SUPPORTING YOUNG CARERS

Guidance on young carers for school and college governing bodies
The **School Health Research Network survey**¹ indicates that sixteen percent of secondary school pupils in Wales have caring responsibilities. The proportion rises to 21% for students from the least affluent backgrounds. Estyn has found that some schools, FE colleges and Pupil Referral Units could do more to recognise young carers and provide them with the support they may need with learning, development and well-being.

Young carers may be more likely to experience poorer health and education outcomes than their peers. The impact of their caring role can be long or short term, affecting their physical and mental health and well-being and financial security into adulthood.

Young carers have legal rights under the *Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014*². A young carer may also have rights as a child in need of care and support under the Act. The 2014 Act defines any carer as: ‘A person who provides or intends to provide care for an adult or disabled child’. A young carer is a carer who is under 18 years of age.
In addition, all children, including young carers, have rights as set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

Estyn published a **Young Carers Thematic Report** in May 2019, reflecting growing awareness and concern about the impact of caring responsibilities on the education, development, and well-being of young carers. The report evaluates the quality of provision for young carers in education settings in Wales. It includes case studies highlighting effective practice and makes recommendations for improving support for young carers. A summary of the key findings and recommendations for schools, colleges and Pupil Referral Units is included at the end of this guidance.

16% of secondary school pupils in Wales have caring responsibilities.
KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

GOVERNING BODIES SHOULD:

- Use the Estyn checklist, included at the end of this document, to support the evaluation of the current approaches used within your school, college or PRU to identify and support young carers.

- Develop sound procedures for identifying and supporting young carers, potentially through a carers policy or plan.

- Ensure that all school employees have received training to identify and support young carers.

- Put in place arrangements for recording the number of young carers within the school or college and tracking and monitoring outcomes for them.

- Embed a whole-school/whole-college approach to creating a carer friendly environment, for example, identifying a staff member as a carer champion or a specific member of the school governing body who leads on young carer issues.
According to the 2011 census there are an estimated 370,000 unpaid carers in Wales, including 21,611 young adult carers (aged 16-24) and 7,544 young carers (aged under 16). Wales has the highest percentage of young carers in the UK.

In the education context, census data would suggest that there is at least one young carer in every class, but this is likely to be an underestimate, as evidenced by the 2017/18 School Health Research Network survey.

Although this data is focused on secondary school pupils it is important to remember that many young carers are of primary school age. Young carer services in Wales currently support children as young as five years old.

In general, there is a lack of data on the number of carers, including young carers. Reasons for this include a lack of self-identification by carers themselves and low levels of awareness amongst professionals with whom they are in contact. Many young carers don’t recognise their caring role or are unwilling to identify themselves as carers. They may be reluctant to disclose information about their home life for fear of bullying or perceived negative impact if they are identified to a local authority social services department, especially given the stigma associated with being a carer.
There is a general lack of awareness of young carers amongst education and other professionals and it is therefore most important that individuals in key roles i.e. teachers understand the issues that may affect young carers and how to help them understand their rights as a carer, as well as how to obtain relevant support from different organisations, including their local authority or charities, that can help them in their caring role.

There are schools, colleges and PRUs in Wales that demonstrate very positive practice in identifying and supporting young carers amongst their pupils and learners; Estyn’s young carers thematic report (see Section 3 below) highlights some examples. However, currently too many young carers remain hidden at school.

**EXPERIENCES OF YOUNG CARERS**

The experience of each young carer is different. Some young carers may provide a few hours’ care a week, others may provide 50 or more hours per week. Of the 7,544 carers aged under 16 identified through the 2011 census, 811 (10.8%) provided 20-40 hours per week unpaid care and 802 (10.6%) provided 50 hours per week or more of care. Caring tasks may include giving medication, personal care, providing emotional support, household tasks, cooking, shopping and caring for siblings.

Young carers often talk about feeling tired and under pressure. Many experience traumatic life changes such as bereavement, family break-up, losing income or housing, and seeing the effects of an illness or addiction on the person they care for.
Research by Carers Trust and the University of Nottingham found that almost a third of young carers surveyed (29%), reported that their own physical health was ‘just OK’, and 38% reported having a mental health problem.

Problems with young carers’ educational attendance or attainment can impact on their future lives. It can be difficult for young carers to think about the future when their focus is on more immediate concerns. Being tired or distracted when in school or college can adversely affect their educational attainment and there is some evidence from England that young carers have lower educational attainment at GCSE level. Some UK wide research has shown that young carers are more likely than the national average to be not in education, employment or training (NEET) between the ages of 16 and 19.
2. RIGHTS OF YOUNG CARERS

Duties on local authorities in relation to carers, and to people who are cared for, are set out in the Social Services and Well-being (Wales Act) 2014. (2014 Act)\(^8\). To help people understand their rights under this legislation, Welsh Government published a leaflet in November 2019: Understanding your rights as a carer.

This legislation was implemented from April 2016 and gives carers of any age, including young carers, a right to support for any needs which meet the eligibility criteria set out by the 2014 Act. Local authorities and health boards must also promote the well-being of carers who need support. Any potential and eligible needs for support are identified through a local authority carers’ needs assessment.

Not all carers will need a carers’ needs assessment and it is important to note that all carers, of any age, have a right to access information, advice and assistance from their local authority, whether or not they have been assessed.

Section 3 of the Act defines a carer as:

‘A person who provides or intends to provide care for an adult or disabled child’

Any child or young person who provides care to an adult or disabled child must be offered an assessment where it appears to the authority that the carer may have need for support, regardless of the authority’s view of the level of support the carer needs. This applies whether or not the cared for person is receiving care and support through the local authority.

THE SOCIAL SERVICES AND WELL-BEING (WALES) ACT 2014 DEFINES A CARER AS:

‘A PERSON WHO PROVIDES OR INTENDS TO PROVIDE CARE FOR AN ADULT OR DISABLED CHILD’. 
The assessment must “have regard to his or her developmental needs and the extent to which it is appropriate for the child to provide the care.” 9

If the carer is “a young adult carer aged between 16 and 25 it must include “an assessment of any current or future transitions the carer is likely to make into further or higher education, employment or training and have due regard to what the young adult carer wishes to participate in”.10

Statistics show that 895 assessments of need for support for young carers were undertaken in Wales during 2018-1911.

Under the 2014 Act a young carer potentially has legal rights both as a child, and as a carer. In addition to a right to assessment as a carer, a young carer may have rights as a child in need of care and support under Section 21 of the 2014 Act. The local authority has a duty to offer an assessment to any child “where it appears to that authority that the child may have needs for care and support in addition to, or instead of, the care and support provided by the child’s family.”12

In addition, all children, including young carers, have rights as set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)13. These rights should not be diminished because a child lives within a family where someone needs care and support. However, young carers may find it difficult to access their rights to health and health services, social security or an adequate standard of living (Articles 24, 26, 27).
3. WORK BY ESTYN ON YOUNG CARERS

There is growing awareness and concern about the impact of caring responsibilities on the education, development, and well-being of young carers. Research indicates that young carers have poorer health and well-being and worse education outcomes than their peers\(^{14}\).

In May 2019 Estyn published a Young Carers Thematic Report: *Provision for young carers in secondary schools, further education colleges and pupil referral units across Wales*\(^{15}\). The report evaluates the quality of provision for young carers in education settings in Wales. It includes case studies highlighting effective practice and makes recommendations for improving support for young carers.
IDENTIFYING YOUNG CARERS

The Estyn report made 8 recommendations.

Six for schools, colleges and pupil referral units:

R1 Ensure that they have sound procedures to identify which of their pupils/learners have a caring role.

R2 Have a named member of staff with lead responsibility for young carers who acts as a point of contact for young carers and champions their needs.

R3 Raise staff awareness of young carers’ needs.

R4 Engage with specialist services to review and improve their provision to meet the needs of young carers.

R5 Track and monitor the progress and outcomes for young carers as they currently do for other groups of vulnerable learners.

R6 Evaluate their provision for young carers with reference to the checklist in Appendix 1 or available toolkits.

One for local authorities:

R7 Focus carer strategies on increasing the capacity of schools, colleges and PRUs to identify and meet the needs of young carers

And, one for Welsh Government:

R8 Produce reliable, nationally-collected data to help identify young carers.
Amongst other things, the review found that:

“There is a lack of reliable data to identify how many young carers there are in schools, PRUs and colleges across Wales. Many providers do not know which of their pupils and learners have a caring role. A consequence of this is that the provision for young carers at secondary schools, colleges and PRUs varies widely”.

The review suggested that robust systems for identifying young carers and their needs are key to supporting them and monitoring their progress. The report recommends that secondary schools, colleges and PRUs ensure they have a sound procedures in place for identifying young carers. The progress of, and outcomes for, young carers should be individually tracked and monitored, as they currently are for other groups of vulnerable learners.

In some parts of Wales a young carers identity card has been introduced which young people can use to quickly and easily identify themselves as carers when they wish to. The Welsh Government is working with local authorities on the development of a future national model for a young carers ID card scheme Which should assist in, and improve the recognition of, and support for, young carers in education and health settings 16.

GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE: PERSON CENTRED APPROACH

Schools, colleges and PRUs that take a person centred approach to supporting young carers generally create effective plans to support learners. For example, one page profiles, which are used in a number of settings across Wales, set out what is important to the young person, what their needs are, their hopes for the future and how the school can support them.

**AWARENESS AND SUPPORT**

It is important that staff in education settings have a good awareness of young carers and their needs: Estyn recommends raising staff awareness. It finds that secondary schools, colleges and PRUs with a named lead member of staff for young carers provide good support for young carers. This staff member takes lead responsibility for young carers, acts as a point of contact for young carers and champions their needs. Estyn recommends that schools, colleges and PRUs identify a carers’ lead (R2).

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**GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE: RAISING AWARENESS**

The most effective providers have bespoke and comprehensive personal, social education (PSE) programmes that focus specifically on raising awareness of the role and diverse needs of young carers. Assemblies, information displays and visits by outside speakers from specialist agencies such as the Carers Trust support these sessions well.

Estyn, Young Carers Thematic Report (2019) p13

The Estyn report highlights some of the ways in which schools, colleges and PRUs make provision for supporting young carers. Examples include: providing a place to complete homework, supporting young carers to access phones so that they can contact home during the school day, and offering a range of cultural and sporting activities during lunchtimes which benefit young carers who are unable to access after-school clubs due to their caring role.

Some of the schools and colleges visited by Estyn enable young carers to make use of their skills in the school community, for example by taking on leadership roles in school councils or acting as mentors for other young carers.
STRATEGIC PLANNING

Estyn's report emphasises the importance of good strategic planning and recommends that local authorities focus their carer strategies on increasing the capacity of schools, colleges and PRUs to identify and meet the needs of young carers. Where local authorities have good strategic planning for carers, including in educational settings, young carers can be identified and supported when transferring between education settings.

Better engagement between education providers and health boards, local authorities and third sector organisations helps to strengthen provision for young carers in schools, colleges and PRUs.
TRAINING AND RESOURCES

The report highlights the range of free and easily available toolkits and award schemes which provide schools with valuable support and advice on how to support young carers, and develop a whole-school approach to meeting their needs.

Estyn's report indicates that many secondary schools, colleges and PRUs do not make full use of the training and resources available to them to help in identifying and improving support for young carers. However, it states that Welsh Government initiatives to promote the well-being of young people, such as the training to raise awareness of the impact of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), are starting to have an impact in schools.

Schools that have accessed the ACEs training have widened their focus on meeting the needs of vulnerable learners to include young carers alongside children who are looked after and those who are eligible for free school meals.

GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE: RESOURCES TO SUPPORT WORK WITH YOUNG CARERS

Carers Trust Wales' Young Carers in Schools Programme, provides a useful framework and toolkit for schools to review and improve their provision for young carers against a set of clearly defined standards. Schools which utilise these resources generally have strong systems in place to train staff about young carers’ needs.
In academic year 2019/20 Carers Trust Wales are piloting a ‘train the trainer’ programme with the four regional education consortia of Wales (ERW, CSC, GwE, EAS) to improve the identification, recognition and support for young carers in schools. Funded by Welsh Government, the programme has provided in-depth training for staff/teachers in primary and secondary schools and given them the tools and support to cascade the information across all school staff, for example during INSET days. Additionally, Carers Trust Wales have co-produced bilingual lesson plans for primary and secondary schools that are strongly aligned with the Health and Well-being strand of the new Curriculum for Wales.

Teachers and educators can also access bilingual factsheets to further understand how to support young carers in schools and colleges. The themes for these resources include: young carers emotional well-being, young carers’ rights and how schools and colleges can work with local carers’ services. Schools and colleges who are interested in the resources can contact wales@carers.org or the wellbeing leads within their education consortia.

There are a number of local and regional schemes that are available to support schools and colleges to develop better practice and to have their approach to supporting young carers formally recognised, for example through award schemes.

Carers Trust Wales has worked with the Learning and Work Institute to develop Supporting Students with Caring Responsibilities: A Resource for Further Education Providers to Help Young Adult Carers Succeed in Further Education in Wales. The resource draws on existing effective practice to provide helpful guidance in relation to admissions, advice, support and creating the right conditions within the college to provide effective support.
TAPPING INTO EXPERTISE ON YOUNG CARERS

There are young carers' projects in all local authority areas in Wales. They provide support, leisure activities and opportunities to meet and socialise with other young carers. Estyn recommends that secondary schools, colleges and PRUs engage with specialist services to review and improve their provision to meet the needs of young carers.

The report states that many secondary schools and colleges visited by Estyn benefit from the advice and support of workers from young carer projects, but it found little evidence of these projects engaging with PRUs. Where providers form strong partnerships with their local young carers’ projects, there are significant benefits for the school and individual young carers.

EVALUATION

Finally, Estyn recommends that secondary schools, colleges and PRUs evaluate their provision for young carers with reference to the checklist in Appendix 1 of its report (see below) or with available toolkits.
ESTYN CHECKLIST

PROVISION FOR YOUNG CARERS

SCHOOLS, COLLEGES AND PRUS MAY FIND IT USEFUL TO ASK THEMSELVES THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS WHEN EVALUATING THEIR PROVISION FOR YOUNG CARERS:

How well do we identify young carers, for example, by gathering information as part of admission procedures, through questionnaires or on-entry screening, or using awareness-raising sessions? (refer to report paragraphs 12–16)

Have we identified a suitable lead member of staff to provide young carers and families with a clear point of contact and effective support? (refer to report paragraphs 17–21)

How well does our provision for young carers fit into our strategic priorities? For example, does it appear in the development plan? (refer to report paragraph 22)

How effectively do we engage with the local health board, local authority and third sector organisations and use local strategies and action plans to support and improve our provision? (refer to report paragraphs 23–24 and case study 1)

How well do we use the resources and toolkits available from specialist agencies to evaluate our practice and help meet the needs of young carers? (refer to report paragraph 25 and case study 2)
How effective is our curriculum, PSE programme and wider provision in supporting young carers? For example, do we do enough to enable young carers to attend extra-curricular activities, access the right equipment and complete homework in an appropriate environment? (refer to report, paragraphs 26-31)

How well do we track and analyse the well-being, progress and individual needs of young carers so that we can put suitable systems in place to support their engagement with learning and improve their educational outcomes? (refer to report paragraphs 32-33)

How effectively do we work in partnership with others, including young carer projects, support groups, multi-agency teams, award schemes and learners’ families to give young carers the opportunities they need to have the best chance of success? (refer to report paragraphs 34-37)

How well do we train our staff to understand the needs of young carers and to develop the knowledge and skills they need to promote the well-being and achievement of all pupils, including young carers? (refer to report paragraphs 38-41)
REFERENCES


7. Ibid.


10. Ibid p7


