

# **National Discussion on Education**

## **Response to Scottish Government**

### **Introduction**

Carers Trust Scotland works to transform the lives of unpaid carers. We partner with our network of local carer organisations to provide funding and support, deliver innovative and evidence-based programmes and raise awareness and influence policy.

Carers Trust's vision is that unpaid carers are heard and valued, with access to support, advice and resources to enable them to live fulfilled lives.

We reach around 44,000 adult carers and young carers from all groups and communities, through a unique network of local carer organisations throughout Scotland. We are positioned centrally to support local carer organisations to deliver localised action, whilst also influencing the environment for unpaid carers.

Carers Trust Scotland welcomes the opportunity to submit a response to the National Discussion on Education consultation and welcomes the commitment to explore a future vision for Scottish education. Education is vitally important to all children and young people and it is imperative that the barriers and challenges that young carers can experience that prevents them from reaching their full potential in education are tackled.

### **1. What kind of education will be needed by children and young people in Scotland in the future?**

The Scottish Government recognises that there are at least 30,000 young carers in Scotland. Further extensive survey work by young carers services and Carers Trust shows that 1 in 5 children in a class has a caring role, however, the number of young carers recorded across schools in Scotland is significantly lower. Many young carers struggle to juggle their education and caring responsibilities which can cause pressure and stress, with the right support being at school can be respite for a pupil who is a young carer. Without support, young carers find attending school difficult.

The Morgan review highlighted *“there have been significant increases in pupils receiving additional support as a result of; communication support needs (293% increase), **young carers (636% increase)**, bereavement (300% increase), family issues (353% increase).*

*Whilst the young carers figures have increased significantly, the number of pupils identified as young carers is likely to be a underreporting of those who are young carers, due to the stigma and reluctance of young carers to identify themselves, or to be identified as a young carer.”*

During consultation, young carers have reported that they want all education professionals to understand who young carers are, how they can be identified and supported within school. A whole school approach of young carer awareness would ensure they are included and able to reach their full learning potential.

*“Sometimes as a young carer school think you are an attention seeker looking for extra help, it can be hard to focus in school”* Young Carer, Carers Trust Scotland Focus Group, October 2022

Young carers also highlighted they would like to see flexible start times for school where possible, even by fifteen minutes. The stress of caring responsibilities before school can sometimes mean that they need time to decompress before they are ready to learn.

*“ I have been off and late due to caring role, you constantly have to explain it sometimes it makes you breakdown, panic attack because you are having to think about it”* Young Carer, Carers Trust Scotland Focus Group, October 2022

Young carers have also suggested having lessons recorded so they are not trying to catch up via email or notes and they have the same opportunity to learn as their peers. Having access to free tutoring if they face barriers to learning, but preferably not at home due to caring responsibilities often focusing around the home.

## **2. How do we make that a reality?**

As part of consultation with young carers, they have highlighted that they want like all education professionals and school staff to receive young carer awareness training. This has been further echoed when young carers took part in a consultation with Scottish Parliament Health, Social Care and Sport Committee on Wellbeing of Children and Young People Inquiry<sup>1</sup>. Part of the Committee’s recommendation following this consultation was that;

*“Young carers awareness training to be rolled out to all education professionals and health and social care staff.”*

Young carers discussed benefit of having Young Carer Champions in every school (a named staff member with dedicated responsibility for supporting young carers and championing young carer support in schools), however, that they don't think it should be a full-time member of teaching staff such as Guidance or Pastoral Care due to having conflicting priorities and not always being available. Schools should be fully resourced to employ Pupil Support Assistants who are valued and not deployed to different departments due to staff shortages. This leads to break down in relationships with learners especially young carers in class who face barriers to learning and find it difficult to trust people when talking about their caring role.

### **3. How can every child and young person's individual needs be supported and addressed in the future?**

Every child and young persons individual needs are different. A lot of their informal learning happens away from school, including young carers who often develop other skills such as budgeting, resilience, and time management as a consequence of their caring responsibilities. Learning from outside of school based education should be given more weight and third sector organisations such as youth work, young carers services and sports should be consulted when looking at the needs of children and young people.

### **4. What is one thing that needs to stay and why?**

During the consultation, young carers highlighted that they would like to keep the physical element of going to school. It can be a place of respite away from their caring role and allow them to spend much needed time with friends. Lockdown was stressful for a lot of young carers, they struggled to engage in learning due to caring responsibilities at home. School also provides a safe space where they also have access to healthy food and drinks.

It also provides opportunities where they can meet with their young carer worker and discuss their caring role away from home life.

Ensuring all young carers are recorded on Scottish Educational Management Information Software (SEEMiS) so they can access any additional support they are entitled to.

### **5. What are the most important priorities for a future Scottish education system?**

A more inclusive, resourced and transparent system is needed. Children and young people should be the focus of any priorities in education, looking at their wants and aspirations. Meaningful partnerships with teachers, family members, third sector and other community learning should be included.

Priorities should not be given to an only academic future and there should be more focus on positive outcomes. During consultation for the National Discussion on Education, young carers highlighted that they would prefer to have regular tests throughout the year and be assessed by teachers rather than external exams at the end of the year.

*“Like if you are having a really bad time with caring and are really worried about them, you are not going to be able to concentrate on an exam that could decide your future”* Young Carer, Focus Group, October 2022.

## **6. How can we ensure that everyone involved in education in Scotland has a say in future decisions and actions?**

Children and young people need to be heart of future decisions and actions. Article 12 of UNCRC states that children have a right to have their views respected. There needs to be meaningful and inclusive engagement involving a variety of methods and not tokenistic gestures. Children and young people who take part in consultations in future decisions and actions should have feedback about their input.

Young carer services including education workers, families and other organisations should be included in partnership working to support children and young people, including young carers to have their voices heard.

## **7. How can children and young people be cared for and supported in the future? (i.e. physical and mental wellbeing)**

Young carers often report an increase in stress, tiredness and mental ill health as part of their caring responsibilities, along with the physical impact that caring has on them. There needs to be a whole school approach to identifying and supporting young carers in education. Although Wellbeing and the SHANAARRI indicators are fundamental to the curriculum for excellence there need to be more priority and resources for wellbeing. Access to continuous specialist support is needed such as counselling. Children and young people having a voice in the support they receive to help them reach their full potential?

With the introduction of the National Care Service (Scotland) Bill, it is important to note the importance the section on the right that young carers have to a break from caring. Having a break from caring should have a positive impact on the young carers health and wellbeing. But this right must be fully implemented and resourced to ensure it is upheld and young carers benefit from this.



Graphic illustration from Scottish Young Carers Festival 2022

### **8. How can the right of every child and young person to have opportunities to develop their full potential be achieved in future?**

United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child incorporation into Scot's Law needs to be implemented with urgency and fully resourced. All children and young people should be fully aware of their rights, including young carers. Young carers should be aware of their rights under the Carers (Scotland) Act 2016 and more needs to be done to ensure they are being offered the opportunity to have a Young Carers Statement.

Children and Young People should have access to a wider curriculum choice so they have a say in their future of education. Young carers highlighted that they want to see a curriculum that includes practical and life skills, including bills, cooking for family, first aid, health and wellbeing information on dealing with stress, and mental health support their own and cared for person.

*"Would be so beneficial to know how to book transport, pay bill- sometimes need to take cared for person to app, would be good to know how to book a taxi for wheelchair access for example."* Young carer, Focus Group, October 2022

Youth work and other third sector organisations, such as young carer services, need to be sufficiently resourced so they can keep providing much needed specialist support to children and young people.

A young carer during the focus group for the National Discussion on Education explained that she was also dyslexic and her school had went above and beyond to support her with barriers to her learning that she had due to dyslexia. However, when she highlighted that she was struggling in school due to her caring role she felt she wasn't taken seriously and was asked if she needed more

support with her dyslexia. Children and young people can not be put in silo's based on one need, they need to be assessed as being a whole person.

**9. How can children and young people be helped to learn about our changing world, so they feel able to positively contribute?**

Children and young people need to feel nurtured, safe and included to flourish. They need to have access to information in various formats, time to process it and be given the choice to contribute. Their views need to be respected and actively listened to.

**10. Do you have any other comments that you would like to provide about a vision for the future of Scottish Education?**

No.

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<sup>i</sup> <https://digitalpublications.parliament.scot/Committees/Report/HSCS/2022/5/13/bcc3be8f-4d1c-41c1-9036-cfa112ff7e47#3cf45d64-a8f9-4732-a3a7-08c5af4741cb.dita>