

Care to Achieve: Long Term Outcomes of Looked After Children

Brief Summary of a Discussion about the Use of Educational Outcomes Data

Background

The CELCIS education team hosted a half-day discussion event on 7th February 2017, bringing together colleagues from the principal data holding agencies, those who use data to assess progress towards improvement goals, and those with research and knowledge exchange interests in these data. The immediate outcomes of the afternoon were to achieve clarity about the data currently held and their availability, and an opportunity to voice exploratory questions and propose suggestions for further potential collaborations.

The meeting was held under a form of the 'Chatham House rule,' with appropriate respect for confidentiality and understanding that speakers may not necessarily be representing their employing organisations. A full record of the meeting was prepared for distribution to participants only, but there was agreement that it would be useful to summarise some of the issues discussed for a wider audience.

Key Points

- The Education Outcomes of Looked After Children report is published annually in June. The key to linking information about people held on different databases (local authority social work and education, and Skills Development Scotland (SDS)) is the Scottish Candidate Number (SCN). The SCN is usually assigned at P1, so this approach to data matching does not provide information about pre-school children.
- Currently only 80% of looked after children have SCNs, so data about the remaining 20% are missing from analysis; a small number of local authorities contributes to this shortfall which may be skewing the available data.
- Most looked after children leave school at 16 years or under, while the norm for the overall school population is now 17 years or older.
- Children who are looked after for the whole year have better educational outcomes than children looked after for part of the year. Fewer placements appear to be related to better outcomes.
- Standardised testing assessments in P1, P4, P7 and S3, beginning later this year, will provide additional data in future.
- SDS maintains the 16+ Data Hub for ages 16-24 (and information for children with additional supports needs from age 14.5). Information is shared by local authorities, ScotXed, SAAS and HMRC. The information is used for providing advice services to young people, and SDS publishes the Annual Participation Measure report and Destination Survey reports at three months and nine months after leaving school.

- The SFC receives information about care leaver enrolments (as a result of self-declaration) directly from colleges and from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) in respect of universities. The SFC began collecting data in AY 2013/14.
- From data available it appears that 16.3% of care leavers enrolled in Scottish universities did not progress to second year (compared to the Scottish average of 8.8%).
- There is increasing use of the term 'care experienced' in preference to 'care leaver'. The former has the advantage of being more inclusive but suffers from the lack of a statutory definition – and potential problems in relation to entitlement to financial support.

Selected points raised in discussion

- Would it be valuable to have follow-up destination data two years from leaving school? Similarly would it be useful to try to follow up young people to age 25?
- How can data be used to allow early identification of support needs that could be used in care planning?
- Locally held data (e.g. held by individual institutions and local authorities) is often very detailed and could be used among corporate parents for planning and monitoring services.
- Could the SCN be used for longitudinal research, e.g., to follow care experienced students into higher education and employment?
- SIMD is based on postcodes which may underplay disadvantage in children looked after away from home (e.g. in foster care in more advantaged postcodes).
- Should research look also at care leavers not in positive destinations so we can describe and highlight the experiences and needs of this important group?
- It would be useful to have some wider discussion about the data currently available from SFC, HESA and UCAS sources.
- Is it possible to link with health and homeless databases?
- The review of the care system provides an opportunity both to interpret data already held and to consider what additional information is needed.

Further information

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