



Employer Equalities Group (EEQ)

How do we make apprenticeships more accessible and attractive to care experienced young people?

A short life working group report | **January 2024**

Foreword from the Chair

The story of care experienced young people and apprenticeships in Scotland is one of wasted talent and missed opportunities.

We've heard all the recent sentiment of just transitions, career system reviews, skills system reviews, levelling up, no-one left behind – we can call it what we like – but how do we turn rhetoric into the action that care experienced young people need?

As of September 2023, 2.1% of Modern Apprenticeship starts in Scotland identified as care experienced individuals. That equates to 252 out of the 12,136 who began an apprenticeship in the financial period April and September 2023.

The achievement rate for those identifying as care experienced is 59% compared to 72% for non-care experienced young people - that is an achievement rate gap of 13%.

Behind the numbers are real young people. Real young people who face a range of inequalities exacerbated by a lack of consistent advice and support, stuck in a system that instead of helping them on, actively holds them back.

This report proposes options to change how the system responds to tackling the issues affecting care experienced young people looking to become apprentices. That includes how those working with young people, such as employers, Scottish Government, government agencies and local authorities need to collaborate and contribute to the changes required.

We need new models and ways of working if we are to encourage more care experienced young people to reap the benefits of an

apprenticeship while also encouraging more employers to provide care experienced young people with apprenticeship opportunities.

The Young Person's Guarantee (YPG), through Developing the Young Workforce, plays a vital role in bringing together employers, partners, and young people. More than 800 organisations have committed to it, to connect 16–24-year-olds with jobs, apprenticeships, further or higher education, training, volunteering and enterprise opportunities. With employer momentum clearly there, and commitment from government to support all of Scotland's young people, further steps are required to specifically support care experienced young people in taking up an apprenticeship.

I want to offer a sincere thank you to all who contributed to this vital report. Your experience and knowledge is integral to drawing up the actions that need to be taken.

It's time to rewrite the story on care experienced young people and apprenticeships in Scotland to one of potential fulfilled, and with these actions, we can.



Tony Scally
National Lead for Employability Service Development,
Action for Children, Chair of the Care Experienced Short Life
Working Group, SAAB Employer Equalities Group member

Executive Summary

This report explores why young people from care experienced backgrounds are less likely to choose apprenticeship opportunities. It also examines why apprenticeship participation levels and achievement rates for care experienced young people are lower than their non-care experienced peers.

The report attempts to understand the challenges and barriers this group of young people face in accessing and sustaining apprenticeships and looks at key recommendations and actions we can implement through private, public and voluntary sector collaboration.

The report puts forward 4 solutions for systemic change.

These fundamental shifts will allow Scotland's care experienced young people to have a true chance to reach their full potential.



Solution 1 -

Expand the Care Experienced Student Bursary (CESB) in Scotland to offer care experienced young people undertaking an apprenticeship some financial support.



Solution 2 -

Lobby the UK government to adjust apprenticeship wages for care experienced individuals.



Solution 3 -

Call for changes to Department for Work & Pensions policy to offer greater support for care experienced young people starting work particularly those living in supported accommodation.



Solution 4 -

Bend the spend – actions need to be taken to prevent incurring costs in the future, by putting in place measures to spend public finances more efficiently, saving the public purse in the long term.

In addition to the financial solutions outlined above, a number of actions can be taken forward now, by a range of stakeholders, to begin the progress of the systemic change required:

Employers can:

- embed flexible recruitment approaches to attract care experienced young people.
- provide a mechanism that checks for barriers such as “previously being in the care system”.
- develop a care experienced policy with processes which ensure access to support such as mentoring or buddying.
- partner up with national provision, local authorities and the voluntary sector to provide crucial, out of work, mentoring support.

Executive Summary

Skills Development Scotland (SDS) can:

- seek Scottish Government funding to create a “starting work fund” so that care experienced young people, aged 16-29, can get the equipment they need to start work..
- ensure mentoring support is available to all care experienced young people to assist them in sustaining their apprenticeship.
- develop mentoring guidelines/best practice.
- monitor apprenticeship providers and report on support for care experienced Modern and Graduate Apprentices via contracts.

Local Authorities can:

- provide a named person at local authority level for consistent communication to help each apprentice connect with employers and training providers.
- provide early help and pre-apprenticeship support for care experienced individuals, as aligned to the ‘scaffolding’ in The Promise.
- offer a first point of contact for employers which is clear and easily accessible.
- offer continued, supported accommodation for apprentices – based on income rather than unemployment/ employment status.

The employer board can:

- evidence the case for an increase to the minimum wage for apprenticeships by conducting a cost-of-living analysis of care experienced apprentices.
- research the effects of mentoring and employer best practice internationally and from post-school environments to demonstrate its positive effect.
- support governments, local authorities and other agencies as they work to change restrictions and cut bureaucracy.
- pilot a scheme which incorporates different components, actions, support, and funding to test the effectiveness of the recommendations made in this report.
- explore the possibility of a review of funding levels.

1

Background

This report explores why young people from care experienced (CE) backgrounds are less likely to choose apprenticeship opportunities. It also examines why apprenticeship participation levels and achievement rates for care experienced young people are lower than their non-care experienced peers. The report attempts to understand the challenges and barriers this particular group of young people face in accessing and sustaining apprenticeships and looks at key recommendations and actions we can implement through private, public and voluntary sector collaboration.

This report is the result of a short-life working group – made up of employers, third sector organisations and equalities experts with experience of working with young people in a care setting – set up to examine barriers to apprenticeships for CE young people (see full membership list in Appendix 4). The barriers were initially highlighted in a paper presented to the Scottish Apprenticeship Advisory Board's (SAAB) Employer Equalities Group (EEG) – an independent, employer-led group which gathers evidence on inequalities, diversity and inclusion in relation to apprenticeships.

The report and short life working group was created in response to a previous piece of work highlighting some of the barriers care experienced young people have in accessing support and accessing apprenticeships. The original paper was presented at a meeting in February 2020 (see Appendix 1).

It highlighted that care experienced young people had little or no awareness of apprenticeship opportunities – but, once provided with more information, were interested in exploring apprenticeships. The report examined many of the barriers and blockers to information and opportunities which care experienced young people find especially challenging. It resonated with research from Skills Development Scotland, which also showed ongoing, disproportionately low take-up of apprenticeship places by people declaring themselves as care experienced (see Appendix 2) and those completing and qualifying in their apprenticeship.

Members of SAAB's Employer Equalities Group agreed that this inequality of opportunity should be looked at further, through the establishment of short life working group (SLWG). This work would examine and capture the barriers faced by CE young people, but from an employer lens and perspective.



2

Context

Apprenticeships support Scotland's economic ambitions by creating a skilled workforce, enabling more productive businesses, while assisting in shaping a fairer and more equal society. Scotland's economy is facing some distinct challenges driven by a shortage of labour in specific key sectors and a broader skills deficit. The annual [Business Barometer Report](#) (from The Open University and British Chambers of Commerce) states that more than seven in ten Scottish businesses are struggling with skills shortages. But Scottish businesses need to look at how they hire and support staff from under-represented groups, such as people with disabilities, people with care experienced backgrounds or workers from diverse ethnicities. Almost 40% of employers don't have programmes in place for under-represented groups.

Apprenticeships are an excellent vehicle for attracting new talent from all sectors of the economy, as well as those from under-represented and diverse groups. Apprenticeships have a unique role to play in fulfilling this need, but for many, including those with care experienced backgrounds, it can be a real challenge.

This can be attributed to many factors, for example: access to opportunities, entry level qualifications, ambition, limited peer support, lack of positive role models/champions, personal finance, accommodation costs and overall support required. Early intervention to address these issues can make a difference in care experienced

young people accessing and sustaining apprenticeship opportunities. Providing early support can help a young person develop a set of personal strengths and life skills that prepare them for the world of work and prevent a multitude of negative consequences later in life.

However, some of the difficulties faced by this group of young people are challenges from within the system itself. Currently, the system does not collaborate effectively across policy and service areas regarding care experienced young people. There is no consideration or framework for cost avoidance, which if put in place as a policy, could prevent costly issues for the system. Failure to collaborate and intervene effectively at an early stage is detrimental to the public purse resulting in future demand for services such as mental health, housing, employment, and at a very worst-case, criminal justice.

A lack of early intervention and support means that the system fails to make the most of the talent that exists within this group of people. Care experienced young people can flourish as citizens in society, long-term employees, and valuable contributors to a skilled, diverse, future workforce - if we can initiate changes in the current system and provide the right conditions and support. Young people bring a source of rich new talent into organisations and are often representative of the communities we serve or who our markets or future customers are.



Almost 40% of employers don't have programmes in place for under-represented groups. Apprenticeships are an excellent vehicle for attracting new talent from all sectors of the economy, as well as those from under-represented and diverse groups.

Apprenticeships can be especially valuable for care experienced individuals: they offer paid work; opportunities to build confidence; gain industry insight and develop valuable skills that employers need. In return, employers benefit from dedicated and confident apprentices that bring different skills and perspective to their business. An apprenticeship can make a huge difference to a young person's life.

By providing an apprenticeship opportunity and offering effective support, employers can enable care leavers to overcome the challenges they have often experienced and help them on their way to a happy, successful, and independent life.

3

Short Life Working Group on Care Experience

The approach

The purpose of the group was to broaden our understanding of what crucial support was necessary and of vital importance to improve support for care experienced young people in order to access and sustain an apprenticeship. The group agreed to take a different approach to previous research and analysis by pulling together a range of experts from across industry, as well as experts across social policy directives. We aimed to use key meetings/workshops to develop our understanding of the complexity of what we were trying to achieve and develop solutions and actions. These solutions were to be collective, recognising that to address this complex issue, we required the support and buy-in from employers, government, and public and voluntary sector partner agencies.

To achieve this, the SLWG had some key objectives.

- 1) tackle as many of the actions as possible from the original research paper, drawing on the findings through the workshops held with care experienced young people.**
- 2) challenge other stakeholders, including government, on recommendations out-with the scope of the group**
- 3) maximise the number of employers on the SLWG to ensure employer voice is captured**
- 4) listen to a variety of experts and invite guest speakers to meetings, to offer specialist knowledge, expertise and independent views**

5) attempt to develop solutions rather than create more recommendations

6) focus efforts across three main areas:

i) Recruitment practices and processes

ii) Mentoring opportunities

iii) Qualifications in mentoring to support recruitment of care experienced young people

We agreed the work should be timebound, be interactive, workshop based, involve presenters from a range of partners to gain knowledge and identify best practice (see Appendix 3).

In total, 8 sessions were undertaken, lasting approximately 2 hours. Some of the sessions included input from outside Scotland, in particular the Welsh Government, but rich and varied input was also received from industry professionals including Scottish and Southern Energy, Diageo, McTaggart Construction, Scottish Power, Scottish Water, as well as a range of the private sector and voluntary sector employers (see Appendix 4).

Due to the complexity of the issues raised, there was strong input from Scottish Government and voluntary sector partners. This included Developing Young Workforce (DYW), Young Person's Guarantee (YPG), the Promise (see Appendix 5), Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) as well input from the voluntary sector (Equate Scotland) and Glasgow City Council's care experienced employment support team.

4 Identifying the problem: barriers faced by care experienced individuals

We used the previous research conducted and desktop analysis, as well as previous reports and papers (see Appendices 6 & 9) and workshop sessions to identify the challenges faced by care experienced young people in accessing and maintaining apprenticeships. We categorised these into areas we need to focus on. These barriers are outlined below, followed by solutions put forward by the group from an employer perspective. It is based on what employers can change and influence, and the help they would need from wider policy, government and partner agencies to improve the support, recruitment and retention of CE individuals in apprenticeships.

1 Recruitment barriers

Qualifications – care experienced people are more likely to suffer a disrupted education. A life moving between care locations; the trauma of a life event leading to engaging with the care system; or even a school which hasn't understood and supported continuity of learning can affect attendance and resulting attainment. Low levels of qualifications can be a barrier when selecting applicants by employers for apprenticeships (required entry levels).

Work experience – taking account of care experienced individuals' life circumstances means understanding the lack of opportunity for gaining work experience, especially if moving frequently between care situations (at home, kinship care, fostering, residential) which involves a frequent change of address. Lack of family support in securing work experience is an important factor. Therefore, low educational achievement alongside lack of work experience, can result in limited information to include in an application or CV. Processes often doesn't take account of other valuable skills a care experienced young person may have.

Application skills – care experienced people may not have the family support to help make an effective application or prepare and perform at job interviews. Employers reported that it is easy to lose people during the first round of applications when people without basic CV 'coaching' can be sifted out.

Interview expectations and dress code – a core competency interview process within an equal opportunities' framework can work against some young care experienced people who often find it difficult to communicate the key points. In addition, requiring a particular dress code for an applicant may be a challenge to a young person.



Low educational achievement alongside lack of work experience, can result in limited information to include in an application or CV. Processes often don't take account of other valuable skills a care experienced young person may have.

Evidencing ID – there can be barriers with ID – the cost involved in obtaining a passport, driving licence or lost National Insurance cards make it hard to evidence identity and comply with right to work requirements in the UK, as well as make it difficult to open up bank accounts.

Lack of advice – missing out on being able to seek support from nearby family or key influencers who understand the world of work can mean little or no understanding of expectations of a recruitment process generally.

Potential digital barriers – being unable to afford or access mobile data or broadband creates limitations to accessing online job opportunities, research and application processes.

Barriers to staying and completing the apprenticeship

Financial barriers – apprenticeship wages can be too low to support independent living. Glasgow City Council reported that supported accommodation can take up to 65% of an apprentice wage, leaving an unsustainable balance to pay for food, clothes, equipment, travel, communications – mobile phone and data. Failing to have enough money to pay for transport or food can prevent someone from sustaining work or an apprenticeship.

2 Equipment – buying appropriate clothes for a uniform for example, in hospitality, or buying tools for work such as joinery can be too much for a budget before the first pay cheque. This is compounded by the stigma of admitting to financial difficulty.

Transport – multiple location working, varying hours of work or particularly early or late working hours can make it impossible for someone relying on public transport to get to work when required.

Unstable accommodation – ‘sofa surfing’ or temporary accommodation can pull someone away from transport links as well as affect mental health. It also removes any sense of stability for a person in terms of where they live which can lead to stress, anxiety and social exclusion.

Difficulties at work – not having an advocate at work can leave the person not knowing who to turn to for advice. The stigma of care experience can mean that they do not declare their background and find it difficult to ask for help. Often, employers may be unaware of their background or their situation.

Trauma – caused by dates of significant events – for example a family member’s birthday - can lead to mental health challenges which can be hard to deal with if there is no support network.

The stigma of poverty – or the culture at work may prevent them for asking for help. For example, not having money to pay for transport to work can be embarrassing.



Accommodation can take up to 65% of an apprentice wage, leaving an unsustainable balance to pay for food, clothes, equipment, travel, communications - mobile phone and data.

3 Complex needs

Care experienced people can have complex needs and don't always declare as care experienced. Employers do not ask or request this information, so often it is unknown.

Each person's needs are different – every instance of care experience is different. As a result, people need individualised support, tailored to meet their needs. They often don't want to declare due to stigma or trauma.

Understanding who to approach can be difficult – care experienced young people have a network of services and support to access, but access points are not always clear. For employers of a care experienced person, understanding which support service to approach about an employee can also be difficult.

4 The post-care support network is still fragmented.

A care experienced person needs to know where to go for each issue – post school, there is a lack of consistency of support as well as a complex network of organisations interacting with the individual. Bringing employment into the equation adds further complexity. Repeatedly having to declare 'care experience' status can bring up trauma of fear of stigma. While mentoring is seen as a way to provide consistency, according to research conducted by the **Scottish Mentoring Network**, the majority of mentoring takes place in a school or workplace settings (see Appendices 7 & 8). This not only excludes those not attending school but fails to provide crucial support in the months after leaving school. This hugely disadvantages young people in the care system as they are more likely to leave school at 16 than their peers not in care.



Post school, there is a lack of consistency of support as well as a complex network of organisations interacting with the individual.

5 Postcode lottery for support

Each local authority (LA) can take a different approach – and evidence of success is not clear. Third sector organisations provide support, but funding limitations mean they cannot achieve the volumes required to reach all young people. There is no clear route for employers to understand who to work with and some employers may have to engage with multiple LAs.

Understanding who to approach can be difficult – care experienced young people have a network of services and support to access, but access points are not always clear. For employers of a care experienced person, understanding which support service to approach about an employee can also be difficult.



5

Solutions



Solution 1:

Expand the Care Experienced Student Bursary (CESB) in Scotland to offer care experienced young people undertaking an apprenticeship some financial support.

– This would embrace the steps being taken in England and Wales to offer care experienced young people £3000 when they take up an apprenticeship. The bursary is paid directly to the individual, not the learning provider and supports accommodation and other living costs. Given that around 2% of apprentices identify as care experienced, the variation in cost to the public purse would be small. This could be costed out over a longer apprenticeship, with tailored support as apprenticeship wages increase year-on-year.



Solution 2:

Lobby the UK government to adjust apprenticeship wages for care experienced individuals. Although many employers pay an improved rate, this is often restricted due to employer's current wage structure and sits outside Fair Work. Often the wage received is not sufficient for overall living costs in the first year if the CE young person has additional accommodation costs.



Solution 3:

Call for changes to Department for Work & Pensions policy to offer greater support for care experienced young people starting work, particularly those living in supported accommodation – Scottish Government could stand with the Welsh government to lobby support for care experienced people starting work. It's especially important to support housing benefit for a longer period, particularly in year 1 and 2. We would propose a tail-off period - at a minimum - or preferably, continue housing benefit for the whole duration of an apprenticeship.



Solution 4:

Bend the spend – actions need to be taken to prevent incurring costs in the future, by putting in place measures to spend public finances more efficiently, saving the public purse in the long term.

This should include considerations in how the education and skills budget is allocated and how skills programmes and mentoring services are procured. The Scottish Government could start by making better use of the Apprenticeship Levy.

What employers can do:

Employers have an important role in developing a skilled workforce for the future – which, in turn, contributes to a successful economy. To attract and provide support to care experienced apprentices, the following actions could be considered.

- 1. Embed flexible recruitment approaches to attract care experienced young people.** For example, provide placements and supported work experience opportunities, leading to the recruitment and employment of care experienced apprentices.
- 2. Provide a mechanism that checks for barriers** such as “previously being in the care system”. Currently further and higher education colleges have a tick box in the application for the young person to self-declare, which generates the CESB and other support.
- 3. Develop care experience policy and processes** to ensure access to support such as mentoring or buddying throughout your organisation. Support staff with access to training to become peer mentors/role models to care experienced young people.
- 4. Partner up with national provision,** local authorities and the voluntary sector to provide crucial, out of work, mentoring support, i.e., within the community. This will supplement in-work mentor support provided by the employer.

What Skills Development Scotland (SDS) can do:

- 1. Seek Scottish Government funding to create a “starting work fund”** so that care experienced young people, aged 16-29, can get the equipment they need to start work. This could include, purchasing tools, uniforms, lunches, work wear (not PPE) and any additional transport costs. This should be ring-fenced to individuals rather than going to a learning provider. As part of any start up fund, consideration should be given to a contingency funds for delays affecting income between the end of any DWP support (universal credit) and 1st salary/wage when starting an apprenticeship.
- 2. Mentoring support should be available to all care experienced young people** to assist them in sustaining their apprenticeship. SDS can ensure that mentoring is included in all training opportunities, initiatives, including apprenticeships.
- 3. Develop mentoring guidelines and best practice.** Support a mentoring key standards approach, facilitate or commission organisations to deliver mentoring training and establish qualifications for employers’ staff.
- 4. Monitor apprenticeship providers** and report on support for care experienced Modern and Graduate Apprentices. Contract decisions should consider the quality of support to help build an effective long-term mentoring culture around apprenticeships. One idea is for apprentice satisfaction surveys to include a question about mentoring support. This would remove the need for care experienced individuals to have to self-identify in order to provide evidence.

What local authorities can do:

1. Use current financial mechanisms to provide additional support to Care Experienced young people accessing apprenticeships.

Utilise Young Person's Guarantee, No one Left Behind, UK Shared Prosperity and local skills funding, particularly for those with additional accommodation costs to help them to sustain apprenticeships.

2. Local Authorities provide early help and pre-apprenticeship support for those with care experience, as aligned to the 'scaffolding' in The Promise. Local Authorities should provide a named person for consistent communication to help each apprentice connect with employers and training providers.

3. Offer a first point of contact for employers which is clear and easily accessible. The current systems differ greatly on a local and regional basis, making it difficult for employers to navigate. This would help employers better engage with services for care experienced employees, including third sector and specialist services in their area.

4. Offer continued, supported accommodation for apprentices – based on income rather than unemployment/ employment status. Currently those in supported accommodation find themselves in a position where financially they cannot take up an apprenticeship due to care component contribution costs. Working collaboratively across social work, skills finance and youth justice for example would enable more young people to remain in supported accommodation, while completing the first year(s) of an apprenticeship.

What the new employer board can do

1. Evidence the case for an increase to the minimum wage for apprenticeships by conducting a cost-of-living analysis of care experienced apprentices. The new employer board and partners to conduct an analysis of household and living costs, to establish a baseline. Currently the Welsh Government have an initiative that creates a £19,000 annual income fund for CE people.

2. Research the effects of mentoring and employer best practice internationally and from post-school environments to demonstrate its positive effect. Further evidence and insight can be taken from expert groups and care experience organisations. If found, evidence could be submitted to Scottish Government to alter funding models which will support post-school transitions for apprentices.

3. Support governments, local authorities and other agencies as they work to change restrictions and cut bureaucracy. Work should focus on existing caps and conditions for individual grants, benefits/ bursary/ hardship funding, ensuring that the system is accessible, available across the country and provides access to adequate support to CE apprentices and employers.

4. Pilot a scheme which incorporates different components, actions, support, and funding to test the effectiveness of the recommendations made in this report.

5. Explore the possibility of a review of funding levels. Particular focussing on adjusting the current fees for those from protected characteristic groups, i.e. care experienced young people. An additional top up fee could be included to reflect the cost of accommodation and living expenses.

Appendix

Appendix 1: Care Experience Report February 2020

This report collates learning from the Barnardo's and Action for Children Modern Apprenticeship Project (Sept 2018 – Sept 2019), feedback from Barnardo's and Action for Children employment staff, and feedback from care experienced young people who attended a workshop on work-based learning.

Challenges/ Barriers

The main challenges/barriers for care experienced young people in accessing work-based learning opportunities are noted below.

Care experienced young people had little/no awareness of apprenticeship opportunities but were interested in engaging with these opportunities once they had more information. Only some of the participants had undertaken work experience/ placement while at school. They identified their **main barriers** as:

- A lack of qualifications, and lack of support to achieve these i.e. at school or college
- Discrimination / prejudice around the background and current situation of some care experienced young people (for example, interactions with the criminal justice system; pregnancy; mental health)
- Not having the right networks and/or knowledge of the labour market

- Lack of relevant work experience
- Cost of travel

The **staff who supported** care experience young people into work, identified similar barriers **but also mentioned**:

- Lack of motivation
- Lack of self-belief/confidence
- Young people can struggle to organise themselves, get public transport, generally take on responsibilities associated with employment
- Lack of trust in support/support agencies
- Less support available once they have left care – automatically transferred to social security benefits, with support to find employment etc a secondary consideration
- Carers have no / lack of knowledge of options – some have preference for college, perceived as a 'safe place' (lack of awareness of apprenticeships)
- Moved around: lack of consistency at school, which limits qualifications attained. This also means they may not want to take a job in the area they are in as they plan on moving soon.
- Unrealistic expectations

- Lack of positive influences: family, peer, social
- Financial responsibilities of running their own household (the situation most care leavers are in) – most MA wages are unrealistic for them
- Location: rural / distance and high transport costs make attendance at college or certain jobs impossible
- Some resort to ‘playing the system’ i.e. take up jobs for a few weeks, get paid, leave
- Uninformed employers – both in terms of the needs of and support for care experienced young people, but also in terms of MAs / VQs

Through our specific project focusing on supporting care experienced young people, the **following challenges were identified:**

- External factors, such as issues with housing, money, family, health
- Disengaged with education
- The discipline to work and study is a pressure for some young people
- The level of MAs and lack of experience and education qualifications
- Wages offered are too low (in hospitality for instance, it was reported that some employers pay lower wages if they convert to MAs and they mainly get sessional work so this isn't viable)
- Young people can often focus on the short-term impact of an option and may not be in the position to accept a lower wage for the longer-term benefit of doing an apprenticeship
- Providers engaged in the project now have a greater understanding of the needs of care experienced young people but require further support to help them sustain
- Providers require extra support to understanding how to meet the young person's needs, which can often be complex
- Providers have access to Enhanced Funding but require more advice on what this could be used for (e.g. pastoral support)
- Employers' ability and capacity to support care experienced young people varies, although those involved in the project were generally open-minded and willing to support, just unsure how
- Need to ensure those working with care experience young people understand the benefits of work-based learning and how to access the opportunities
- Specific to the project, there was a challenge in knowing which providers to engage within

Key areas for discussion

Through consultation, staff and young people were asked to consider potential solutions to some of these challenges. These are listed below:

- **Earlier intervention:** engaging with young people from the age of 15 is much more likely to produce a stable and more positive transition
- **Ambition in care:** focus on ‘fire-fighting’ and keeping young people safe. This is clearly very important, but there is limited / no conversation about career aspirations
- **Financial considerations:** wages for some MAs are too low, care experienced people have to support themselves on that income. Some young people are better off attending college and receiving the FE bursary, and only attending 2/3 days per week.
- **Alternative routes into apprenticeships:** ensuring care experienced young people can access programmes like the Employability Fund was seen as important. As were work placements/work experience with employers might help young people get a ‘foot in the door’ and help overcome the qualifications barrier. This could also help raise the aspirations of the young person who might not have had work experience or considered options like an MA before. SDS could also look into offering the Level 4/5 apprenticeship out with school as some care experienced young people will have disengaged from school.
- **Promotion of apprenticeships:** improve the knowledge of care experienced young people, and the staff who support them, of different post-school opportunities
- **Partnerships:** partners need to be more joined up to think about the wider support package for care experienced young people, not just the part that falls within their organisation’s remit. A particular issue highlighted was a lack of consistency across Local Authorities which can be detrimental and confusing for those moving between areas. Young people identified organisations such as Barnardo’s and Action for Children as valuable sources of support for them.
- **Employers:** employers could look to offer alternative recruitment processes such as hiring for attitude rather than existing qualifications (or use task-based methods/tests during recruitment). Some young people may have some modules/parts of qualifications but not sat the final exam so consideration needs to be given to how their achievements can be recognised and considered during recruitment (also applicable to FE courses). Holding open days for young people to meet employers, and informal interview settings work well as it can be less intimidating. Employers require additional support to advise on supporting care experienced young people to sustain and progress. Young people suggested that employers could receive more training in support care experienced employees, including the promotion of mentoring schemes.
- **Convictions:** more restrained application of convictions for care experienced young people to give more consideration to the longer-term impact on the individual of having a conviction. Employers need more information on fairly assessing those with convictions during recruitment.
- **Apprenticeship delivery:** some young people may be concerned about a lack of ‘protected time’ for study during an apprenticeship, and by the thought of taking on a job and study at the same time. The application process for apprenticeships involves completing

a lot of documentation which might be off putting for some young people, particularly those with literacy issues. It was also suggested by young people that the age restrictions on funding for MAs is reviewed for care experienced young people, and consideration is given to lower entry qualifications for them to take into account the additional barriers they may have faced.

Appendix 2: Apprenticeships stats for Care Experienced Individuals

Skills Development Scotland Annual Report

Modern Apprenticeships - As of September 2023, the proportion of MAs self-identifying as care experienced was 2.1% at the end of quarter 2, 0.3 pp higher than the same point last year. The number of care experienced starts increased from 226 to 252 (+11.5%) relative to the same point last year.

Graduate Apprenticeships - In 2020/21, 1.5% of Scottish-domiciled full time first-degree entrants were care experienced. In addition, in Scotland, 1.5% of children under 18 were classed as 'looked after' that year. In 2021/22, the number of GAs self-identifying as being care experienced remained low for the third consecutive year, falling back below 5. The breakdown of GA enrolments by self-identified care experience is shown in table 9. • Unrealistic expectations

Appendix 3: Examples of good employer practice

There are several employers in Scotland who are actively supporting care-experienced individuals into work. Here are a few examples:

The Scottish Government itself set a target of providing 1,000 job opportunities to care-experienced individuals by 2022.

Barclays Bank established a partnership with the charity, MCR Pathways, to provide mentoring and support to care-experienced young people in Glasgow. The partnership includes a work experience program and apprenticeships, as well as training for managers on how to support care-experienced employees.

Edinburgh Airport launched a program to provide employment opportunities for care-experienced individuals in partnership with Who Cares? Scotland. The program includes mentoring, training, and work experience opportunities, as well as support with housing and transportation.

John Lewis Partnership partnered with Action for Children and Who Cares? Scotland to create a 'Building Happier Futures' employment programme.

Marks and Spencer partners with Action for Children to provide work experience opportunities to care-experienced young people. The retailer also provides training and development opportunities to help young people build their skills and progress in their careers.

Morrison Construction partners with the Prince's Trust to provide work experience and apprenticeship opportunities to care-experienced young people. The construction company also provides mentoring and coaching support to help young people develop their skills and confidence.

The Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS) launched a program to support care-experienced individuals into apprenticeships in the financial services sector. The program, called "Fresh Start", includes mentoring, training, and work experience opportunities. RBS partners with the Prince's Trust to provide employability support to care-experienced young people. The bank offers work experience and mentoring opportunities, as well as training and development programmes to help young people build their skills and confidence.

Scottish Power established a partnership with Action for Children, to support care-experienced individuals into apprenticeships in the energy sector. The program includes mentoring and training, as well as work experience opportunities. SSE partners with Includem to offer employability support to care-experienced young people.

Scottish Water partners with Barnardo's to provide employability support to care-experienced young people. The utility company offers work experience opportunities and training and development programmes to help young people build their skills and progress in their careers.

SSE established a partnership with Action for Children, to provide apprenticeships and employment opportunities for care-experienced young people in the energy sector. The program includes mentoring, training, and work experience opportunities, as well as support with housing and transportation.

Standard Life Aberdeen launched a program to support care-experienced individuals into internships and apprenticeships in the financial services sector. The program includes mentoring, training, and work experience opportunities, as well as support with CV writing and interview skills.

The Welsh Government is trialling a pilot scheme, Basic Income for Care Leavers, which provides a monthly payment of £1,600 a month for a person leaving care and turning 18 years of age between 1st July 2022 and 30th June 2023. The payment is unconditional with no requirements attached. It builds on the existing support offered to care experienced children in Wales and ensure young people who take part in this pilot get all the support they need to give them the best possible chance to make their way in life and the transition out of care more positive.

Glasgow City Council employer support – brokering relationships with employers for the duration of the apprenticeship / work placement / also finding placements and employment opportunities for young people, tailored to the things they want to do, considering how well their dreams fit their preferences, capabilities, and availability of work.

These examples demonstrate the range of industries and sectors that are providing opportunities for care-experienced individuals in Scotland. By offering mentoring, training, work experience opportunities, and other forms of support, these employers are helping to create a more inclusive and diverse workforce in Scotland, while also providing care-experienced individuals with the tools and resources they need to succeed.

Other employer examples:

- 1. Hilton Hotels and Prince's Trust partnership**
- 2. Asda and Includem partnership**

3. Tesco and Barnardo's partnership

4. Network Rail and Action for Children partnership

5. Arnold Clark and Prince's Trust partnership

6. Marks and Spencer and Action for Children partnership

7. SSE and Includem partnership

8. Morrison Construction and Prince's Trust partnership

9. RBS and Prince's Trust partnership

Appendix 4: What the Short Life Working Group did

The group met monthly, over a 6-month period approximately, taking evidence and insight from several organisations, to hear both about barriers and good practice which could be learned from and modelled. Membership was made up of employers, third sector organisations and equalities experts with experience of working with young people in a care setting., as well as support with housing and transportation.

Name & title	Organisation
Tony Scally (Chair) National Lead for NTSF and Employability (Scotland)	Action for Children
Gail Kelly HR Manager	Forster Group
Mark Haslett Senior HR Consultant: Policy & Diversity	Scottish Power Energy Network
Patricia Anderson Employer Liaison Officer	Barnardo's
Sheila Gordon Training Academy Lead	Cornerstone Community Care
Jessica Dradge Apprenticeship & Skills Development Leader	BAE Systems
Elaine Walls & April Robertson National Operations Teams	Skills Development Scotland

Name & title	Organisation
Suzanne Sherry Directors	Sherry Solutions
Tara Clark Looked After Children (LAC) Policy Lead	Scottish Government
Gillian Dalziel CSR Programme Manager	Diageo

Specialist speakers and additional experts

In addition to the SLWG's membership, the group also heard from a range of specialist speakers and experts from across industry, different social policy directives, as well as public and voluntary sector partner agencies. They were invited to share best practice or knowledge of successful initiatives, on the basis that lessons learned could be adapted/ applied and help reach solutions for care experienced individuals.

Thanks to the following people and organisations for their insight:

- Laura Smith-Gulliver, Equate Scotland
- Sandy Riddell, Scottish Qualifications Authority
- Kenneth Fleming, The Promise, Scottish Government
- Gill Davies and David Willis, Welsh Income Guarantee – Welsh Government
- Sandy Begbie, Young Person's Guarantee
- Sam Greer, Education and Employability Manager, SSE
- Fergus McMillan, Head of Equality and Diversity, Skills Development Scotland
- Michael Lennox, Senior Customer Engagement Manager – Scotland, CITB

- Lorna Gilmour, Department for Work and Pensions
- Douglas Aitken, Lochlie Construction Group
- Frankie McGhee, Employability Services, Glasgow City Council
- Stephen Rogers, McTaggart Construction
- Tommy McDade, Barnardo's

Short Life Working Group' objectives:

- To explore each recommendation listed, determine how or if they can be taken forward into actions, considering the following:
 - who is it for?
 - is it viable and achievable (i.e. legislative change?)
 - does it require further research?
- Develop a delivery/implementation plan, clearly outlining:
 - recommendations to be taken forward by SAAB
 - identify recommendations out with SAAB – who they are for and whether further research is required
 - resources required: toolkit/materials produced; online channels; stakeholder contribution; support required from partner agencies (SDS, DYW, SE etc.); further research; and funding.
- To develop a communications strategy, to be approved by SAAB EEQ, to help share, explain and embed messaging and recommendations with appropriate audience groups/ stakeholders, to raise awareness and enable real change.

Appendix 5: The Promise

The Independent Care Review was set in recognition of the fact that Scotland’s “care system” isn’t working. It published its findings – [The Promise](#) – in 2020.

A pertinent example of the difficulties facing young people in transitioning to work is highlighted in the publication of The Promise:

Case study - Jack

Jack was brought up in care. He’s 18 now and has recently moved into a flat that other people have called ‘temporary accommodation’. He remembers the months leading up to his 18th birthday. The idea of getting his own place seemed so exciting but now it feels really hard. Jack moved a lot throughout his childhood and went to lots of different schools. He was in Secure Care for a while. He found education difficult. It felt like he found school harder than his friends and he didn’t leave with many qualifications.

He’s applied for a few jobs since moving but hasn’t had any interviews. He has been leaving the ‘references’ section on his application form blank and wonders whether that’s not helping. He’s tried to ask for help but no one seems to be able to give it. All of the jobs he would like to do seem to ask for more qualifications than he has. He knows the local college offer courses he could take but he’s already worried about paying his bills so he needs to spend his time earning, not learning.

Advocacy (pp114 – 5)

An advocate is someone who provides support to individuals and families accessing information and advice. An advocate can help individuals to access rights, benefits that they are entitled to and guide them to legal advice and through legal processes if that is what is required. Scotland must aim to ensure that care experienced children, young adults and families can navigate the system of care without such extra support. The workforce should become the primary trusted adults who children and young adults turn to for support, advice, and care. However, advocates will be required for as long as the ‘care system’ remains complex and does not provide what children, young adults and families need. Therefore, during the implementation of the Care Review advocates must be available to children, young adults and families who come into contact with the ‘care system’.

Advocacy must operate with the following principles:

- Care experienced children and adults must have the right and access to independent advocacy, at all stages of their experience of care and beyond. Their needs in terms of who they can relate best to must be recognised and respected.
- Independent advocacy organisations must be commissioned to ensure that advocacy is structurally, financially and psychologically separate from statutory organisations and service providers.
- There must be no upfront or hidden charges associated with engaging an advocate.
- There must be consistent advocacy standards across Scotland that are subject to inspection and regulation.

- Advocates must be skilled and knowledgeable about the rights and entitlements of children. There must be specialist advocates available to support disabled and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.
- There must be no upper age limit. Advocacy must be available for all care experienced individuals for as long as they need it.
- Advocacy must be readily and quickly available to all families who are in contact with the 'care system'. Families must be supported to understand and advocate for their rights and entitlements.
- Peer advocacy has been proven to support families to navigate their way through a complex system and reduce the number of children being removed from their families. Groups and providers of peer advocacy must be supported to provide meaningful support to families.

Appendix 6: Relevant reports

1. Report by Skills Development Scotland Evaluation & Research – Young Peoples’ Career Ambitions (2023)

	Care exp	Not care exp
Not having enough confidence in myself	50%	47%
Not enough work experience	45%	45%
Not having contacts / knowing the right people	32%	38%
Not enough jobs	36%	31%
Not earning enough money to live on	32%	34%
Being discriminated against	31%	18%

Interestingly, 11% indicated that lack of role model was a barrier.

2. Report by Iriss – Care experience and employment (2021)

This report highlights similar findings to those of the SLWG. [Care Experience and Employment](#), 3 August 2021

“But while apprenticeships are seen as a good employment option for young people, care leavers can often be put off by the low levels of pay and the entry requirements. Taking an apprenticeship can leave them financially worse off than being unemployed (Become). The low pay can be a barrier because they cannot earn enough to support themselves independently, while becoming eligible for council tax and other bills, and having benefits reduced.

This [Centre For Social Justice](#) (2016) sets out a series of policy recommendations to support the continued development of services and support for care leavers in England, focusing particularly on traineeships and apprenticeships:

- allow care leavers to retain their benefits during the first month of an apprenticeship
- allow care leavers to retain their Housing Benefit at the existing level for the first month of an apprenticeship or traineeship.”

Appendix 7: Benefits of Mentoring

Mentoring is an effective way for employers to support care-experienced individuals into employment or apprenticeships. Employer mentoring involves pairing a care-experienced individual with a more experienced employee within the organization who can provide guidance, advice, and support. All support should be planned through a trauma responsive lens, with acknowledgement that most Care Experienced Children (and young people) have experienced developmental trauma and are protected under article 39 of the UNCRC: Article 39 (recovery from trauma and reintegration). Taking this approach can support applicants to make progress without the trauma or stigma of self-disclosing their life experiences.

Here are some ways in which employer mentoring can benefit care-experienced individuals:

1. Emotional Support: Care-experienced individuals may have experienced trauma and may struggle with low self-esteem or feelings of isolation. Mentoring provides a safe and confidential space for the mentee to discuss their concerns and feelings. This emotional support can be invaluable in helping the mentee build confidence and resilience.
2. Professional Development: Mentoring can help care-experienced individuals develop their professional skills and knowledge. The mentor can provide guidance on career development, work-related issues, and offer feedback on performance. This can help the mentee to progress in their career and achieve their full potential.
3. Networking: Mentoring can also provide care-experienced individuals with access to a wider network of contacts within the organization. This can be particularly useful when seeking out new job opportunities or looking for career advice.
4. Role Model: Care-experienced individuals may not have had positive role models in their lives. Mentoring can provide them with a positive role model within the workplace who can demonstrate how to be successful in a professional environment.
5. Advocacy: Mentors can act as advocates for their mentees, providing support and guidance to ensure that their needs are met within the organization. This can help to ensure that care-experienced individuals are treated fairly and that any barriers to their success are addressed.

A 2021 report by the Scottish Mentoring Network outlined the positive impact that effective mentoring relationship could have on individuals at different points in their life.

The report cites Professor Jean Rhodes who has written extensively on youth mentoring, “her research over the years has explored how youth mentoring can be effective (2011, 2008, 2006, 2005, 2002). She states that youth mentoring can impact young people in 3 ways:

- (1) enhancing their social relationships and emotional well-being;
- (2) improving their cognitive skills through instruction and conversation;

And (3) promoting positive identity development through meaningful connection to role models and advocates.”

Appendix 8: Lack of post-school mentoring provision

In October 2021, the Poverty Alliance conducted a rapid evidence review of the effectiveness of mentoring and tutoring for children and young people living in poverty. While it found that evaluation evidence on mentoring in Scotland was minimal and there were gaps in provision geographically, mentoring did have positive impacts of young people. However, it also found that ‘mentoring programmes are most often focused on secondary school aged pupils.’

- In March 2021, the Scottish Government announced a £19.4 million fund for mentoring programmes to support young people. This included funding for MCR Pathways, a key provider of mentoring for care experienced as well as children and young people affected by poverty, to further rollout provision across Scotland.
- Mentoring programmes in Scotland typically use adult volunteers focused on developing one-to-one relationships in community settings. They are also most widely delivered by third sector organisations, but there are also several programmes delivered by local councils as well as colleges/universities.

This lack of provision for post-school individuals means that at the most important transition time there is little guidance and support.

Appendix 9: Sources

Apprenticeship Quarterly stats – Skills Development Scotland

Graduate Apprenticeship Annual Report – Skills Development Scotland

Scottish Mentoring Network

Apprenticeship Bursary for Care Leavers – UK Government

Incentive Payments for Hiring Apprentices – UK Government

Scottish Mentoring Network – The Promise Mentoring Mapping

Scottish Mentoring Network – Poverty Alliance

Independent Care Review - The Promise

Resource on Care Experience – for apprenticeship learning providers – from Skills Development Scotland

Skills Development Scotland – Main streaming Report 2023

