

Coronavirus: Support to raise awareness of young carers in education.

Carers Trust Scotland's overall position:

Carers Trust Scotland acknowledge the Coronavirus pandemic means government must take measures to deal with the emergency, including to delay and flatten the curve.

We appreciate that these are unprecedented times with information and guidance around school closures and qualifications still in development. However, we are concerned about school closures, the understandable cancellation of the 2020 exam diet and how this will impact young carers. We would ask that where possible consideration be given to young carers and their caring role.

Scottish Government recognises that there are at least 29,000 young carers in Scotland. Further extensive survey work by young carers services and Carers Trust show that as many as one in five children in a class has a caring role.

Young carers tell us year on year that education is one of the biggest challenges they face, often with teachers not understanding their caring role. Caring responsibilities can be a barrier to educational attainment, as many young carers will:

- be distracted (for example, checking their mobile phone often) or be quiet and withdrawn,
- be secretive about their home life,
- feel pressured to remain in a caring role and not progress onto further education or training,
- struggle at home to learn or study due to hectic or chaotic circumstances at home,
- experience a lack of parental/guardian support for regular school activities such as parents' nights and open days at school,
- often be late or miss full days off school,
- have low self-esteem or confidence, and
- struggle to complete homework.

We have two main concerns relating to school closures, social isolation measures, and cancellation of the 2020 exam diet.

1. School closures and social isolation measures

- Increase demand for young carers to provide additional care**
 Young people’s caring responsibilities and duties may increase following school closures as a consequence of some social care provision being reduced and the need for social isolation as a priority to protect the cared for person. Caring responsibilities may also increase for young carers who are part of a family network of providing unpaid care and if some carers within the family network become affected by the virus, there may become added expectation on the young carer to provide additional care during this difficult period. These are just some examples which could result in the young carer having a reduced opportunity to engage in home learning activities and therefore putting them at a disadvantage to their peers. We want schools to recognise the added responsibilities that some young carers may be taking at this time and the impact this may have on their ability to stay on top of home learning expectations and to be flexible with them. We encourage all schools to take a person-centred approach and sign-post young carers to further support that may be available, such as the Young Scot Young Carers Package, Young Carer Grant and local carer support services.
- Health and wellbeing (identification)**
 Education professionals are often key in identifying young carers and sometimes their school is the only service who know about their caring roles. Young carers will also be affected by social isolation and distancing as school can be the only time that some young carers have an opportunity to experience a life alongside of their caring role. This could have a detrimental impact on their mental health and wellbeing. We are encouraging young carers who are not currently known as a young carer to their school to disclose their caring responsibilities so that they are able to access further support that they may need. We would ask that schools be encouraged to reach out to the young carers for a health and wellbeing check-in discussion and where possible encourage them to link in with supporting services, including dedicated young carer services. We would welcome the support of COSLA in encouraging local authorities across Scotland to implement this.

To assist with this task schools could be directed to the following pages:

Education Scotland’s National Improvement Hub:

<https://education.gov.scot/improvement/learning-resources/supporting-young-carers-in-education>.

Carers Trust Scotland’s Digital Education Hub: <https://carers.org/resources-schools-scotland>.

Young Carer Grant: <https://applications.socialsecurity.gov.scot/young-carer-grant>.

Young Scot Young Carers Package: <https://young.scot/campaigns/national/young-carers>.

2. Cancellation of 2020 exam diet

- **Award of qualification**

Young carers have reported that they are worried or anxious around obtaining their exam award due to a variety of issues such as poor prelim results, not being able to hand in coursework on time or poor attendance at school as a consequence of their caring roles. Due to their caring responsibilities some young carers reported that their performance during prelims was negatively impacted; including having lack of study time or poor concentration during the exam; resulting in a lower grade being awarded than they were predicted. We would ask that when issuing guidance to teachers on awarding qualifications that there is specific guidance giving consideration to young carers and ensuring that their individual and unique circumstances are taken into account. We are in discussions with SQA on developing specific guidance relating to young carers.

In addition, we are also aware that a small number of young carers approaching school leaving age may have high absence rates or poor engagement due to a variety of reasons and this may have resulted in missed assessments earlier in the year. Following discussions with education partners, we have been informed that it is general practice that these students are offered to sit the National 3 or 4 assessments before leaving school so they would have the chance to gain some level of qualification. The impact of school closure from late March to potentially the end of the academic year may affect these young carers accessing Further Education in August/September 2020. We would also ask that additional consideration is made for these students as they may be at risk of not attaining a qualification at all.

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