of Early Intervention

5.11 The need to focus on early intervention to prevent young people from becoming disengaged with education was a recurrent theme among stakeholders. Several commented that the issue should not be so much about ‘putting things right’ but ‘not letting things go wrong in the first place.’ Strategies to prevent young people becoming disengaged with education at an early age should be considered and improved. The evidence collected as part of this research suggests that, in general terms, this is about the early tackling of negative attitudes (both of young people and school staff), behaviour management issues and low attainment. It is recognised that a range of Scottish Executive policies and initiatives are in place to address the need for early (and sometimes specialist) intervention support. These include Integrated Community Schools, EMAs and a greater focus on vocational learning.

5.12 In the case of young care leavers and looked after children there is also a need to provide supportive adult(s) who can show an ongoing interest in the child’s educational progress and to address the tendency for placement moves. As a previous study exploring the educational experiences of looked after children notes, *“whilst some degree of placement*

*change may be unavoidable, failing to fully consider the needs of young people dealing with such change is not”(Harker 2003).*²⁰

Change Attitudes to Education

5.13 Changing attitudes towards education was considered paramount. In developing strategies to increase participation, there is a need to consider how to ‘switch young people onto learning’ and change negative mindsets. For some this was about providing taster sessions, learning in small groups or raising awareness of differing types of provision (to demonstrate learning is not all “chalk and talk”). Feedback from some of the young people we spoke to suggests that there is a need to reduce the risks they perceive to ‘trying education for the second time’. One young person felt he would try learning again if he felt he was being educated with other people who were ‘like him.’

A NEET Young Person
Mary is 18 and left school at 16 since when she has been unemployed. She recently started a life skills course which she has found very different to school. ‘The staff treat you differently and talk to you like a grown up.’ Her views towards education have changed as she has grown older which she attributes to maturity. She now sees education as important and hopes to apply for a college place next year though she is not sure what to study and whether she’ll be funded to do it.
A Care Leaver
Jack left school with no qualifications at 16 and is now 22. Since leaving care, he has had spells of employment as a gardener. He is a recovering drug addict. Jack is reluctant to re-engage with education because he struggled at school. He is dyslexic which he considers a major barrier to learning as he is scared of being seen as a failure. Jack thinks he might consider learning. Factors that would help reduce his concerns would be taster sessions, an opportunity to go to a college and observe what it’s like, small group tuition, being educated with other care leavers to whom he can relate and help with his dyslexia.

5.14 Evidence from the consultations with young people suggests attitudes towards education shift as they mature, or when they are provided with life skills support through other provision (motivation, transitional programmes, for example). However, the challenge is then to translate aspirations into actions.

Increase self-motivation

5.15 To encourage young people to re-enter education, there is a need to improve self motivation. Many young people needed support to increase their self-esteem, confidence and self-belief. This may involve providing supportive adults or role models to support and encourage young people. Whilst there is evidence that some young people are provided this type of support from life skills provision, for example, this is not always sustained once the young person leaves the programme or moves to an alternative provider.

5.16 Shifting attitudes to education and increasing self-motivation to learn is, however, a complex task, since a range of other barriers and issues are inter-related. These may involve the need to demonstrate the benefits of learning over a job, the need to consider the financial

²⁰ Harker, R., Dobel-Ober, D., Lawrence, J., Berridge, D, and Sinclair, R. (2003). Who Takes Care of Education? Looked after children’s perceptions of support for educational progress. *Child and Family Social Work*, 8, pp 89-100.

implications of educational engagement and a need to encourage young people to take a short-term risk for long-term gain. These issues are explored in further detail below.

5.17 Is learning entitlement just about learning or should it be more concerned with transferring NEET to EET? If the focus is simply on learning then this is based on a value judgement that education is better than a potentially low paid job. Furthermore, even if after successful or unsuccessful engagement with post-compulsory education, this still leads to a low paid job, this raises questions about the incentives to young people to re-enter education. It could be that young people are making rational judgements not to re-engage with learning, based on their current financial position and assessment of the risks. A number of studies have identified the potential opportunity costs of education and training options as opposed to employment:

“...it would appear that returns to lower level vocational training may be insufficient to ensure that learning pays sufficiently to warrant the necessary investments...”²¹

“There is a lack of clarity concerning the value of FE for low attainers who are assessing their transition options – there are some concerns that FE is not always best positioned to address the needs of low attainers and that there might be opportunity costs in these young people not seeking out the more traditional labour market routes which they might have ordinarily pursued. This relates to how young people assess their options and that FE as a ‘second chance’ to improve attainment might not always be the best option for some young people who might benefit more from joining the labour market at a young age.”²²

5.18 Furthermore, there might be financial disincentives present which prevent some young people from considering learning re-engagement. This study has indicated that some young people are very risk-averse about how learning re-engagement is likely to affect their current benefits entitlement. These benefits, while acting as a relative form of ‘security’, could be producing a benefits trap.

5.19 It could be argued that the NEET/ care leaver group are not following the usual ‘risk’ trajectory of those entering FE or HE (who forego current earnings for projected increased earning potential in the future). This trajectory appears to have become ‘distorted’ for the NEET group and young care leavers, through their reliance on the benefits system.

Education-readiness

5.20 Being ready for education was also highlighted as an important pre-requisite for success. This meant different things for different people. For some, it was about managing their drug addiction or alcoholism, for others, behaviour and motivation. For some, it meant having structure in their life, a routine, or, in the case of care leavers, having stable accommodation, and the ability to manage independently once away from an institution.

²¹ Policy Research Institute (1995). Learning Pays: Individual Commitment, Learning and Economic Development.

²² York Consulting (2005). A literature Review of the NEET Group. Scottish Executive.

Some stakeholders commented that the Pathway Plan for young people leaving care was a positive step forward and provided a useful starting point. However, several stakeholders working with care leavers highlighted that, in developing a plan of action, there were other priorities to address that were often more pressing than education.

5.21 Defining the point at which young people may be ready to re-enter education is difficult. Strategies to increase participation therefore should acknowledge that some young people may need multiple attempts before they are sufficiently 'ready to engage'. For some young people, other barriers to education will need to be addressed first. The 'holistic' needs of young people who have been previously disengaged from learning need to be monitored and addressed on an ongoing basis. This appears to be the case for both the NEET group and young care leavers. Given their previous experiences and relative vulnerabilities, it is often the case that a set-back in any aspect of their lives has a negative impact on all or many aspects.

Focus on Retention as well as Recruitment

5.22 There is a great deal of evidence, both from the young people and those who represent them, that the issue is not just about getting young people to enter education but about **retaining them** once they are there. Whilst entitlement might help to allay financial concerns that may act as a barrier to initial participation, it does not tackle the issue of retention. Several of the young people interviewed had embarked on learning at some point but few had sustained this to course completion. Strategies need to be provided therefore to support young people once they are in learning. This relates to the 'holistic' support requirements of such young people. The resource-intensive nature of such support should also be considered, in terms of capacity and the overall costs.

Provide Ongoing Support

5.23 The need for ongoing support featured as a strong theme during consultations. A requirement for various levels of support was highlighted including:

- **Careers Advice and Support** - Young people need access to information and advice about courses, help with applications and interviews, information about various options available to them. As demonstrated in Chapter 3, some deficiencies in careers provision are apparent and there is a need to improve access for vulnerable groups. There is also a need to increase knowledge of educational opportunities and the associated funding across the various stakeholder groups who work with, advise and influence young people. Some interviewees felt further education needed to be marketed differently. The current image of young people in FE was considered to be one of 'shiny, happy people', and therefore, one that many disadvantaged young people cannot relate to

- **Benefits Advice** – Young people also need realistic independent advice about how a course of action might impact on their current benefit entitlement and housing. Although many perceived a reduction in benefits precluded participation in education, the extent to which this was perception or reality was not always transparent. Nevertheless, stakeholders working with young care leavers were clear that the additional costs of living independently and the need for secure housing were crucial for care leavers to enter and sustain learning
- **Role models** – one stakeholder commented that young care leavers would benefit from positive role models, young people ‘like them’ and from similar backgrounds who have succeeded despite adverse circumstances
- **Support for learning** – once in education, young people need ongoing support to assist their learning. This may be basic skills tuition, advice on dyslexia and other special needs, mentoring or tutoring support. There was evidence that some of this support does exist in Glasgow and Edinburgh, but is by no means universal, and appears to exist in ‘pockets’ across the two cities
- **Help with life skills/coping** – the evidence collected as part of this study shows that many of these young people have chaotic lives. Difficulties in one area of their life (such as housing, family, health or financial problems) can trigger a host of other problems. Young people need ongoing emotional and life skills support, someone to help them tackle difficulties and provide advice, motivational support and promote self-belief
- **Tailored/flexible assistance** – it is clear that despite commonalities, NEET groups and care leavers are far from homogeneous. Several stakeholders highlighted the need for support to be flexible and tailored to suit the diversity of need. Such support would focus not only on educational issues, but also on other factors which may (temporarily) prohibit young people from learning. This is needed not only to encourage young people to take up learning but also to support them once they are there. This is to ensure that, in the event that other problems emerge, help is available to support them and to assist them to re-engage quickly. This relates to the point outlined above. There is a need for ‘holistic’ support mechanisms, which are flexible and long-term
- **Continuity** – The need for consistency in terms of who provides advice and support was also highlighted. One care leaver commented that a number of professionals had come in and out of his life and he felt he could not rely on them. Provision of a consistent presence to support and advise young people could be within the education sector or outside of it. The central issue is that by ensuring continuity in who provides it, young people can build up trusting relationships with those who support them

“Young care leavers and NEET young people are not a homogeneous group. They are coming from different places. It is not possible to meet the needs of everyone within one package.” Influencing Stakeholder Care

“A supplement on top of the young person’s giro (JSA) would not be sufficient to encourage young people (care leavers) with the problems they face to attend college. There has to be a recognised support system which helps them all the

way through. If they had a system where, if a young person was in FE and their rent was paid each month, then that might improve matters. It would mean less risk of dropping-out of college.” Support Worker, Influencing Stakeholder Care

“Young care leavers face very many barriers to entering FE, not least that their lives are very chaotic. They are often relying on very fragile relationships that they have built up. Often these relationships will lead them into drugs, drink and early pregnancy.” Support Worker Influencing Stakeholder Care

Consider Institutional Barriers

5.24 Two issues emerged in relation to institutional barriers:

- There is evidence that prior low levels of attainment are precluding some young people from entering education i.e. prior low attainment means that they are not qualifying to take part in FE. Therefore, the need exists to examine the extent to which young people would realistically be able to participate even if entitlement were to be introduced
- Some young care leavers felt they were discriminated against when applying for college courses due to the perception by the college that, on the whole, the group was unlikely to succeed on any course. It is not clear whether this was perception or reality. Nevertheless, it could be that prior lower attainment perpetuates low expectations among some educational institutions. Targets for achievement and retention rates may mitigate against non-traditional learners securing places

Opportunity Cost

5.25 One stakeholder interviewed felt that there was an opportunity cost of promoting participation in learning at the expense of participation in employment or training options. This relates to comments earlier in the report which questioned the ‘value judgement’ of re-entering education, and whether it is the best option for the target groups (NEET and young care leavers). In the event that these groups are able to re-engage successfully with learning – given the barriers outlined in this report – it is unclear if this would translate into more successful labour market outcomes than if they had pursued the labour market in the first instance (i.e. avoided learning re-engagement).

5.26 The young people who took part in this study seemed quite adept at weighing up their options, given the information they have at their disposal. Currently, it seems that many young people favour entering the labour market to re-entering education. If it is deemed appropriate and necessary to encourage them to consider further their education options, it would seem that a more compelling case for the benefits of doing so is required.

Joining Up

5.27 Some felt there was still a need for better, more joined up services. These services should not be limited to providers who are directly involved in formal IAG or post-school

education provision, but should encompass a wider range of providers/support staff who are in close proximity to these young people and are therefore likely to be able to exert some level of influence and support in guiding young people through their education options. In particular, it was felt that there was a need to tap into youth and voluntary services to promote learning to young people.

5.28 It has been noted earlier in the report that many service providers were unsure about the support (or, indeed, the processes) available for the NEET and young care leaver groups to re-enter education. This suggests the need for a more ‘joined-up system’, with a stronger foundation of knowledge and sign-posting among this service provider ‘network’. This would help to ensure that ‘messages’ and advice to young people are consistent, clear and accurate.

5.29 Several of the issues identified above are not new. Nevertheless, the evidence suggests that strategies to tackle barriers to re-entering education for the groups in question piecemeal. Solutions need to be multifaceted and more ‘joined up’ to provide a holistic approach to the complex issue of securing educational engagement among the two groups consulted. Strategies to sustain engagement as well as to encourage entry are considered crucial.

Summary of Views of Other Solutions and Strategies by Respondent Type

5.30 Strategies that would need to be considered alongside entitlement are summarised in Table 5.3 below by respondent type.

Table 5.3 Summary Table Views of Other solutions and strategies required alongside entitlement²³

Theme Emerging	Type of Stakeholder Reported by
Start Young	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic Stakeholders
Change Attitudes to Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Care leaver group • NEET Group • Strategic Stakeholders • Influencing stakeholders
Increase self-motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Care leaver group • NEET Group • Strategic Stakeholders • Influencing stakeholders
Education-Readiness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic Stakeholders • Influencing stakeholders
Focus on retention as well as recruitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic Stakeholders • Influencing stakeholders
Provide on-going support	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Careers advice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Care leaver group • NEET Group • Strategic Stakeholders • Influencing stakeholders

²³ This table presents an overview of the key issues by the type of stakeholder consulted. The information presented in the table must be taken alongside the findings reported in the text. Where a particular stakeholder type is not represented – this may not necessarily mean that that the theme was not present for that participant group. Rather, the theme was not particularly prevalent amongst this group, or they did not comment about it specifically during interview i.e. the theme did not present itself as an emerging issue in the interview.

Theme Emerging	Type of Stakeholder Reported by
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benefits advice • Positive role models • Support for learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic Stakeholders • Influencing stakeholders • Strategic Stakeholders (Care only) • Strategic Stakeholders • Influencing stakeholders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help with life-skills/coping 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic Stakeholders • Influencing stakeholders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tailored/flexible assistance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic Stakeholders • Influencing stakeholders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Care leaver group
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider Institutional Barriers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Care leaver group • NEET Group • Strategic Stakeholders • Influencing stakeholders
Opportunity Cost	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic Stakeholders
Joining Up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic Stakeholders

Conclusions

6.1 The evidence from this study confirms that of previous research with regards to the factors affecting involvement in post-16 education opportunities among the two groups – NEET and young care leavers. These include how prior low levels of attainment, health problems, additional support needs, housing difficulties, and negative experiences of school operate in complex ways to discourage re-entering education.

6.2 Young people from both groups face multiple barriers to re-engaging with post-compulsory education for which there is no ‘one size fits all’ solution.

6.3 Whilst the notion of a system of learning entitlement is generally considered valuable, few felt that it provided the answer to increased participation among the target groups.

6.4 Barriers to participation are not just a matter of finance, although tackling financial constraints is important, particularly for those faced with the additional costs of living independently. While this is mainly an issue for young care leavers, individuals within the wider NEET group are not exempt from facing this challenge. Of equal importance is the need to address other personal, circumstantial and institutional barriers facing both the NEET and care leaver groups.

6.5 Solutions to remove barriers to participation are multifaceted, complex and inevitably, resource intensive. Some of the areas highlighted have already been identified in previous research and some are being tackled through a range of differing policy areas (for example, the need for adequate careers advice and support through the Careers Scotland Inclusiveness and key worker service, a need for learner-led rather than demand-led provision and financial top-ups for young care leavers). Nevertheless, it is clear that strategies to remove barriers to participation cannot be tackled in isolation. There is a need to provide better joined-up services in order to more effectively recognise the diversity within and across these two groups of young people, and to be better placed to respond to needs, as they present themselves.

6.6 Despite the conclusion that participation in post-compulsory education is not likely to be increased if tuition and maintenance support was offered on an entitlement basis rather than a guaranteed or discretionary one, it is not suggested that the notion of learning entitlement be abandoned. There is a need for further clarification of the policy objectives behind learning entitlement for future research to be able to draw firm conclusions. This is explored further below.

Recommendations/Implications for policy

Structural Considerations for Learning Entitlement

6.7 Providing adequate support to assist these young people to re-enter education (for example, by improving Information, Advice and Guidance, (IAG)) or to sustain their commitment to education (for example, by providing mentoring or life skills support) are areas which are already receiving significant focus and resource across Scotland. However, it would seem from the results of this study that much more would be required – resources, the skills and backgrounds of service providers and further infrastructural developments to make the systems more ‘joined-up’. The idea of learning entitlement clearly does not exist in a vacuum and has considerable implications for how the surrounding ‘support infrastructure’ is defined and resourced.

Defining Policy Scope

6.8 Solutions to address the barriers facing young care leavers and the NEET group are complex, resource intensive and unlikely to be met by a single policy initiative (such as that proposed by learning entitlement, through increased tuition and maintenance support).

6.9 An additional challenge is that learning entitlement could be ‘all things to all people’. This research scoping study has clarified that future research would require to test more clearly defined hypotheses about learning entitlement, in order to provide consultees with something more tangible to discuss. It is clear that learning entitlement could take on many different focuses and definitions and these need to be separated out and tested. In the longer term, this is likely to offer a significantly clearer policy scope of what is likely to ‘work’ and the implications of the various options.

6.10 As such, the parameters of learning entitlement in policy terms might benefit from clearer definition, as the ‘answers’ are very much dependent on the ‘questions’ which follow the policy scope.

6.11 In essence, this scoping study has attempted to test or explore two issues:

- the groups who would be eligible for entitlement; and
- what they might be eligible for

6.12 In this sense it is trying to address both macro and micro level issues at the same time. In order for future research to explore these issues more effectively there is a need to separate these out and then to redefine the scope of each by posing a series of questions, such as those set out below:

- Entitlement to learning by **different target group** – future questions for consideration could explore: Whether entitlement should be about promoting entitlement to lifelong learning for all? Whether IAG services are therefore effectively operating all-age²⁴? Could the supply-side cope? Are some groups more entitled than others? Should it be targeted? If targeted, how could the effective distribution of resources be ensured? Which sub-sets of NEET should be the focus? Is this confined to 16-21 year olds?
- Entitlement to learning on basis of **type of entitlement** – e.g. is it about additional support? What would be an appropriate number of credits? Does the level of credit needed vary for different target groups? Should there be preparatory courses before starting a course? Should entitlement extend to more informal types of learning, such as those provided in community settings?

6.13 However, before exploring the nature of any future research, there is a need to examine and articulate why learning entitlement merits this type of analysis - is the central objective to promote lifelong learning? Is it to change NEET to EET? Is it about inclusion and economic growth? There would be different policy responses for each of these objectives and they are not necessarily interchangeable.

6.14 From the above, it seems necessary to reflect further on the different possible iterations of ‘learning entitlement’ and to consider these from both the perspective of national objectives and the various hypotheses which merit ‘testing’ through further research.

Issues for Further Research

6.15 Finally, this research focused on a small number of young care leavers and young people not in education, employment or training. It also centred on individuals from within a pre-defined age-range, 16-21. Any future research on entitlement which continues to focus on young care leavers and the NEET group should consider:

- **whether the responses towards learning entitlement are differential depending on the age of young people** – Are the barriers to education different for different age cohorts and do the financial/economic constraints therefore differ?
- **how have barriers to re-entering education been overcome by young care leavers or previously NEET young people who have had a successful re-engagement with learning?** - What support did they receive? How did they remain committed to education in adverse circumstances? To what extent did they overcome financial barriers without a system of entitlement? What were or are their outcomes (educational attainment, labour market)?
- **what would be the likely completion and attainment rates of these young people if they were successfully encouraged to engage?**

²⁴ Careers Scotland is already an all-age service. However, it is not known how effective this is in terms of engaging them.

Summary

6.16 In summary:

- the idea of learning entitlement was perceived positively by all but the nature of this entitlement requires further consideration
- the current definition of entitlement - as explored through this study - was perceived as being insufficient to address the many other barriers which exist to re-entering learning for the groups in question.

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