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Supporting Care Leavers in Scottish Further Education Colleges

A research account of a pilot programme aimed
at supporting looked after young people and
care leavers in further education colleges in
Scotland

Final Report: November 2011

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The research team

The work was carried out by researchers in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Strathclyde. The research team was led by Graham Connelly of the School of Applied Social Sciences. The team included Zachari Duncalf and Judy Furnivall of the New Centre of Excellence for Looked After Children, and Liz Seagraves and Rebecca Soden of the School of Education. Fieldwork assistance was provided by two young researchers, David Miller from Who Cares? Scotland, and Heidi McGinlay from the Scottish Throughcare and Aftercare Forum.

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Executive Summary

Chapter 1: Introduction

The aim of the research, conducted between August 2009 and June 2011, was to conduct an evaluation of a programme funded by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) which supported three pilot projects concerned with the engagement in further education (FE) provision of young people aged between 15 and 19 who are in local authority care (at home and away from home) or who have left care. The overall aim of the research was to identify clear lessons for the Council and for the Scottish FE college sector more generally, leading to improved participation by care leavers in post-school education.

The pilot sites were in three geographical locations and included five colleges. These were: Glasgow (John Wheatley College); Edinburgh (Jewel & Esk College, Stevenson College and Edinburgh's Telford College); and Dumfries and Galloway (Dumfries & Galloway College). The Glasgow project began in August 2008 while the others began in summer/autumn 2009. The Edinburgh and Dumfries and Galloway projects were funded for two years and the Glasgow project received funding for a third year so that it was coterminous with the other pilots.

Chapter 2: Background and context

This chapter explains the use of the terms 'looked after' children and young people and 'care leavers'. It distinguishes between those looked after 'at home' and 'away from home' and outlines the 'corporate parent' responsibilities of local authorities and their key partners, including further education colleges. The chapter outlines the current policy context and provides a review of research in relation to leaving care and the education of looked after young people.

The further education college sector is important in relation to strategic planning for lifelong learning and employability skills, particularly since around one third of students live in Scotland's most socially deprived areas. The colleges are also geographically optimally located to facilitate participation by their target population, with almost 80% of people in areas of high social deprivation living within a four mile radius of a college. The *By Degrees* study of care leavers in higher education in the UK found that 40% of the study population had previously attended an FE college, suggesting that colleges provide an important progression route for looked after young people.

The chapter outlines current policy in Scotland in relation to the 'corporate parenting' of looked after children and care leavers. The poor educational outcomes of looked after children in general are described, as well as the improvements seen in recent years, particularly for children looked after away from home. The importance of the further

education sector in providing both progression opportunities and also help to overcome gaps in schooling within an adult environment has been highlighted. The chapter poses two questions. Does this group of young people define success in the same way as service providers, policy makers, researchers and academics do? What is the relevance of any difference in interpretation in relation to the pilot projects? The literature reviewed in this chapter goes only part of the way to answering these important questions, since it is clear that there are considerable individual differences in experience and perception. We can conclude two things: first, we should be cautious in conflating attainment and achievement; and, second, it is vital that the voice of looked after young people and care leavers should be considered in interpreting the outcome measures collected as part of the research discussed in this report.

Chapter 3: Goals and methods of the research

The research used quantitative methods to analyse recruitment, attainment and progression statistics, provided by colleges' data managers, about the young people who participated in college courses during the pilot programme. A letter was provided by the SFC to the colleges giving permission to share with the research team data which is normally regarded as the property of the SFC. The young people were also invited to complete entry and exit questionnaires, though this approach was less successful than we had hoped, and in particular there was a low response to the end of course questionnaire (see Appendix 1). Qualitative methods were used to ascertain the views of the key participants; these included analysis of discussions with programme staff and interviews with the young people.

Chapter 4: The aims of the pilot projects

All three pilot projects aimed to reach out to young people who were or had been looked after with a view to engaging them in further education. All three made use of a combination of career and personal guidance, support to sustain attendance and educational aspects. On the other hand, the three pilot projects were very different, both in terms of their location and in approach.

Two were located in exclusively urban areas, though one of these was based in a single locality, the east end of Glasgow; one was located in a rural area. Travel to attend college presented challenges in all locations. Sometimes college staff made emergency payments when students had no money or had mislaid travel cards. In the rural location, some students travelled long distances to attend college.

Two of the pilots (Glasgow and Dumfries & Galloway) made use of specially constructed programmes, both having a strong focus of personal and social development as well as

vocational elements. John Wheatley's lasted a full year, though students could progress to mainstream courses sooner, while Dumfries & Galloway's was shorter: 12 weeks of one day per week, followed by 13 weeks' full-time provision. Both used youth work approaches and engaged with external agencies, and both had residential components. Dumfries & Galloway's programme made considerable use of vocational 'taster' sessions. In both cases the purpose was to prepare the young people for mainstream courses. The Dumfries and Galloway programme also gave students access to study by distance learning where this suited students' particular needs.

The Edinburgh programme did not use a specially constructed course solely for looked after young people but instead used a range of approaches to prepare young people for college and to help them to sustain their place once in college. These approaches included liaising with schools and social services, providing advice to young people about going to college, offering access to additional in-college support, offering flexible attendance, giving help to find part-time work and runner summer programmes. Students were supported to access the standard college preparation course and mainstream provision.

Chapter 5: The young people: participation and outcomes

This chapter reports on the students enrolled on courses in the five colleges during 2009-2011. The data are derived from student records as prepared for the FES returns to the SFC and from data supplied by college staff. Over the two years records were supplied for 428 young people, some of whom were students returning for a second year at college.

In 2009-10, 48% were under 16 years of age at the start of their courses, a proportion which fell to 35% in 2010-11. These averages are skewed by John Wheatley College where 90% were under 16 in 2009-10 and 73% in 2010-11. Some of the younger students were on school-link provision and others were at college as an alternative to school. While the programmes were designed principally to meet the needs of looked after young people or care leavers who had reached normal school leaving age, these figures show that the colleges engaged with the young people while still at school as part of the process of transition from school to further education or work.

There were no differences in outcomes between males and females. There was, however, a strong association related to vocational focus which, in line with national figures, showed a tendency for the young men to be on courses related to construction and engineering and for the young women to be on courses studying hair and beauty and health, child and social care.

John Wheatley and Dumfries and Galloway colleges developed special courses for looked after young people/care leavers. The Edinburgh programme was aimed at supporting young

people to access college courses available to all students. The majority (over 90%) of students were on courses at SCQF level 5 and below.

Success was considered in terms of course completion, progression to further courses in college, overall positive outcomes (i.e. college, work, other training) and successful attainment (i.e. gaining 70% of units of the course). The colleges argued that gaining some course units was a measure of success as this indicated progress.

John Wheatley's 'Transition to Learning and Work' courses were full-time and lasted a year (or half year for January starts) while Dumfries & Galloway's 'Go Further' programme was offered on a day-release programme for 12 weeks, with an optional follow-up 12 week full time programme.

In 2009-10 86% of the Go Further students completed their course with 60% completing in 2010-11. In the first year of the programme 18% were reported as continuing in college and overall 43% had a positive outcome. In the second year of the programme it was reported that 40% were planning to continue and 90% had positive outcomes. In 2009-10 37% of the John Wheatley Transition to Learning and Work students completed their course with 48% completing in 2010-11. In 2009-10 40% of the TTLW students continued in college with 51% overall having positive outcomes, while in 2010-11 it was reported that 61% were planning to continue and overall 81% had positive outcomes.

A higher proportion of the Go Further group completed their courses while a higher proportion of the John Wheatley students continued in college. The programmes were similar in terms of overall positive outcome. Many of the Dumfries and Galloway students were still attending school, while John Wheatley's students, although of school age, were no longer attending and they typically had a high degree of disaffection towards education. The challenge for colleges is to know their target groups and ensure that provision is designed to take account of their particular needs.

Dumfries and Galloway's Go Further programme used college- assessed units achieved by 64% of the students in 2009-10 and 53% in 2010-11. John Wheatley's Transition to Learning and Work course was recorded initially as a non-assessed course. During 2010-11 it was reported as an assessed course with a 48% success rate.

Where students attended mainstream college courses, overall around 60% completed. In 2009-10, 31% progressed, with 54% expected to progress in 2010-11. Positive outcomes were reported for 46% in 2009-10, a proportion expected to have risen considerably to 67% in 2010-11. Dominant Programme Group 18 (i.e. a category of courses designed for students with a range of support needs) might be a suitable comparator. In 2009-2010 on average 78% of the students on DPG18 courses completed, clearly a higher rate than achieved by students in the pilots.

The destinations of some students were unknown and some young people lose contact with college. The number of 'unknowns' reduced in 2010-11 but this issue remains a challenge for college-agency partnerships so young people at risk do not become 'lost' to the system.

Dumfries & Galloway and the Edinburgh colleges emphasised working with young people prior to enrolling in college. In 2009-10 a total of 186 young people were supported and 32% enrolled. In 2010-11 153 were supported, with 46% intending to enrol. Support in transition is an important service for students from a looked after background, and how colleges, local authority throughcare services and Skills Development Scotland collaborate to provide this support is clearly an important matter for local partnerships.

Chapter 6: The young people's accounts

This chapter reports on the young people's accounts of their personal lives, college experiences and aspirations for the future. Information was derived from questionnaires completed on commencing and leaving courses and interviews with individual young people. Most young people had clear aspirations for the future but for some it was not clear that the courses they had undertaken had helped them to achieve these although they may have gained other benefits from the college experience such as meeting new people. Several young people provided examples of a failure to match learning opportunities to their aspirations and existing level of educational attainment. Most young people were managing considerable external demands in addition to their college work. Young people expressed considerable satisfaction with the support they received at college. Questions are raised, however, about how such support should be most appropriately provided and whether there should be a stronger focus on supporting the specific learning needs of young people. In particular an issue emerged that for some young people the support offered undermined existing resilience.

Chapter 7: What the pilot projects learned from their programmes

From the projects' perspectives, the full-time workers who had most contact with the students and who were freed up from other responsibilities to engage in networking with potential referring agencies, to meet young people prior to enrolment, to be available to students when a crisis arose, to provide training for colleagues and to help resolve problems, were regarded as crucial to the success of the pilots. Since these posts were funded by the project grant it is unlikely that they could be resourced by the pilot colleges in future and by other colleges intending to make available special provision for looked after young people and care leavers. There is also a compelling argument that suggests the particular support needs of care leavers are not different from those of other young students who face financial, housing and relationship difficulties and have involvement with

statutory agencies. What is different, however, is that local authorities and their partners, including colleges, have continuing corporate parent responsibilities for students from a looked after background. Some of the activities engaged in by the full-time workers, such as amending college policies and developing referral pathways is complete, while some others, such as disbursement of hardship funds, could be transferred to mainstream student support facilities. Nonetheless, the pilot colleges recognised the importance of having a 'named person', someone known to students and staff, with at least a part-time role to champion the needs of students from a looked after background.

All three pilots emphasised the importance of having an effective infrastructure: an operational group with clearly defined remit and roles; workable arrangements for referral and sharing confidential information about young people; and a supportive network of partners.

All of the partners could identify significant benefits arising from conducting training for a broad range of college staff about the experiences of looked after children and young people. Although this training was typically conducted by the pilot staff there is no reason why colleges should not invite partners, such as local authority leaving care teams, to provide this service.

Chapter 8: Conclusion and recommendations

The final chapter in this report reviews the findings presented in the earlier chapters in the light of the original aims for the research and considers the key themes that have emerged. The chapter also lists recommendations which we hope will be useful for practitioners and others concerned with developing the post-school educational opportunities available to looked after young people and care leavers.

Recommendation 1: *Further education colleges in Scotland are important post-school destinations for many looked after young people. The discontinuities at earlier stages in education mean that access to college courses is vital for these young people. Colleges should be encouraged to develop local partnerships to increase the opportunities available to young people to progress in their education, with particular emphasis on providing support to complete courses and to gain qualifications.*

Recommendation 2: *Students from a looked after background often need considerable practical and personal support to attend and maintain a college place. Provision of this support is not necessarily the responsibility of the college. Care should be taken to ensure that support does not undermine a young person's existing resilience. Students from a looked after background sometimes have additional learning support needs and where this is the case early help to address these is a college's responsibility. Summer schools which help prepare young people for college should be considered.*

Recommendation 3: *Local authorities, as ‘corporate parents’, and their college, voluntary sector and SDS partners, should continue to collaborate with efforts recommended in the We Can and Must Do Better report to encourage looked after young people to have high aspirations and to aim high in education. This is not easy but recent improvements in school attendance and attainment suggest that raising awareness can make a difference. Opportunities for looked after young people to meet other young people with a positive experience of education and to have access to individual tuition if required and mentoring support should be considered.*

Recommendation 4: *Leaving care teams, SDS advisers and college champions should help young people to ‘present’ themselves in ways that allow varied achievements to be taken into account and recognised for entry to mainstream programmes. Most of the young people wanted to progress educationally and for many this was related to vocational options. But it is also important to challenge assumptions that looked after young people are more suited to particular (often lower-level) courses. Information aimed at looked after young people should refer to the broad range of course options available and also progression opportunities.*

Recommendation 5: *Colleges can best support looked after young people when there is awareness of the difficulties and barriers to participation in education that they typically experience.*

Recommendation 6: *Students can drop out for a variety of reasons, some prompted by situations arising in college and others unconnected with the course. It is important for college services to be responsive in offering support. Whilst student services encourage students to self-refer, some students may need considerable encouragement to seek and accept help.*

Recommendation 7: *It is important that colleges liaise effectively with local authority leaving care and school pastoral care teams in relation to young people under school leaving age and also that local authority staff continue to accept corporate care responsibilities for these young people.*

Recommendation 8: *College partnerships should consider ways of increasing the proportion of students who are successful in their courses in conventional terms, i.e. who gain SQA qualifications. This is not a simple matter but is likely to involve a combination of good pre-course guidance, following up absences immediately, catch-up tuition for gaps in learning and encouragement.*

Recommendation 9: *The tendency to reinforce gender stereotypes through recruitment to courses should be countered, as should failure to match learning opportunities to young people’s aspirations and existing level of educational attainment.*

Recommendation 10: *Recruitment to the pilot programmes exceeded recruitment targets, indicating that there is a demand for further education among looked after young people and care leavers. Colleges elsewhere in Scotland should be encouraged to work with partners to provide suitable support and encouragement for young people to access courses.*

Recommendation 11: *The SFC's Advisory Group should give advice on realistic benchmarking of completion rates on special programmes for care leavers. The DPG18 average of 78% gives a starting point for a target, accepting that the pilot projects achieved lower rates.*

Recommendation 12: *Engagement with FE should be regarded as a transition process, rather than an end in itself. A recent five-country European project recommended that services should collect regular information about individuals in their care as well as aggregated data up to the age of 25 (Hojer, Johansson, Hill, Cameron, & Jackson, 2008). We recommend that local authorities and Skills Development Scotland should help colleges to try to ensure that young people do not 'disappear' and continue to receive support.*

Recommendation 13: *Local authorities, Skills Development Scotland and a partner college should agree a formal protocol which clarifies roles, management support and information sharing arrangements. Colleges should consider the value of having a staff member provided with time to fulfil the role of 'champion' for looked after children and care leavers.*

Recommendation 14: *The SFC should clarify the funding arrangements for colleges recruiting students for whom local authorities have continuing corporate parent responsibilities. College and local authority partnerships should reach agreement about their respective division of support arrangements for these young people, bearing in mind that this could be a complex exercise where a college needs to liaise with several agencies.*

Recommendation 15: *Scottish FE colleges should be encouraged to make a commitment to gain the Buttle UK Quality Mark for Care Leavers, with support from Scotland's Colleges, SDS, the SFC and representatives of the pilot colleges. This in turn requires that Buttle UK confirms it has the resources to support the FE Quality Mark. Colleges should bear in mind that seven universities in Scotland have considerable experience of the Quality Mark for higher education, in developing support and monitoring systems and in engaging with local authorities and other care providers in activities designed to raise educational aspiration.*

Recommendation 16: *Buttle UK should consider whether the use of the term 'care leaver' is appropriate, since an increasing proportion of young people will continue to be looked after until 18 and supported beyond that to the end of full or part-time education. Buttle should also provide a commitment to publish aggregate data related to students in both FE and HE who declare a looked after background. Buttle might also consider the idea of providing a physical plaque as well as the right to use the logo.*

Chapter 1: Introduction

Aim of the research

The aim was to conduct an evaluation of a programme funded by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) which supported three pilot projects concerned with the engagement in further education (FE) provision of young people aged between 15 and 19 who are in local authority care (at home and away from home) or who have left care. The overall aim of the research was to identify clear lessons for the Council and for the Scottish FE college sector more generally, leading to improved participation by care leavers in post-school education.

The pilot sites were in three geographical locations and included five colleges. These were: Glasgow (John Wheatley College); Edinburgh (Jewel & Esk College, Stevenson College and Edinburgh's Telford College); and Dumfries and Galloway (Dumfries & Galloway College). The Glasgow project began in August 2008 while the others began in summer/autumn 2009. The Edinburgh and Dumfries and Galloway projects were funded for two years and the Glasgow project received funding for a third year so that it was coterminous with the other pilots.

The research was conducted between August 2009 and June 2011. The following questions were used to guide the research:

1. What did the programme involve from the perspectives of the participants and other key stakeholders?
2. What is the care experience of the students and what was their prior educational attainment and engagement with education?
3. What difficulties were encountered by the projects and how were these addressed?
4. What were the achievements of the students on their college courses?
5. What success factors can be determined from the experiences of the projects, and from similar activities elsewhere?
6. What plans do the colleges and their partners have for sustaining the achievements of the project after the special funding ends?
7. What are the implications of the project for the Scottish further education sector in general and for Buttle UK in particular?

The genesis of the programme

The pilot programme originated from an initial approach made to the SFC by John Wheatley College which had already been collaborating with Glasgow City Council in relation to its Enhanced Vocational Improvement Programme (EVIP) aimed at young people aged 15+ who have experienced considerable challenges in their lives. These students included young people who were looked after or were care leavers. John Wheatley College approached the SFC for support to trial a programme during 2008-2009 aimed specifically at young people from care backgrounds. Meanwhile the Frank Buttle Trust (now Buttle UK)¹ approached the SFC with a proposal to participate in a UK-wide pilot in further education colleges of its Quality Mark for supporting care leavers in post-school education. The Quality Mark for Care Leavers in higher education was introduced in 2006.

Structure of the report

An overview of the research approach, key messages and recommendations can be found in the Executive Summary which precedes the main report. A background to the research context – the Scottish further education system, looked after children in Scotland and their outcomes in education, and a review of related literature can be found in Chapter 2 which follows. Readers who are familiar with this context may prefer to begin reading at Chapter 3 which outlines the research methodology. Details of the pilot projects, their aims, organisation and provision are given in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 provides details of the students who attended the colleges, recruited through the pilot programmes, their achievement and progression, based on analyses of returns from the colleges' data systems. The chapter contains illustrative data tables and additional data tables referred to are located in Appendix 2. Chapter 6 contains a detailed account of the experiences of the students who participated in the pilot projects, based on questionnaires and fieldwork interviews. Chapter 7 presents a summary of the projects' accounts of the lessons learned based on interviews with key informants. Chapter 8 contains a discussion of the findings in relation to broader policy issues, key messages arising from the research and recommendations. Chapter 9 contains the research team's conclusion and outlines the potential next steps for promoting participation in further education for looked after children and care leavers.

¹ See: www.buttleuk.org

Chapter 2: Background and context

Introduction

This chapter begins with a brief account of the Scottish education system and the further education college sector in particular. This account is set within the wider policy context of providing opportunities for some of the least academically qualified school leavers. The chapter continues with an overview of looked after young people and care leavers and current policy, particularly as it relates to post-school opportunities. The remainder of the chapter is allocated to a more detailed discussion of the research evidence in relation to the education of looked after young people and the importance of the further education sector in collaborating with schools and local authorities.

The chapter explores in particular the difficulties faced by many young people as they transition from being looked after to their experience of life after care. Important questions are raised about the role of a college education in the process of transitioning from care settings. There is a growing literature exploring the views of looked after young people and care leavers about what constitutes success and how their ambitions are taken seriously and encouraged.

The Scottish education system and the college sector

The Scottish education system is different in origins and structure from the systems in the other UK administrations. Education has always been administered within Scotland and since the introduction of devolved government in 1999 oversight of the entire education system, from pre-school to college and university provision, has been the responsibility of Scottish Ministers who are in turn accountable to the Scottish Parliament.

Most qualifications gained by students at the secondary school stage and in further education colleges are accredited and awarded by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA)². The SQA has devised a means of comparing the levels of and credit-rating different qualifications, known as the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). One use of the Framework is to compute what is known as a 'tariff score', arrived at by adding the credit ratings of awards as a fairer means of comparison where students gain academic and vocational qualifications of different types.

At the time of writing there were 42 further education colleges in Scotland, two of which had indicated plans to merge. Although this total includes specialist centres, such as the three agricultural and land-based colleges, the national centre for Gaelic language and

² See: www.sqa.org.uk

culture, and an adult education residential centre, most FE colleges are effectively community colleges providing a range of courses in general education, vocational preparation and access to higher education. The college sector operates within a complex web of relationships – with schools and universities, with local authorities, voluntary organisations, community groups and local employers – and it is important in relation to strategic planning for lifelong learning and employability skills, particularly since around one third of students live in Scotland’s most socially deprived areas (Thomson, 2008). The colleges are also geographically optimally located to facilitate participation by their target population, with almost 80% of people in areas of high social deprivation living within a four mile radius of a college (Raab & Storkey, 2001). One study of care leavers in higher education in the UK, the *By Degrees* project, found that 40% of the study population had previously attended an FE college, suggesting that colleges provide an important progression route for looked after young people (Jackson, Ajayi, & Quigley, 2005).

The colleges are collectively supported and represented by Scotland’s Colleges, an umbrella organisation which aims to provide strategic direction within the sector, to act as a bridge in discussions about the contribution of FE to Scotland’s economic development with the Lifelong Learning Directorate of the Scottish Government, the SFC and other interest groups, and to contribute to continuing professional development of the sector’s workforce³. Scotland’s Colleges, therefore, has an important role in promoting the principles embodied in the Buttle UK Quality Mark for Colleges.

In 2009-2010 there were 347,357 students enrolled in Scottish FE colleges, of which 55% were female, 5.3% were from non-white ethnic groups and 15% had a disability or additional support needs. Most students (95%) were enrolled on award-bearing courses. While most enrolments were on further education programmes, a small but non-trivial proportion (14%) of students were enrolled on higher education programmes leading to awards at higher national certificate and diploma (HNC/D) levels. It is this aspect of FE provision which makes available additional opportunities for non-traditional students to progress to degree-level courses, in-house⁴ through validation agreements with a university, through articulation agreements with the newer, ‘post-1992’, universities, or by using their awards as entry qualifications to courses in older universities, with or without advance standing by credit transfer arrangements. In fact most such progression is to post-1992 institutions, a fact which some observers have described as simply maintaining educational inequalities (Field, 2004).

In terms of qualifications, higher education accounted for 23% of awards gained in colleges, compared with 48% of awards of further education qualifications; the remaining third of awards were accounted for by National Units (also offered in schools), special needs

³ See: www.scotlandscolleges.ac.uk

⁴ For example, Edinburgh’s Telford College launched a BA (Hons) in Youth Work, in collaboration with Napier University, Edinburgh: <http://www.ed-coll.ac.uk/news/showNews.aspx?NewsID=98>

programme completions and ‘non-recognised’ awards. More detailed statistical information about FE provision is available in the SFC report, *Scotland’s Colleges: A Baseline Report for Academic Year 2009-10* (Scottish Funding Council, 2011).

Transitions from school to college and work

Further education colleges are important players in relation to three aspects of Scottish Government policy aimed at young people: More Chances, More Choices (MCMC); the reformed curriculum for children aged 3-18 (Curriculum for Excellence or CfE); and 16+ Learning Choices.

The More Chances, More Choices policy articulated the then government’s commitment to reducing the proportion of young people most at risk of becoming disengaged socially and economically, the so-called NEET (not in education, employment or training) group (Scottish Executive, 2006b). Approximately one young person in seven in Scotland falls into this category, a proportion that is higher than in most other parts of the UK⁵. Care leavers are particularly at risk of being NEET. The table below, taken from the survey of destinations carried out by Skills Development Scotland nine months after the school leaving date, shows the significantly higher risk looked after children have of not being in a ‘positive destination’. Considered in another way, the table also shows the comparative advantage of being looked after away from home compared to being looked after while remaining in the family home (Scottish Government, 2010c).

Table 1: Proportions of school leavers in positive destinations

	2008-09 (%)	2009-10 (%)
Looked after at home	49.6	49.9
Looked after away from home	64.1	65.4
Not looked after	86.3	87.5

The Scottish Government expects that its MCMC policy will be addressed by the entitlements conferred by the Senior Phase of CfE and the 16+ Learning Choices strategy. The Senior Phase of CfE takes place in the final stages of compulsory education and beyond, normally around age 15-18 (Scottish Government, 2008b). The aim of the Senior Phase is that all young people should have the opportunity to extend their education, build up a portfolio of qualifications, develop skills and have clear, supported pathways to the next stage. Colleges are regarded by government as vital to this aspect of CfE and they are expected to help young people to experience a smooth transition from schools.

⁵ Source: The Poverty Site: <http://poverty.org.uk/index.htm>

The *16+ Learning Choices: Policy and Practice Framework* confirms young people's entitlement to the Senior Phase of CfE and highlights looked after young people and care leavers as a priority group facing significant barriers to learning (Scottish Government, 2010d). The Framework outlines the responsibilities for key partners. For colleges this means:

- Working with local partnerships to ensure the supply of core-funded provision (in relation to type, level and timetabling) matches demand from young people, including those who are attending college for part of their S5/S6 school curriculum, and those going to college for post-16 learning;
- Ensuring learning opportunities are available on a flexible entry basis;
- Ensuring young people's support needs are met in order to improve retention and progression.

The Scottish Government invited the national career guidance agency, Skills Development Scotland, to develop a 16+ Learning Choices Data Hub (expected to go live in autumn 2011)⁶. The idea of the Hub is to have a management information system to match the needs of individual young people and potential learning choices.

A review by Scotland's Colleges considered the learning and teaching challenges facing FE colleges (Scotland's Colleges, 2008). The report recommended that colleges should provide experiences 'regarded by learners as unique to their circumstances, needs and aspirations by building on college responsiveness to the diverse needs of the learner population, on the greater attention being paid to the needs of specific groups and on the student-centred traditions of the sector' (ibid., p.2). These experiences include opportunities to gain vocational qualifications and also introductory courses to acquaint students with college life, develop core skills in literacy, numeracy and IT, and build softer skills in self-presentation, time management and independence. The report pointed out the importance of having skilled staff and providing good continuing professional development opportunities. In relation to looked after young people and care leavers the report highlights the importance of collaborating with local authorities to improve the educational attainment of this group.

The principal role of colleges is in assisting young people to gain vocationally relevant qualifications but even for these students, and particularly for some students who have been socially and educationally disadvantaged, there is an equally important function in providing a safe haven in which to form good relationships, to feel happy and to develop personal confidence. This point is supported by evidence from a small study of 700 learners in 10 colleges which found that while most learners cited improved opportunities as the main reason for entering a college, on closer examination the learners wanted more than access to a better job (Connelly & Halliday, 2001). The students wanted their learning to connect to life as they lived it locally. The subject content mattered less to these learners

⁶ See: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Education/edandtrainingforyoungple/16pluslc/data>

than the relationships forged with other learners and college staff and the impact that these relationships had on the quality of their life.

Looked after children in Scotland

In 2010 there were almost 16,000 children looked after by Scottish local authorities, representing just over one percent of the child and youth population. This figure was a four percent increase on the previous year and the number has been increasing since 2001 (Scottish Government, 2011).

Approximately 40% of these children are looked after at home, 30% are in foster care, 20% in kinship care and 10% in residential care. These proportions have remained relatively stable in recent years but they represent a change when compared with earlier years. In 1976, for example, a higher proportion of children were looked after in residential settings – 36% compared with 22% in foster care (Scottish Government, 2011). The proportion in formally recognised kinship care placements with relatives has also grown in recent years. These proportions are also different in different countries, though it is not easy to compare care regimes internationally. One study compared five countries in Europe and showed that higher proportions of children were cared for in residential settings in Denmark and Hungary, while foster care was more prominent in Sweden and family based care was more commonly used in England and Spain (Hojer, et al., 2008).

Children and young people are looked after for varying lengths of time, with more than two-thirds having been looked after for one or more years. The care history of a child may include more than one episode of care with return to the family home in between, or movement between different care settings.

Looked after children face a range of challenges that are potentially damaging for their education. These challenges include moves of placement and school, absence and exclusion from school, time away from formal education, inadequate support for learning difficulties and lack of encouragement (Connelly, McKay, & O'Hagan, 2003; Voice of the Child in Care, 2004). As a group, looked after children and young people face considerable hardships which may affect their capacity to lead satisfying lives in adulthood. These issues include poor mental and physical health, drug and alcohol addiction, experience of homelessness, poor familial and work relationships, involvement in criminal activity and teenage pregnancy (Cocker & Scott, 2006; McLeod, 2007; Scott & Hill, 2006).

The looked after child's journey through the care system is not always a smooth one and may feature periods in different kinds of setting, returns to the family home and placement breakdowns. On the other hand, stable placements lead to better outcomes in education, career and relationships and improved wellbeing (Biehal, Clayden, Stein, & Wade, 1995; Meltzer, Lader, Corbin, Goodman, & Ford, 2004).

The process of leaving care can also be characterised by discontinuity, leading to insecurity. Young people who are looked after move to living independently at a younger age than is typical for their non-looked after peers. Reaching the minimum school leaving age for many signifies a turning point in their lives and the possibility of being independent is understandably attractive, though agencies have been criticised for not doing enough to provide options that mean young people feel supported (Dixon & Stein, 2002; Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People, 2008). Local authorities provide help to allow young people to plan for leaving care but research has indicated that only about half of young people feel well prepared for leaving care (Dixon & Stein, 2005). Planning for leaving care is more limited for young people on home supervision compared with those looked after away from home (Stein & Dixon, 2006).

Also, while help with accommodation and finance is typically provided, support for education appears to be more variable. Poor outcomes are associated with previous placement instability and limited support from family, friends or professionals; conversely, consistency of placement and support, and social skills training, are beneficial (Stein & Dixon, 2006). One survey found that many young people thought that leaving care had a negative impact on their health, particularly as they did not have enough money to eat well and were depressed as a result of isolation (Ridley & McCluskey, 2003). Therefore, for young people who are looked after, the transition from school to college may coincide with other major life transitions and can produce challenges which go beyond finding suitable accommodation, and include financial pressures, relationship difficulties and worries about health.

Looked after children and care leavers: the legal framework

The statutory origins of the terms of 'looked after' and 'care leaver' lie in the Children (Scotland) Act 1995. Most looked-after children fall into one of two categories - looked after 'at home' or looked after 'away from home'.

A child is looked after at home where there is a Supervision Requirement with no condition of residence through the Children's Hearing system. The child or young person continues to live in their normal place of residence, typically the family home. A child can also be looked after at home under the terms of a permanence order granted by the court under provisions of the Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007. This is an order which gives the local authority the right to determine where the child will reside but the order can vest parental responsibilities and rights in other individuals. Thus, the child's parents could retain some parental rights and the local authority could decide that the child may reside at home.

A child is looked after away from home (i.e. away from their normal place of residence) where there is a Supervision Requirement with a condition of residence through the Children's Hearing system, or where accommodation is provided under Section 25 of the

1995 Act (voluntary agreement) or is the subject of a permanence order under Section 80 of the 2007 Act. The child or young person is cared for away from their family home, e.g. in a foster care placement, residential children's house, residential school, secure unit or kinship care.

There is an added complication in the use of the term, 'looked after', in the sense that a child looked after at home, their family and school, would not identify with the more familiar term 'in care' which has been typically reserved for foster or residential placements. This causes confusion in schools, and perhaps also in colleges. Just as families often continue to share the care of children looked after away from home, local authorities and collaborating agencies are in the position of sharing the care of children who are looked after while remaining in the family home. A further confusion exists in relation to kinship care. Schools, in particular, can find it hard to distinguish between children looked after in a legal sense and private arrangements involving extended family.

The term 'care leaver' is defined in Section 29 of the 1995 Act which sets out a local authority's responsibilities to provide 'aftercare' support to young people who cease to be looked after. The precise wording in the Act is as follows: 'A local authority shall, unless they are satisfied that his welfare does not require it, advise, guide and assist any person in their area over school age but not yet nineteen years of age who, at the time when he ceased to be of school age or at any subsequent time was, but who is no longer, looked after by a local authority'.

Section 29 was amended by Section 73 of the Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act 2001 which gives duties to local authorities to carry out an assessment of the aftercare needs of a young person. These duties are spelled out more fully in *Regulations and Guidance on Services for Young People Ceasing to be Looked After by Local Authorities* (Scottish Executive, 2004). The process by which the assessment is carried out is known as Pathway Planning. The provision of pathway planning is uneven; only 51% of young people ceasing to be looked after over their minimum school leaving age during 1 August 2009 and 31 July 2010 had a pathway plan on the date they were discharged, and only 69 % had a pathway coordinator (Scottish Government, 2011). More information, including a useful handbook of good practice in pathway planning, can be found on the website of the Scottish Throughcare and Aftercare Forum⁷.

The Protection of Children (Scotland) Act 2003 requires relevant bodies, including colleges, to safeguard children, young people and vulnerable groups to whom they have an increased duty of care. This duty requires educational institutions to have procedures in place for protecting children and young people from harm or abuse, for responding appropriately to disclosures and complaints, for training staff, and for liaising with other relevant agencies.

⁷ See: <http://www.scottishthroughcare.org.uk/bestpractice.php?page=Pathways+Practice>

The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2009 gives legal force to the entitlement of looked after children and young people to have ‘additional support’ in relation to their education.

...a child or young person has additional support needs if the child or young person is looked after by a local authority (within the meaning of section 17(6) of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 (c36).

The effect of this change in the law is that there is an assumption of the entitlement to an assessment of additional support needs where a child or young person is looked after. This means that there is a requirement for the local authority which provides a looked after child or young person’s education to conduct an assessment. Such an assessment may conclude there are no individual needs or may specify needs implying varying degrees of professional intervention. Assessed requirements place obligations on other organisations, such as health authorities and private fostering agencies. It is the responsibility of the ‘home’ local authority to meet the financial requirements of any assessed additional requirements.

The Act also stipulates that support can include that which is beyond educational support, for example, multi-agency support from health, social work and voluntary agencies, as well as support during the transition of young people to further learning, training and employment. A college, as an identified ‘appropriate agency’, has specific duties. One duty is the requirement to comply with a request from the local authority to assess the expected needs of a young person with additional support needs (prior to their entry to college) for their course. This responsibility sits alongside the duty of the appropriate agency to respond to requests for information from the local authority to help with ‘transitional planning’ for young people with additional support needs while they are still at school. The Act is supported by the *Supporting Children’s Learning Code of Practice* (Scottish Government, 2010b).

Looked after children and care leavers: the policy context

Current Scottish Government policy in relation to looked after children derives from the *Looked After Children & Young People: We Can and Must do Better* report and a suite of supporting materials identifiable by a distinctive branding depicting a green swirl on a light blue background (Scottish Executive, 2007). The report’s findings were framed within five key themes, deliberately to emphasise the rights of looked after children and young people and care leavers to the same good life prospects envisaged by Ministers for all of Scotland’s children. These themes are:

- Working together
- Becoming effective life long learners
- Developing into successful and responsible adults
- Being emotionally, mentally and physically healthy
- Feeling safe and nurtured in a home setting

The report's themes and actions for improvement highlighted the important connection between wellbeing and success in education. The report also made explicit use of the concept of the 'corporate parent,'⁸ a term encapsulating the duties and unwritten obligations of local authorities and their partners in sharing the parenting of looked after children.

The Scottish Government published guidance for corporate parents in *These are our Bairns: A Guide for Community Planning Partnerships on being a Good Corporate Parent* (Scottish Government, 2008c). This guide introduces the notion of the wider 'corporate family' and outlines actions and outcome measures for services. Good corporate parenting is defined as: '[accepting] responsibility for the council's looked after children and young people; [making] their needs a priority; [and seeking] the same outcomes any good parent would want for their own children' (p.3). It is clear that FE colleges are regarded as being an important part of this wider corporate family, providing opportunities for progression in general and vocational education, and helping young people to make a fresh start and overcome barriers to learning⁹. In order to help children's services to evaluate their effectiveness as corporate parents, HMIE has developed a self-evaluation guide, *How Good is Our Corporate Parenting* (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education, 2009).

Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC)¹⁰ is a national programme that aims to improve outcomes for all children and young people in Scotland by providing a framework for all services and agencies working with children and families to work in a co-ordinated way. The GIRFEC approach is based on eight indicators of wellbeing: safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible and included (SHANARI). These wellbeing indicators are regarded as the basic requirements for all children and young people to grow and develop and reach their full potential. Since the GIRFEC framework is aimed at planning services for children and young people of all ages, it also has relevance for partners collaborating in the transitions from school and care settings to college.

Core Tasks for Designated Managers in Educational and Residential Establishments in Scotland (Scottish Government, 2008a) enumerates the responsibilities Ministers expect educational and residential establishments to undertake in fulfilling their role as corporate parents. This guide identifies 27 'core tasks' and suggests that the 'designated manager' should attend 'multi-agency training' and should act as an advisor to colleagues. Support for briefing a range of staff is available through the Looked after Children Website¹¹ maintained by Learning and Teaching Scotland and training materials in the form of an interactive DVD-ROM (Furnivall, Connelly, Hudson, & McCann, 2008).

⁸ Elected Member Briefing Note No 2 Corporate Parenting:
<http://www.improvementservice.org.uk/library/589-elected-members-development/625-briefings/view-category/>

⁹ For more advice see: www.corporateparenting.co.uk

¹⁰ See: www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/Young-People/childrenservices/girfec

¹¹ See: www.lookedafterchildrenscotland.org.uk/index.asp

One chapter in the Guidance is aimed specifically at further and higher education establishments. It suggests that the remit for a senior member of staff should include responsibility for strategy, systems development and the management of operational activities. Emphasising the importance of partnership working, it covers information sharing, confidentiality, continuing professional development and meeting identified needs. There is currently no published review of the designated manager role.

Partnership Matters describes the roles and responsibilities of agencies supporting people with all forms of additional support needs at or as they prepare to go from school into college or university or from college or university into employment (Scottish Government, 2009c). This guidance aims to ensure that students (including looked after young people and care leavers) with additional support needs are supported by the appropriate organisations during their transition phases into and out of college and university. It is specifically aimed at staff associated with the range of support measures which students with additional support needs require. The guidance proposes that effective partnership working by all the organisations involved in supporting a student with additional support needs will help to reduce the barriers which may prevent their access and participation in learning.

The education of looked after children and young people

Evidence of low attainment by looked after children, and the related lack of attention to education by professionals, was first highlighted in England by Sonia Jackson (Jackson, 1987). The concerns have since become a significant aspect of public policy within the different UK administrations (Department of Education and Skills, 2007; Department of Health Social Services and Public Safety Northern Ireland, 2007; Scottish Executive, 2007; Welsh Assembly Government, 2007).

The origins of specifically Scottish interests in the education of looked-after children came with the publication of a study highlighting a tendency to concentrate on behaviour rather than academic performance in child care reviews (Francis, Thomson, & Mills, 1996) and of a review of research, policy and practice (Borland, Pearson, Hill, & Bloomfield, 1998).

That review led directly to an the inspection of the education of 50 children in residential care settings in five of Scotland's 32 local authorities (Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools and Social Work Services Inspectorate, 2001; Maclean & Gunion, 2003). The *Learning with Care* report pinpointed significant weaknesses in relation to the support in education for children who had been removed from the family home with the aim of improving their welfare. For example, statutory care plans were found to be of varying quality, or were missing; they typically included little useful information about education, and were not routinely shared with schools. The report recommended that local authorities should develop an integrated policy covering education and social work to ensure that the

educational needs of looked after children were met effectively. It set in train a sequence of policy and practice reforms that continues 10 years later.

An important theme in the literature over many years has been the damaging effects of unstimulating intellectual conditions and low educational expectations of looked after children (Berridge, 1985; Berridge & Brodie, 1998; Jackson & McParlin, 2006; Kahan, 1994). Many young people report being stigmatised by other pupils and teachers as a result of being identified as looked after. The corrosive effect of stigma on mental health, self-confidence and access to opportunities emerged as a strong theme in a study of the views and experiences of success of young people in residential care carried out by researchers on behalf of Who Cares? Scotland (Siebelt, Morrison, & Cruickshank, 2008). The research led to a media campaign funded by Scottish Government in 2010 aimed at dispelling myths associated with being in care and promoting positive images of looked after children¹². Bullying is also a common experience; in one small study in England a quarter of young people surveyed about their views of education felt that the bullying they experienced at school was the worst thing about being at school (Morgan, 2007).

I can't remember how many schools I've been in. I think school has been an enjoyable experience so far, but I don't think that I've done my best at school because of all the moves I've had and I've lost education. (Female, 13) (Ritchie, 2003, p. 13)

The effect of frequent placement moves on children's perceptions of their educational progress was illustrated by a survey of 2,000 children and young people in public care conducted by the Who Cares? Trust (Shaw, 1998). The research found that the perception of doing worse in education increases as the number of care placement moves increases, and also, significantly, the perception of doing better is particularly high - at 60% - where young people experienced only one placement. Moving care placement *per se* is not necessarily disadvantageous, since moves can also be positive experiences, but rather it is likely to be the reasons for and nature of the move and its physical and emotional effect on the child or young person that have damaging consequences for education. It is difficult to provide a nurturing living environment when placements are inconsistent and unplanned. Research on young people leaving care shows that those who experienced high levels of placement instability had the worst adjustment to employment, social relationships, financial management and housing (Biehal, et al., 1995). In interpreting the findings of such research it is important to recognise that it tends to highlight negative consequences and does not give prominence to the experiences of young people who do succeed and adjust well, despite disadvantages earlier in life. This is also a disadvantage of cross-sectional research which does not include a life-span perspective.

Care standards¹³ draw attention to the rights of children to receive good educational experiences and have adequate study facilities, including access to computers and the

¹² See: www.givemeachancescotland.org

¹³ See: www.nationalcarestandards.org

internet. There has been significant effort in Scotland to raise awareness about the importance of giving extra attention to the education of looked after children, particularly following the publication of the *We Can and Must do Better* report. This effort has included a more strategic approach to highlighting the responsibilities of corporate parents among elected members and professionals in social work, education and health, and the widespread provision of training. There is compelling evidence that focusing on education can be effective in improving outcomes (Brodie, 2010; Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children’s Services, 2008; Gallagher, Brannan, Jones, & Westwood, 2004). There is also evidence that looked after children who have higher educational attainment experience more stable, satisfying adult lives and are less likely to experience mental ill health (Happer, McCreadie, & Aldgate, 2006; Martin & Jackson, 2002).

Educational outcomes: attendance and attainment

Attendance and attainment are only two examples of educational outcomes and while they are important tools in monitoring trends, it is also important to be aware that they have limited use in describing the wider achievements of looked after children. Looked after children in Scotland had almost twice the average number of absences from school in 2008-09 as those not looked after: 45.0 half days compared with 25.0 (Scottish Government, 2009a). But it is the absence from school of children looked after at home (average number of half days’ absence = 58.7) which accounts significantly for the poor overall outcome, while children looked after away from home have absences only a little higher than their non-looked-after peers (28.1 half days compared with 25.0). Table 2 shows the percentage attendance at school of looked after children during two years. What is evident is the better and improving attendance of children looked after away from home while those looked after at home continue to have poorer attendance.

Table 2: Percentage attendance at school of looked after children

	2003-2004 (%)	2009-2010 (%)
Looked after at home	84.7	85.0
Looked after away from home	91.4	93.0
Not looked after	93.1	93.3

A standard measure of attainment that has been reported annually is ‘the academic attainment of young people aged 16 or over who ceased to be looked after during the year’. Table 3 below shows a comparison of the percentages of care leavers on three metrics - those gaining no awards as a result of taking external examinations administered by the Scottish Qualifications’ Authority (SQA), those who gained at least one award at the most basic level (SCQF Level 3) or higher, and those gaining awards in both English and

mathematics at the most basic level or higher – in 2003, 2006 and 2008 (Scottish Executive, 2003, 2006a; Scottish Government, 2010a).

Table 3: Academic attainment of care leavers over 16 in Scotland: change from 2002-03 to 2007-08

	2002-2003 ¹⁴		2005-2006		2007-2008	
	<i>Home</i>	<i>Away</i>	Home	Away	Home	Away
<i>No awards</i>	67%	47%	386 (55%)	242 (43%)	389 (55%)	223 (39%)
<i>At least one award at Level 3 or higher</i>	33%	53%	319 (45%)	320 (57%)	322 (45%)	353 (61%)
English and Math at Level 3 or higher	27%		195 (28%)	231 (41%)	182 (26%)	263 (46%)

The most striking feature of this table is the high proportion of care leavers who gained no qualifications by the time they left school, compared with 3.3% of all children in Scotland who left school in 2008 without qualifications (Scottish Government, 2010e). Also evident is the significantly lower attainment of young people looked after at home, compared to those placed away from home. The table also shows encouraging signs of improvement in attainment during this relatively short five-year period.

Young people value education, though not always in traditional ways and education may not be their immediate priority. Looked after children and young people are not a homogeneous group; some young people, because of their particular experiences or because they are especially resilient, will cope well in education despite facing disadvantage. Others will need significant emotional support and specific help to overcome gaps in basic schooling. Cameron studied the experiences of 54 high achieving looked after young people and found that an important feature of resilience was the capacity to ask for help. For example, being able to ask for and receive help from a foster carer, residential worker or social worker to complete a college or UCAS application could be a significant first step in being successful in post-school education (Cameron, 2007).

¹⁴ The total number of care leavers in 2003-03 was 1,138. Only percentages were presented within categories in the statistical report. The proportion gaining both English and maths was not reported by home and away from home.

Progressing to college or university

One small-scale study found that 67% of the 77 looked after young people consulted wanted to carry on with their education after leaving school, 10% did not want to carry on and the others were undecided. One young person said:

I want to further my education to help further my life, my career aspects, so to get myself out of poverty and so I can start a fresh life (Morgan, 2007, p. 27).

The young people identified both barriers and supports in relation to a college education. The supports included being settled in housing, having the necessary funds to support themselves and being supported by social workers. A quarter of the young people said that avoiding making an issue of being in care would help.

This point is an important reminder to professionals that while some young people coming from a looked after background will need additional support to pursue their education beyond school, and will benefit from staff with a significant awareness of their needs, help should be provided in ways that are non-stigmatising and which encourage autonomy. This includes recognising that young people are capable of doing things by and for themselves.

Support interventions need to aim to increase young people's resilience and also to prevent the development of problems (Iwaniec & Sneddon, 2006, p. 266).

Some looked after young people are more ready for greater degrees of independence than others. The report *A Sense of Purpose* noted that many young people struggle to leave care and find a confident transition to independence because the care system has, in effect, deskilled them (Barry, 2001). There is a difficult balancing act to be achieved in providing protection and support in a way that does not result in stunting the growth of independence. Stein observed that the difficulties associated with being in care and of leaving care mean that there is inevitably low participation in post-school education among this group of young people: 'care leavers are expected to undertake their journey to adulthood, from restricted to full citizenship, far younger and in far less time than their peers' (Stein, 2006, p. 274). Since the focus for looked after young people at age 16 to 18 is the process of leaving care and becoming socially independent, it is understandable that some find it difficult simultaneously to maintain their attention on college studies.

Table 4 below, taken from a report compiled by Skills Development Scotland, shows the destinations of school leavers three months after leaving school, comparing looked after and not-looked after young people (Scottish Government, 2009b).

Table 4: Destinations of looked after children three months after leaving school

Destination	Looked after (%)	Not looked after (%)	Total (%)
Higher education+	2.6	35.5	34.9
Further education	27.9	27.0	27.0
Training	15.4	4.9	5.1
Employment	8.5	18.6	18.4
Voluntary work	0.4	0.2	0.2
Unemployed seeking work	35.8	11.1	11.5
Unemployed not seeking work	6.5	1.5	1.6
Unknown	2.9	1.2	1.2
Total leavers = 100%	1,043	52,489	53,532

+ This figure includes HNC/D level courses in further education colleges.

What is particularly striking is the disparity in the proportions of young people from looked after and not-looked after backgrounds entering higher education. There are two cautions which should be applied: first, the data on looked after young people appear to be incomplete when compared with similar data supplied by local authorities' social work services; second the 2.6% in the table represents about 27 individuals, a figure which is likely to underestimate the true number of students with a care background in further education. The contrast in the proportions unemployed is also striking. The table also shows the significance of further education courses for looked after young people and care leavers.

The role of Buttle UK in supporting progression in education

The Frank Buttle Trust (renamed Buttle UK in 2011) launched the Quality Mark for Care Leavers in Higher Education in 2006, following a recommendation in the *By Degrees: Going to University from Care* research report (Jackson, et al., 2005). In order to gain the Quality Mark, higher education institutions should demonstrate a commitment to providing support to students with a care background during the application process and while on course. Although the details of its commitment are drawn up by the individual institution in the form of a 'plan of action,' there is a requirement to demonstrate progress in relation to collaboration with local authorities and leaving care teams, and to encourage aspiration in education among looked after children. Six of the Scottish universities have been awarded the Quality Mark. Buttle UK has published practice guidelines for universities and partner

agencies (Buttle UK, 2010). The guidelines take account of recommendations in the By Degrees report:

- Every student should have a named personal advisor for the full duration of his/her course;
- All HEIs should have a comprehensive policy for recruitment, retention and support of students from a care background;
- More HEIs should develop further compact arrangements with local authorities to increase participation of care leavers who should be specifically invited to open days and summer schools;
- All institutions should have a named liaison person who can be contacted by leaving-care teams and personal advisors;
- Student welfare/support services should contact new students known to have been in care and be proactive in offering any necessary help with financial, study or personal needs;
- Admissions tutors and widening participation officers should be better informed about the care system and understand that examination grades may reflect difficulties overcome as much as the applicant's level of ability.

Since 2008, UCAS, the body which administers applications for undergraduate places in universities across the UK, has included a voluntary question which allows applicants to declare a looked after background. The purpose is to allow university support staff and course selectors to direct additional help to applicants and to provide information about summer schools, scholarships and accommodation. There are at least three problems apparent in this system: first, we do not know how the question is interpreted and therefore whether a looked after background is deemed a hindrance or a help by this approach; second, this approach understandably does not take account of students applying directly to a university (e.g. by an articulation agreement with a college); and, third, UCAS, for reasons that are not entirely clear, has not published any of the data it has collected in 2008, 2009 and 2010.

One of the requirements of the pilot programme funded by the SFC was that the five participating colleges should take part in a trial of a Quality Mark for further education involving 28 colleges throughout the UK. Funding for the trial was provided by the following government agencies or departments the Learning and Skills Council, The Department of Business, Innovation and Skills and the Department of Children, Schools and Families (England); the Scottish Funding Council; the Welsh Assembly Government; and Northern Ireland's Department for Employment and Learning.

Summary

This chapter has explained the use of the term 'looked after' and outlined current policy in Scotland in relation to the 'corporate parenting' of looked after children and care leavers. The poor educational outcomes of looked after children in general have been described, as well as the improvements seen in recent years, particularly for children looked after away from home. The importance of the further education sector in providing both progression opportunities and also help to overcome gaps in schooling within an adult environment has been highlighted. We end with the two questions posed at the start of this chapter. Does this group of young people define success in the same way as service providers, policy makers, researchers and academics do? What is the relevance of any difference in interpretation in relation to the pilot projects? The literature reviewed in this chapter goes only part of the way to answering these important questions, since it is clear that there are considerable individual differences in experience and perception. We can conclude two things: first, we should be cautious in conflating attainment and achievement; and, second, it is vital that the voice of the care leavers should be considered in interpreting the outcome measures collected as part of the research discussed in this report.

Chapter 3: Goals and methods of the research

What the research set out to achieve

The purpose of the study was to conduct an evaluation of three pilot projects supported by SFC funding concerned with the engagement in further education provision of young people aged between 15 and 19 who had been or were looked after (either at home or away from home) by local authorities. The overall aim of the research was to identify clear lessons for the SFC and the Scottish FE college sector leading to both improved participation by care leavers in and a better experience of post-school education. The pilots projects were in three locations: Glasgow (John Wheatley College); Edinburgh (Edinburgh's Telford College, Jewel & Esk College, and Stevenson College); and Dumfries and Galloway (Dumfries & Galloway College – Dumfries and Stranraer campuses). The Glasgow project began in August 2008 while the others began in summer/autumn 2009. The Edinburgh and Dumfries and Galloway projects were funded for two years and the Glasgow project received funding for a third year so that was coterminous with the other pilots.

The research approach and methods

Defining the population

Although the SFC programme was essentially targeted at a group called 'care leavers' (those who have lived in care settings or had had social work involvement but no longer do), a number of the young people who participated in the programme continued to have 'looked after' status (because they had been looked after at age 16 and had supervision order in force until reaching their 19th birthday) or stayed in residential or foster care settings even after formal supervision requirements had ended. This is an important point, because it is a reminder that the term 'care leaver' has only limited utility. As agencies develop their responses to their corporate parent responsibilities, this will include a continuing role with young people who have been looked after, for example, until they have completed post-school education and perhaps even beyond. Before the evaluation was carried out it also became apparent, through initial meetings with the colleges, that there were a number of different ways in which the terms 'looked after' or 'in care' were understood by both the staff and young people. For the purposes of this research, we took the terms 'looked after' and 'in care' to mean that a young person had, or has had at some point in the recent past, either social work intervention or been cared for away from home in residential, foster or kinship care.

We felt it was important in communicating with project staff and young people to use a mixture of terminology and definitions, since it was clear that different terms were in use. Also, the young people we interviewed or asked to complete a questionnaire were already

identified by the programme, and therefore their status as a ‘young person in care’ or a ‘care leaver’ had been pre-determined.

Ethics

An application was made for ethical approval in accordance with standard procedures for research projects sponsored by the University of Strathclyde¹⁵. In addition, the ethical guidelines by both the Social Research Association (2003)¹⁶ and the Scottish Educational Research Association (2005)¹⁷ were considered followed in relation to both the conduct of the research and also the storage of data. All the researchers had undergone the appropriate levels of checks under Disclosure Scotland procedures.

Proper approaches to maintaining confidentiality and gaining consent for interviews were adhered to the data collection procedures, with both service providers (members of staff providing the programme) and service users (young people in care and care leavers). There were additionally three other ethical considerations for us in collecting the data: 1) choice (i.e. we were careful to remind participants of their right to decline to participate; 2) care with regard to the sensitive nature of questioning about a young person’s time in care; 3) the ethical implications and complexities of training and engaging two young care leavers as researchers. The first and second of these ethical considerations are discussed in more detail below under ‘research methods’. We were guided in our approaches by a number of authors who have written about conducting research with children and young people (Alderson & Morrow, 2004; Fraser, Lewis, Ding, Kellett, & Robinson, 2004; James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998; Valentine, Butler, & Skelton, 2005).

In evaluating the programme, the SFC, the staff co-ordinating the programme and the research team were keen to hear from as many people (providers and users) as possible, however, the desire to gain knowledge was never placed over the rights to participate or refuse to engage in the research. All potential participants were provided with written information about the research, either in advance or at the time of meeting a researcher.

Research methods

The research used quantitative methods to analyse recruitment, attainment and progression statistics, provided by colleges’ data managers, about the young people who participated in college courses during the pilot programme. A letter was provided by the SFC to the colleges giving permission to share with the research team data which is normally regarded as the property of the SFC. The young people were also invited to complete entry and exit questionnaires, though this approach was less successful than we had hoped, and in particular there was a low response to the end of course questionnaire (see Appendix 1). Qualitative methods were used to ascertain the views of the key participants; these

¹⁵ See: www.strath.ac.uk/ethics/

¹⁶ See: www.the-sra.org.uk/ethical.htm

¹⁷ See: <http://www.sera.ac.uk/docs/Publications/SERA%20Ethical%20GuidelinesWeb.PDF>

included analysis of discussions with programme staff and interviews with the young people.

Research methods and young people

Interviews (a total of 82) with young people were carried out in each college during both years of the pilot programme. Most of these interviews were conducted by one researcher and many were also conducted along with one of the two young researchers recruited to assist with the project. We held initial discussions with the three pilot co-ordinators in order to seek their advice about how to approach the young people. Subsequently the main interviewer met key staff in the colleges to discuss how the young people would be informed about the research so they could make informed choices about whether or not to participate (Letherby, 2003; May, 2001).

A range of approaches was used to provide information for young people. At the start of the research, we tried contacting students by email with the help of the colleges, giving an email address for addressing questions to the main interviewer and providing a link to a podcast in which the interviewer explained the research. It became clear that many of the young people either did not have ready access to email or did not use their email to communicate with college. This approach had only very limited success and the young people were either disinclined to contact the team directly in this way or were unable to because they had not received the information about the project. We also used more traditional methods – an advertising poster was created and the podcast was made available to colleges on DVD-ROM, in addition to the standard research information sheet.

College staff made arrangements for interviews with the young people in advance of the researchers' visits. Interviews typically lasted between 15 and 20 minutes. At the start of each interview the researcher gave an oral summary of the research aims and checked that the interviewee had read the information sheet and was still willing to go ahead. The young person was asked to sign a consent form. The researcher took notes during the interview and at the end of the interview read the notes to the young person who was then invited to sign them as a true account of their views.

Using young people as researchers

An important part of the research process involved the recruitment and training of two young researchers, both of whom had experience of having been looked after. Two considerations influenced the decision to do this. First, we thought it important to involve researchers closer in age to the students, and who shared the experience of being looked after. Second, we wanted to provide opportunities for young people to gain research experience. The young researchers were appointed through our existing contacts with Who Cares? Scotland and the Scottish Throughcare and Aftercare Forum. Both took part in a one-day course on research training and each received a certificate of attendance. The young people helped to conduct interviews and also engaged more informally with students. The involvement of the young researchers was introduced in a second podcast so the

participants of the programme would recognize David and Heidi and this was also made available on the DVD-ROM provided to the colleges.

Chapter 4: The aims of the pilot projects

Introduction

This chapter outlines the aim of the pilot programme funded by the SFC and gives accounts of each of the three different programmes. The sources of these accounts are the projects' initial proposals, interview transcripts, conversations with the projects' managers and other documentation supplied by the programmes.

The aim of the pilot programme

John Wheatley College received special funding from the SFC in 2008-2009 to trial a programme aimed at supporting looked after young people and care leavers to attend college. As a result of discussions based on the John Wheatley experience, and in the light of developing Scottish Government policy about the role of FE in collaborating with 'corporate parent' partners, the SFC decided to advertise for proposals from colleges to participate in a two-year pilot programme. Three projects were selected, centred on FE colleges and their local authority partners in different locations: Dumfries & Galloway (Dumfries & Galloway College); Edinburgh (Jewel & Esk, Stevenson, and Telford colleges); Glasgow (John Wheatley College).

The aim of the programme was to trial a range of ways of supporting young people aged between 15 and 19 in local authority care (at home and away from home), or who had left care, to engage with further education. For the colleges, this meant developing or extending relationships with local authority partners, such as children and families' and leaving care teams, Skills Development Scotland and residential schools. It also meant developing an infrastructure for planning and reporting outcomes and providing wrap-around services for young people with gaps in their education or who face other challenges related to their prior care experience. A further aspect of the programme involved participating in a UK-wide pilot of an extension of Buttle UK's Quality Mark (previously only available to higher education institutions) to FE colleges. The overall aim of the pilot programme was to identify clear lessons for the SFC and the Scottish FE college sector leading to improved participation by looked after young people and care leavers in post-school education.

The provision

John Wheatley and Dumfries & Galloway colleges developed courses specifically designed for looked after young people and care leavers. The Edinburgh colleges aimed to support

young people onto and through mainstream courses¹⁸. In broad terms about one-third of the students started on programmes designed specifically for looked after young people and care leavers, about a fifth were on introductory college and vocational preparation courses, while just under a half were on various award bearing courses leading to NQ or equivalent qualifications from Access to Advanced Higher or other higher level qualifications. The majority were involved in programmes at SCQF Level 5 and below, while five percent of the young people were enrolled on higher level courses, such as HNC and SVQ3.

The Dumfries and Galloway Programme

Dumfries & Galloway lies in the south-west of Scotland. One third of the population lives in rural settlements spread over 2,500 square miles and this rural nature, combined with poor transport, presents challenges for young people accessing support services and further education. Dumfries & Galloway College¹⁹ moved to its present location in 2008, where it is co-located with higher education facilities (University of Glasgow and University of the West of Scotland) and local authority social work services in the Crichton campus. The college also has a campus in Stranraer, the second main town in the region.

The Dumfries and Galloway programme was established as a partnership between Dumfries and Galloway College, Dumfries and Galloway Council and Skills Development Scotland. It was co-ordinated by the local authority's Integrated Children's Services Officer, reporting to a steering group, under the auspices of the Looked After Children Advisory Group. The college-based aspects of the programme were managed by a member of the college's academic staff. This programme was offered initially at the Dumfries Campus and was also subsequently made available at Stranraer.

At the outset, the pilot had four main aims:

- Improve the participation, retention, achievement and attainment of looked after young people and care leavers.
- Formalise partnership arrangements for referral, identification, tracking, monitoring and supporting looked after young people and care leavers.
- Delivery of a specially developed programme to enable looked after young people and care leavers to acquire appropriate life, employability and core skills and to experience different vocational areas to enable them to make informed future choices.

¹⁸ We use the term 'mainstream' in this context to designate courses that were not specifically developed for looked after young people/care leavers as part of this pilot initiative and in which the care leavers are part of a group of other types of students. Some of the courses the students took part in are introductory and preparatory in nature in order to provide access to further education and as such would not be classed as 'mainstream' in the wider further education context.

¹⁹ See: www.dumgal.ac.uk

- The development of a parallel initiative to aid the transition programme and enable participation by those who are not able or willing to attend a college campus location.

The SFC funding paid for the appointment of the project co-ordinator, 2.0FTE caseworkers to provide additional support for students, the development and operation of the Go Further programme, provision of staff training, development and the trialling of data sharing and monitoring arrangements among the partners. In the first year of operation the caseworkers based at Dumfries also covered Stranraer once the programme there was established. In the second year a full-time caseworker was appointed at Stranraer.

The programme received referrals from schools, children and families and throughcare teams. The referral system included interview and discussion about whether a college course was appropriate. Students could access a range of provision, including mainstream college courses, by traditional attendance or via open learning, the specialist 'Go Further' programme (part-time over 12 weeks) and an optional 12 week full-time follow-up programme, and could also receive support to prepare for taking a college course in future.

The Dumfries & Galloway pilot regarded the Go Further course as a particularly innovative aspect of their programme. Go Further was provided as a one day per week programme, run over 12 weeks. Students could then progress to a 12 week full-time Go Further programme and there were also options to engage in a programme in collaboration with the Prince's Trust. The aim of the Go Further programme was to provide a staged introduction to college to prepare students to progress to a mainstream college course at Dumfries & Galloway College or elsewhere. The programme included a mix of personal development activities, problem solving and teamwork, E-portfolio development, sport and recreation and 'taster' sessions related to a range of college courses. Students began with a common programme but taster sessions could be arranged from within college provision as individual interests emerged. The programme featured a breakfast club, given the long journeys many students travelled to reach college and to help with transition. There was also a short residential experience in week 3 of the Prince's Trust programme. During summer 2010, when the college was quieter, staff experimented with providing individually tailored sessions for some young people, using the Flexible Learning Unit. The team was planning to build on this experience to provide a summer school programme in summer 2011.

Go Further made use of partnerships with a range of organisations to access resources and to make use of specialist expertise in youth work. These agencies included the Oasis Youth Centre, The Prince's Trust, Community Learning and Development and Get Ready for Work.

The role of the caseworkers, who met students by appointment, on a drop-in basis and also more socially at breaks, was to offer counselling and guidance, help with completing college and other application forms and provide support for meals and transport. They could arrange for the loan of a laptop if required. The caseworkers also liaised with other relevant

agencies, including schools, social work services and Skills Development Scotland. The support could be provided during a home visit to discuss learning opportunities generally and the college provisions specifically, during the application process and at any point during the programme.

It was proposed that the pilot would offer college provision for 20 young people in year 1, with 70% still attending or finishing the course; in year 2 the programme would make provision for 40 young people, with 80% still attending or finishing the course. Additionally, the programme hope to make contact with young people still enrolled at school (S3/4) to provide advice and support in relation to progressing to college: estimated at 30 in year 1, increasing to about 40 in year 2.

The Edinburgh Programme

The Edinburgh programme covered a large, mainly urban, region, centred on Scotland's capital city and including three surrounding local authority areas.

The programme, known as The Transitions for People Leaving Care (TLC) project, was provided by a partnership of three colleges (Jewel & Esk College²⁰, Stevenson College²¹ and Edinburgh's Telford College²²), the City of Edinburgh Council (Children & Families and Economic Development Department), Skills Development Scotland, and Capital City Partnership (CCP). The project budget was managed by Telford College.

The Edinburgh project was aimed at young people who were, or had been, looked after before, during and after the time of leaving school, to provide the support that they needed to move on and make informed choices. To be eligible for TLC Project support young people had to have been looked after on their 15th birthday by the City of Edinburgh Council, East Lothian Council, Midlothian Council or West Lothian Council and be considering attending one of the three colleges in Edinburgh. The project accepted referrals of young people up to age 21. As we report later, some workers and referrers felt that the eligibility criteria ruled out some young people who might otherwise have participated in the project.

A particular feature of the Edinburgh programme was its focus on supporting looked after young people to take up and sustain places on mainstream college courses, rather than on specialist courses aimed solely at looked after children and care leavers, though these mainstream courses could include 'college preparation' course already offered by the colleges.

²⁰ See www.jec.ac.uk

²¹ See www.stevenson.ac.uk

²² See www.ed-coll.ac.uk

The programme was focused on an 'offer' made to looked after young people on their 15th birthday. The offer consisted of seven aspects.

- An identified case worker.
- Intensive support and guidance in a school or other setting.
- Options to help prepare for college and progression planning.
- Support and guidance during college attendance
- The option of a flexible study schedule.
- Financial support and assistance to find part-time work
- Continued support for a period after leaving college or referral to a suitable agency.

The programme was publicised among schools, social work services and relevant agencies providing care services. Referrals came from a range of agencies, including schools, social work, the voluntary sector or individuals. A project worker was based in each college (in the first year two people job-shared at Stevenson) and these workers were line-managed by college staff. The project workers typically met young people in school, at young people's centres (i.e. children's homes) or at another mutually acceptable venue, aimed at building relationships to provide support through the transition from school into further education. A referral form was developed to assist in this process and to provide more detailed information about the young person, in particular about the barriers they faced and the needs they had when starting college.

The funding was used to pay for a full-time project co-ordinator, one FTE careers specialist key workers to provide advice about opportunities, one support worker per college, discretionary funds to support students and training and administrative costs.

The pilot programme aimed to reach 200 young people over two years, half being 15+ and still at school.

During the first year of operation, the partnership decided to offer summer programmes in each of the colleges. Summer programmes were run in 2010 and were also planned for summer 2011. The programmes provided a range of academic, personal development and recreational activities. The format was a little different in each college (for example, one college provided a programme on three days per week over a six-week period) but the colleges combined to offer a joint out-of-college activity programme on three days spread out over the period. An important feature of the summer programmes was the opportunity to meet and make relationships with college staff. The summer programmes had the following aims.

- Bridging the gap for care leavers between leaving school and going to college.
- Preparing care leavers for college.
- Engaging the young people in positive activity over the summer period.
- Enhancing their likelihood of being accepted onto college courses.

A total of 37 young people attended the summer school across the three colleges in 2010.

The Glasgow Programme

The pilot programme in Glasgow was based at John Wheatley College, a further education college operating from two modern campuses in the east area of Glasgow, one located in Easterhouse and the other near the Forge shopping centre in the Shettleston/Parkhead areas of the city.

Approximately one third of Glasgow's looked after children and young people live within the college's catchment area. The area is served by two community planning partnerships (East Centre and Calton; and Baillieston, Shettleston and Greater Easterhouse), the East Community Health and Care Partnership, and the Glasgow East Regeneration Agency. The college is a major partner in furthering the aims of these agencies to improve the life experience and chances of people living in the east of Glasgow. All these agencies identified 'vulnerable' young people, looked after children and care leavers and other young people 'in transition' as priority groups.

The John Wheatley care leavers' programme grew out of previous experience of collaboration with Glasgow City Council in the provision of the Enhanced Vocational Inclusion Programme (EVIP), a full-time vocational education programme aimed at 'disengaged' S4 pupils offered as an alternative to mainstream school education. In fact, the John Wheatley pilot included young people on EVIP who were not legally looked after but were regarded as being at high risk of becoming looked after.

The Transitions to Learning and Work (TTLW) Programme was specifically aimed at students from a looked after background. Referrals to the programme came mainly from social work services or schools.

The core of the pilot was a group programme provided for a fixed period of 12 weeks. The aim was to prepare the young people to access mainstream college programmes at the end of the transition experience, though individuals could progress to mainstream programmes during this time, if appropriate. It was also possible for the young people to repeat the programme if it was judged that they needed additional support.

The programme was co-ordinated by a senior lecturer. The co-ordinator did not teach on the programme, and had other college duties, but provided a pastoral role in supporting students, encouraging attendance and monitoring progress. Attendance was full-time (3.5 days). The curriculum included 'taster' sessions (e.g. in vocational courses), personal and social education, sport and personal fitness, and information technology. There was a considerable 'guidance' component – typically three to four hours per week instead of the single hour provided as standard for other courses. Additionally the college contracted with an external agency to provide intensive group work which focused on personal and social

development, developing confidence and personal responsibility, and exploring issues related to drug and alcohol use. These youth work aspects were regarded as important elements of the programme, since, according to the programme staff, a number of the young people had been involved in offending, and some had 'tags' and special conditions regulating their lifestyles. The programme also provided a one-week residential component, linked to the John Muir Trust environmental award scheme²³.

There were particular challenges for the course staff in working with the young people, including following up late-coming and non-attendance, liaising with carers and social workers, and providing support and encouragement. In the second year of the programme the staff decided to have separate male and female groups as a response to difficulties that had arisen between the sexes during classes in the previous year.

The John Wheatley College programme began prior to the SFC pilot and therefore had funding for three years compared to the two years of funding allocated to the other two pilot programmes. The programme expected that attract 50 students in each of the three years.

Summary

All three pilot projects aimed to reach out to young people who were or had been looked after with a view to engaging them in education beyond school. All three made use of a combination of career and personal guidance, support to sustain attendance and educational aspects. On the other hand, the three pilot projects were very different, both in terms of their location and in approach.

Two were located in exclusively urban areas, though one of these was based in a single locality, the east end of Glasgow; one was located in a rural area. Travel to attend college presented challenges in all locations. Sometimes college staff made emergency payments when students had no money or had mislaid travel cards. In the rural location, some students travelled long distances to attend college. At John Wheatley, there was a particular complication in that travel between the college's two sites was potentially hazardous for some students because it took them into the territory of a rival gang.

Two of the pilots (Glasgow and Dumfries & Galloway) made use of specially constructed programmes, both having a strong focus of personal and social development as well as vocational elements. John Wheatley's lasted a full year, though students could progress to mainstream courses sooner, while Dumfries & Galloway's was shorter: 12 weeks of one day per week, followed by 13 weeks' full-time provision. Both reported using youth work approaches and engaged with external agencies, and both had residential components. Dumfries & Galloway's programme made considerable use of vocational 'taster' sessions. In

²³ See: www.jmt.org/jmaward-home.asp

both cases the purpose was to prepare the young people for mainstream courses. The Dumfries and Galloway programme also gave students access to study by distance learning where this suited students' particular needs.

The Edinburgh programme did not use a specially constructed course solely for looked after young people but instead used a range of approaches to prepare young people for college and to help them to sustain their place once in college. These approaches included liaising with schools and social services, providing advice to young people about going to college, offering access to additional in-college support, offering flexible attendance, giving help to find part-time work and runner summer programmes. Students were supported to access the standard college preparation course and mainstream provision.

Chapter 5: The young people: participation and outcomes

Introduction

The data reported in this section are derived principally from the FES (Further Education Student) returns to the Scottish Funding Council (SFC). This approach was proposed by one of the colleges and agreed upon early in the evaluation process. The SFC wrote to the five colleges indicating that these data could be supplied to the research team outside the normal reporting timetable, i.e. they could be provided before being submitted to the SFC. The approach was developed initially in collaboration with a member of the student records staff at John Wheatley College as that college's programmes had begun a year earlier than the other colleges and therefore the college had existing data. The research team understands the complexities involved in extracting a subset of data from the overall college dataset and reporting it in a format suitable for our use and so appreciates the co-operation of records staff and programme staff in the colleges who made considerable efforts to provide the data. Nevertheless, compiling the data took considerable research time, for example, in clarifying requirements and sending reminders. Information not available through the FES data, mainly about student destinations, was collected directly from college staff and their co-operation in this regard is also appreciated.

This section of the report outlines the data collection process, provides some background information on the students who took part in the Care Leaver Initiative, describes the type of courses the students participated in and considers student outcomes. The findings are presented in a summarised form in this section; a more detailed account is given in Appendix 2.

The data collection process

Records officers in each of the five colleges were asked to provide data related to the young people participating in the Care Leaver Initiative for the 2009-10 and 2010-11 academic years. Additionally, John Wheatley College's student records officer provided data for academic year 2008-09. The data were provided as individual student records with the college number used as the key identifier to match records and so track progression and multiple enrolments. Initial data about students enrolled on programmes were collated at the end of March in each year. In 2009-10 records officers were asked to update the data collation by the end of September 2010 to include any changes and also to provide information about attainment of awards based on SQA results. These data were used to inform three interim reports provided to the SFC in January 2010, June 2010 and February 2011. In 2010-11, due to the time requirements of reporting the research to the SFC, the

updating took place at the end of June/beginning of July. The additional information from project workers regarding student destinations was collected to the same timescale.

Collecting the data at different points of time in the academic year had consequences for interpreting the data and making comparisons over the two years. These matters are highlighted within the report.

Issues related to using the FES data

Several issues emerged in the process of collating the data and these are outlined below.

- The information provided directly in project workers' reports did not always correspond to the information extracted from students' records and therefore discussions were held with the colleges' records staff to reconcile the differences. In the Edinburgh colleges, in particular, it appears that a number of young people began courses and withdrew prior to being enrolled. In a small number of cases they may have taken part in short courses but were not registered on college data systems. For example, in 2009-10, Telford College piloted a short course specifically for care leavers but this was not officially registered in the student records data.
- In some cases, the outcome reported (for example 'successfully completed an assessed course' or 'completed a course but not successfully assessed' or 'withdrawn') was different in the data received separately from records staff and programme staff and these discrepancies were subsequently clarified through discussion.
- There were some differences in the ways in which colleges reported assessed courses and how success was defined. Generally, on assessed courses, success is taken to mean the achievement of 70% of course units; therefore, those on part-time or day-release courses understandably achieve fewer units than those on full-time courses and are nevertheless successful. This was a largely unproblematic matter in relation to students enrolled on mainstream National Qualification (NQ), or equivalent, courses. There were courses in which successful completion was possible without undertaking any formally assessed work, although students may have been presented for externally assessed NQ units because this was appropriate for them. Therefore, success was determined by meeting attendance requirements and personal targets. Where a student completed such a course this was sometimes recorded as 'successful completion of a non-assessed course', but in other cases it was reported as an 'assessed course'. For example, the John Wheatley College Transitions to Learning and Work Programme during 2008-2010 was reported as a non-assessed course; on the other hand, in Stevenson College some preparatory vocational courses were classified as being assessed although it was possible to be successful without undertaking any formal (i.e. nationally recognised) assessment,

and therefore in the data provided students who gained one or two formally assessed units in a full-time, one-year programme were recorded as successfully completing an assessed course where they also met the other course requirements. In Dumfries and Galloway, the Go Further Course was based on college developed and assessed (i.e. as opposed to national qualifications) units and in the FES data these outcomes are reported as deriving from an assessed course. We have retained the colleges' classification of the students' course outcomes. This makes direct comparison of outcomes across colleges and courses somewhat problematic as the term 'assessed course' has slightly different meanings.

- A further issue concerns students' prior qualifications. This was one area that in initial discussions was highlighted and assurances given that this information was collected via the FES data. However, in reality this information does not appear to have been recorded in all cases, depending on the registration process within the colleges. Therefore, prior qualifications as recorded within the colleges' datasets for reporting to the SFC do not necessarily reflect the reality of prior qualifications held by the students. Additionally, the information contained in the FES2 data on prior qualifications is not very detailed. For these reasons, the data on prior qualifications were not used within the analysis.

Background information about the students

Numbers enrolled

Tables 5 and 6, below, show numbers of students enrolled in academic years 2009-10 and 2010-11. As noted above, data were collected from John Wheatley College for students enrolled in 2008-09, but for consistency of presentation across the colleges, they have not been included in the tables that follow. The additional figures for John Wheatley College are included in an annexe of Appendix 2.

The tables show a total of 499 student-enrolments across the five colleges for the two years of the pilot programme. Some of these enrolments were accounted for by students returning to the programme for a subsequent year and when these are deducted there were 428 individual looked after young people in total enrolled on courses as part of the pilot programme.

Table 5: Number of students enrolled (2009-2010)

College	Returning students	New students	Total
Dumfries and Galloway (Dumfries and Stranraer campuses)	-	66	66
Jewel and Esk College	-	41	41
Edinburgh's Telford College	-	22	22
Stevenson College	-	17	17
John Wheatley College	18	65	83
Total	18	211	229

Table 6: Number of students enrolled 2010-2011

College	Returning students	New Students	Total
Dumfries and Galloway (Dumfries and Stranraer campuses)	23	53	76
Jewel and Esk College	11	32	43
Edinburgh's Telford College	4	31	35
Stevenson College	4	23	27
John Wheatley College	29	60	89
Total	71	199	270

Age

The mean age, minimum and maximum ages and the proportion under age 16 are presented in Table 7.

Table 7: Age range of students

Year	Min	Max	mean age	n and % under 16
2009-10 (229)	13.5	21	16.1	109 (48%)
2010-11 (270)	13.5	24.5	16.6	94 (35%)

As the 2010-11 cohort included 26% who were returning students it might be expected that this would raise the mean age of the group: the returning students had a mean age of 17 (minimum 14.5; maximum 21) and the new students had a mean age of 16.4 (minimum 13.5; maximum 24.5). The figures for those under 16 are strongly influenced by the John Wheatley College students of which 90% were under 16 in 2009-10 and 73% in 2010-11. Excluding John Wheatley College students, 23% of the 2009-10 students and 16% of the 2010-11 students enrolled in the other four colleges were under 16 years of age.

Some of the young people were attending college on school link programmes or other school-based programmes which would account for some of those under 16. Others were

attending college instead of being at school because they were regarded as being ‘at risk of exclusion’ or were described as ‘school refusers’. While the programmes were designed principally to meet the needs of looked after young people or care leavers who had reached normal school leaving age, these figures reflect the commitment of the colleges to work with looked after young people while still at school as part of the process of transition from school to further education or work.

Gender

There was little variation in the overall gender balance over the two years. In 2009-10, the cohort was 48.5% male and 51.5% female, while in 2010-11 it was 47% male and 53% female. An analysis was undertaken to investigate any differences in outcomes according to gender²⁴, but no statistically significant differences emerged. The only strong association related to vocational focus which, in line with national figures, showed a tendency for the young men to be on courses related to construction and engineering and for the young women to be on courses studying hair and beauty and health, child and social care²⁵.

Disability

Across all colleges, 82% of the 2009-10 students and 76% of the 2010-11 students were recorded as having no known disabilities. Other disabilities recorded were as shown in Table 8.

Table 8: Type of disability 2009-2010 and 2010-2011

Type of disability	2009-10	2010-11
Dyslexia	15 (6.5%)	25 (9.0%)
Sight and hearing impairments	4 (1.5%)	5 (2.0%)
Unseen conditions (e.g. asthma)	5 (2.0%)	13 (5.0%)
Mental health difficulties	5 (2.0%)	3 (1.0%)
Other unspecified disabilities	13 (6.0%)	19 (7.0%)

Course Provision

The three localities – Dumfries & Galloway, Edinburgh and Glasgow – adopted diverse approaches to programme development and delivery. Because of the recognition that some young people from a looked after background have had a negative experience of education, have low attainment, and are going through major changes at this stage in their lives, all of the programmes emphasised the importance of additional support before and during the transition process, during the students’ time at college, and on leaving college or progressing to other courses.

²⁴ As all data are categorical, the chi-square statistical test was used.

²⁵ SFC (2010) *Scotland’s Colleges: a Baseline Report* p.30 indicates that males account for over 80% of activity in the fields of engineering, transport, construction, manufacturing and women account for over 70% of enrolments in health care, arts & crafts and over 65% in personal and family care.

John Wheatley College and Dumfries & Galloway College developed courses specially designed to meet the needs of the target group – ‘Transitions to Learning and Work’ at John Wheatley and ‘Go Further’ in Dumfries & Galloway. This specialist programme was a major focus of John Wheatley’s provision, although support was offered to looked after young people on other courses. The Dumfries & Galloway and the Edinburgh programmes also involved engaging with young people prior to applying to college, to assist them in the process of transition and to help them enrol in ‘mainstream’ courses appropriate to their needs. The aim in all colleges was also to provide support for students throughout their time in college to assist retention and to raise awareness and understanding amongst staff of the particular needs of these students.

Types of courses in which students enrolled in each college

Dumfries & Galloway: Some students were enrolled on ‘Go Further’ Introductory courses specially designed for care leavers, while others were on a range of mainstream courses covering a variety of levels, vocational areas and modes of study. Some of those on the initial day-release ‘Go Further’ introductory course continued to a special short, full-time Go Further Course in their second term: six in year 1 and five in year 2. In year 2, seven students also continued on the day release delivery of the Go Further Programme. Most students on the Go Further introductory course were school based and were attending as school link students (19 out of 28 in year 1 and 25 out of 30 in year 2).

In their proposal document, Dumfries & Galloway set targets of recruiting 20 young people in 2009-10 and 40 in 2010-11, and working with 30 young people who were still at school. In terms of overall student numbers and others who were supported, these figures have been exceeded.

Jewel and Esk: The students were enrolled on a range of mainstream courses covering a variety of levels, vocational areas and modes of study, including vocational/college preparation courses and NQ and equivalent courses. Some started on school link programmes. Participation covered full-time, part-time and day-release provision.

Telford: The students were enrolled on a range of mainstream courses covering a variety of levels and vocational areas. Most were on full-time courses while some were registered on school link programmes.

Stevenson: The students were enrolled on a range of courses. Most were on college/vocational preparation or personal development courses offering units at Access 3 and Intermediate 1 levels, though these were optional and student success was evaluated against personal targets. Other students were enrolled on vocational courses (NQ, City & Guilds and SVQ). Most were full-time students.

In the Edinburgh proposal document, target figures are given for engagement with young people across different types of group (i.e. those still at school, those who had just left, and others up to age 21). The target was to engage with 200 young people over the two years of the project, but this included giving support to both those enrolled and not yet enrolled. The above figures, when added to other students supported prior to enrolment, indicate that these targets have been exceeded.

John Wheatley: The students were involved, at least initially, in two main programmes: Transitions to Learning and Work (TTLW), designed specifically for looked after young people/care leavers; and the Enhanced Vocational Inclusion Programme (EVIP) which is aimed at young people who might otherwise be excluded or disengaged from school but are not necessarily looked after children or care leavers. Looked after young people and care leavers were also on other vocational courses such as NQ and SVQ programmes, taster courses, evening classes or flexible learning provision. John Wheatley College had a target of recruiting 50 young people per year. Fewer students were recruited to TTLW than expected, though the total number of students recruited to TTLW and other courses exceeded the target figure.

Table 9 provides an overview of the types of courses the students were enrolled over the two years.

Table 9: Types of courses on which students were enrolled

Type of course	2009-10 (n=229)	2010-11 (n=270)
Special care leaver	31%	23%
Introductory, preparatory or personal development	21%	27%
NQ Access	19%	13%
NQ Intermediate/equivalent ¹	24%	31%
NQ Higher/AH/HNC equivalent ²	5%	6%

¹ e.g. SVQ 1 and 2, CGLI

² e.g. SVQ3

Courses described as ‘introductory, preparatory or personal development’ include introduction to college, learning and vocational taster type courses which include both personal targets for development and lead to some assessed units at Access and Intermediate 1 and, occasionally, Intermediate 2 levels. Those designated NQ Access and Intermediate courses generally had a clear vocational focus, e.g. construction, hair and beauty, digital media, child care. Thus, the majority of young people were involved in programmes at SCQF level 5 and below.

Around two-thirds of the returning students were continuing in higher level programmes in the same or similar vocational areas. Other students were continuing in introductory courses, some in different vocational areas while others were continuing in the same programme. Details of returning students are included in Appendix 2.

Student Outcomes

Defining success

In this section four particular outcomes are reported: completion of course; continuing in college; overall positive outcome; and assessment outcomes.

‘Completion of a course’ can be taken as a positive level of engagement with the college and represents achievement by a young person.

The stated aims of the three providers are to encourage young people to engage with further learning and so ‘continuing in college’ for further study is a key outcome for these young people. Some who do not complete their initial course(s) reapply and come back to college. This information was not obtainable from the FES data and so student destinations were sought directly from the colleges. This information represents what was known by the project support staff at the time of the data collection – September 2010 for the 2009-10 cohort and June 2011 for the 2010-11 cohort.

The different times in the academic year at which data were collected have consequences for the interpretation of the data, particularly in relation to students progressing or planning to progress to further studies. In the first year, by September, it was clear which students had taken up places for a further year’s study. In the second year, by June, colleges were reporting those who had definite places for the next year and also those who had applied or were thinking about progressing. For ease of interpretation, these figures have been combined in the tables that follow, however, it is quite possible that some students who intend to progress will not, and therefore the final number will be lower than presented here.

Some students did not complete their courses, but did go on to further training or employment; also on completion of a course, some progress to other training or employment. Therefore, as an indicator of a ‘positive outcome’, the outcome categories progression to further study in college, employment, or other training have been combined.

The reporting of ‘assessment outcomes is quite complex. Successful completion of a course is usually defined as a student having passed 70% or more of the assessed units. The number of units obtained will, of course, vary according to the mode of attendance and length of course. We noted in the introduction that there were some differences in the way colleges defined assessed courses and that we have used the categories reported by the colleges. Where students have not achieved sufficient units to be recorded as ‘successful’, they can nevertheless still gain some units - achievements which represent progress and stepping stones to further study or further opportunities. Therefore, we also consider the number of units achieved by students who might otherwise be deemed to be ‘non successful’ because of what might be regarded as a somewhat arbitrary, or at the very least, statistical, definition of success.

In the following sections we consider firstly the programmes specifically designed for looked after young people and care leavers and then the ‘mainstream’ courses.

Specific Care Leaver Programmes

This section is concerned with the outcomes of Dumfries & Galloway College’s ‘Go Further’ and John Wheatley College’s TTLW programmes.

Table 10: Outcomes for students on special Care Leaver Courses

College and year	Completed	Progress in college	Positive outcome
2009-10			
D&G Go Further (28)	86%	18%	43%
John W TTLW (43)	37%	40%	51%
2010-11			
D&G Go Further (30)	60%	47%	90%
John W TTLW (31)	48%	61%	81%

There is a notable difference between the two years in the proportions of students reported as continuing in college, and consequently having gained positive outcomes. This may be, in part, an artefact of the data because of the different points in time of the data collection. It would be unwise to conclude anything on the basis of only two points in time. If the change is genuinely indicative of an improving trend then this is of course encouraging.

Dumfries & Galloway College’s short, day-release course for care leavers achieved a relatively high completion rate (86% in year 1 and 60% in year 2). In comparison John Wheatley College’s longer full-time course for young people in or leaving care had a relatively lower completion rate (37% in year 1 and 48% in year 2). This is perhaps unsurprising given that a shorter commitment is easier to maintain and, while course completion can give a sense of achievement, these outcomes should also be considered in the light of the extent to which they contributed to young people’s ongoing development or progress to further study (i.e. they may not complete their course, but they do come back to college) or other positive outcomes. The background of the students also needs to be taken into account. Many of Dumfries & Galloway College’s students were still attending school, while the John Wheatley students on the TTLW programme were no longer attending although they were below school leaving age. John Wheatley College staff indicated that the young people referred to the TTLW programme typically had complex needs and often expressed a high degree of disaffection towards education. Nevertheless, non-completion of courses is a matter of concern, both for the potential negative effect on the individual and for the resource implications. Non-completion of courses in further education generally

is a matter of concern to the SFC²⁶. There is further discussion of completion rates later in this chapter.

Assessment outcomes: Dumfries and Galloway's 'Go Further' units were assessed in the college, with 64% of students recorded as successful in 2009-10 and 53% in 2010-11. In 2009-10, ten students were not successful in terms of attainment; five out of six students who completed the course gained between one and four college assessed units and one did not gain any; four students had withdrawn before the end of the course and had not achieved any units. In 2010-11, two of the 'Go Further' students were recorded as having completed the course but were deemed 'not successful' in attainment terms: one gained four college units and the other gained nine college units. Twelve students (43%) withdrew before the end of the course: one gained three units, while the other 11 did not gain any. Therefore, five out of 28 students (2009-10) and 11 out of 30 students (2010-11) did not gain any units as a result of their involvement with the programme.

In 2009-10, John Wheatley College's Transition to Learning and Work was recorded as a non-assessed course for those in the first stage and as an assessed course for those who had continued from the previous year. Six out of 34 students on the non-assessed stage gained between one and three units. Three of the nine on the assessed element were recorded as being successful; of the others, two withdrew with no units, two who completed did not gain any units, and two others gained one unit each. In 2010-11, all TTLW students were recorded as being on an assessed course, with 15 (48%) reported as successful. The remaining 16 (52%) students withdrew before the end of the course: nine did not gain any units, six gained one or two and one gained three units. Therefore, in 2009-10, four out of nine students on assessed courses did not gain any units, compared with nine out of 31 in 2009-10.

Other courses

This section reports the outcomes for the young people on what we have called 'mainstream' courses, i.e. courses that are not specifically designed for the care leaver group.

²⁶ See: SFC Press Release of 31.08.11 at: www.sfc.ac.uk/web/FILES/PressReleases_SFCPR112011/SFCPR112011_College_Performance_Indicators_2009-10.pdf

Table 11: Outcomes for other courses in each of the colleges

College and year	Course completion	Progress in college	Positive outcome
2009-10			
Dumfries & Galloway (38)	45%	29%	60%
Telford (22)	41%	32%	41%
Jewel & Esk (41)	71%	27%	46%
Stevenson (17)	71%	41%	47%
John Wheatley (40)	65%	33%	35% ¹
Total (158)	60%	31%	46%
2010-11			
Dumfries & Galloway (46)	61%	61%	76%
Telford (35)	74%	57%	63%
Jewel & Esk (43)	65%	30%	44%
Stevenson (27)	52%	33%	63%
John Wheatley (58)	59%	74%	83%
Total (209)	62%	54%	67%

¹This lower figure is partly attributable to a high 'unknown' figure for the destinations of these students.

The caveat expressed above regarding the difference between the two years in proportions continuing or intending to continue in college and the effect on the overall positive outcomes applies to these figures.

Assessment outcomes: Students on these courses were working towards assessment in the form of units of SQA National Qualifications, or other equivalent awards, for example, CGLI and BTEC. Some were registered for SVQ awards. Successful completion is usually defined as being where a student has passed 70% or more of the assessed units. In some instances, however, failure to achieve one or two core units means that the outcome is considered unsuccessful. The information received from student records officers indicates that in 2009-10 a total of 152 students were on assessed courses, with 69 (45%) completing them successfully. In 2010-11 a total of 205 students were on assessed courses, with 95 (46%) completing them successfully. The variation across colleges is shown in Table 12.

Table 12: Students who successfully completed an assessed course

College and year	Assessed and successful
2009-10	
Dumfries &Galloway (38)	29%
Telford (22)	23%
Jewel & Esk (37)	47%
Stevenson (17)	65% ¹
John Wheatley (38)	63%
Total (152)	45%
2010-11	
Dumfries & Galloway (46)	46%
Telford (34)	59%
Jewel & Esk (43)	42%
Stevenson (27)	48% ¹
John Wheatley (55)	42%
Total (205)	46%

¹ These figures include students on college preparatory courses where assessment is based on personal targets and attendance requirements and externally awarded assessment is optional, though most achieve some SQA units.

Overall, the proportion recorded as having been successful in attainment terms remains the same, though there are some within college variations.

Units achieved by those not considered successful in attainment terms: In 2009-10, 83 of the 152 students (55%) on assessed courses were 'not successful' in attainment terms, with 65 withdrawing before the end of the course and 18 completing the course but 'not successfully'. In 2010-11, a total of 110 of the 205 students (54%) on assessed courses were not successful, with 79 withdrawing before the end of the course and 31 completing their course, but 'not successfully'. The number of units that the students were reported as having achieved is shown in Table 13.

Table 13: Units attained by students on assessed courses who were not recorded as 'successfully completing' (Number of students).

	No units	One or two units	Three to 7 units	10 or more units
2009-10				
Withdrawn (65)	48	13	3	1
Completed not successful (18)	7	2	4	5
Total (83)	55	15	7	6
2010-11				
Withdrawn (79)	35	19	19	6
Completed not successful (31)	10	4	13	4
Total (110)	45	23	32	10

A considerable number of young people left without apparently achieving any units from their college experience and, in some cases, this will be because they had left before having the opportunity to gain credits. A higher proportion, however, did gain some units in 2010-11 compared to 2009-10. An overall summary is presented in Table 14.

Table 14: Summary attainment of students on assessed courses

		Successful (i.e. achieved 70%)	Not successful but gained some units	Not successful, no units gained
2009-10	(152)	45%	18%	36%
2010-11	(205)	46%	32%	22%

Factors influencing success

Given the variety of provision, it was considered that different types of provision might be more suited to the needs of the young people. For example, were those students on day-release or part-time courses more likely to be successful than those on full-time courses? Were those on preparatory courses more likely to be successful than those on NQ accredited courses? Given the diversity of provision, the number of options within variables and, in some cases, small numbers, the data did not readily support analysis using tests for statistically significant associations. It was possible, however, to investigate the relationship of outcome, in terms of completing a course or withdrawing, in relationship to mode of attendance and type of course by collapsing categories, permitting a chi-square test to be carried out.

The mode of attendance data were collapsed into full-time, part-time and other (e.g. open learning, of which there were very few). Analysis using such broad categories suggested that there was no statistically significant association between mode of attendance and whether or not students completed their course.

Course type data were collapsed into care leaver, introductory and Access courses, Intermediate level and higher level courses. In 2009-10 there was an indication that those on the introductory and Access courses were more likely to complete than those on the slightly higher level NQ Intermediate courses. This observation was not replicated in the 2010-11 data.

This suggests that the type of course and mode of attendance were not influential in student retention. Thus, explanations for lower completion rates need to be sought elsewhere.

Note on course completion – comparison with other students

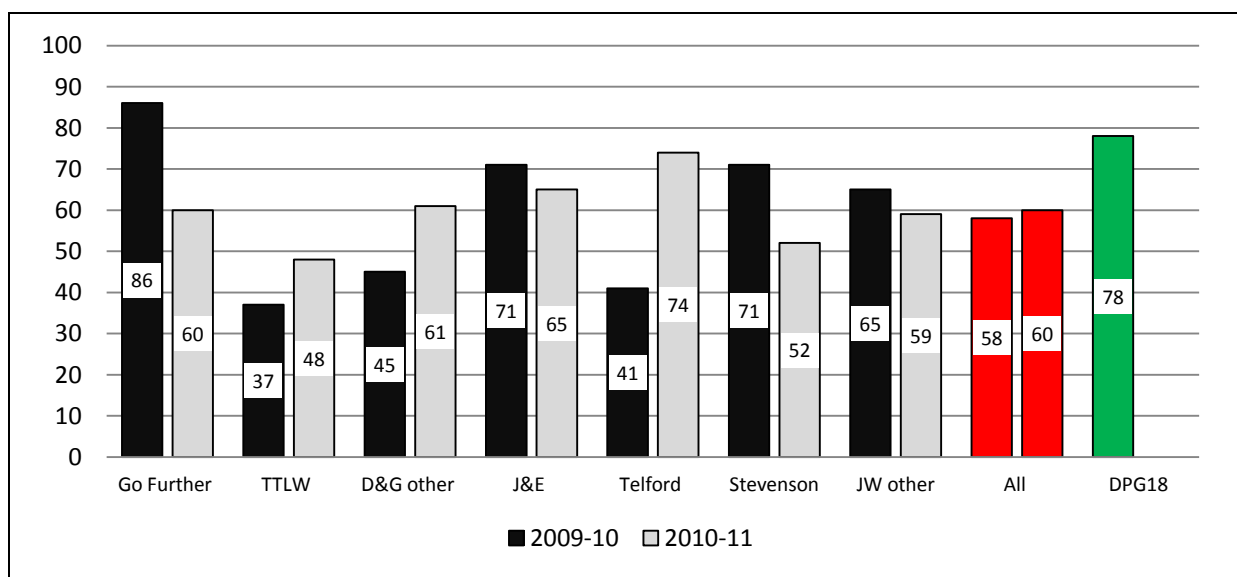
As noted above there was a range of course completion rates across the colleges in the special care leaver and other courses, with some variation across the two years. Partial attendance at a course may be regarded as a success if a student progresses to a further positive experience, and it can be argued that the college experience has contributed to that

progress. Reasons for non-completion are not evident from the data and are explored through the qualitative data.

It was appropriate to consider how these students fared compared to other student groups, but it was difficult to identify an appropriate comparator group for benchmarking purposes. A suitable group would be looked after young people/care leavers on courses in other colleges on similar courses but not supported through the care leaver initiative. Collecting such data was beyond the scope and remit of the evaluation project and at the time of the evaluation it was not clear the colleges would be able to easily identify care leavers. The SFC suggested that students on Dominant Programme Group 18²⁷ courses might provide a suitable comparator group, in that these are aimed at students coming to college with a range of support needs, both emotional and educational.

The SFC Statistics Division extracted data for students on DPG18 courses in the five colleges in 2009-2010²⁸. These excluded courses provided for students with specific disabilities as there were about 80% recorded as having no known disabilities within our dataset. As with the care leaver data, numbers varied between the colleges, with John Wheatley College having the highest number and Dumfries and Galloway College the lowest. Also, the retention rate varied: the range was from 69% to 86%, with the average being 78%. The figures are illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Course completion rates (percentage of students who enrolled on courses)



²⁷ DPG18 courses/programmes are specialised provision for students with additional support needs and so attract additional funding.

²⁸ 2010-2011 data were not available within the timescale of the research.

The variations within colleges suggest that these data need to be reviewed over a longer period of time and that the colleges might aspire to higher retention rates for care leaver students. Questions which colleges may wish to consider are these:

- How should the care leaver group be benchmarked?
- What are realistic retention targets?

Destination unknown

Within the FES data, 93 students (40%) in 2009-10 and 102 (38%) in 2010-11 were identified as having withdrawn from courses, with destination unknown. Course managers and project workers were asked to provide the information on where students had gone after leaving college, either having withdrawn or on completion of a course. Overall, the destinations of 66 (29%) of the 229 students in 2009-10 and 37 (14%) of the 270 students in 2010-11 were unknown. This figure varied between colleges, with a somewhat large range from 6% to 65% unknown in 2009-10. In 2010-11 the range was from 0% to 30%. The improvement noted may reflect greater success in tracking students over time. On the other hand, as with other data reported, this may be because the data were collated in June for the 2010-11 students, whereas the collation was in September for the 2009-10 students. It is possible that some of the young people indicating their intent to continue in college will not progress and their destinations may change to 'unknown'. Because follow-on support was identified as being an important element of provision for this target group, it remains a priority to track students and work with other agencies who support the young people to ensure they do not become 'lost', particularly as agencies have continuing 'corporate parent' responsibilities for these care leavers.

Students supported, but not yet enrolled in college

The Dumfries & Galloway and Edinburgh colleges' programmes emphasised the importance of spending time with and supporting the young people who were referred to them but were not yet ready to enrol on college courses. The Edinburgh TLC programme appointed a project worker to engage particularly with young people while they were still in school. The numbers supported in this way are presented in Table 15.

Table 15: Students supported during the academic year prior to enrolment and the number accepted for the following year

College and year	Number supported	Number accepted/applied
2009-10		
Dumfries & Galloway	44	11
Edinburgh Colleges	142	49
Total	186	60 (32%)
2010-11		
Dumfries & Galloway	39	13
Edinburgh Colleges	114	57
Total	153	70 (46%)

More detailed information was collated about these young people in 2009-10 and a brief report is included in Appendix 2.

Colleges reported that some of the young people with whom they had first contact in 2009-10 had subsequently applied to start courses in 2011-12. For example, Dumfries and Galloway had nine such applications. In both years, project workers reported maintaining contact with young people although they did not subsequently apply for courses. The workers emphasised the importance of this support in order to develop relationships with young people, to help them through the transition process and help them make the most appropriate choices. This role overlaps with that of other agencies such as local authority through-care services and Skills Development Scotland and therefore it is important that colleges continue to work closely with these agencies.

Summary

This chapter has reported data derived from college systems, supplemented by project workers' information about destinations, describing the background of the students enrolled on courses, the types of courses they participated in, and outcomes in terms of course completion, progress to further college courses, positive outcomes and success in relation to assessed attainment.

It was noted that colleges appear to have exceeded the target numbers for engagement set out in their original proposals. Most of the young people were enrolled in low-level course (i.e. below SCQF level 5) with many starting on special access or introductory level courses and while this will have been appropriate for some students it is legitimate to question whether that was true for so many. There are issues to be addressed in relation to course completion/student retention, progression to further college courses and successful attainment of a recognised award.

Chapter 6: The young people's accounts

Introduction

This chapter describes the young people's accounts, as told in responses to questionnaires and in interviews. Though the focus of the chapter is on the evaluation of the programmes from the young people's perspective, it also provides a broader context of their personal experiences of care and education which also became important as the analysis was undertaken.

The information presented in this chapter is drawn from two distinct sources. Young people were offered the opportunity to complete a questionnaire at the point of entering college (entry questionnaire) and again either when they completed a course or if they left college prematurely (exit questionnaire). Both questionnaires are provided in Appendix 1 of this report. Despite a relatively low level of return the questionnaire data provides a broad overview of the young people's views in certain key areas.

In addition a total of 82 young people agreed to participate in individual interviews to explore their experiences in more depth. The detailed personal accounts revealed in the interviews provide a richer perspective on how young people felt about their time at college and on their prior educational and care experiences. The individual space afforded in the interviews also gave young people an opportunity to reflect on some of the more complex responses evoked by their college experience. The findings from the questionnaires and interviews are presented separately and are followed by a discussion of the different perspectives identified.

The purpose of the entry questionnaire was to get an indication of the expectations young people held on coming to college and also to obtain some background information about their experience of school and where they were staying. This last point was to be used as a proxy for care status, as it quickly became clear that the language used by professionals in relation to looked after young people and care leavers often held little meaning for the young people themselves. An exit questionnaire was designed with parallel questions to try to establish to what extent the young people's expectations had been met.

Student entry questionnaire

During the first term of the projects (August to December 2009) it was not possible to have questionnaires completed as a result of time constraints. Although the student records data suggested that 165 young people were enrolled across the five colleges in that period, we only received 15 completed questionnaires, and the decision was taken to use this small

number as an extension of the piloting activity. The colleges agreed to encourage more students to complete questionnaires from January 2010 onwards.

During the second part of the 2009-10 academic session (i.e. from January 2010) the data we received from student records indicated that there were 46 new students; 34 questionnaires were received, representing a 74% return for this intake. During the second year (2010-2011), the data received indicated that 270 young people were enrolled, 71 of whom were returning students and 199 were new students. A total of 112 questionnaires were returned, representing 56% of the new students. The questionnaire dataset was examined for duplicates and a small number was removed.

The data tables in this chapter show percentages, based on a total of 146 responses, although in some questions the total is lower because of missing responses. The returns were not evenly distributed between the pilots, with Dumfries and Galloway achieving a higher return rate than the others. Analysis of the information supplied by young people about their college courses suggest that those who completed the questionnaire were broadly representative of the whole cohort. A high proportion (43%) was younger than the minimum school leaving age (16), indicating that the pilot programmes included in their recruitment significant numbers of young people taking college courses as an alternative to being at secondary school.

The majority of young people had found out about the programme from a professional involved with them, most frequently their social worker or a teacher. Gaining qualifications and being better equipped to improve employment opportunities were the most important reasons the young people gave for taking up the opportunity of going to college (see Table 16).

Table 16: Reasons for coming to college

	VI	I	NI	NS
I'll get qualifications	66	26	<1	2
I will have a better chance of getting a job after I have finished	58	33	3	2
It will help me find out about jobs I can do	52	38	1.5	2
I'll learn lots of useful things that will help me	47	44	1.5	3.5
In college they treat you like adults	43	39	7	6
It is better than doing nothing	44	34	11	6
I'll be able to go on to other courses	38	45	5	8
The courses seem interesting	28	55	5	8
I knew other people coming to college	23	32	25	12
Adults told me it was the best thing to do	19	36	29	11
I didn't know what else I could do	10	27	33	25

VI = very important; I = important; NI = not important; NS = not sure.

Percentages do not always total to 100 because of missing responses.

Some young people also provided comments to explain their particular reasons for going to college. Some of these were indicative of the most commonly expressed vocationally-related aspirations.

I left school at 14 and want to gain the qualifications I missed out on at school.

Some suggested broader personal life goals or very specific personal reasons.

I came to college to get somewhere in life.

[To be] near to mum.

Others were indicative of the expectations of family or professionals.

Because my social worker wanted me to come to collage [sic] because I was skiving skill [sic] and never going and getting into trouble.

The most important things about college for the young people appear to be related to learning that is enjoyable and useful and getting help with course work (see Table 17). These goals appear to be regarded as being more important than social and personal support, although for some these are unsurprisingly important aspects of being at college. For example, just under half thought the opportunity to take part in sports was very important or important.

Table 17: Important things about college

	VI	I	NI	NS/NR
Staff who are happy to help me with my course work	41	53	1.5	3
Learning in ways that are enjoyable	43	45	7	4
Staff who will discuss all the options I have	40	47	6	5
Learning things in classes that are useful in my day-to-day life	41	45	6	5
Having classes where there are lots of things to do rather than writing	38	49	10	2
Being allowed to choose the things I learn about	37	49	7	3
Having classes where there are lots of things to do rather than listening to the teacher	31	48	14	6
A nice place to meet with friends	27	46	16	10
Staff who will help me make my own mind up about what is best for me	27	47	12	11
Social activities	29	40	14	14
Staff I can talk to about what is happening in my life	30	38	14	15
Staff who are interested in me as a person	27	40	15	17
Opportunities to take part in sports	24	23	23	28

VI = very important; I = important; NI = not important; NS/NR = not sure/Not relevant.

Percentages do not always total to 100 because of missing responses.

Difficulties about coming to college

Over a quarter of the young people did not identify any difficulties about coming to college, while half indicated one or two difficulties and the rest indicated three or more. The reasons most frequently cited were practical impediments. A common anxiety was money.

I'm going to have to pay rent for my flat on my own so I'm not sure if I'm going to be able to afford it.

My biggest problem is the money, am very tight with money plus I support my sister and am worrying not to be able to come to college every day and that will affect my study.

Although some young people expressed anxiety about managing the demands of college work this was not their predominant worry. Almost a third of young people were concerned about managing other pressures in their lives. These included having to care for other members of their family. Concerns about managing college included both the demand of course work and successfully accommodating to the organisational aspects of college life.

Reading and writing and getting to the right rooms on time. I get help with this by staff, friends and my family.

The questionnaire responses revealed anxiety about the potentially stigmatising impact of their previous experiences.

People knowing about my past.

Comments like this one illustrate concerns about the way some students from a care background worry about how they might be perceived by lecturers or other students.

School Experience

The young people were asked about their last year of school attendance and their achievements at the point they left school. Over half of those responding had last attended school in S4 which corresponds with the earliest school leaving age. Almost a quarter, however, had not attended since S3 or before. Some, however, had previously continued in school for one or two years beyond the minimum school leaving age. The majority indicated that all their classes took place in school but some had attended college, work placements or other learning centres in addition to their school experience.

A substantial minority, almost a third, of young people said that they had attended school all the time. Almost half, however, indicated that their attendance was half time or less and almost a third said they hardly ever attended school. In addition half of these young people had been excluded in their last year of school. Among those who had been excluded almost half had been excluded on more than three occasions.

Since leaving school young people had been engaged in a number of activities associated with learning or employment. Only about a third had spent time doing nothing. More than a third had already attended college and several had undertaken paid work with even more searching for employment. A substantial number of the young people indicated that they

had been involved in voluntary work of some kind. Over half the young people had achieved at least one SQA qualification by the time they had left school.

Personal information

A number of questions were included in the questionnaire to establish basic information about the young people themselves and their living arrangements. Young people ranged in age between 14.5 and 24.0 with the mean age being 16.5. Around a third (34%) was under 16. The age profile is broadly in line with that of the dataset compiled from college returns, indicating that in this respect the questionnaire sample is representative of the care leaver population enrolled in the pilots. Slightly over half of the young people were male, marginally different from the overall pilot student population of which just over half was female.

Instability of placement is widely reported to be a problem for young people in the looked after system and particularly during the transition to independence. Although about one third of these young people had moved home in the previous year, usually either into or out of accommodation in the care system, the majority remained in the same living environment. Almost half of young people were living at home with their parents.

Student leaving college questionnaire

A questionnaire with parallel questions to the entry questionnaire was prepared. It was hoped that most students would be able to complete this questionnaire, even if they left before the end of their course. This proved difficult to achieve and although questionnaires were sent out by post and included stamped, addressed return envelopes, where students had not maintained contact with the colleges, only a few returned a questionnaire. Staff members were asked to arrange with students to complete a questionnaire if they knew they were leaving and at the end of the course for those who completed the courses. Again this proved difficult, especially for those students who were not part of a cohort on a specific programme targeted at looked after young people. Staff also indicated that some of the young people had refused to complete the questionnaire. We do not know why this is but there is considerable demand on students' time to complete course/college evaluation questionnaires and so this aspect of data collection is subject to the effects of feedback exhaustion, lack of interest and for some students, exposure to continuing problems with literacy.

If a student had come to the end of one course, but was planning to continue with another course, the completion of the questionnaire was deferred until they were leaving following the second course. This judgement was made to get feedback on the overall college experience rather than just the initial course and was particularly relevant to students whose courses finished after a few weeks or one term. At the end of the second year of the pilot programmes (June 2011), we arranged with colleges for students be invited to

complete the questionnaire whether or not they were continuing after the summer. The questionnaires were not circulated in the first term of 2009-10 and, therefore, any students who left in that first term were not included in those who could potentially be asked to complete the questionnaire.

In August 2009 there were 165 enrolments, with 47 leaving during their first term. This left a potential 118 students to be invited to complete a leaving questionnaire. From January 2010 there were a further 46 enrolments and so the total target group amounted to 164. From the August 2010 entry data we know that 71 students continued from the previous year and so it is probable they were not asked to complete a questionnaire at the end of the 2009-10 academic year. Deducting these from the total left a potential 93 students to be invited to complete a questionnaire for the 2009-10 academic year. In the 2010-2011 academic year there were 270 individuals enrolled. Therefore, overall there was a potential 363 students who could have been invited to complete a questionnaire.

At the end of the first year 23 questionnaires were returned, representing a 25% return for 2009-10 students and 61 questionnaires were received in 2010-11, representing a 23% return on the second year. Overall this gave a total of 84 leaving college questionnaires and an overall 23% return. As this is a low rate of return we cannot claim that these are representative of all students leaving the programme and therefore they need to be interpreted cautiously. They are really only a snapshot of some young people's experiences. As with the entry questionnaire, there were more responses and a higher return for Dumfries and Galloway and therefore the experiences of these students have contributed disproportionately to the collective results.

Table 18: Exit questionnaire returns by college

College	N (84)	% of exit questionnaire responses	% of entry questionnaire responses (n=146)
Dumfries and Galloway College, Dumfries & Stranraer	35	42%	42%
Edinburgh's Telford	17	20%	16%
Jewel & Esk	22	26%	12%
Stevenson	7	8%	8%
John Wheatley	3	4%	22%

Just over half the respondents to the exit questionnaire were female. Almost half were living with family members and most of these were with their parents. About a quarter were looked after away from home either with foster carers or in residential care. Almost a fifth was living independently. A few were living in less usual circumstances such as with a friend's family, a mother and baby unit or in bed and breakfast accommodation.

In the data tables only the percentage figure is reported, in all cases based on the 84 responses. There is a small number of missing responses in some of the questions and so they do not always total to 100%. Where the percentage is based on another base figure it is noted, with explanation, in the table. The responses of those who completed courses were compared with those who did not. These were analysed using the Mann-Whitney non-parametric statistical test for ordinal level data, achieving a significance level of $p < 0.05$. This suggests differences identified were not chance occurrences and suggests they are important enough to investigate further. Mann-Whitney performs a rank ordering of responses and provides a figure for the mean-rank. In the report that follows only the percentage figures for 'definitely true' are presented as this gives the clearest indication of the difference in responses.

Courses undertaken

Students were asked about the courses they were undertaking at the point they decided to leave. From the responses, the courses were categorised into types of courses where possible. As Table 19 indicates, the exit questionnaires received considerably under-represent the specific care leaver courses, particularly because of a very low rate of return from exiting students of the John Wheatley College programme which represent the views of only three students. Therefore it is not possible to attribute responses to particular courses and their value is in what they say about the perceptions of their college experience of a sample of the students.

Table 19: Courses undertaken - exit questionnaire returns compared with entry questionnaire

Type of course	% of exit questionnaire responses (n=84)	% of entry questionnaire responses (n=146)
Special care leaver course	24	47
Introduction to college/learning/vocational prep/PD	24	23
NQ Access level	0	6
NQ Intermediate/equivalent	36	13
NQ Higher/equivalent	8	2
Not clear	6	6
Missing	2	3

Just over half of the young people finished the courses they were undertaking. Less than half of the respondents gained any formal certification for their work at college. The mixture of those who completed and did not complete the course enables some comparison between the groups on the issues explored by the questionnaire.

Reasons for studying at college

Table 20 below shows the responses to statements indicative of the young people's perceptions of their experiences of college. The responses show that the respondents felt in general they were treated 'like an adult', that college courses were interesting, being at

college was better than doing nothing and that they had learned useful things likely to be helpful. The responses are more varied in respect of the statements about progression to other courses and about employment.

Table 20: Perceptions of the utility of the college experience

	DT	LT	NT	NS
In college they treated you like an adult	66	26	8	0
The courses were interesting	61	33	5	1
It was better than doing nothing	66	25	6	3
I learned lots of useful things that helped me	50	32	12	6
I can now go on to other courses	45	32	12	10
It helped me find out about jobs I can do	37	38	19	6
I now have a better chance of getting a job	33	38	19	10

DT = definitely true; LT = a little true; NT = not true; NS = not sure.
Percentages do not always total to 100 because of missing responses.

There was a statistically significant difference in the responses of those who completed their course and those who did not in all of these statements, apart from 'It was better than doing nothing', where both groups were broadly in agreement (68% of completers and 62% of non-completers thought this was definitely true).

Table 21: The utility of college - perceptions of course completers compared with non-completers

	Percentage who responded 'definitely true'	
	Completers (n=47)	Non-completers (n=37)
In college they treated you like an adult	75	54
The courses were interesting	75	43
I learned lots of useful things that helped me	70	24
I can now go on to other courses	66	19
It helped me find out about jobs I can do	51	19
I now have a better chance of getting a job	60	0

The differences based on all responses across each statement are statistically significant: Mann-Whitney $p < 0.05$

It is not surprising that those who left before completing their course have a more negative view of their experiences and it is encouraging that some who did not complete maintained a positive view despite this. It is clearly important not to assume that non-completion of a course is an entirely negative experience for a student. Students make what in their terms are positive decisions to leave a course they are not enjoying, does not suit their needs or when other opportunities present themselves. We know from other responses that substantial proportions of the students had financial and other worries or were caring for members of their family which may have led to their decision to withdraw from the course.

There is one aspect in which the completers and non-completers can be entirely distinguished and that is in their relative responses to the statement, 'I now have a better

chance of getting a job'. This difference highlights a sub-set of care leavers attending college who by their own reckoning have not benefited in an employability sense from their time at college. Perhaps two conclusions can be drawn from this finding. First, there is a sub-set of students for whom the vocational utility afforded by college matters but who feel their time at college has not helped them to progress educationally or vocationally. This group might be described as being at particular risk of drifting. Second, the statement itself appears to be helpful in discriminating between 'positive' and 'negative' non-completers. Both of these observations might be useful highlighting a group of young people who need particular post-college support and practical assistance from college guidance staff, career advisers and throughcare workers. Perhaps also this assistance needs to focus directly on helping young people to make progress towards realising vocational goals.

Important things about college

The students were, on the whole, positive about the support they received and opportunities for learning in college, with the personal and social aspects being less true, or seen as less relevant.

Table 22: Value of being in college

	DT	LT	NT	NS/NR
Staff who are happy to help me with my course work	74	19	0	7
Staff who discuss with me all the options I have	68	25	3.5	3.5
Having classes where there are lots of things to do rather than writing	69	19	4	7
Learning in ways that are enjoyable	54	42	2	2
Staff who will help me make my own mind up about what is best for me	62	26	7	5
Having classes where there are lots of things to do rather than listening to the teacher	58	29	6	7
Staff who are interested in me as a person	64	19	7	10
Learning things in classes that are useful in my day-to-day life	51	33	10	6
A nice place to meet with friends	54	31	9	6
Social activities	44	43	7	6
Staff I can talk to about what is happening in my life	58	19	13	10
Being allowed to choose the things I learn about	44	39	6	10
Opportunities to take part in sports	29	17	23	26

DT = definitely true; LT = a little true; NT = not true; NS/NR = not sure; not relevant
 Percentages do not always total to 100 because of missing responses.

Statistically significant differences in the responses of those who completed and those who did not complete were found in relation to five of these statements, as shown in Table 23 below.

Table 23: Value of college - perceptions of course completers compared with non-completers

	Percentage who responded 'definitely true'	
	Completers (n=47)	Non-completers (n=37)
Staff who are happy to help me with my course work	87	57
Staff who discuss with me all the options I have	77	57
Learning in ways that are enjoyable	64	41
Staff who are interested in me as a person	77	49
Staff I can talk to about what is happening in my life	68	44

The differences based on all responses across each statement are statistically significant:
Mann-Whitney $p < 0.05$

As shown in the table, the differences were found mainly in the statements relating to the students' perceptions of how college staff relate to them. The table shows the proportions who said the statements were 'definitely true' for them. Thus students who completed were more likely to indicate that staff helped them both in relation to college work and personal issues, though relatively high proportions of non-completers were positive about this aspect of their experience.

Difficulties experienced

The responses indicated that those who did not complete their courses were more likely to refer to difficulties in their personal lives and in relationships with others (staff and peers) in college. It may not be the learning or course experience that is the main reason for not completing, though as noted below that is an issue for some, but rather their life circumstances and relational skills and understanding that need to be addressed.

Young people were asked about the difficulties they had faced coming to college. While a quarter did not identify any difficulties, just over half indicated one or two difficulties and the rest selected three or more. The main difficulties relate to other things happening in their lives, travel arrangements and finance.

Table 24: Difficulties experienced by the young people

Difficulty	%
There are other pressures in my life	36
Getting to college on time was difficult	26
Travel to college took a long time	24
The money I get wasn't enough	21
I didn't like college work	12
The work was too difficult	12
I felt I didn't fit in with other people	10
It doesn't leave me time to do other things I want to do	7
The timetable didn't suit me	2

The responses of those who completed and those who did not were analysed using the chi-square test for nominal data (comparing yes and no responses). While a slightly smaller proportion of those who completed indicated they had specific difficulties compared to those who did not complete, there was a statistically significant association in relation to only one point: 'I didn't like college work'. This difficulty was, in fact, only selected by non-completers and some 27% of these. It is not possible to interpret this difference although the findings presented earlier would predict that these students were not confident that what they were doing at college would help them vocationally.

Twenty-two young people provided additional comments about difficulties they had encountered. Most (17) were from students who had not completed their courses. Several related to personal, family and health issues which had made attending college difficult. Two had become pregnant. Some said they did not have friends or family to help them with all the 'things outwith college'. Six of the comments referred to disciplinary matters resulting from incidents where their own behaviour or attitude had been viewed as unacceptable.

Issues with employer over attitude which resulted in employer terminating contract, so unable to continue at college.

I got kicked out for going through a hard time at home.....

Only five of those who completed their courses mentioned having other difficulties. For three this related to accommodation and tenancy changes which had required time off college and had meant catching up on missed classes.

The best thing about college

Most of the students were able to refer to something they liked about college. In fact only two did not. These are useful insights for their value in helping to identify aspects of college experience which appear to encourage continued engagement. There was no apparent difference in this aspect between those who completed their courses and those who did not.

For all, the most frequently mentioned 'good thing' was meeting friends, making new friends and meeting new people. For the most part this seemed to imply peers, but reference was made to getting to know the 'tutors and chefs' on a cookery course, and also meeting the public through the 'salon' (29 mentions).

This was closely followed by the opportunity to 'learn new things'. The statements ranged across general comments about 'learning new things' to specific topics e.g. mechanics, joinery, beauty, and specific skills e.g. 'using tools' and 'learning the trade' (24 mentions). There was a further emphasis on enjoying practical aspects of courses e.g. the workshops, 'doing the practical work in the kitchens' and 'being in the salon' (14 mentions). This was qualified by three young people who indicated that it was good because it was 'not school' or 'different from school' or 'learning more about stuff than what I did before'.

The next 'best thing' identified was the support provided by programme tutors and some respondents named particular staff.

I think that the best thing about college was that the teachers and staff sat with us on breaks and associated with us'.

Other comments were indicative of vocational opportunities, and still others used terms which were positively related to personal development, such as 'self-improvement' 'doing something worthwhile', or more about avoidance of negative consequences: 'giving me something to do', 'keeping me out of trouble'. The fact that both vocational opportunities and social opportunities are important is confirmed by other research which found that college was seen as a safe haven and a place to make positive relationships with friends and supportive staff (ref).

Aspects of college students liked least

Fifteen out of the 84 students who responded indicated that there was nothing they did not like about college, including five who did not complete their courses. Respondents were invited to give examples of things they liked least and some might have felt obliged to respond. However, in common with the things they liked best, these highlight aspects of college students think are important.

The most common theme of things 'least liked' related to aspects of learning and course provision (25 comments, 17 from students who had completed their courses). These comments referred to not liking written work, class-based lessons as opposed to practical activities (a finding that parallels aspects students liked best). Some students named specific subjects they disliked.

Another theme was around organisational issues (mentioned in 16 separate comments), in particular, early starts and long days, comments which mirror the results presented in Table 24 indicating problems experienced in travelling to college. Other organisational issues related to changing timetables, finding rooms in the college, having long lunch breaks and 'lots of rules'.

Some students referred to relationships with college staff and other students being the thing they liked least (15 comments). Some of the comments were quite general: 'not getting on with people') while others were more specific.

I felt that my tutor did not like me and this showed in front of the class.

Lecturers were not always understanding of my situation.

Some young people had uncomplimentary things to say about fellow students. Those who did not complete were more likely to be negative about relationships compared with completers. In interpreting these findings it is important to restate the finding that the quality of relationships with peers and staff was also an aspect that students found to be the

best thing about college. Once again it is important to recognise that there is a sub-set of students for whom the experience was not positive and while these may be the minority they also belong to a group of young people who have already had significant negative life experiences.

Open-ended comments

Respondents were given the opportunity to make other comments about their college experience. As they are highly individual it is not possible to discern any particular pattern or theme in these statements but they are reported here for their insight into the special circumstances of students from a looked after background. Many of these comments were enthusiastic, e.g., 'I thought it was great' and only three were negative, such as the respondent who said: 'I'll be advising people not to go'.

Comments were made about the support received from staff: '[I] couldn't have got through college without the help, support and guidance from [programme tutor]'. Another expressed regret for not asking for help sooner, and another reported reluctance to accept support but said: 'it would have been a good thing to do'.

Other comments relate to students' perceptions of a difficulty which was highlighted in the *Learning with Care* report (Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools and Social Work Services Inspectorate, 2001) and elsewhere, of acknowledging the status of young people who are care leavers and their need for additional support, while also respecting their confidentiality. Comments from four different respondents are quoted to illustrate different dimensions of this issue.

Some of the staff do not keep information that I want left between us.

[I don't like] people knowing about my background from my past and not knowing they would be on the course.

[I don't like] teachers who were not part of the course interfering with our group when they didn't understand us or our course.

Other people were understood more than me and weren't getting the same attention.

Plans for the future

Young people were asked about their immediate intentions and their plans for the future. Most young people's immediate plans were to get a job and/or do another college course. A small number already had jobs, while others were hoping to find jobs. Some already had places on courses, but most were hoping to return, or thinking about applying. Some respondents were unclear about the future, wanting to 'sort themselves out' or 'explore options'. But overall aspirations for getting jobs and work dominated. About half of 55 employment-related responses did not specify a particular job, but the others indicated a vocational preference, including three young people who hoped to run their own businesses and five who aspired to careers requiring degree-level qualifications.

Conclusions from the questionnaires

When the responses to the more open questions and the data from the rating scales are integrated they suggest five considerations that are important for the effective participation in college of this group of young people. They need:

- Supportive and understanding relationships
- Support in developing and maintaining relationships
- Approaches to learning which are active, relevant and enjoyable
- College staff who show understanding of their out of college lives
- Support in their out of college lives, though not necessarily provided by college staff.

Interviews with students

Between January 2010 and April 2011 three rounds of interviews with young people took place at the various college campuses. A total of eighty-two young people were interviewed. This sample consisted of forty-two (51%) males and forty (49%) females ranging in age from 14 – 22 with an average age of 17. Twenty (24%) of the young people were attending John Wheatley College, twelve (15%) at Telford College, fifteen (18%) at Stevenson College, ten (12%) at Jewel and Esk College, eleven (14%) at Dumfries and Galloway College and fourteen (17%) were based at the Stranraer Campus of Dumfries and Galloway College.

Whilst twenty-nine (35%) young people were still classified as being in care, fifty-three (65%) were care leavers. In total the young people had amassed 557 (average of 7) years in care, 227 (average of 3) social workers, 198 (average of 2) placements (made up of 77 residential moves, 93 foster care moves and 28 home based moves) and 126 (average of 2) school moves. Between them they also had 226 standard grades (an average of four per young person as 25 young people were aged 15 and had not yet taken any standard grades) although young people were often unclear about the specific details of the grades they attained.

Beyond the quantitative findings gained from the interviews with young people on the SFC programmes, the evaluation collected a wide variety of life experience and context from the young people in relation to both their education and in/post-care experiences. These findings are grouped into the following headings: young people's experience of being in care and of social work; young people's experience of education pre-college; young people's experience of education at college; young people's experience of support at college; additional context about the lives of the young people; and future aspirations.

Note that the names attributed to the quotations have been changed from the real names of students to preserve anonymity. The college locations have been removed for the same

reason. Pseudonyms have been used as a more friendly way of indicating different individuals and of identifying the gender of the young people interviewed.

Young people's experience of being in care and of social work

A social worker acts, for many young people in care, as a main contact point between services such as health, education and their placement. As stated above young people had a number of different social workers throughout their time in care. Young people had between one and 23 different social workers during this time. In total 57 (70%) young people identified experiencing no or negative support from their social workers in relation to their education. Sixteen (19%) young people felt that their social worker was supportive in relation to their education and nine (11%) did not comment on this.

I know my social worker is under a lot of pressure. I understand that because she is part-time and there are lots of staff changes where she works she can't support me in my education like I would like her to (Kim, 19)

My social worker has never supported me with my education. I decided to do it myself and make something of my life (Rachel, 15)

Social worker doesn't really bother because I live with my family and don't live in care. If I lived away from home I think they'd have cared more. They only phone when it's coming up to a panel meeting (Michelle, 16)

Upon further enquiry, young people said that these were the general feelings of their experience and not necessarily related to just one social worker. For example, Georgina was placed in a hostel when things broke down with her mum where she found that 'it was full of junkies and alcoholics.' She stated that she 'would have preferred to have stayed in care rather than move back and forth to my mum's.' This, she said, 'was typical of social workers not understanding basic things about how to care' (Georgina, 19) and indicates just one of the many difficulties young people in care or leaving care are having to face whilst at the same time trying to maintain a place at college.

A total of 35 (43%) young people identified other key people in their life such as, foster carers, residential workers, leaving care workers and teachers who had been helpful in relation to their education pre-college. A separate 38 (46%) young people identified one or more person from this grouping who had helped them in applying for and securing a place at college.

Young people's experience of education pre-college

Only 15 (18%) young people interviewed maintained a place at a single secondary school throughout their high school years, from start to finish. The other 67 (82%) young people experienced a number of changes in secondary education and whilst at school struggled with behavioural, emotional or education-based problems which meant that they had found it difficult to sustain a place at school. This resulted in 23 (28%) young people being excluded from school and, of this number, 17 (74%) not returning to any form of secondary education from the age of thirteen onwards. Young people stated:

I could have achieved much more than I have done. I just wanted to be a regular teenager (Jim, 18)

Moving from being at home to foster care to residential and back between them numerous times you just give up. I didn't see the point of school and no one seemed to understand why I was struggling (Katie, 16)

They seem to target you. They think that because you are in care you're going to be the trouble maker. My bag was searched dozens of times for drugs and fags and they never found anything. In the end I got thrown out because they said they couldn't support my needs but I didn't have any needs (Simon, 16)

When people found out I was in care I got bullied at school and had to move schools. It's difficult to fit in and form new friendships when you move schools (Ray, 16)

Young people's experience of education at college

In general the young people felt that their experiences of their education and social life at college were positive ones. A theme expressed in the positive experiences was the opportunity to progress educationally and to gain qualifications required for entry to work or higher level vocational courses.

[The course allowed me to] test to see whether I like it or not then I can move onto other levels without feeling I had invested too much if I didn't like it (Rebecca, 18).

Passport courses have helped me gain some basic skills that I really needed before moving on to the proper college courses (Tanya, 18).

More negatively, while young people on mainstream programmes were engaged in a wide variety of courses although also evident was a tendency towards gender specific courses such as hairdressing and beauty for girls and construction for boys.

Some young people felt that they had been wrongly assessed or misinformed by the programme staff about their options.

The support staff thought I had enough qualifications to go on to mainstream but [they said] I can always change if I feel it is too much (Simone, 16).

Well actually I think they could have informed me about all of my options and not just assumed that I wanted to be on a certain course at a certain level (Cherelle, 16).

I wish I could have just gone on to a mainstream course without doing this one first (Melvin, 15).

A number of young people interviewed also appeared to be on lower level courses, despite having qualifications that might have made them eligible for higher level courses. For example, Marcy (20) had a HNC and a GNVQ but was placed on an introductory course at the college. Other examples of this were highlighted in students' comments, such as these.

Not sure what course I'm on but I think it is the wrong one (James, 17).

I wish I could be on a different course as I feel I am over qualified for this one but I know that they are just thinking about my best interests (Antonia, 20).

[I'm] bored on the course (Kim, 19).

Mike (18) had formerly undertaken and enjoyed a catering course in a different college but had had to leave because of personal circumstances. He felt that on his placement in a building site in his new course he was ‘treated like a skivvy’ and was not learning any vocationally useful or transferable skills. While he confessed not to have expressed his concerns or articulated his interests, no-one on the programme seemed to have got to know him well enough to become aware of his previous experience and continued interest in catering.

The problem of the course not meeting expectations was also evident in the interviews with young people taking part in special courses solely aimed at care leavers.

Sometimes I don't like doing computers – we only mess around and I don't learn anything which is what some of them like but I want to move on to other things (Hayley 16).

[I] didn't want to do hairdressing but feel that's my only option if I move into mainstream next year (Sienna 15).

While a majority of students were positive about their experience, eight out of 20 young people interviewed at John Wheatley College, two out of 11 at Dumfries and Galloway College and two out of 14 at Dumfries & Galloway's Stranraer campus expressed feelings indicating they were unclear about the aims or outcomes of the programme and also felt that they had no choice about being on the course. Examples of other somewhat negative comments made by the young people about the course are quoted below.

I had a really poor experience of the course. I went to a building site but worked as a skivvy. Didn't learn anything (Mike, 18).

Our teacher always turns up late if at all and others [students] on the course are really disruptive. I don't feel I can say anything (Steven, 15).

Young people's experience of support at college

Asked in interviews about the support that they received while participating in the programme, different perceptions emerged. Many young people felt positive about this aspect, saying that the programme staff they came into contact with listened to them and felt understood.

They listen to me and understand how my life out there impacts on what I can achieve in college... they stick with me and know when to push and when and when not to (Stephen, 17).

They listen to me which is more than anyone has done before... We get to test things out, courses I mean, so I know what I can do when I qualify (Michael, 17)

Sixty-five (79%) of the young people interviewed said that they felt supported on the programme and by the workers. Most referred to support in a general sense, perhaps knowing that support was available if required, while 18 (28%) young people were able to give specific examples of the kinds of support they had received. Some of these responses are quoted below for illustration.

If we've got any questions she's good to talk to. I was getting bullied in class and they were there to sort it out (Gemma, 15).

They always make me smile. It's a calm place to come. They listen if I have something to tell them (Rebecca, 15).

They ask us what we want to do. We have choices. It's not forced on us (Rachel, 15).

Others were more negative. For example, 13 (16%) of young people interviewed said that they could have found the support they needed elsewhere by themselves.

I would rather just go to student welfare because they treat you like all the rest when all you want to know about is money (Rose, 16).

My social worker helps me with anything that [the case worker] at the college can do. I know that my leaving care worker, when I get one, will also do the things that [the worker] does at the college so I don't need them for anything (Tanya, 18).

Although the proportion of students who felt they were not receiving the support they needed is smaller than the larger group who were apparently satisfied with the help they got on the programme, this group of students whose expectations were not met was more able, as might be expected, to express these more negative feelings. More quotations from interviews have been selected because of their value in highlighting the particular concerns expressed by some of the looked after young people.

I now behave they have stopped supporting me (Cherelle, 16).

I feel harassed and stupid. They don't seem to think we can look after ourselves. They treat me like I don't know what I'm doing or where I want to go (Gayle, 16).

I think they have the wrong attitude about us, like we're not able to achieve. I mess around a lot because that is what they expect us to do (Tabatha, 15)

I'm worried because I have been told I won't get any support when I go on to a mainstream course (Richard, 15)

Don't know what support I get. [Worker] wanders around all the time so I don't really see [worker] (Michelle, 16).

Really struggling. Don't think [worker] understands at all. I think they need to have time to listen to us rather than wandering around the corridor all the time (Danielle, 16).

[Worker] helps me fill out forms but nothing else really (James, 17).

Additional context about the lives of the young people

An interesting feature of the lives of the young people highlighted by the interviews was that most (72 out of 82) had jobs, were involved in voluntary work, or had responsibilities at home at the same time as attending college.

I have to get them [siblings] ready before I come to college (Rose, 16).

I feel like I'm the adult sometimes (Maggie, 16, speaking about being a carer for her dad).

Sixteen young people were volunteering up to two days a week in a wide variety of setting including St John Ambulance, British Red Cross, a youth club and a special school. Nineteen had jobs and eight cared for their own children, siblings or their parents.

Many of the young people interviewed (58 of the 82) spoke about significant achievements of which they were proud as a way of illustrating how well they were coping with the demands of attending college. The variety of individual achievements included attending the gym at 6:30 am every week-day, having recently overcome difficulties with anger management, being able to sustain a relationship long enough to live with their partner, having a baby, making positive relationships with parents and siblings, going on holiday, managing money, making new friends, taking up a new interest, and gaining the confidence and skills to work with other young people. Twenty-three of the young people interviewed were living independently.

Future aspirations

Most (62 of the 82) young people interviewed spoke about their desire to progress to particular mainstream college courses, typically with potentially vocational prospects, while 14 said they hoped to get employment directly after leaving the programme.

Conclusions from the interviews

In relation to the young people's experience of the college programme the main findings from the interviews were as follows.

- The young people interviewed typically had experienced discontinuity in respect of home, school and social work support. A majority felt they had not been encouraged educationally by a social worker, though a minority had received support. Under a half identified other significant adults (e.g. a teacher or foster carer) who had helped them with their education.
- The majority of young people felt supported by the programme though only a proportion of these could say specifically how they had been supported. A minority was less satisfied with the support available. Others would have preferred to seek out support themselves, either in mainstream student services or outside college.
- In general the young people felt that their experiences of education and social life at college were positive ones. Most wanted the opportunity to progress educationally and to gain qualifications required for entry to work or higher level vocational courses.
- But some young people identified having been placed on the wrong college course, a course that they didn't like, a course they had no choice over or one which did not appear to acknowledge prior qualifications. Some young people felt they were not learning things from their college course.

- Many spoke of significant achievements, such as paid or voluntary work, independent living and caring for others, in addition to maintaining their college course.

Discussion

The initial intention of the research team was to collect data on most of the young people through the entry and exit questionnaires and through these identify a subset of young people who would be prepared to be interviewed. In the event the low response rate from the questionnaires and some of the unavoidable delays in the process meant that other approaches had to be taken, principally asking college staff to invite young people to participate. Those who took part in the interviews were recruited in a much more opportunistic way and this was linked to their availability when the interviewer was in the college. There are likely to be overlaps in the three respondent groups but identifying these clearly is impossible. This may also mean that some of the differences in responses reflect systematic differences between the groups.

Information from both the questionnaires and interviews suggested that almost all the young people had clear aspirations for the future and for most of them this was related to future employment or continued learning. Interestingly, however, the proportion of young people who believed that the college experience would be effective in helping them attain these goals was less by the time they were finishing college. Even among those who had successfully completed their courses only 60% felt that this had improved their prospect of gaining a job.

Both the questionnaires and the interviews also identified that many young people were experiencing multiple demands on their time in their lives outside college. Although in the questionnaires these were categorised as difficulties, the more extensive discussions in the interviews suggest that for many of the young people these were areas of considerable resilience and demonstrated a wide range of skill and capabilities that could potentially have been built on within college.

Most of the young people were positive about the level of support they received within college. The number of comments in the questionnaires was quite small, however, and young people were selecting from a series of possible responses which included several positive statements about support. The more reflective comments in the interviews examined the young people's experience of support at a greater depth. Although there was still a strong sense from young people that they had been supported they often struggled to provide concrete examples of this. In addition several young people identified ways in which the support provided had not really met their individual needs or could more appropriately have been provided by other people in their lives. More concerning is that some young

people were identifying occasions on which the “support” they had received had effectively disempowered them or failed to recognise their capability or aspirations.

Summary

This chapter has reported on the young people’s accounts of their personal lives, college experiences and aspirations for the future. Information was derived from questionnaires completed on commencing and leaving courses and interviews with individual young people. Most young people had clear aspirations for the future but for some it was not clear that the courses they had undertaken had helped them to achieve these although they may have gained other benefits from the college experience such as meeting new people. Several young people provided examples of a failure to match learning opportunities to their aspirations and existing level of educational attainment. Most young people were managing considerable external demands in addition to their college work. Young people expressed considerable satisfaction with the support they received at college. Questions are raised, however, about how such support should be most appropriately provided and whether there should be a stronger focus on supporting the specific learning needs of young people. In particular an issue emerged that for some young people the support offered undermined existing resilience.

Chapter 7: What the pilot projects learned from running their programmes

Introduction

Towards the end of the first year of the pilot programme, in May 2010, questions were sent by email to a range of staff involved in the pilot programmes. Responses were received from four project co-ordinators (two in Dumfries & Galloway), 10 support staff or tutors, 11 mainstream college lecturers with direct experience of looked after young people and 10 representatives of referring agencies (e.g. education, social work staff or voluntary sector staff). Approximately one year later, in June 2011, interviews were conducted with key staff from each project to discuss what had been learned as a result of running the pilots.

This chapter provides an account of the key messages arising from the experiences of the teams engaged in the pilots, combining data from both rounds of inquiry. Since the pilot projects were quite different, this chapter highlights the learning identified by each project separately and then summarises the key messages arising from the pilot programmes collectively.

The Dumfries & Galloway programme

Caseworkers

The steering group representatives were clear that the most important feature of the pilot was the developing role of the full-time attached caseworker. The caseworkers were regarded as being a vital component in providing a 'wraparound' service for the young people. They could meet the young people and identify their needs to ensure that a highly individual programme was provided if necessary. Some young people had been maintained in their course, despite facing a crisis, because they had immediate access to support. College lecturers could also contact a caseworker if a difficulty had arisen in class and this interface was usually sufficient to prevent a problem leading to a student being excluded from class or leaving the course.

The caseworkers also had an important role in networking generally and liaising with schools, careers specialists in Skills Development Scotland and local authority and voluntary sector social work staff. As a result, there was better communication between the college and referring agencies. It was important to be clear about the skill set required to be an effective caseworker and to select staff carefully.

In future the caseworkers will have an educational role (specifically in relation to the Prince's Trust programme) as well as performing counselling and guidance roles.

Supporting students

The caseworkers found that the mobile phone text facility was usually the best means of contacting students. For example, they used text messages as a reminder to attend college or specific classes, placement or other commitments. In the early stages of re-engaging with college, this approach was found to be efficient and effective. Another feature staff indicated they found effective was the use of a symbol in the class register which indicated to teaching staff that if concerns arose the caseworkers could provide additional information. There was also the promise that where problems arose these should be addressed immediately or at least within half an hour. This contract between staff and students prevented matters from escalating.

Training and briefing for staff

The Dumfries & Galloway programme made particular use of the Scottish Government We Can and Must Do Better training materials to provide training for college lecturers during 'breakfast briefings' which proved to be very popular. These were opportunities to provide information about looked after young people and outline the pilot programme. The questions asked at these meetings reinforced the need to have these discussions and were also valuable for the programme staff in indicating how good their communication was. Training was also provided for the college's board members, senior managers and janitors (the latter because sensitive handling of minor behavioural difficulties could make the difference between a student engaging with the college or withdrawing from their course).

I found it reassuring to know that this group of students have advocates within the college system with a fuller understanding of their situation than would be possible for the full range of college staff with which they have contact. I did not feel there were any deficiencies in the information with which I was provided.

Partnership

The steering group representatives emphasised the importance of the role of project co-ordinator (a local authority appointment) as well as having a college programme manager during the initial setting-up phase. The co-ordinator could facilitate things and help to develop trust among the partners. In the early stages, regular meetings were regarded as essential but as the operational relationships developed the meetings could be less regular. Having a launch of the pilot programme for elected members in September 2009 was found to be a good educational exercise as well as being a PR opportunity. The distinction between the management and steering groups was found to be appropriate. These groups will continue in future, though the membership may change to reflect changing roles in the college and local authority. The existence of the project has improved communication, helped to clarify the role of the college in facilitating the local authority's corporate parenting role and brought the college into partnership in the local authority's More Choices, More Chances steering group.

Having access to information about the young people was important to the college caseworkers. This was done by agreeing that data could be shared between the local authority and the college, provided that the young person agreed. None had objected.

Flexible curriculum

A great deal had been learned as a result of the creative provision in Go Further and also in the Prince's Trust programme. For some young people, having a gradual introduction to college was an effective way of re-engaging with education. It was important to get to know the young people and to negotiate with them individually to find out what pattern of attendance was likely to be suitable. For some, this might mean enrolling on a mainstream course immediately, though for others with poor prior experience of education a staged approach, with part-time attendance and 'chunking' of learning along with support elements appeared to work well. The staff felt they had learned a lot about offering a good transition programme. As well as custom-designed curriculum materials, they had also purchased a commercial package, Transition in Action which had evaluated well with staff and students²⁹. They also found that providing certification at an early stage, e.g. the opportunity to gain a first aid certificate in week 1, was highly regarded by students. Offering the programme on two sites had not presented difficulties.

The Edinburgh programme

Dedicated support workers

Having support workers entirely associated with the programme and not having to juggle the role with other college responsibilities was regarded as the most important feature of the project. The staff were aware that this was possible because of the pilot funding and was unlikely to be resourced in future, though one college planned to extend the role, while widening the responsibility to all vulnerable students. The workers were the 'face' of the programme for college staff and other professionals and this visibility helped to raise the profile of the project and also raise awareness of looked after young people. Flexibility in interpreting the role meant that the staff could develop relationships with relevant agencies and meet prospective students before they came to college. The staff said they had found from experience that for some young people an initial meeting away from college was an important 'bridge' for developing confidence.

The support workers felt that their direct knowledge of the young people's experiences and the barriers they faced meant they could act as advocates within the college. For example, the colleges had introduced on-line application and selection, with the assumption that applicants would have ready access to the internet to track progress of their own application. Where this created difficulties for students on the pilot project, paper application forms were used and the experience has highlighted the need for alternative

²⁹ See: www.playbackice.com/

arrangements to be available so students without easy access to the internet are not disadvantaged.

The workers highlighted several examples of their varied advocacy role. One was where a worker negotiated to prevent a young person losing their bursary as a result of poor attendance by making a case for extenuating circumstances and helping the student to address the difficulties. In another case a worker prevented a classroom behavioural incident leading to exclusion from college. In some cases involvement in advocacy led to variations in a college's policies. One example was a change made to a college's policy on applications which means that a looked after young person will be guaranteed an interview, though not of course guaranteed a place. In another the policy on discipline was amended so that looked after children and care leavers would automatically be treated under the arrangements in place for school link courses which allow more leeway in disciplinary matters. All the colleges had introduced the possibility of self-declaration of looked after/care leaver status at the point of application, a feature that would trigger additional support.

Supporting students

As in the Dumfries & Galloway programme, the mobile phone was found to be the most convenient and immediate form of contact with students.

I got a text from a young person – 'Are we still meeting this afternoon?' – and I thought, brilliant, that's what I want.

The staff thought that the students had appreciated having specialist workers and felt that although some aspects of the role could be transferred to mainstream student services there was still a need for a dedicated close support function to help keep students from dropping out when a crisis arises or to prevent escalation of challenging behaviour in class. A student may have to attend a review or children's hearing and may prefer to be able to negotiate time off from college with someone who understands their situation and with whom they have developed a relationship of trust.

Partnership arrangements

The partners formed a representative steering group to oversee the programme and to receive reports. The project was managed by an operational group comprising college managers, local authority looked after children co-ordinators, and representatives of Skills Development Scotland and voluntary sector organisations. The operational group met approximately every six weeks. The process of managing the project helped to develop links which are expected to persist beyond the life of the pilot. The staff felt that it was crucial to have good relationships with local authorities and that there should be a formal agreement in place for sharing information so that referrals can be conducted speedily, taking account of the need to maintain confidentiality.

The existence of summer schools was regarded as an important legacy of the partnerships which developed as a result of the pilot. It is planned that these will continue provided funding can be secured.

The Glasgow programme

Re-engaging young people in formal education

The programme managers at John Wheatley College felt the pilot had been successful in re-engaging in education young people who had previously drifted away from secondary schooling. These were students who typically had poor school attendance, were at risk of exclusion and who were also exposed to gang culture. The additional funding had allowed the college to provide a dedicated programme which it was argued could be sufficiently flexible to keep the young people engaged. If an approach was not working staff could change tack. Engaging youth workers who could work alongside lecturers in college and who also provided out of college activities was regarded by the programme staff as an important success factor. Many of the students had very unhappy memories of school and so the aim was to make the college experience as different from school as possible, front-loading the programme with trips and fun activities, and gradually introducing more formal learning experiences. Although the main aim of the youth work activities was to help re-engage the young people, the college was also mindful of the importance of formal recognition of achievement and therefore Youth Achievement Awards and the John Muir Trust Award had been introduced.

The gang culture which circumscribes the lives of many young people in the east of Glasgow was a significant barrier. For example, while the programme was based at the main Easterhouse Campus, taster sessions in construction and hairdressing and beauty were offered at the East End Campus; some young people refused to participate, even when transport was provided, as this would involve travelling to or through other gangs' territories.

Partnership arrangements

The programme managers felt that the development of close working relationships with a range of agency partners was a particular benefit of the pilot. They had received good support from Glasgow City Council staff in youth justice and children and families teams, and from pastoral care staff in local schools. In fact the TTLW programme had received a Flourish award from Glasgow City Council in recognition of effective partnership. Mostly relationships had developed through informal contact, though there were also formal meetings with senior managers in Education and Children's Services. College staff were invited to participate in social work case reviews and Intensive Support and Monitoring Service (ISMS) reviews for individual young people when appropriate.

Referral arrangements

The programme managers found that it was important to have reliable pre-entry information about the young people to allow them to tailor the programme to fit their particular needs. Initially referral information varied considerably; subsequently the programme used a standard referral form for details of contacts and care plan.

Staff development

The programme staff highlighted the importance of selecting staff with a track record of working successfully with young people who typically have poor prior experience of engagement with formal education. The staff need to be able to work flexibly and not to be easily discouraged. They need good skills in negotiation with the young people and with colleagues and, in turn, they need to know that they have support from managers. Staff were asked in advance about their development needs. Support was provided by an educational psychologist and by making available the We Can and Must Do Better training materials.

Key messages

Achievements

Although the individual pilot programmes were quite different, a common factor was a commitment to provide opportunities for looked after young people to access further education with a view to progressing to further courses or being better prepared to gain employment. Although the young people varied in the amount of pre-course and on-course support they needed, many would not have sustained a college place without additional scaffolding arrangements. For most of the students, participation in the programmes provided opportunities to develop in confidence, gain transferable skills and get qualifications. However, high rates of non-completion to some extent undermined these achievements.

The experience of the pilots collectively has identified the following success factors.

- Developing or improving support systems tailored specifically to the needs of looked after young people and care leavers. Respondents in the colleges felt that having dedicated workers accessible to young people, prior to entry and on course, as well as to college teaching staff and referral agencies was vital to the success of the pilots. This is an expensive resource made affordable by the pilot funding. Nevertheless, the importance of having staff with time freed up to develop relationships with young people and referral agencies was regarded as a vital component of the projects. Maintaining good communication with young people was important and mobile phone text messaging was found to be the most effective way of maintaining contact and reminding young people of meetings.

- Understanding looked after young people and care leavers. Not all young people with a looked after background need additional support to attend college and some will prefer to get on with their courses without extra intervention. For many, however, the effects of disrupted family life, placement and school discontinuity mean that they face considerable personal challenges in maintaining a college place. Difficulties with relationships and accommodation, or with course work, can cause students to drop-out. Personal frustrations can provoke inappropriate behaviour in college, leading to difficulties with lecturers and, in some cases, formal exclusion. While the problems which can arise are not necessarily particular to students with a looked after background, all of the pilots found it very beneficial to provide briefing about being looked after and the college's role in sharing 'corporate parent' responsibilities. Programme staff spoke about achieving 'culture change' within colleges. Sometimes this was associated with providing information about young people who are looked after and the priorities for improving outcomes for this group. Improved awareness had also influenced colleges' policies, systems and practices. Programme workers could provide briefing, as could partner agencies, and the Scottish Government We Can and Must Do Better Training Materials were also found to be very useful.

There is a lot of support from staff. If a student doesn't turn up to class I can phone and someone will go and look for them. I can phone for help if faced with really poor behavioural and it is good to be able to talk about a student with someone else so that we can give the student the best learning experience possible.

- Substantial investment in external partnership activities. The pilots varied in their arrangements for overseeing the programmes but all benefited from having good relationships with partners in local authorities, Skills Development Scotland, schools and voluntary sector agencies. In all cases the partnerships benefited from informal contacts and networking, but having a formal protocol in place, particularly in respect of referral and sharing information appears to be an important success factor. Keeping partners informed by newsletter or short 'catch-up' meetings seemed to be more useful than having larger, formal partnership meetings. Investment in partnership was regarded as being important for improving the referral process and partners can provide valuable additional support to programmes and for individual students.
- Additionality and 'wraparound' services. The Glasgow and Dumfries & Galloway pilots were based around programmes specifically aimed at care leavers, with the option to progress to mainstream courses. These programme included group work activities designed to increase confidence and to help students to feel 'at home' in the college setting. The Edinburgh pilot recruited students directly onto mainstream provision, though this included 'preparation for college' courses. All three pilots provided additional services through dedicated workers, partnership and referral

arrangements, support for to coming to college and, in Edinburgh, summer schools, which collectively amounted to a supportive infrastructure.

Referral arrangements

Of the 10 representatives of referring agencies who responded to our questions, two were social workers, one was a leaving care worker and the others held various posts where they had specific responsibility for the welfare or education of looked after young people. All were from the Edinburgh or Dumfries pilots. Most had referred several young people, with a range between one and 17. Typically they had heard of the programme by direct contact with a pilot or by communication within or from a local authority.

I was contacted by the project workers last year. They came out to meet myself and other agencies to explain the purpose of the project. Leaflets with phone numbers and information about the course were distributed. The project workers also enquired about our roles and where we might fit into the referral process (Referrer 9).

All of the referrers were positive about the support available to the young people from the projects and about the communication with the programme and the information they had received.

Mentoring, advice, practical support, financial support/advice. We met with worker who advised on course options and gave us advice on completing application forms. (Referrer 5).

One referrer gave an example of a young person refusing to attend college because they felt another young person had been treated unfairly by a course lecturer. The referrer felt that the college-based project worker had intervened appropriately, taking the complaint seriously and arranging for it to be investigated through the college procedures. A meeting was arranged with the young person 'to try to facilitate a return to college'. The referrer said: 'This was a good example of a project worker advocating on behalf of the young person' (Referrer 9).

Most said they were happy with the referral process, though examples of minor frustrations were related, such as having difficulty in finding the address to send back a completed application form and eligibility criteria that appear to exclude a young person the referrer thought would otherwise meet the project's aims. In response to the question about 'gaps' in provision, another referrer suggested that the inclusion criteria should be widened to include those 'at risk' of becoming looked after. Others also referred to young people who missed out because of not quite fitting the inclusion criteria.

Only two of the 10 referrers opted to provide a response to the 'anything else' open-ended section of the questionnaire, both effusive in praise of the provision. One of these comments is quoted below.

This is one of the best developments I have seen in a long time. An excellent response to an area of need. Worker works quickly to engage with young people and is very committed to her role. Young people have found college a less scary and daunting process. They have reported enjoying meeting

with her to discuss and see around it before applying. They have had support with applications. (Referrer 8).

Problems encountered

Many of the problems encountered were pilot-specific, such as the delay in setting up a database to allow tracking and monitoring of students experienced by one of the pilots. The following themes extracted from discussions about problems are presented for their value in identifying considerations in setting up similar projects.

- The time requirements for negotiating and maintaining partnership relationships, providing staff development and for giving support for individual students can easily be underestimated.
- While all the pilots valued their partnerships, these also present challenges such as a willingness to share the ownership of the project and not to see it as entirely the responsibility of the college, reaching agreements about sharing information about young people and being open to addressing difficulties which arise.
- College systems and practices which present barriers to looked after students. For example, permitting absence to attend reviews or other statutory meetings without prejudicing attendance or not allowing a young person to keep two course applications open at once, even though he or she might need to do so because of changes pending in accommodation.
- Resistance from college staff who argue that all students should be treated in the same way. This is a delicate area because many looked after students just want to get on with their lives and do not always want to be treated as special cases. On the other hand, a willingness to understand and be responsive to particular needs is an important mark of inclusiveness in education. Having a supportive, understanding culture is critical for encouraging engagement among students with unhappy previous experience of education and is not the same as being undemanding or having low expectations.

This has been very positive for me – I have enjoyed working with the young people. I know more about the individuals than I would normally do and this has allowed me to be more understanding of their needs and difficulties and I think this has allowed me to teach them more effectively.

- Young people may feel pressured to accept a college place as part of supervision conditions, the ending of a supervision order or arrangements for independent living. If they do not feel personally committed to the programme, do not understand its aims or have been inadequately prepared, they are unlikely to engage sufficiently to gain from attendance and may become disruptive for other students and lecturers.

- Students can drop out for a variety of reasons, some prompted by situations arising in college and others unconnected with the course. It is important to be responsive in offering support. Whilst student services encourage students to self-refer, some students may need considerable encouragement to seek and accept help.
- Students can get discouraged if they are unsuccessful in applications for specific courses. This may be a particular problem for young people who are looked after and are more likely to have lower grades. Sometimes students are offered places on alternative courses with a view to progressing to the desired course. When this happens they need access to good on-course guidance so they are clear what qualifications they need, what additional qualities (e.g. placement or work experience) would enhance their application, and how the proposed course can help them access the desired course. If this guidance is not provided there is a real risk that students' negative views of education are confirmed.

Plans for sustaining the aims of the pilots

All three pilots felt that the principles exemplified by the projects would leave a legacy in terms of awareness of the needs of looked after young people, partnerships with referring agencies, supportive culture in colleges and an infrastructure for referral, recruitment and tracking. In all cases respondents could point to instances of college policies or systems having been adapted so that students with a looked after background were not disadvantaged, or indeed were advantaged (e.g. guaranteed interviews). All the pilots felt that the provision of specialist staff was important and that sustainability was at least partly dependent on having access to a degree of dedicated resource. The pilots which provided special programmes or summer schools were uncertain that these could be sustained without hypothecated funding. An arrangement to credit colleges providing extra support for looked after young people and care leavers in a similar way to the 'weighted' funding arrangements for students with disabilities or additional support needs would help, at least for colleges with significant provision.

The Buttle UK Quality Mark for Colleges

At the time of the final interview with programme staff (June 2011), four of the colleges had been awarded the Quality Mark and the fifth had submitted an application for the award and the outcome was awaited. All the colleges agreed that the process of reviewing policies and provision had been helpful in providing a focus for their collaboration with partners and support arrangements in place for care leavers. Among the advantages respondents identified in the process were the following:

- The framework provides a check of provision against good practice.
- The discipline involved in preparing an action plan and identifying key responsibilities and delivery timescales is very useful.

- The Quality Mark helps to raise awareness about looked after children and care leavers throughout the college, including among senior managers and board members.
- The Quality Mark highlights gaps in provision.
- The prestige of a UK-wide scheme is valuable in liaising with partners and may be useful in helping to attract specific funding.

Among the more negative points highlighted were these:

- Will Buttle UK have the resources to sustain a Quality Mark for further education?
- Concern were expressed that the champions of the Quality Mark within the colleges are in pilot projects which are about to end and the experience may be consequently lost.
- Buttle UK does not provide a plaque, unlike for example Investors in People. The physical presence of a plaque at a college reception is a useful way of publicising the award.

Conclusion

Unsurprisingly, from the projects' perspectives, the workers who had most contact with the students and who were freed up from other responsibilities to engage in networking with potential referring agencies, to meet young people prior to enrolment, to be available to students when a crisis arose, to provide training for colleagues and to help resolve problems, were regarded as crucial to the success of the pilots. Since these posts were funded by the project grant it is unlikely that they could be resourced by the pilot colleges in future and by other colleges intending to make available special provision for looked after young people and care leavers. There is also a compelling argument that suggests the particular support needs of care leavers are not different from those of other young students who face financial, housing and relationship difficulties and have involvement with statutory agencies. What is different, of course, is that local authorities and their partners, including colleges, have continuing corporate parent responsibilities for students from a looked after background. Some of the activities engaged in by the full-time workers, such as amending college policies and developing referral pathways is complete, while some others, such as disbursement of hardship funds, could be transferred to mainstream student support facilities. Nonetheless, the pilot colleges recognised the importance of having a 'named person', someone known to students and staff, with at least a part-time role to champion the needs of students from a looked after background.

All three pilots emphasised the importance of having an effective infrastructure: an operational group with clearly defined remit and roles; workable arrangements for referral and sharing confidential information about young people; and a supportive network of partners.

All of the partners could identify significant benefits arising from conducting training for a broad range of college staff about the experiences of looked after children and young people. Although this training was typically conducted by the pilot staff there is no reason why colleges should not invite partners, such as local authority leaving care teams, to provide this service.

The projects were different in approach. Two invested heavily in special programmes for young people from looked after backgrounds, while one aimed to help young people to access existing college courses. The Glasgow and Dumfries & Galloway pilots chose full-time, in-college activity programmes of varying lengths and content, while the Edinburgh pilot emphasises pre-entry guidance and summer schools. There are advantages and disadvantages in both approaches. What is clear is that some young people from a looked after background will need considerable support to be ready, mentally, socially and practically, to engage with college. The questions for college partnerships will inevitably centre on the best use of resources to make this support available.

Finally, the colleges were positive about their involvement in piloting the Buttle UK Quality Mark for further education colleges.

Chapter 8: Conclusion and recommendations

Introduction

The final chapter in this report reviews the findings presented in the foregoing chapters in the light of the original aims for the research and considers the key themes that have emerged. The chapter also lists recommendations which we hope will be useful for practitioners and others concerned with developing the post-school educational opportunities available to looked after young people and care leavers.

The aim of the research was to conduct an evaluation of three pilot projects supported by Scottish Funding Council (SFC) funding concerned with the engagement in further education (FE) provision of young people aged between 15 and 19 who were looked after (either at home and away from home) by local authorities or who have left care. Over the two years 428 young people participated in the pilot programmes. About one-third of the students started on programmes specifically aimed at looked after young people and care leavers, about a fifth were on introductory college and vocational preparation courses, while just under a half were on various award bearing courses leading to NQ or equivalent qualifications from Access to Advanced Higher or other higher level qualifications. The majority were involved in programmes at SCQF Level 5 and below, while five percent of the young people were enrolled on higher level courses, such as HNC and SVQ3.

The overall aim of the research was to identify clear lessons for the Council and for the Scottish further education college sector more generally, leading to improved participation by care leavers in post-school education. In discussing the issues which arise in the data, we return to the original research questions which have guided the study.

1. What did the programme involve from the perspectives of the participants and other key stakeholders?

John Wheatley and Dumfries & Galloway colleges developed courses, although different in design, duration and content, which were specifically created for looked after young people and care leavers. The rationale was that many young people from a looked after background have had a disrupted school education as a result of placement and home moves, family pressures and other factors which can affect school attendance. The cumulative effect of these difficulties, it was argued, highlight the need for a specific programme to support young people, help them adjust to college attendance and gain transferable skills and qualifications to allow progression to further college courses or to enhance employment prospects.

The Edinburgh pilot, involving three different colleges, also aimed to provide support for young people, based on considerable knowledge of their background, both as a group of young people at risk and also individually as care leavers with particular aspirations and support needs. The Edinburgh programme did not develop a specific programme, but supported young people onto and through mainstream college provision, though this included courses aimed at helping a broad range of returners to education become oriented to college. The Edinburgh colleges offered summer schools in 2010 and 2011 which were evaluated positively by college staff and prospective college students.

There are advantages and disadvantages in both approaches. The Edinburgh pilot learned from experience that a degree of special support is needed, hence the investment in summer schools and liaison with residential schools. The case against the development of a specific programme lies in the resource implications and also in the testimony of students from a looked after background who want their particular circumstances and the implications for maintaining a college place to be understood but who in other respects prefer to be treated like other students. They also want to feel they have some choice in the course they take and that this matches their previous qualifications and wider experience. The relatively high completion rates achieved by the shorter *Go Further* programme in Dumfries & Galloway, and the motivational advantages deriving from a sense of achievement, might indicate that where specific provision is made available it should ideally be short in duration, students recruited should be clear about the aims of the programme, and how these will help to meet their individual needs and get help to identify clear progression opportunities.

Some young people from a looked after background will need additional support to be ready, both mentally, socially and practically, to engage with college. The questions for college partnerships will inevitably centre on the best use of resources to make this support available.

The pilot programmes felt their efforts over two years had made a positive difference to the lives and opportunities for young people from a looked after background. They also felt their presence, networking and influence had effected a culture change in colleges in the sense that the varied circumstances of looked after children were better understood. Most of the young people who participated were positive about the support they received. The relatively high non-completion rate and low rate of achievement of SQA qualifications, however, highlights the importance of focusing more on support to stay on course.

Recommendation 1: *Further education colleges in Scotland are important post-school destinations for many looked after young people. The discontinuities at earlier stages in education mean that access to college courses is vital for these young people. Colleges should be encouraged to develop local partnerships to increase the opportunities available to young people to progress in their education, with particular emphasis on providing support to complete courses and to gain qualifications.*

Recommendation 2: *Students from a looked after background often need considerable practical and personal support to attend and maintain a college place. Provision of this support is not necessarily the responsibility of the college. Care should be taken to ensure that support does not undermine a young person's existing resilience. Students from a looked after background sometimes have additional learning support needs and early help to address these is a college's responsibility. Summer schools which help prepare young people for college should be considered.*

2. *What is the care experience of the students and what was their prior educational attainment and engagement with education?*

The young people interviewed typically had experienced discontinuity in respect of home and school and social work support. A majority felt they had not been encouraged educationally by a social worker, though a minority had received support. Under a half identified other significant adults (e.g. a teacher or foster carer) who had helped them with their education. The majority of young people felt supported by the programme though only a proportion of these could say specifically how they had been supported. A minority was less satisfied with the support available. Others would have preferred to seek out support themselves, either in mainstream student services or outside college.

In general the young people felt that their experiences of education and social life at college were positive ones. Most wanted the opportunity to progress educationally and to gain qualifications required for entry to work or higher level vocational courses.

But some young people identified having been placed on the wrong college course, a course that they didn't like, a course they had no choice over or one which did not appear to acknowledge prior qualifications. Some young people felt they were not learning things from their college course.

Many spoke of significant achievements, such as paid or voluntary work, independent living and caring for others, in addition to maintaining their college course.

Recommendation 3: *Local authorities, as 'corporate parents', and their college, voluntary sector and SDS partners, should continue to collaborate with efforts recommended in the We Can and Must Do Better report to encourage looked after young people to have high aspirations and to aim high in education. This is not easy but recent improvements in school attendance and attainment suggest that raising awareness can make a difference. Opportunities for looked after young people to meet other young people with a positive experience of education and to have access to individual tuition if required and mentoring support should be considered.*

Recommendation 4: *Leaving care teams, SDS advisers and college champions should help young people to 'present' themselves in ways that allow varied achievements to be taken into account and recognised for entry to mainstream programmes. Most of the young people wanted to progress educationally and for many this was related to vocational options. But it is also important to challenge assumptions that looked after young people are more suited to particular (often lower-level) courses Information aimed at looked after young people should refer to the broad range of course options available and also progression opportunities.*

3. *What difficulties were encountered by the projects and how were these addressed?*

From the students' perspective, a quarter did not experience difficulties in engaging with college, but just over half indicated one or two difficulties and the rest identified three or more. The main difficulties related to other things happening in their lives, travel arrangements and finance.

The programmes also experienced difficulties as the following 'problem' themes indicate.

- The time requirements for negotiating and maintaining partnership relationships, providing staff development and for giving support for individual students can easily be underestimated. Partnerships also present challenges such as a willingness to share the ownership of the project and not to see it as entirely the responsibility of the college, reaching agreements about sharing information about young people and being open to addressing difficulties which arise.
- College systems and practices can present barriers for looked after students. For example, permitting absence to attend reviews or other statutory meetings without prejudicing attendance or not allowing a young person to keep two course applications open at once, even though he or she might need to do so because of changes pending in accommodation.
- Resistance from college staff who argue that all students should be treated in the same way. Having a supportive, understanding culture is critical for encouraging engagement among students with unhappy previous experience of education and is not the same as being undemanding or having low expectations.
- Young people may feel pressured to accept a college place as part of supervision conditions, the ending of a supervision order or arrangements for independent living. If they do not feel personally committed to the programme they are unlikely to engage sufficiently to gain from attendance and may become disruptive for other

students and lecturers. Students can get discouraged if they are unsuccessful in applications for specific courses.

Recommendation 5: *Colleges can best support looked after young people when there is awareness of the difficulties and barriers to participation in education that they typically experience.*

Recommendation 6: *Students can drop out for a variety of reasons, some prompted by situations arising in college and others unconnected with the course. It is important for college services to be responsive in offering support. Whilst student services encourage students to self-refer, some students may need considerable encouragement to seek and accept help.*

4. What were the achievements of the students on their college courses?

While the programmes were designed principally to meet the needs of looked after young people or care leavers who had reached normal school leaving age, the colleges also engaged with young people while still at school as part of the process of transition from school to further education or work and also recruited students under the minimum school leaving age, typically young people who had become disengaged with school. Students were also recruited to 'non-assessed' courses which provided a 'taster' of college experience.

Less than half of students on assessed courses were 'successful' in conventional terms, defined as having achieved 70% or more of the assessed units required for their course. The main reason for this low figure appears to be students leaving before completing sufficient amounts of their course.

There were no differences in outcomes between males and females. There was, however, a strong association related to vocational focus which, in line with national figures, showed a tendency for the young men to be on courses related to construction and engineering and for the young women to be on courses studying hair and beauty and health, child and social care.

Most young people had clear aspirations for the future but for some it was not clear that the courses they had undertaken had helped them to achieve these although they may have gained other benefits from the college experience such as meeting new people. Several young people provided examples of a failure to match learning opportunities to their aspirations and existing level of educational attainment.

Recommendation 7: *It is important that colleges liaise effectively with local authority leaving care and school pastoral care teams in relation to young people under school leaving*

age and also that local authority staff continue to accept corporate care responsibilities for these young people.

Recommendation 8: *College partnerships should consider ways of increasing the proportion of students who are successful in their courses in conventional terms, i.e. who gain SQA qualifications. This is not a simple matter but is likely to involve a combination of good pre-course guidance, following up absences immediately, catch-up tuition for gaps in learning and encouragement.*

Recommendation 9: *The tendency to reinforce gender stereotypes through recruitment to courses should be countered, as should failure to match learning opportunities to young people's aspirations and existing level of educational attainment.*

5. *What success factors can be determined from the experiences of the projects, and from similar activities elsewhere?*

The colleges exceeded the target numbers for recruitment set out in their original pilot proposals. It is difficult to extrapolate from this to FE more generally, because of the large number of colleges in Scotland and the variation in size of local authorities. At the very least this indicates that there is a desire among looked after young people to access college courses and therefore a need for coherent support arrangements to help them to do so.

Success was also considered in terms of course completion, progression to further courses in college, overall positive outcomes and successful attainment (i.e. gaining 70% of units of the course). The colleges argued that gaining some course units was also a measure of success as this indicated progress.

Dumfries and Galloway's Go Further programme used college-assessed units, achieved by 64% of the students in 2009-10 and 53% in 2010-11. John Wheatley's Transition to Learning and Work course was recorded initially as a non-assessed course. During 2010-11 it was reported as an assessed course with a 48% success rate. Where students attended mainstream college courses, overall around 60% completed. In 2009-10, 31% progressed, with 54% expected to progress in 2010-11. Positive outcomes were reported for 46% in 2009-10, a proportion expected to have risen considerably to 67% in 2010-11. Dominant Programme Group 18 (i.e. a category of courses designed for students with a range of support needs) might be a suitable comparator. In 2009-2010 on average 78% of the students on DPG18 courses completed, clearly a higher rate than achieved by students in the pilots.

The destinations of some students were unknown and some young people lose contact with college. The number of 'unknowns' reduced in 2010-11 but this issue remains a challenge for college-agency partnerships so young people at risk do not become 'lost' to the system.

Other important success factors emerged from the discussions with key staff in the pilots.

- The importance of having staff with time freed up to develop relationships with young people and referral agencies.
- Understanding looked after young people and care leavers. Not all young people with a looked after background need special support to attend college and some will prefer to get on with their courses without extra intervention. But improved awareness has influenced colleges' policies, systems and practices. Programme workers could provide briefing, as could partner agencies, and the Scottish Government We Can and Must Do Better Training Materials were also found to be very useful.
- The pilots varied in their arrangements for overseeing the programmes but all benefited from having good relationships with partners in local authorities, Skills Development Scotland, schools and voluntary sector agencies. The partnerships benefited from informal contacts and networking, but having a formal protocol in place, particularly in respect of referral and sharing information appears to be an important success factor. Investment in partnership was regarded as being important for improving the referral process and partners can provide valuable additional support to programmes and for individual students.

Recommendation 10: *Recruitment to the pilot programmes exceeded recruitment targets, indicating that there is a demand for further education among looked after young people and care leavers. Colleges elsewhere in Scotland should be encouraged to work with partners to provide suitable support and encouragement for young people to access courses.*

Recommendation 11: *The SFC's Advisory Group should give advice on realistic benchmarking of completion rates on special programmes for care leavers. The DPG18 average of 78% gives a starting point for a target, accepting that the pilot projects achieved lower rates.*

Recommendation 12: *Engagement with FE should be regarded as a transition process, rather than an end in itself. A recent five-country European project recommended that services should collect regular information about individuals in their care as well as aggregated data up to the age of 25 (Hojer, et al., 2008). We recommend that local authorities and Skills Development Scotland should help colleges to try to ensure that young people do not 'disappear' and continue to receive support.*

Recommendation 13: *Local authorities, Skills Development Scotland and a partner college should agree a formal protocol which clarifies roles, management support and information sharing arrangements. Colleges should consider the value of having a staff member provided with time to fulfil the role of ‘champion’ for looked after children and care leavers.*

6. *What plans do the colleges and their partners have for sustaining the achievements of the project after the special funding ends?*

All three pilots felt that the principles exemplified by the projects would leave a legacy in terms of awareness of the needs of looked after young people, partnerships with referring agencies, supportive culture in colleges and an infrastructure for referral, recruitment and tracking. In all cases respondents could point to instances of college policies or systems having been adapted so that students with a looked after background were not disadvantaged, or indeed were advantaged (e.g. guaranteed interviews).

The pilots felt that the provision of specialist staff was important and that sustainability was at least partly dependent on having access to a degree of dedicated resource. The pilots which provided specific programmes or summer schools were uncertain that these could be sustained without hypothecated funding. An arrangement to credit colleges providing extra support for looked after young people and care leavers in a similar way to the ‘weighted’ funding arrangements for students with disabilities or additional support needs would help, at least for colleges with significant provision.

Recommendation 14: *The SFC should clarify the funding arrangements for colleges recruiting students for whom local authorities have continuing corporate parent responsibilities. College and local authority partnerships should reach agreement about their respective division of support arrangements for these young people, bearing in mind that this could be a complex exercise where a college needs to liaise with several agencies.*

7. *What are the implications of the project for the Scottish further education sector in general and for Buttle UK in particular?*

The pilot colleges were involved in advising upon and testing the ‘commitment’ framework devised by Buttle UK for further education colleges. The statement of commitment and the Quality Mark awarded for successfully demonstrating progress towards it, were developed as a result of Buttle UK’s experience with a parallel Quality Mark for higher education, introduced in 2007. The pilot colleges were generally positive about their involvement in preparing applications for the Quality Mark, They identified a number of advantages in the process, as well as some concerns.

Advantages:

- The framework provides a check of provision against good practice.
- The discipline involved in preparing an action plan and identifying key responsibilities and delivery timescales is very useful.
- The Quality Mark helps to raise awareness about looked after children and care leavers throughout the college, including among senior managers and board members.
- The Quality Mark highlights gaps in provision.
- The prestige of a UK-wide scheme is valuable in liaising with partners and may be useful in helping to attract specific funding.

Concerns:

- Will Buttle UK have the resources to sustain a Quality Mark for further education?
- Concerns were expressed that the champions of the Quality Mark within the colleges are in pilot projects which are about to end and the experience may be consequently lost.
- Buttle UK does not provide a plaque, unlike for example Investors in People. The physical presence of a plaque at a college reception is a useful way of publicising the award.

Recommendation 15: *Scottish FE colleges should be encouraged to make a commitment to gain the Buttle UK Quality Mark for Care Leavers, with support from Scotland's Colleges, SDS, the SFC and representatives of the pilot colleges. This in turn requires that Buttle UK confirms it has the resources to support the FE Quality Mark. Colleges should bear in mind that seven universities in Scotland have considerable experience of the Quality Mark for higher education, in developing support and monitoring systems and in engaging with local authorities and other care providers in activities designed to raise educational aspiration.*

Recommendation 16: *Buttle UK should consider whether the use of the term 'care leaver' is appropriate, since an increasing proportion of young people will continue to be looked after until 18 and supported beyond that to the end of full or part-time education. Buttle should also provide a commitment to publish aggregate data related to students in both FE and HE who declare a looked after background. Buttle might also consider the idea of providing a physical plaque as well as the right to use the logo.*

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Appendix 1: Data collection instruments used with young people

The questionnaires were adjusted slightly for each of the three pilot programmes, to customise the college names. The examples included here are those used for the Edinburgh pilot.

Coming to College

This questionnaire is for people who have recently started college. We are researchers at the University of Strathclyde and we would like to ask you some questions about coming to college and also about yourself.

All your answers will be confidential and only the research team will see them. This means that no one reading the report we write can know which responses came from you. So please be as honest and open as you can.

However, if it helps you can do this along with a friend you trust or ask one of the college staff to help you with it. You can miss out any questions you don't want to answer.

The questionnaire should take you about 20 minutes to complete.

Thank you for agreeing to complete this questionnaire.

If you know your Scottish Candidate Number, please write it in the box below.

If you do not have your SCN, please write in your college registration/ID number in the box below.

About your college

1. Which college are you going to? Please tick one.

- Edinburgh's Telford College
- Stevenson College
- Jewel and Esk Valley College

2. What is the name of the course you are doing?

3. How did you find out about the course you are doing at college?

Please tick **all** that apply.

- a teacher
- someone from college who came to school to talk
- someone from college when I was there for a college link course from school
- a college lecturer from another course
- a youth worker
- my social worker
- a careers officer
- my parent or carer
- someone else in my family
- a friend
- someone who has already done the course
- advertising leaflet
- poster
- an advert in a newspaper or magazine

If you found out about the course in some other way, please tell us about it.

4. Reasons for doing a college course

a) Did you start college because you wanted to leave school but you were too young? Yes No

b) Were you told you had to come to college by someone in authority? Yes No

c) Here are some reasons why people study at college. How important were these reasons for you when you decided to start college? If you are not sure select the last column.

	Very important	Important	Not Important	Not sure
The courses seem interesting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I'll get qualifications	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
It will help me find out about jobs I can do	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I will have a better chance of getting a job after I have finished	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I'll be able to go on to other courses	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I'll learn lots of useful things that will help me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
In college they treat you like adults	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I knew other people coming to college	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Adults told me it was the best thing to do	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I didn't know what else I could do	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
It is better than doing nothing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you have another reason for coming to college please tell us about it.

5. Important things about college

Here is a list of things that people say they want from college. How important is each one to you? If you are not sure tick in the column headed 'not sure'. If you think any of the points are not relevant to you tick in the column headed 'not relevant'.

	Very important	Important	Not important	Not sure	Not relevant
Staff who are interested in me as a person	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Staff who are happy to help me with my course work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Staff I can talk to about what is happening in my life	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Staff who will help me make my own mind up about what is best for me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Staff who will discuss all the options I have	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Being allowed to choose the things I learn about	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Learning in ways that are enjoyable	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Learning things in classes that are useful in my day-to-day life	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Having classes where there are lots of things to do rather than writing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Having classes where there are lots of things to do rather than listening to the teacher	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Social activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A nice place to meet with friends	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Opportunities to take part in sports	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you have other things you would like to get from coming to college please tell us about them.

6. Difficulties about coming to college

Here are some difficulties people face when studying at college. Please tick any that you think you might experience.

It doesn't leave me time to do other things I want to do

Travel to college takes a long time

Getting to college on time is difficult

The money I get isn't enough

I'm not sure I'll fit in with other people

I think the work might be too difficult

I find learning difficult

There are other pressures in my life

If you think there are other difficulties about coming to college, please tell us about them.

Your School Experience

7. What year were you in when you last went to school?

Tick one

- S2
- S3
- S4
- S5
- S6
- not sure

8. During your last year at school you might have taken classes in school some of the time and also gone to other places for classes. Which of the following best describes what you did?

Tick one.

- All my classes were in school
- Some classes were in school and some were in college
- Some classes were in school and some in another centre
- Some classes were in school and sometimes I went to a job training scheme

If you did anything else during your last year at school please tell us about it.

9. **How would you describe your attendance during your last year at school?**

Tick one.

- I attended all the time
- I attended more than half the time
- I attended about half the time
- I was absent more than half the time
- I was hardly ever there
- I can't remember

10. **Sometimes pupils are excluded from school. Did this ever happen to you during your last year at school?**

Yes No

If **no**, go to question 11.

If **yes**, how often did it happen during your last year at school?

- Once
- Twice
- 3-5 times
- more than 5 times
- I can't remember

11. Here is a list of things you might have done since you left school. Please tick all that you have done.

- another college course
- looked for a job
- worked in a paid job without training
- worked in a paid job with training
- worked as a volunteer
- spent time not doing anything

If you have done anything else since you left school, please tell us about it.

12. Do you have any SQA certificates? Yes No

13. Here are some other certificates or awards you can get.

Tick all those you have.

- ASDAN
- Duke of Edinburgh
- Young Achievers Award
- Sports Awards
- Sports Leader
- None of these

If you have any other certificate or award please tell us what it is.

About yourself

We would like to know some personal details. This helps us when analysing the answers from everybody to know if different groups of people have different views.

14. **Date of birth**

15. **Gender** Male Female

16. **Where do you normally live now?**

- At home with a parent or parents
- In the house of other relatives
- With a friend's family
- In my own flat or house
- With foster carers
- In a residential unit or children's house
- In a residential school or secure unit

If none of these, then please tell us where you live now?

17. **Where did you normally live a year ago?**

- At home with a parent or parents
- In the house of other relatives
- With a friend's family
- In my own flat or house
- With foster carers
- In a residential unit or children's house
- In a residential school or secure unit

If none of these, then please tell us where you live now?

Finally... .

18. We would also like to ask you some questions about your experience of being 'in care'. This means you may have been supported by a social worker while staying at home, or you may have lived with foster parents or stayed in a residential unit. We are interested in how you think this affected your education. We need your special agreement to ask these questions and we would like to contact you about this.

Are you willing to tell us about your experience of being 'in care' and how this affected your education?

Yes No

19. We would like to contact you again in the future to find out about your college experience

Can we contact you again in the future to find out how you get on at college?

Yes No

If you have said **yes** to either question 18 or 19 please let us have your contact details:

So we can contact you, please tell us your contact details:

name:

email:

mobile phone number:

address:

Thank you.

Thank you very much for taking time to do this questionnaire.

Please put it into the envelope and give it to the researcher/your tutor.

If you want to talk to anyone about the research you can email Zachari Duncalf (zachari2009@hotmail.com) or Liz Seagraves (liz.seagraves@strath.ac.uk)

Leaving College

This questionnaire is for people who are leaving college for any reason. We are researchers at the University of Strathclyde and we would like to ask you some questions about your college experience.

All your answers will be confidential and only the research team will see them. This means that no one reading the report we write can know which responses came from you. So please be as honest and open as you can.

However, if it helps you can do this along with a friend you trust or ask one of the college staff to help you with it. You can miss out any questions you don't want to answer.

The questionnaire should take you about 15 minutes to complete.

Thank you for agreeing to complete this questionnaire.

The college has given you your Scottish Candidate Number. Please write your number in the box. If you do not have a SCN please write in your college registration/ID number.

SCN:

College ID:

About your college experience

1. Which college do you going to? Please tick one.

- Edinburgh's Telford College
 Stevenson College
 Jewel and Esk Valley College

2. When did you start at college?

Month Year

3. What is the name of the course you were doing when you decided to leave?

4. Did you finish the course?

Yes No

5. Did you get any certificates from your work at college?

Yes No

If yes, please tell us what they are:

6. Reasons for doing a college course

Here are some reasons for studying at college. How **true** were these of your experience of college? If you are not sure, select the last column.

	Definitely true	A little true	Not True	Not sure
The courses were interesting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
It helped me find out about jobs I can do	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I now have a better chance of getting a job	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I can now go on to other courses	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I learned lots of useful things that helped me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
In college they treated you like an adult	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
It was better than doing nothing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

7. Important things about college

Here is a list of things that people say they want from college. How **true** were these of your experience of college? If you are not sure, tick in the column headed 'not sure'. If you think any of the points are not relevant to you tick, in the column headed 'not relevant'.

	Definitely true	A little true	Not true	Not sure	Not relevant
Staff who are interested in me as a person	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Staff who are happy to help me with my course work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Staff I can talk to about what is happening in my life	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Staff who help me make my own mind up about what is best for me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Staff who discuss with me all the options I have	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Being allowed to choose the things I learn about	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Learning in ways that are enjoyable	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Learning things in classes that are useful in my day-to-day life	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Question 7 continued

	Definitely true	A little true	Not true	Not sure	Not relevant
Having classes where there are lots of things to do rather than writing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Having classes where there are lots of things to do rather than listening to the teacher	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Social activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A nice place to meet with friends	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Opportunities to take part in sports	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

8. Difficulties about doing a college course

Here are some difficulties people face when studying at college. Please tick any difficulties you experienced.

It didn't leave me time to do other things I want to do

Travel to college took a long time

Getting to college on time was difficult

The timetable didn't suit me

The money I get wasn't enough

I felt I didn't fit in with other people

The work was too difficult

I didn't like college work

There are other pressures in my life

If you experienced any other difficulties, please tell us about them.

9. Please tell us in your own words what you think was the best thing about college?

10. Please tell us in your own words what you liked least about college?

11. If you have any other comments about college please write them here.

Next steps

12. What are you going to do now?

13. What are your plans for the future?

About yourself

We would like to know some personal details. This helps us when analysing the answers from everybody to know if different groups of people have different views.

14. **Date of birth**

15. **Gender** Male Female

16. **Where do you normally live now?**

- At home with a parent or parents
- In the house of other relatives
- With a friend's family
- In my own flat or house
- With foster carers
- In a residential unit or children's house
- In a residential school or secure unit

If none of these, then please tell us where you live now?

Thank you very much for taking time to do this questionnaire.

Please put it into the envelope and give it to your tutor who will send it to us.

If you want to talk to anyone about the research you can email Zachari Duncalf (zachari2009@hotmail.com) or Liz Seagraves (liz.seagraves@strath.ac.uk).

Appendix 2: Additional data tables

Introduction

This section of the report contains additional data related to student participation and outcomes during the period of the pilot project, i.e. academic years 2009-2011. Readers who are interested in a more detailed account of the statistics will find here further information on the characteristics of the students and their outcomes. Details are provided by individual college and there are also tables showing comparison across the colleges.

The Appendix is structured in four sections. Section 1 provides data on the background of the students - numbers enrolled, age, gender, disability. Section 2 details programme participation, outcomes and progression. Section 3 outlines assessment outcomes. Section 4 provides additional information about students being supported (e.g. while still at school) but not yet enrolled in a college course.

At the end of the Appendix, some information is provided in relation to John Wheatley College's programme during the year prior to the pilots, i.e. 2008-2009 (Annexe A) and details of students (Annexe B).

1. Background information about students

The pilot at John Wheatley College began in 2008-09, a year ahead of the other colleges. For consistency of presentation across the colleges, John Wheatley's 2008-09 figures have not been included in the tables that follow, but are attached as Annexe A. Therefore, the data here represent students participating in the care leaver initiatives during the academic years 2009-10 and 2010-11.

Numbers enrolled

Table 25: Number of students enrolled (2009-2010)

College	Returning students	New student	Total
Dumfries and Galloway (Dumfries and Stranraer campuses)	-	66	66
Jewel and Esk College	-	41	41
Edinburgh's Telford College	-	22	22
Stevenson College	-	17	17
John Wheatley College	18	65	83
Total	18	211	229

Table 26: Number of students enrolled (2010-2011)

College	Returning students	New Students	Total
Dumfries and Galloway (Dumfries and Stranraer campuses)	23	53	76
Jewel and Esk College	11	32	43
Edinburgh's Telford College	4	31	35
Stevenson College	4	23	27
John Wheatley College	29	60	89
Total	71	199	270

In the tables that follow, returning and new students are reported together, unless a specific issue related to either group is being discussed. Further information about the returning students is given below.

Age of students at the beginning of their course

The age range of students is presented in tables 17 and 18, with the mean age and the percentage who were under 16 when they were enrolled on courses. As noted below in the section on the 'types of courses' young people were participating in, some were on school link or other school-based programmes which would account for some of those under 16 years. Others were in college instead of being at school, and this is particularly relevant to the figures for John Wheatley College. It is notable that the majority of John Wheatley students were under 16 when they started on their college courses.

Table 27: Age range of students (2009-2010)

College	Min	Max	mean age	n and % under 16
D&G (66)	14	21	16.5	20 (30%)
J&E (41)	14.5	20	16.75	10 (31%)
Telford (22)	15	20.5	16.8	3 (14%)
Stevenson (17)	15.5	21	17.7	One (6%)
John W (83)	13.5	17.5	15.0	75 (90%)
All (229)	13.5	21	16.1	109 (48%)*

* Excluding John Wheatley, 34 out of 146 (23%) were under 16. It should also be noted that in John Wheatley College many of the students were school-based but in college because of being at 'risk of exclusion'. In other colleges some of the younger students were on school link courses and others were reported as 'school refusers'. The returning students at John Wheatley were all under 16.

Table 28: Age range of students (2010-2011)

College	Min	Max	mean age	n and % under 16
D&G (76)	15	24.5	16.9	21 (28%)
J&E (43)	15.5	21	17.3	4 (9%)
Telford (35)	15	17.5	17.5	4 (11%)
Stevenson (27)	16	21	17.2	0
John W (89)	13.5	18.5	15.4	65 (73%)
All (270)	13.5	24.5	16.6	94 (35%)*

* Excluding John Wheatley, 29 out of 181 (16%) were under 16.

As the 2010-11 data include 26% who were returning students one would expect this to raise the mean age of the cohort. The returning students had a mean age of 17 (minimum 14.5 years; maximum 21 years); the new students had a mean age of 16.4 (minimum 13.5; maximum 24.5). Fifteen of John Wheatley College's returning students were under 16, while across the other colleges only four of the returning students were under 16. This reflects the younger age generally of the John Wheatley cohorts. Excluding John Wheatley College, the mean age of the returning students was 17.7 (minimum 15.5; maximum 21).

Gender

There was little variation in the overall gender balance in the two years, though there were some within-college differences.

Table 29: Gender of students (2009-2010)

College	Male	Female
D&G (66)	31 (47%)	35 (53%)
J&E (41)	23 (56%)	18 (44%)
Telford (22)	17 (77%)	5 (23%)
Stevenson (17)	9 (53%)	8 (47%)
John W (83)	31 (37%)	52 (63%)
All (229)	111 (48.5%)	118 (51.5%)

Table 30: Gender of students (2010-2011)

College	Male	Female
D&G (76)	37 (49%)	39 (51%)
J&E (43)	16 (37%)	27 (63%)
Telford (35)	24 (68%)	11 (32%)
Stevenson (27)	12 (44%)	15 (56%)
John W (89)	38 (43%)	51 (57%)
All (270)	127 (47%)	143 (53%)

Disability

FES data collection allows for the specification of a range of disabilities. The majority of students in both years were recorded as having no known disability. None was recorded as having mobility impairments or requiring the use of a wheelchair in 2009-10 and one student was recorded as having mobility impairments 2010-11. In the second year, slightly more students were noted as having disabilities, notably dyslexia.

Table 31: Disability (2009-2010)

College	no known disability	Dyslexia	Sight or hearing impairment	Unseen conditions eg asthma	Mental health issues	Other
D&G (66)	52 (79%)	3	2	3	1	5
J&E (41)	31 (76%)	4	1	1	2	2
Telford (22)	17 (77%)	1	1	0	0	3
Stevenson (17)	15 (88%)	2	0	0	0	0
John W (83)	72 (87%)	5	0	1	2	3
Total (229)	187 (82%)	15 (6.5%)	4 (1.5%)	5 (2%)	5 (2%)	13 (6%)

Table 32: Disabilities (2010-2011)

College	no known disability	Dyslexia	Sight or hearing impairment	Unseen conditions eg asthma	Mental health issues	Other
D&G (76)	51 (67%)	7	2	4	2	10
J&E (43)	36 (84%)	5	0	0	0	2
Telford (35)	27 (77%)	2	1	2	1	2
Stevenson (27)	19 (70%)	5	1	1	0	1
John W (89)	72 (81%)	6	1	6	0	4
All (270)	205 (76%)	25 (9%)	5 (2%)	13 (5%)	3 (1%)	19 (7%)

2. Programme Participation, Outcomes and Progression

Types of courses

Course provision was similar across both years of the pilot.

Dumfries & Galloway: Some students were enrolled on ‘Go Further’ introductory courses specially designed for care leavers, while others were on a range of mainstream courses covering a variety of levels, vocational areas and modes of study. Some of those on the initial day release ‘Go Further’ introductory course continued to a special short-full time Go Further Course in their second term (six in first year and five in year 2; in year 2, seven also continued on the day release delivery of the Go Further programme). The majority on the Go Further introductory course were school-based and attending as school link students (19 out of 28 in year 1 and 25 out of 30 in year 2).

Jewel & Esk: The students were enrolled on a range of mainstream courses covering a variety of levels, vocational areas and modes of study, including vocational/college preparation courses and NQ and equivalent courses. Some started on school-link programmes. Participation covered full-time, part-time and day-release provision.

Telford: The students were enrolled on a range of mainstream courses covering a variety of levels and vocational areas. The majority were on full-time courses; some were registered on school link programmes.

Stevenson: The students were enrolled on a range of courses. Most were on college/vocational preparation or personal development courses offering units at Access 3 and Intermediate 1 levels, though these were optional and student success was evaluated against personal targets. Others were enrolled on vocational courses (NQ, C&G and SVQ). Most were full-time students, with the others studying as part-time and day-release students.

John Wheatley: Students are involved, initially, in two main programmes: Transitions to Learning and Work (TTLW), designed specifically for looked after young people/care leavers; and the Enhanced Vocational Inclusion Programme (EVIP) which is for young people who might otherwise be excluded or disengaged from school but are not necessarily looked after children or care leavers. Other young people who were care leavers were on other vocational courses such as NQ and SVQ, taster courses, evening classes or flexible learning.

Overall, the types of courses students were enrolled on are given in tables 33 and 34.

Table 33: Types of course students enrolled on in 2009-2010

Type of course	Returning students ¹	New students	Total
Special care leaver	9	62 (29%)	71 (31%)
Introductory, preparatory or personal development	2	45 (21%)	47 (21%)
NQ Access	6	38 (18%)	44 (19%)
NQ Intermediate/equivalent ²	1	55 (26%)	56 (24%)
NQ Higher/AH/HNC equivalent ³	0	11 (5%)	11 (5%)
Total	18	211 (100%)	229 (100%)

¹ John Wheatley students

² e.g. SVQ 1 and 2, CGLI

³ e.g. SVQ3

Table 34: Types of courses students enrolled on in 2010-2011

Type of course	Returning students	New students	Total
Special care leaver	14 (20%)	48 (24%)	62 (23%)
Introductory, preparatory or personal development	9 (13%)	63 (32%)	72 (27%)
NQ Access	13 (18%)	23 (12%)	36 (13%)
NQ Intermediate/equivalent	25 (35%)	58 (29%)	83 (31%)
NQ Higher/AH/HNC equivalent	10 (14%)	7 (3%)	17 (6%)
Total	71 (100%)	199 (100%)	270 (100%)

Excluding the special care leaver provision, in both years, students in Dumfries & Galloway, John Wheatley, Telford and Jewel & Esk colleges were more likely to be on NQ or equivalent mainstream courses, whereas at Stevenson College a higher proportion of students were on vocational prep/introductory courses.

Around two-thirds of the returning students were continuing in higher level programmes in the same or similar vocational areas. Others were continuing in introductory courses, some in different vocational areas while others were continuing in the same programme.

Returning Students (2010-11)

In total there were 71 returning students, 45 of whom were progressing with courses at more advanced levels than the previous year.

Dumfries & Galloway: Note that in the report for the 2009-10 cohort it was reported that 16 Dumfries & Galloway College students were returning to college. In the 2010-11 data there are 23 returning students, i.e. more than expected.

- Nine were Go Further students, three of whom continued in the Go Further Programme; three were following NQ intermediate level vocational courses and three were following preparatory type courses.
- Fourteen students from a wide range of NQ access/intermediate level courses continued: two went into the Go Further programme; the remaining 12 progressed mainly in the same vocational area to a course at the next stage of development.

Edinburgh's Telford: Note that in the data for the 2009-10 cohort it was reported that seven students were returning to college. In the 2011-11 data there were four returning students. Three of these progressed to more advanced courses, while one was retaking the same course.

Jewel & Esk: Note that in the data for the 2009-10 cohort it was reported that 11 students were returning to college. In the 2011-11 data there were 11 returning students.

- Five progressed to a higher level course within the same vocational area
- Four moved to different vocational areas at the same level of study, e.g. motor vehicle maintenance to carpentry and joinery, construction to retail.
- Two continued on the same courses (to complete/resit).

Stevenson: Note that in the report for the 2009-10 cohort it was reported that seven students were returning to college; in the 2011-11 data there were four returning students. Three students who had been on college preparation courses progressed to vocational courses, two to introductory care courses and one to an HNC. One from an NQ higher course progressed to an HNC.

John Wheatley: At the end of 2009-10 it was reported that 30 were continuing in college. In the 2010-11 data there are 29 returning students. Six out of the 29 were now in their third year of college (from initial 2008-09 intake):

- Two of these had been TTLW students, one of whom was continuing in the TTLW group for the third year; the other had progressed to a FT hairdressing course.

- Four had been on the EVIP course and had progressed to FT vocational courses in their second year; they were continuing to the next level of study in their vocational areas of hairdressing and construction.

Twenty-three of the 2009-10 intake of students had continued for a second year.

- Ten of these were TTLW students, eight of whom were continuing in TTLW and two progressed to other vocational courses in construction and computing.
- Thirteen were EVIP students, five of whom had been school link students on the taster EVIP courses. Three of these continued with the full-time EVIP programme and two followed other vocational courses in hairdressing and beauty. The other eight EVIP students continued to further vocational courses in construction, building craft and hairdressing.

Course Outcomes as reported in FES2 data

The figures presented in the tables 35 and 36 below are derived from the FES2 outcomes field reported to the SFC.

Table 35: Student course outcomes (2009-2010)

College	No. enrolled	Outcome (FES data)				
		completed, assessed successful	completed, assessed not successful	completed a non-assessed course	withdrawn, transfer to other college	withdrawn destination unknown
D&G GoF	28	18 (64%)	6 (21%)	nr	0	4 (14%)
D&G other	38	11 (29%)	6 (16%)	nr	0	21 (55%)
J&E	41	18 (44%)	7 (17%)	4 (10%)	3 (7%)	9 (22%)
Telford	22	5 (23%)	4 (18%)	nr	0	13 (59%)
Stevenson	17	11 (65%)	1 (6%)	nr	0	5 (29%)
John W TTLW ¹	43	3 (7%)	4 (9%)	9 (20%)	0	27 (63%)
John W other	40	24 (60%)	0	2 (5%)	0	14 (35%)
Total	229	90 (39%)	28 (12%)	15 (7%)	3 (1%)	93 (41%)

¹ During the initial stage of TTLW the students were recorded as being on a non-assessed programme; for those who were continuing, their outcomes were recorded as an assessed course.

Of the 96 students who were recorded as having withdrawn, 45 (20% of all students who started) left before completing 25% of their programme; a further 31 (14%) left having completed 25% or more but less than 50% of their programme; 20 (9%) completed between 50% and 85% of their programme.

Table 36: Student course outcomes (2010-2011)

College	No. enrolled	Outcome (FES data)				
		completed, assessed successful	completed, assessed not successful	completed a non-assessed course	withdrawn, employment/ other college	withdrawn destination unknown
D&G GoF	30	16 (53%)	2 (7%)	nr	0	12 (40%)
D&G other	46	21 (46%)	7 (15%)	nr	1 (2%)	17 (37%)
J&E	43	18 (42%)	10 (23%)	nr	2 (5%)	13 (30%)
Telford	35	20 (57%)	5 (14%)	1 (3%)	1 (3%)	8 (23%)
Stevenson	27	13 (48%)	1 (4%)	nr	0	13 (48%)
John W TTLW¹	31	15 (48%)	0	nr	0	16 (52%)
John W other	58	23 (40%)	8 (14%)	3 (5%)	1 (2%)	23 (40%)
Total	270	126 (47%)	33 (12%)	4 (2%)	5 (2%)	102 (38%)

¹ For the academic year 2010-11 John Wheatley TTLW students were reported as being on an assessed programme.

Of the 107 students who were recorded as having withdrawn, 28 (10% of all students who started) left before completing 25% of their programme; a further 26 (10%) left having completed 25% or more but less than 50% of their programme; 36 (13%) completed between 50% and 90% of their programme; the data were missing for 17 students (6%).

Completion of course

Completion of a course can be taken as a positive level of engagement with the college and represents an investment both by and in the young person. These figures represent a summary of the figures in tables 37 & 38 for those who completed the courses they were registered on, whether they were assessed or not assessed and, if assessed, whether or not they were successful. Success rates on assessed courses are reported below (Assessment Outcomes).

Table 37: Students who completed courses and who withdrew before the end of the programme (2009-2010)

College	completed	withdrawn
D&G Go Further (28)	24 (86%)	4 (14%)
D&G other (38)	17 (45%)	21 (55%)
J&E (41)	29 (71%)	12 (29%)
Telford (22)	9 (41%)	13 (59%)
Stevenson (17)	12 (71%)	5 (29%)
John W TTLW (43)	16 (37%)	27 (63%)
John W other (40)	26 (65%)	14 (35%)
Total (229)	133 (58%)	96 (42%)

Table 38: Students who completed courses and who withdrew before the end of the programme (2010-2011)

College	completed	withdrawn
D&G Go Further (30)	18 (60%)	12 (40%)
D&G other (46)	28 (61%)	18 (39%)
J&E (43)	28 (65%)	15 (35%)
Telford (35)	26 (74%)	9 (26%)
Stevenson (27)	14 (52%)	13 (48%)
John W TTLW (31)	15 (48%)	16 (52%)
John W other (58)	34 (59%)	24 (41%)
Total (270)	163 (60%)	107 (40%)

Progression at the end of the year

Although, the FES outcome shows those who appear to ‘drop out’ recorded as ‘withdrawn, destination unknown’, it was expected that the project co-ordinators might know more about destinations and they were asked to provide this if available and also for those who had successfully completed courses, as a separate exercise to the FES data collection. These data are reported in the sections which follow.

This section reports how many students continued in college for further study. For academic year 2009-10, this information was supplied in September 2010, when it was clear which students had returned. However, as the data for the academic year 2010-11 had to be collated in June 2011, the figures for 2010-11 students can only be taken as an indication of intention to progress. Some colleges were able to provide information about students that had offers of places, those that had applied and those that were thinking of applying. Others only indicated that students ‘were planning to continue’. For simplicity, this information has been collapsed into a single category indicating intention to progress.

Table 39: Students who progressed to further study (2009-2010, as reported in September 2010)

College	Progressed to further study
D&G – Go Further (28)	5 (18%)
D&G – other (38)	11 (29%)
J&E (41)	11 (27%)
Telford (22)	7 (32%)
Stevenson (17)	7 (41%)
John W – TTLW (43)	17 (40%)
John W – other (40)	13 (33%)
Total (229)	71 (31%)

Table 40: Students who progressed to further study (2010-2011, as reported in June 2011)

College	Intend to progress to further study
D&G Go Further (30)	14 (47%)
D&G other (46)	28 (61%)
J&E (43)	13 (30%)
Telford (35)	20 (57%)
Stevenson (27)	9 (33%)
John W TTLW (31)	19 (61%)
John W other (58)	43 (74%)
Total (270)	146 (54%)

Destinations other than college

This information was provided by college staff and in most cases it represents that last known destination of the young person. It is therefore only a snapshot at the time of reporting, i.e. at the start of the 2010-11 academic year for the first year of the pilot programmes and at the end of June 2011 for the second year. For example, some students may have left to take up a job, but it was not known if they had continued in that job. Likewise, those students who were last known to be unemployed may have in the meantime progressed to some other positive activity. Those recorded ‘other’ were known to have experienced difficulties that prevented them from participating. For example, they had moved away or had family or health issues; they may have been referred to other agencies and a small number were known to be taking part in voluntary activities. The destinations reported here include both those who completed their courses and those who withdrew early.

Table 41: Destinations of students other than continuing in college (2009-2010)

College	Employment	Other training	Unemployed	Other	Unknown
D&G – Go Further (28)	3 (11%)	4 (14%)	6 (21%)	3 (11%)	7 (25%)
D&G – other (38)	7 (18%)	5 (13%)	6 (16%)	3 (8%)	6 (16%)
J&E (41)	2 (5%)	6 (15%)	9 (22%)	10 (24%)	3 (7%)
Telford (22)	1 (4%)	1 (4%)	7 (32%)	1 (4%)	5 (23%)
Stevenson (17)	0	1 (6%)	7 (41%)	1 (6%)	1 (6%)
John W – TTLW (43)	1 (2%)	4 (9%)	0	3 (7%)	18 (42%)
John W – other (40)	0	1 (2%)	0	0	26 (65%)
Total (229)	14 (6%)	22 (10%)	35 (15%)	21 (9%)	66 (29%)

Table 42: Destinations of students other than continuing in college (2010-2011)

College	Employment	Other training	Unemployed	Other	Unknown
D&G Go Further (30)	3 (10%)	10 (33%)	3 (10%)	0	0
D&G other (46)	3 (6.5%)	4 (9%)	6 (13%)	2 (4%)	3 (6.5%)
J&E (43)	3 (7%)	3 (7%)	20 (47%)	3 (7%)	1 (2%)
Telford (35)	1 (3%)	1 (3%)	3 (8%)	1 (3%)	9 (26%)
Stevenson (27)	2 (7%)	6 (22%)	1 (4%)	1 (4%)	8 (30%)
John W TTLW (31)	3 (10%)	3 (10%)	0	0	6 (19%)
John W other (58)	2 (3%)	3 (5%)	0	0	10 (17%)
Total (270)	17 (6%)	30 (11%)	33 (12%)	7 (3%)	37 (14%)

There is a notable difference between the two years in terms of the balance of those progressing or intending to progress to further study and ‘unknown’ destinations. This is likely to be, in part, an artefact of the data because of the different points in time of data collection. It is quite possible that some of the young people will not progress and their destinations may change to ‘unknown’. If this is a genuine change then it is likely that a greater proportion of the young people will continue.

Overall positive destinations

Combining the information about progressing to other (typically more advanced) college courses and other destinations it is possible to consider whether young people had positive destinations or not as an outcome of their college experiences. Positive might be considered as employment or other training. Those who are unemployed or unknown might be considered as a non-positive outcome. ‘Unknown’ generally indicates that the young person has not maintained contact and in some cases has refused support or ‘opted out’ of educational activities. The lower figure on Table 43 for the ‘positive outcome’ for John Wheatley College’s ‘other’ students reflects a higher ‘destination unknown’ figure (see Table 41). Fewer ‘destinations unknown’ were reported in 2010-11. ‘Other’ relates to those students who had not continued because of known personal circumstances.

Table 43: Overall destinations: positive and non-positive (2009-2010)

College	Positive outcome	Non-positive outcome	Other
D&G – Go Further (28)	12 (43%)	13 (46%)	3 (11%)
D&G – other (38)	23 (60%)	12 (32%)	3 (8%)
J&E (41)	19 (46%)	12 (29%)	10 (24%)
Telford (22)	9 (41%)	12 (54%)	1 (5%)
Stevenson (17)	8 (47%)	8 (47%)	1 (6%)
John W – TTLW (43)	22 (51%)	18 (42%)	3 (7%)
John W – other (40)	14 (35%)	26 (65%)	0
Total (229)	107 (47%)	101 (44%)	21 (9%)

Table 44: Overall destinations: positive and non-positive (2010-2011)

College	Positive outcome	Non-positive outcome	Other
D&G Go Further (30)	27 (90%)	3 (10%)	0
D&G other (46)	35 (76%)	9 (20%)	2 (4%)
J&E (43)	19 (44%)	21 (49%)	3 (7%)
Telford (35)	22 (63%)	12 (34%)	1 (3%)
Stevenson (27)	17 (63%)	9 (33%)	1 (4%)
John W TTLW (31)	25 (81%)	6 (19%)	0
John W other (58)	48 (83%)	10 (17%)	0
Total (270)	193 (71%)	70 (26%)	7 (3%)

The caveat expressed above regarding the proportions intending to progress and the ‘unknowns’ also applies to the change in balance between the ‘positive’ and ‘non-positive’ outcomes over the two years’ figures.

3. Assessment outcomes

Many students were working towards assessment in the form of units of SQA National Qualifications, or other equivalent awards such as CGLI and BTEC. Some were registered for SVQ awards. Successful completion is usually taken as having passed 70% or more of the assessed units. However, in some instances, failure to achieve one or two core units means that the outcome is considered unsuccessful. Tables 35 and 36 present the information received from college student records on those reported as having successfully completed an assessed course.

Four Jewel and Esk College students in 2009-10 completed non-assessed courses. John Wheatley College’s TTLW programme in 2008-10 was recorded as a non-assessed course for the initial participation but those who continued for a second stage were recorded as participating in an assessed course. In 2010-11 the TTLW provision was recorded as being an assessed course. In 2010-2011 a small number of students were recorded as completing non-assessed courses. The figures for non-assessed provision have not been included in Tables 45 and 46.

Table 45: Students who successfully completed an assessed course (2009-2010)

College	Assessed and successful
D&G GoF (28)	18 (64%) ¹
D&G other (38)	11 (29%)
J&E (37)	18 (47%)
Telford (22)	5 (23%)
Stevenson (17)	11 (65%) ²
John W TTLW (9)	3 (33%)
John W other (38)	24 (63%)
Total (189)	90 (48%)

¹ The Go Further units were internally designed and assessed.

² This figure includes 9 students on college preparatory courses where assessment is based on personal targets and attendance requirements and external assessment is optional. Two out of six students on mainstream vocational courses were successful.

Table 46: Students who successfully completed an assessed course (2010-2011)

College	Assessed and successful
D&G GoF (30)	16 (53%)
D&G other (46)	21 (46%)
J&E (43)	18 (42%)
Telford (34)	20 (59%)
Stevenson (27)	13 (48%)
John W TTLW (31)	15 (48%)
John W other (55)	23 (42%)
Total (266)	126 (47%)

Units obtained by those not reported as ‘successful’

Where students do not achieve sufficient units to be recorded as ‘successful’, they may still attain some units, an achievement that can allow progression to further study or other opportunities.

Academic Year 2009-10

TTLW Non-assessed course: Although not recorded as being on an assessed course six of the 34 ‘new’ TTLW students gained between one and three units at Intermediate 1 level in office subjects and aspects of personal development.

TTLW assessed course: Four of the nine TTLW continuing students were recorded as ‘not-successful’; two did not achieve any units and two were recorded as achieving one unit – one in hair and beauty and one in childcare. Two had withdrawn without achieving any units.

Go Further: Of the 10 students who were not recorded as ‘successful’ four had withdrawn before the end of the course and had not achieved any units; five of the remaining six who completed the course gained between one and four college assessed units.

Other courses: Eight-three of the 152 students (54%) on other assessed courses were ‘not successful’ in attainment terms, with 65 withdrawing before the end of the course and 18 completing the course but ‘not successfully’. Forty-eight of those who had withdrawn did not gain any units; 17 of those who had withdrawn gained some units (details in Table 47). Eleven of those who had completed, but not successfully, had achieved units and seven did not gain any (see Table 47). This means that some 55 young people (35% of those on the non-specialist care leaver courses) had not achieved any units as a result of their college experience.

Table 47: Units attained by students on assessed courses who were recorded as 'successfully completing' (2009-2010)

	No units	One to two units	Three to 7 units	10 or more units
Withdrawn (65)	48	13	3	1
Completed not successful (18)	7	2	4	5

Academic Year 2010-2011

Care leaver courses: Twelve of the Go Further students withdrew before the end of the course. One gained three units, while the others did not gain any. Two were recorded as having completed the course but were not deemed 'successful' in attainment terms: one gained four college units and the other gained nine college units. Sixteen of the TTLW students withdrew before the end of the course. Nine did not gain any units, six gained one or two and one gained three units.

Other courses: A total of 110 out of 205 students (54%) on other courses were not successful in attainment terms, with 79 withdrawing before the end of the course and 31 completing their course, but 'not successfully'. Thirty-five of those who had withdrawn did not gain any units, while 44 of those who had withdrawn gained some units (details in Table 24). Twenty-one of those who had completed but not successfully achieved some units (see Table 48) while 10 were reported as having no units. This means that 45 (21% of those on non-specialist care leaver courses) had not achieved any units.

Table 48: Units attained by students on assessed courses who were recorded as 'successfully completing' (2010-2011)

	No units	One to two units	Three to 8 units	10 or more units
Withdrawn (79)	35	19	19	6
Completed not successful (31)	10	4	13	4

4. Students supported but not yet enrolled in college (2009-10)

The Dumfries & Galloway and Edinburgh colleges' programmes have put emphasis on spending time with and supporting the young people who have been referred to them but are not yet ready to enrol on college courses. The Edinburgh TLC programme appointed a project worker to engage particularly with young people while still in school. The data reported here were collated by the project workers, initially in April 2010 and then updated in September 2010. The outcomes reported represent information known about the young people at September 2010.

Across the four colleges data were provided for 186 young people who were supported following referral, prior to considering applying to go on to college (Dumfries & Galloway = 44; Telford = 22; Jewel & Esk = 37; Stevenson = 47 and Edinburgh schools' worker = 36).

Outcomes: Of the 186 young people who were supported during 2009-10:

- 32% applied and were accepted on courses;
- 7% were still thinking of applying and remained in contact with the colleges;
- 37% having expressed an intention of going to college did not then progress;
- 21% did not apply;
- 3% applied and were not accepted.

This meant that 61% (113) young people were not maintaining contact with the colleges: 15% were reported as having other positive destinations (work, other training, voluntary activity); 17% had 'opted out' of participation; 11% were not continuing because of personal issues (e.g. health and family issues, moving from the area); and for 16% the destination was unknown.

Table 49: Students supported during 2010-11 but not enrolled on courses

College	Number supported during 2010-11	Number accepted/applied for 2011/12
Dumfries & Galloway	39	13 ¹
Jewel & Esk	35	21
Edinburgh's Telford	25	11
Stevenson	35	11
Edinburgh school worker	19	14
Total	153	70 (46%)

¹ Additionally, nine students who were supported but not enrolled in 2009-10 have now applied for 2011/12

Annexe A: John Wheatley 2008-2009 data

Numbers enrolled: During 2008-2009 John Wheatley College enrolled 54 students as part of the Care Leaver initiative

Age: The mean age at the start of their courses was 15.5 (minimum 14.5; maximum 17.5). Forty-six (78%) were under 16.

Gender: Male 21 (39%); Female 33 (61%)

Disability: No disability 48 (89%); Dyslexia 2 (3.5%); Unseen 4 (7.5%)

Type of course: Transition to Learning and Work 38 (70%); Other 16 (30%)

Outcomes

Table 50: Student outcomes John Wheatley College (2008-2009)

Course	No. enrolled	Outcome (FES data)			
		completed, assessed successful	completed, assessed not successful	completed a non-assessed course	withdrawn destination unknown
TTLW	38	NR	NR	20 (53%)	18 (47%)
other	16	11 (69%)	3 (19%)	--	2 (12%)
Total	54	14	3	20	20

Destinations

Table 51: Destinations John Wheatley College (2008-2009)

Course	Continue in college	Employment	Other training	Other	Unknown
TTLW (38)	11 (29%)	4 (11%)	8 (21%)	1 (2%)	14 (37%)
Other (16)	7 (44%)	0	0	0	9 (56%)
Total (54)	18 (33%)	4 (7%)	8 (15%)	1 (2%)	23 (43%)

Assessment

The TTLW course during 2008-09 was recorded as a non-assessed course although the young people had the opportunity to complete some assessed units. Fifteen of the 38 (39%) students who were involved passed some units, either through the TTLW course or other courses they participated in during the course of the year along with TTLW.

- Six gained two or three units in computing at Intermediate 1 level
- Two gained 13 and 6 units respectively at intermediate 1 level in construction
- One gained one unit in catering at intermediate 1 level.

Fourteen of the 16 students who started other courses in 2008-09 completed the programme and 11 of them gained sufficient units to be considered 'successful':

- Three with units at Intermediate 1 level in construction
- Eight with units at Access 3 in hairdressing/beauty
- A further three gained some units but were not considered successful overall.