external review of Children Missing from Education (Scotland) CME(S) service

Scottish Government progress report on recommendations

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Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide the Children Missing from Education (Scotland) (CME(S)) multi-agency steering group with progress to date on the recommendations proposed by the external review of the service.

Background

The CME(S) service is a national service and assists and supports local authorities with transferring information, tracing and locating children deemed to be 'missing from education'. Children 'missing from education' are children and young people of compulsory school age who are not on a school roll and are not being educated otherwise (at home, privately or in an alternative provision). They have usually not attended school for a substantial period of time (usually agreed as 4 weeks, or considerably less for vulnerable children). When local searches for children missing from education prove unsuccessful, the service can assist local authorities with a wider search across Scotland, other areas of the UK and in certain circumstances abroad, to locate the child. The service aims to support, advise and provide training for local authority and school staff regarding issues around children missing or at risk of becoming missing from education.

As part of their inspection procedure HMIE request information from CME(S) on a standard set of queries around CME activity prior to each joint inspection of child protection services for children and young people in a local authority area. To date, the service has provided HMIE with information for twenty inspections since the inspection programme began in January 2007.

The service also manages the national "School to School" (S2S) electronic transfer system which moved from development to becoming operationally live in February 2008. The system enables the secure electronic transfer of a standard set of pupil details between publicly funded schools across all 32 local authority areas in Scotland. The system automatically highlights cases of pupils who have left a school but have not appeared at their expected onward destination. More recently, a proof of concept (POC) was undertaken which clearly demonstrated that by using one of two methods tested, any independent school can participate in the national system.

Initially, the project was located with the Support for Learning Division (SfL) and programme costs for the service were met by SfL until April 2008. From this point onwards, the project was mainstreamed to the Scottish Exchange of Education Data (ScotXed) Unit, within Education Analytical Services Division to support the final stages of development and go-live of the national S2S system.

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An external review of the CME(S) service was carried out by Jennifer Stark, a commissioned consultant, over the period September 2006 to April 2007. The review examined how the service had developed during its first two years and its interface with local authorities and other services involved with children who go missing from education www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2009/02/27152211/0.

A multi-agency CME(S) steering group was set up in June 2008 as a result of the external review. The group agreed to:

- take forward the recommendations contained in the review;

- guide the further development of the CME(S) service and local services for children missing from education; and

- respond to any future issues which may arise.

The multi-agency CME(S) steering group has met on three occasions and is scheduled to meet for the last time in May 2009. However, there is a commitment on the part of members to be contacted for reference in the future if required.

Context

The ScotXed partnership is fully committed to the principles and commitments set out in the concordat between the Scottish Government and local authorities. The unit operates in accordance with the Scottish Government's economic strategy and overarching purpose 'to focus government and public services on creating a more successful country, with opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish, through increasing sustainable economic growth.'

The ScotXed partnership has ensured that its activities are aligned to the Scottish Government's five strategic objectives which aim to make Scotland wealthier and fairer, smarter, healthier, safer and stronger and greener and supports progress towards achieving the national outcomes.

CME(S) adopts the 'Getting it right for every child' (GIRFEC) approach and seeks to improve the outcomes for children and young people to help them become successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens.

Progress

There were twenty-four recommendations identified in the review report. Given the period of time elapsing between the date of review, publication and set-up of the steering group many of the recommendations have been dealt with through the routine activity of the service. The recommendations and a summary of progress towards meeting the recommendations are detailed below.

1. *Consider if appropriate systems are in place to support service delivery, ongoing communication with stakeholders, monitoring and evaluation of associated activities and for record keeping and collection of data.*

   The service has operated as part of the well-established ScotXed Unit for over two years and has significantly benefited from the partnership arrangements that ScotXed has in place in relation to supporting business requirements. In addition, processes are in place to support business planning, monitoring and reporting aligned with the budget and adherence to the Scottish Government's corporate guidance. Management information extracted from S2S and CME(S) records is detailed at Appendix 1.

2. *How best to communicate CME(S)'s role and remit to local authorities, to other relevant agencies and to members of the public with whom CME(S) may be involved.*

   The service has taken a lead role in organising and managing a number of awareness raising events including two national conferences (spring 2007 and autumn 2008). Additionally, the service has also contributed to UK-wide events with staff delivering well-received presentations at conferences and seminars.

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Staff have made visits to several local authorities in order to get closer to practice and to highlight areas of concern. These visits have been extremely useful and have established that, in the main, there is a sufficient and consistent level of dialogue between S2S and CME(S) co-ordinators within authorities. A number of practitioners expressed a desire for more efficient engagement and smarter communication. To this end, the ScotXed website www.scotxed.net has been completely redesigned to improve and enhance communication with, and between, stakeholders.

The website now offers a virtual setting for engagement with the entire ScotXed team as well as secure access to restricted areas. The functionality of the website offers an environment where flexible, on-line collaboration is easily and effectively achieved. In addition to the network of School to School Co-ordinators and CME(S) Co-ordinators the opportunity to engage on-line can be extended to all relevant stakeholders to capture and share experiences, documentation and highlight issues.

The website is not intended to replace all face-to-face communication with stakeholders and there will always remain opportunities for people to meet at both local and national level.

3. *How to ensure that appropriate arrangements are in place to guarantee that CME(S) service developments are co-ordinated with developments in other policy areas within the Scottish Government.*

    CME(S) service developments are documented in the ScotXed business plan which is published on the Scottish Government intranet following formal and informal consultation with colleagues across the Scottish Government.

4. *How to ensure that within the new CME(S)/ScotXed working arrangements CME(S)'s distinct interface function with local authorities will continue and develop.*

    Experience to date suggests that the distinct interface with local authorities has been enhanced as a result of the ScotXed partnership arrangements already in place. Examples of this include CME/S2S awareness raising and information update sessions provided at national ScotXed Forums and in the ScotXed Factfile; and, CME(S) and S2S guidance for schools and local authorities published regularly on the website. This will continue to be addressed through the annual business planning process.

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5. *How to ensure that arrangements are in place for monitoring of existing protocols with police and health.*

    Further to the establishment of the multi-agency steering group, it has been agreed that, at this time both the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland (ACPOS) Memorandum of Understanding and the National Health Service in Scotland (NHS) Missing Family Alert protocol are fit for purpose. However, it is acknowledged that this needs to be revisited at the annual business planning cycle of CME(S).

6. *How to ensure that discussion is taken forward with ACPOS regarding issues surrounding implementation of the joint Memorandum of Understanding.*

    The establishment of the multi-agency steering group has offered the opportunity for further discussion around the Memorandum of Understanding and consistency of practice.

7. *The development of a protocol with Women's Aid on the basis of the existing working agreement is taken forward.*

    There are a small number of school-to-school transfers where a child and their associated family members require specific arrangements around disclosure of their whereabouts. Current practice aims to ensure that the needs of the child and family are met however it is acknowledged that a protocol should be developed and agreed by CME(S), Local Authorities and Scottish Women's Aid as soon as possible to formalise working arrangements.

8. *If the current definition for children missing from education should be broadened to include children who are not of compulsory school age.*

    There is a commitment between the ScotXed Unit and the GIRFEC programme to revisit and appraise respective developments such as the national S2S transfer system and e-Care store with a view to including a broader age group in the future.

9. *If discussions with other parts of the UK on the complexities and perceived need for a cross-border protocol should be commenced.*

    A directory of UK CME contacts has been established to aid the efficient exchange of information. There is currently an agreement in place with the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and the UK Information Standards Board (ISB) to include the Scottish Candidate Number (SCN) in the common transfer file with a reciprocal agreement from the Scottish Government. This is a precursor to a form of system integration.

10. *If national guidance to support local authorities with the development of policy, protocols and procedures is required with some degree of urgency.*

    National guidance was embedded within the Scottish Government's handbook 'Safe and Well' and published in August 2005. The handbook is currently being reviewed and it is anticipated that the new on-line guidance will be available in Spring 2010.

11. *If there is a need to clarify and promote the role and responsibility of agencies other than education in supporting children missing from education.*

    The work of the multi-agency steering group has offered an insight into the roles and responsibilities of those stakeholders concerned with children missing from education. Further information and understanding can be developed through the collaborative workspace on www.scotXed.net in the future.

12. *If guidance is required to support multi-disciplinary working including identification of 'at risk' children and the co-ordinated delivery of support for prevention and follow-up.*

    The identification of 'at risk' children and associated co-ordinated support has been subsumed into the work programme of the review of the national guidance for child protection committees.

13. *If a change of service name is required to promote multi-disciplinary involvement.*

    The multi-agency steering group agreed that there should be no change to the name of the service.

14. *If there is a need for national guidance on the roles, remit and responsibilities of designated CME contacts in local authorities with some degree of urgency.*

    A network of CME(S) and S2S co-ordinators across local authorities is now well established and working effectively. They are supported with appropriate guidance contained in 'Safe and Well' to locate children missing from education.

15. *How best to support local authorities to develop information systems to identify families at risk of removing children from education.*

    The identification of 'at risk' children and associated co-ordinated support has been subsumed into the work programme of the review of the national guidance for child protection committees. Any development of information systems to support the identification of families will be consistent with current developments, policy and legislation.

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16. *If there is a need to provide guidance for local authorities on working with diverse groups such as families who seek asylum, families from migrant working groups, families who have itinerant lifestyles and for children who are not of compulsory school age.*

There is specific reference contained in 'Safe and Well' to the groups detailed in the recommendation. Further to this, local authorities are encouraged to provide relevant background information when making a referral to the service. In addition, CME(S) has developed strong links with the UK Borders Agency (UKBA) who can assist with providing information that will help to locate children.

17. *If there is a need to provide guidance to support the risk assessment of children missing from education or vulnerable to missing education.*

Risk assessment is covered by the GIRFEC approach and associated developments.

18. *How to ensure that the guidance in 'Safe and Well' is updated to reflect any changes required.*

'Safe and Well' was designed to be easily updated, published and issued in line with policy and practice development. A review is underway and a revised version will be published on-line in Spring 2010.

19. *How to make arrangements for the sharing of good practice and policy.*

This recommendation is closely related to recommendation two, where some of the activity detailed offers the opportunity to share good practice and policy. The service is also considering how it can establish links with the UK's first hub of child protection expertise which can put agencies in touch with leading professionals from across the world. The Multi-Agency Resource Service (MARS) will help local authorities and other child protection agencies work through difficult cases and share good practice. The small unit will bring together a network of expertise from practice, policy and research to support professionals in the field. It will build on Scotland's robust safeguards for children at risk and be able to draw on international advice.

20. *If there is a need to clarify the complexities regarding home education.*

The Scottish Government published revised guidance for parents and local authorities in January 2008. The purpose of this guidance is to set out the legislative position, provide advice on the roles and responsibilities of local authorities and parents in relation to children who are home educated, and to encourage local authorities and home educating parents to work together to develop trust, mutual respect and a positive relationship that functions in the best educational interests of the child.

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21. *If there is a need to discuss with Child Protection Committees in their strategic capacity how children who have not been located by CME(S) can best be monitored at local authority level.*

    The national forum for Child Protection Committee Chairs has been made aware of the work of CME and is supportive of its role. It is also acknowledged that there are good links at an operational level in local authorities for agencies to share information, where there are concerns in respect of a particular child. It is anticipated that through eCare/i2 those organisations with eCare v1.1.3 will also be able to flag up CME cases by mid-2010.

22. *How to ensure that arrangements are in place for CME(S) to communicate to local authorities identified practice concerns including those related to child protection.*

    A review of the 1998 guidance for child protection committees has been initiated by the Scottish Government and this matter could best be addressed through that review.

23. *If there is a need to hold a future review on CME(S)'s operation and function within the new ScotXed framework.*

    CME(S) is subject to systematic review within the ScotXed strategic and business plan. These plans are published and made available to all stakeholders. Feedback on plans is invited and welcomed to inform continuous improvement.

24. *If policy and guidance and developments for children missing from education in other parts of the UK could assist with the review recommendations and the development of CME(S) as a national service.*

    CME(S) work with a network of colleagues from across the UK and attend events with four home-nations coverage to learn from practice and policy elsewhere.

Children Missing from Education (Scotland) Service

May 2009

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The number of referrals are as follows:

Date	No. of referrals	No. of children
14 Aug 2006 - 30 Jun 2007	86	144
1 Jul 2007 - 13 Aug 2007	4	9
14 Aug 2007 - 30 Jun 2008	64	105
1 Jul 2008 - 13 Aug 2008	1	4
14 Aug 2008 - 30 June 2009	76	120

National School to School Transfer System

The following information summarises activity and covers the period from 'go live' in late February 2008 to late April 2009.

The total number of messages processed since go live is: 357,493

The total number of pupil transfers processed since go live is: 159,907

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Table 1: Transfers by leaving reason

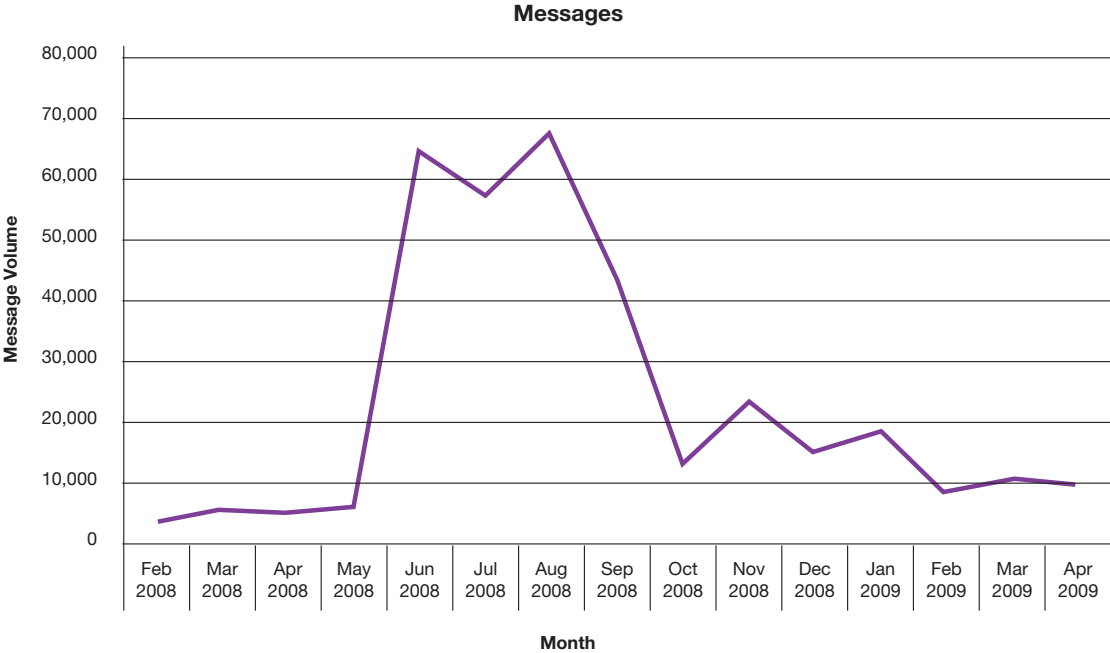| Code	Reason for Leaving	Number of Pupils
05	Unknown Destination	484
-	Pupil Created In Error	3
08	Died	100
01	Publicly Funded Scottish School	85,335
04	Home Education	198
12	Moved Abroad	2,925
13	Moved to England, Wales, N Ireland	2,747
07	Permanently Excluded	56
03	Left School (school leaving age)	51,506
09	Independent Scottish School	1,752
06	Exceptional Permission	133
- (null)	No reason	14,668
Total		**159,907**

The frequency of messages can be seen in Table 2 and the volume of messages processed in Figure 1:

Table 2: Messages by month

Year	Month	Messages
2008	Feb	4,104
2008	Mar	5,816
2008	Apr	5,725
2008	May	6,115
2008	Jun	64,869
2008	Jul	57,155
2008	Aug	67,928
2008	Sep	43,752
2008	Oct	13,342
2008	Nov	23,567
2008	Dec	15,659
2009	Jan	19,079
2009	Feb	9,156
2009	Mar	11,012
2009	Apr	10,214

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Figure 1: Message volumes by month

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