**Being looked after quiz: Dispelling the myths (“Answers”)**

*Which of the following statements are True and which are False?*

1. **Looked after children young people are mostly offenders.**

False: The majority (over 80%) of both referrals to the Reporter and decisions by a children’s hearing about compulsory measures of supervision refer to ‘care and protection’ grounds. Even where offence grounds are considered the care and protection of the child is paramount in making decisions about wellbeing. For more information refer to the annual reports of the Scottish Children’s Reporters Administration at www.scra.gov.uk.

1. **Children and young people looked after ‘away from home’ live in children’s units / homes.**

False: Children looked after ‘away from home’ sometimes live in a children’s unit (other terms include, ‘children’s home’ or children’s house). In fact less than 10% of children looked after in Scotland live in group care settings. Other examples of group settings are residential schools and secure care facilities. Around a half live in family-type settings, such as foster care (30%) and kinship care (20%). Foster care is more common as a placement for younger children and residential care for older children. For example, about 20% of 12-15 year old looked after children live in residential settings, compared with less than 3% of 5-11 year olds and a negligible proportion of under-fives. About 40% of looked after children continue to live with family. This category is termed, ‘looked after at home’.

1. **Looked after children and young people are unlikely to go to university.**

True: This answer however, reflects the reality than only a minority of looked after children progresses to higher education directly from school (around 2% in Scotland, compared with almost half of non-looked after peers). This is a direct consequence of looked after children, as a group, being less likely to gain university entrance qualifications at school, for reasons that are well known. Mostly these have to do with the effects on cognitive development of early trauma and the cumulative effects of disadvantage. Having high aspirations for looked after children in education and providing good support can impact positively on these outcomes. It is important to remember that the statistics quoted are based on surveys conducted in the year after pupils leave school. Many looked after children have a more circuitous route in post-school education, typically involving attendance at further education colleges, the initial destination for more than a quarter of looked after school leavers.

1. **Social workers have the primary responsibility for looked after children and young people.**

False: The responsibility legally lies with the child’s ‘home’ local authority and is therefore shared by professionals working for the authority (e.g. teachers) who have direct contact with the young person. Other agencies (such as health and voluntary sector organisations) also have responsibilities, as part of the ‘corporate parent’ team. In light of the proposals within the Children and Young People Bill, future additions may have to reflect the roles of the Named Person and the function of the Child Plan.

1. **When a child or young person becomes looked after parental rights and responsibilities transfer to the local authority.**

False: This is not automatic and in fact in most cases the parents retain rights and these become shared with the local authority. The implication is that professional, such as teachers, should clarify the extent to which parents are involved with children and can, for example, continue to participate in parents’ evenings.

1. **Children and young people looked after ‘at home’ have the lowest educational attainment.**

True: The attainment (and also attendance) of children looked after at home is lower than the average for all looked after children and significantly below that of children in foster care placements.

1. **Children and young people looked after ‘away from home’ leave care at age 16.**

True: The authors of The Sweet 16? Report (SCCYP, 2008)[[1]](#footnote-1) indicated that they found evidence of a culture of leaving care at 16 or 17. This was more likely to be true of residential care than foster care. However, a local authority can continue to provide accommodation until age 21, and although they have no statutory duty to do so, this is regarded as good practice. A local authority must provide advice, guidance and assistance to a care leaver up to age 19 and may continue support until age 21 or until the end of full-time education. A child or young person looked after on a compulsory basis can have their looked after status extended until age 18. A complication is that a care leaver is entitled to support only if he or she was looked after by the local authority on or after reaching school leaving age.

1. **Looked after children and young people are twice as likely to be excluded from school in Scotland as non-looked after children.**

False: In fact the exclusion rate of looked after children is even higher, about eight times as much. The exclusion rate of all pupils has reduced considerably in recent years but the fall for looked after children has been less dramatic. In fact, most children are not excluded from school and the rate is affected by pupils who are excluded repeatedly. There is concern about ‘unofficial’ exclusion and exclusion which is not accompanied by a credible support plan. A useful resource has been published by the Pupil Inclusion Network Scotland[[2]](#footnote-2)

1. **The educational attainment of looked after children and young people varies across Scotland.**

True: Research has shown that there is considerable variation between local authorities on the educational outcomes of looked after children[[3]](#footnote-3).

1. **When a looked after child or young person is placed in foster care or residential care in a different part of Scotland, responsibilities transfer to the ‘host’ authority or agency.**

False: A local authority may place a child or young person in another area because no suitable placement is available locally. The placing authority retains responsibility and this means visiting the child or young person and arranging statutory reviews. In practice, the child or young person will be attending a school in the host authority or may attend a residential school. In the past, local authorities have not been good at keeping track of the educational development of children and young people placed in another authority. Every school is required to appoint a designated manager, typically a senior manager or member of the pastoral care team, to co-ordinate arrangements for looked after children and young people. This responsibility includes supporting pupils placed by another local authority and co-operating with the placing authority to provide information about progress.

1. The full report is on the web site of Scotland’s Commissioner for Children and Young People: http://www.sccyp.org.uk. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See: www.pinscotland.org [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See: SPICe briefing www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/43321.aspx. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)