

Corporate Parenting Plan

2021 – 2024

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Foreword

I am proud to present Skills Development Scotland's (SDS) third Corporate Parenting Plan, incorporating our report of activity from the last three years.

Outcomes for care experienced young people are still consistently poorer than for their peers without experience of care; and much more can, and must, be done to more fully understand and address this. The challenges faced by many care experienced children, young people and adults have been further compounded by the economic and social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The responsibility is on us all, as corporate parents, to do better for our young people.

In 2020, the Independent Care Review and, in turn, The Promise delivered a powerful and clear message: care must have love and nurture at its heart. Keeping The Promise means ensuring all children grow up loved, safe and respected so they can realise their full potential.

At SDS, our contribution to this shared ambition is to continue providing high quality products and services, informed by listening to the voice of care experienced people, that help enable all individuals to achieve their aspirations.

The Promise cannot be delivered by any one actor or organisation. Collaborating with other corporate parents and building key national and local partnerships across Scotland, has been, and will continue to be, vitally important. Partnership working remains at the heart of all SDS does, and we know that by sharing our strengths and resources we can jointly achieve better outcomes for care experienced people.

This plan provides details of our five new commitments for 2021-24. These reflect the next stage of our corporate parenting journey and will ensure that SDS continues to play our part in helping people with lived experience of care to fulfill their potential.

The achievements and ambitions contained within this plan reflect our commitment to the corporate parenting duties, and to keeping The Promise. More broadly, they also speak to our resolute aim to improve equality of opportunity and outcomes for all of Scotland's young people.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone at SDS, at all levels and across departments and geographies, for the passion and personal commitment shown to improving outcomes for our care experienced customers. The progress we have made to date would not have been possible otherwise, but the challenge ahead will require equal energy and determination.

We look forward to working with our partners, stakeholders, colleagues and customers to help make these ambitions a reality.

Damien Yeates

Chief Executive, Skills Development Scotland

1. Introduction

About Skills Development Scotland

Skills Development Scotland (SDS) is the national skills agency for Scotland. Our purpose is to drive productivity and inclusive growth through investment in skills, enabling businesses and people to achieve their full potential. We engage with partners at national, regional and local level, flexing and shaping our delivery to meet local needs and priorities, while informed by the knowledge of effective practice from across the country and beyond.

We work to help create a Scotland in which:

- all people have the skills, information and opportunities to succeed in the labour market
- businesses drive productivity and inclusive growth
- the learning and skills system is dynamic and responsive
- SDS leads by example and continuously improves to achieve excellence.

Further details on SDS's strategic approach and operational activities can be found in our Strategic Plan.

What is Corporate Parenting?

Corporate parents have a responsibility to understand the lives of Scotland's care experienced young people, and to respond to their needs as any parent would.

The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 ('The Act') came into effect on the 1 April 2015. Part 9 of The Act makes specific provision for those who are care experienced, providing a legislative framework for corporate parenting.

The related statutory guidance defines corporate parenting as:

“An organisation's performance of actions necessary to uphold the rights and safeguard the wellbeing of a looked after child or care leaver, and through which physical, emotional, spiritual, social and educational development is promoted”.

Within The Act, SDS was named as one of 24 public bodies to which corporate parenting duties apply.

Our Duties as a Corporate Parent

The Act confers six statutory duties on the named corporate parents, including SDS. As laid out in Section 58, we must:

- be **alert** to matters which, or which might, adversely affect the wellbeing of an eligible young person
- **assess** the needs of eligible children and young people for any services or support provided
- **promote** the interests of eligible children and young people
- seek to provide eligible children and young people with **opportunities** to promote their wellbeing
- take appropriate action to help eligible young people **access** those opportunities
- keep our approach to corporate parenting under constant review, seeking out opportunities for **improvement** wherever possible.

Under sections 60 – 65 of The Act, corporate parents must also publish (and keep under review) detailed corporate parenting plans and reports, collaborate with each other, follow directions and guidance, and provide relevant information to Scottish Ministers.



The Promise: Scotland's Independent Care Review

Launched by the First Minister in October 2016, Scotland's [Independent Care Review](#) is a Scotland-wide commitment to bring about root and branch improvements in the care system, with input from 5,500 individuals with care experience.

- On 5 February 2020, the Care Review published seven reports, with **'The Promise'** narrating a vision for Scotland, built on five foundations. Offering a shared purpose and a clear direction for change, those foundations are:
 - **voice:** children must be meaningfully heard and listened to in all decisions about their care
 - **family:** where children are safe in their families and feel loved, they must stay
 - **care:** where living with their family is not possible, children must stay with their brothers and sisters when safe to do so
 - **people:** the children that Scotland cares for must be actively supported to develop relationships with people in the workforce and wider community
 - **scaffolding:** children, families and the workforce must be supported by a system that is there when needed. The scaffolding of help, support and accountability must be ready and responsive when it is required.

The Promise now refers to the long-term change programme for the improvement of Scotland’s care system spanning 10 years (2021-2030). Work to #KeepThePromise between 2021 and 2030 will be shaped by a series of three plans, each lasting for three years and outlining the priorities and action across that period. *Plan 21-24* outlines Scotland’s route map for the first three years, providing key priorities and areas of focus under which corporate parents and other organisations will work to achieve the required change. Those are:

- **What matters to children and families:** by 2024 organisations should be able to demonstrate that they are operating from the perspective of children and families, rather than the perspective internal to the ‘system’.
- **Listening:** by 2024 organisations that have responsibilities towards care experienced children and families, should be able to demonstrate that they are embedding what they have heard from them.
- **Poverty:** by 2024 organisations should be able to demonstrate how they are ensuring that they play their part in mitigating the impacts of poverty.
- **Children’s Rights:** by 2024 organisations that have responsibilities towards care experienced children should be able to demonstrate that their rights under the United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) are being consistently upheld.
- **Language:** by 2024 organisations that have responsibilities towards care experienced children and young people should be able to demonstrate that they are embedding destigmatising language and practices across the way they work.

The Promise, and in the immediacy, *Plan 21-24* has been an important driver in the development of the new SDS Corporate Parenting Plan 2021-24 and in helping to shape our products and services to best serve care experienced children, young people and adults.



Children’s Rights

SDS supports the Scottish Government in its vision for a Scotland in which:

“...children’s human rights are embedded in all aspects of society. A Scotland where policy, law and decision making takes account of children’s rights and where all children have a voice and are empowered to be human rights defenders”.

SDS aims to embed a safeguarding ethos and practice which is both proactive and responsive towards issues of protection, safety and wellbeing. Using a ‘critical friend’ approach, in 2019 we worked with the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) to review, revise and update our approach to [child and vulnerable adult protection](#). Across Scotland, we have established a network of Nominated Protection Officer at senior level to assist teams handle child protection concerns.

As a public body we play a role in supporting the Scottish Government to embed children's rights and wellbeing across policy and practice. In line with provisions outlined in the UNCRC, there is a clear expectation that public bodies will adopt a step change in how they articulate their contribution to fulfilling, protecting and respecting children's rights. Our Corporate Parenting Plan takes this rights-based approach.

Defining 'Care Experience'

The Act provides definitions for the legal terms 'looked-after' and 'care leaver'. Within SDS, we choose to use the term 'care experienced', by which we mean anyone who currently meets, or has ever previously met, the criteria for 'looked after'. This includes those looked after at home, or away from home in kinship, residential, foster or secure care. Our intention is to act as corporate parent to anyone who identifies themselves within this broader 'care experienced' definition, and as such, this term is used throughout this plan.

About this Plan

Section 61 of The Act requires SDS, as a corporate parent, to report on its corporate parenting duties. This, SDS's third Corporate Parenting Plan, contains a report of progress made against the commitments in our 2018 – 2021 plan, as well as setting out our new commitments for 2021 – 2024.

“I liked that the careers support was always there. If you needed to talk or work things out, they would do anything they could by making you appointments to see them or seeing you straight away if possible.

They would encourage you to make your own choices and work out some kind of future plans.”

Care Experienced Young Person from the 2020 Career Ambitions Survey.

2. Our Corporate Parenting Plan 2018-21

Summary of Performance Against the 2018-21 Commitments

This section provides a high-level overview of our performance against each of our 2018-21 commitments. It provides a brief summary of activity for each commitment, highlights key achievements and sets out where activity from our 2018-21 commitments will be taken forward through the next plan period.

“I quite enjoyed that fact that the adviser took the time to question the subject areas that I enjoyed, it allowed us to develop a broad range of opportunities. It was also helpful for the adviser to share links to educational sites which allowed me to explore further career prospects with the ability to look into each prospect further.”

Care Experienced Young Person from the 2020 Career Ambitions Survey.

Commitment One: Develop and Promote a Narrative Within SDS Which Champions and Embeds Our Corporate Parenting Activity, Explaining to Colleagues Why it is Important, and the Difference it Makes.

In practice, this meant we were committing to:

- increasing the visibility of our role as a corporate parent across SDS, by expanding our Community of Practice (CoP) to incorporate more teams
- continuing to raise awareness amongst colleagues about the importance of our corporate parenting role through internal communications
- share more information internally about our successes as a corporate parent, so all colleagues could celebrate and understand their contribution.

What we Did:

Over the last three years, frontline career guidance staff have continued to engage proactively in our COP. This has included regular exchange of new ideas and approaches, as well as signposting news items and resources to help build cross-business awareness of matters relating to our care experienced customers. In 2020, we reviewed and revised the remit and membership of our CoP, expanding its reach by moving to a digital format (internal SDS Yammer channel). This has allowed more frequent and wider engagement from across SDS, including colleagues from our work-based learning equality teams and non-delivery colleagues. Our CoP met in 2021, to help inform the development of this plan.

Another way in which we share best practice, knowledge, insight, and resources is through dedicated pages on our intranet 'Connect'.

These pages provide information and resources for operational colleagues on how to best deliver our services to young people with care experience. At a local level, we have supported Career Information, Advice and Guidance (CIAG) colleagues to attend events related to corporate parenting which extend their knowledge and understanding of local partners and provision.

All colleagues have access to relevant training, developed in partnership with Who Cares? Scotland, which allows them to understand our duties as a corporate parent and invites them to consider how this impacts their job role. Reviewed in 2019, this training was then incorporated into our corporate induction process and made compulsory for all existing SDS colleagues and board members. As of April 2021, 100% of SDS colleagues had completed this training. Frontline delivery colleagues also receive additional equality training, including content which highlights a shift in our duties in respect of the findings of the Independent Care Review.

An internal communications campaign accompanied the publication of our 2018-21 plan to help raise awareness and understanding of our commitments. We maximise opportunities to use communication tools such as case studies and blogs to talk about the achievements of care experienced customers, not just to highlight the difficulties they may face. To maximise impact, we aim to coincide these activities with national campaigns, including Care Day, Scottish Apprenticeship Week, Results Helpline, Care Experienced Week and on the anniversary of The Promise launch.

There is now far greater awareness of corporate parenting across SDS than in 2018. In 2019, 70% of colleagues responding to our all-colleague survey said they were aware of SDS's role as a corporate parent, compared to 60% in 2017. An additional question added in 2019 revealed that 65% of colleagues felt they understand the importance of corporate parenting to their role. Both questions will again be asked in the 2021 colleague survey to measure changes in awareness related to our role as a corporate parent.

Commitment Two: Drive improvements in Data Quality Across SDS and in Collaboration with Our Partners, to Support the Development of a Robust Evidence Base in Relation to Outcomes for Care Experienced Young People.

In practice, this meant we were committing to:

- creating a performance and evaluation framework that helps colleagues and partners to understand and report the difference we are making as a corporate parent
- working with the Scottish Government, local authorities and other partners to drive the quality and robustness of information held on the shared data set regarding care experience
- developing new and better ways to measure outcomes for care experienced young people as our data became more robust, including long-term outcomes from education and apprenticeships, and a breakdown of the Annual Participation Measure by care experience.

What we Did:

We remain committed to improving our ability to demonstrate our performance in supporting care experienced young people to achieve concrete outcomes. However, as reported in our previous plan, this is a complex and challenging area, and progress continues to be limited.

Our ability to report on our services to care experienced customers relies heavily on having confidence in our ability to robustly identify the full care experienced population from our customer data. This directly impacts our ability to publish certain performance information, including a care experienced view of the Annual Participation Measure.

In early 2021, we took part in a review of UK statistics in relation to post-16 education – this highlighted a lack of robust information on care experience. Although data is being shared by local authority education departments, there is no administrative data sharing agreement with social work departments, who are in a better position to identify those who are currently or previously looked after. This is particularly problematic for accurately identifying customers who are looked after but have now left school.

Significant work has been undertaken since 2018, to progress the sharing of care experience data directly from social work departments into the SDS-held shared data set. It was jointly agreed that the best approach to take would be to include the provision of data sharing from social work departments within a new data sharing agreement between the local authority and SDS. Society of Local Authority Lawyers and Administrators in Scotland (SOLAR) endorsed this approach as the most suitable way forward. Work to implement this continues.

This is not to say that no progress has been made. We have been able to utilise a range of other data sources including apprenticeship participation statistics, our customer surveys and feedback, and through other partner data to build a picture of our delivery to care experienced customers. Open questions in surveys and feedback are a particularly helpful means to listening directly to the voice of our care experienced customers, and numeric measures allow us to track progress over time.

Alongside the development of our 2021-25 cross-business equality outcomes, we also conducted and published an extensive Equality Evidence Review including a summary of evidence on the education and employment outcomes achieved by care experienced young people.

Commitment Three: Develop a Range of Mechanisms Which Enable Care Experienced Young People to Access and Develop Careers Within SDS.

In practice, this meant we were committing to:

- building on our experience of delivering work tasters, by finding new and different ways for care experienced young people to experience SDS as a workplace
- working with key partners to advertise appropriate SDS job vacancies to care experienced young people, particularly our own Modern Apprenticeship opportunities, and to support their applications using innovative approaches
- developing a programme of support, including mentoring, for care experienced young people entering SDS employment, and their colleagues, to ensure a sustained training and employment experience.

What we Did:

As a corporate parent, it is important to us that we create appropriate pathways for care experienced young people to access and develop careers within SDS. Our Young Talent Programme is the primary route for this, with a range of opportunities available from work tasters, work experience and Foundation Apprenticeships through to Graduate Apprenticeships and internships. Across the Young Talent Programme we aim to provide a quality experience of learning and work, including understanding of fair work principles, and through doing so increase the diversity of our workforce.

Some of these opportunities are specifically targeted at young people who face disadvantage in the labour market, including care experienced young people. For example, in 2018 our CIAG and HR Young Talent Team engaged with MCR Pathways to deliver Talent Taster sessions for care experienced school pupils. Pupils that participated in the taster sessions were offered a guaranteed interview should they apply for one of SDS's Foundation or Modern Apprenticeship vacancies. We also collaborated with partners to promote opportunities to young people from care experienced backgrounds. Over the last three years, positive action has taken place to support care experienced young people to apply for Young Talent Programme positions at SDS. This includes adjustments to the wording in our recruitment adverts, ringfencing vacancies and extending the application age from 24 up to 29 for care experienced individuals. In our 2019 round of Young Talent recruitment, care experienced candidates were successful in securing both Modern and Graduate Apprenticeships. Training with Who Cares? Scotland is regularly organised for people managers to ensure care experienced colleagues have appropriate support in place.

We designed a new summer internship programme for care experienced undergraduates between years three and four of their degree. This was designed in recognition of the greater need for some of these students to be able to support themselves financially over the summer break. It was also intended to create a pipeline into our Graduate Internships. We initially planned to pilot the programme in 2020, but unfortunately this had to be postponed because of COVID-19. However, in partnership with Who Cares? Scotland we were able to identify and recruit a small group of summer interns in summer 2021. We will look to understand and build on the learning of both interns and colleagues involved in the pilot ahead of summer 2022.

Recruitment and selection processes are understandably crucial to any increasing equality, diversity and inclusion in the workplace. We continue to put our colleagues through appropriate training to ensure that individuals making selection and recruitment decisions will not discriminate, whether consciously or subconsciously.

In line with our Fair Work ambitions, we have been recording care experience data for our employees since 2019. Monitoring this data allows us to identify the effectiveness of our approaches in attracting and retaining care experienced talent within our organisation. The number of colleagues self-identifying as care experienced, has slightly increased since 2019/20, from 1.0% to 1.1% respectively. In our most recent (2019) colleague survey, 81% of colleagues who identified as care experienced agreed that SDS was a supportive employer.

A personal view of corporate parenting at SDS

Galashiels-based Careers Adviser and Work Coach, Gillian Millar, works closely with care experienced young people.



Gillian Millar,
Careers Adviser and
Work Coach

“In SDS’s role as a corporate parent, we want the best for each young person as they may not have a parent to help them along.”

“Working with care experienced young people is not a short, sharp intervention. We often work with people and see them going to college or going into a job, and we are involved with care experienced people up to the age of 26,”

“There’s no ‘three strikes and you’re out’ approach, or judgement. We are there to help people move on and be successful. To do that we need to build trust and reassure them that we have their best interests at heart.”

Commitment Four: Ensure that our Service Development and Delivery Considers the Needs of our Care Experienced Customers, and Aims to Offer the Best Possible Support to Improve their Learning and Employment Outcomes.

In practice, this meant we were committing to:

- continuing to embed a coaching approach to building relationships with care experienced young people through our CIAG services, utilising feedback and research to drive continuous improvement
- focusing on care experienced young people within our service development work - making explicit the ways in which care experienced young people are included in our thinking about customer needs
- considering how existing SDS support, including Individual Training Accounts and exam results support, could be tailored to better meet the needs of care experienced young people
- reviewing funding, and other provider incentives (e.g., commissioning criteria), for our National Training Programmes, to understand any potential barriers to participation and completion for care experienced customers, and to identify potential improvements that could be made
- providing guidance to learning providers with Foundation Apprenticeship contracts around supporting care experienced young people on programmes and placements.

What we Did:

Our CIAG services continue to offer an enhanced, targeted service to care experienced young people. In 2018/19, 97% of senior phase pupils and 75% of Next Steps customers with known care experience received coaching guidance from SDS, with 84% and 65% respectively showing an improvement in their career management skills. In 2018/19, 75% of care experienced Next Steps customers progressed on to sustained learning, training or work. During the pandemic lockdown, we continued delivery of these services remotely, through one-to-one sessions online, additional means such as our CIAG helpline, and safely through our career centres when the lifting of restrictions allowed.

The CIAG Equality Action Plan 2019-21 was developed to guide our consideration of equality groups, including care experienced individuals, in the development and delivery of our career services. The plan includes actions in support of the Corporate Parenting Plan, including exploring options to further enhance our offer around post-school transitions and exam results. The actions within the plan were reviewed along with our move to remote delivery through an Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) for our CIAG COVID-19 response. The needs of equality groups, including care experienced individuals, have been further considered through embedding EqIAs in the methodology of Scotland's Career Review.

Over the last three years, we have continued to look at ways to support more care experienced people into apprenticeships. The number of Modern Apprentices self-identifying as care experienced has slightly increased as a proportion of all starts. Between 2018 and 2020 this rose from 1.6% to 1.7%, building on the increase from 0.9% to 1.6% achieved over 2015-18. Over the same period, the attainment gap in apprenticeship achievement rates closed by five percentage points, increasing to 66.3% for care experienced Modern Apprentices.

Recognising that care experienced young people may take longer to make sustained positive transitions after leaving school, and may require more attempts to do so, we worked with Scottish Government to extend enhanced contribution rates for care Modern Apprentices from age 19 up to the age of 29. This is in line with the enhanced offer for disabled apprentices. In 2019/20, 92 care experienced Modern Apprentices benefitted from this enhanced funding.

We also worked with learning providers and employers to increase their capacity to support care experienced young people access and achieve apprenticeship opportunities. We designed and introduced a range of workshops and resources for SDS-contracted training providers, some of which focus on specific issues such as recruitment, while others more broadly raise awareness on how to appropriately identify and support the needs of care experienced individuals. 96%² of workshop participants said they would recommend the training to someone else. Participants also highlighted their intention to share their learning with colleagues and integrate it into their everyday working practices. New resources created include a best practice guide for learning providers and employers working with care experienced customers. Following significant consultation with our partners and stakeholders, we published our [Equality Impact Assessment for Work-based Learning in 2020](#).

Covering all work-based learning, this assessment guides SDS and our delivery partners on how to promote equality and diversity in apprenticeships. It has been, and continues to be, used to inform the development of programme enhancements, including those designed to support care experienced young people. The EqIA highlighted that the most common barriers to apprenticeships for care experienced individuals are:

- lack of qualifications/relevant work experience
- lack of networks/awareness of opportunities
- lack of understanding from employers
- cost of travel
- housing issues
- they may move around which can interrupt learning at school and impact employment opportunities.

We have also helped care experienced young people access opportunities, services, and support through additional financial support. We undertook work with SAAS on the Care Experience Bursary to ensure that SDS was added to a list of signatories, enabling careers advisers to confirm an individual's status as care experienced.

When Pathway Apprenticeships were introduced during the pandemic, we ensured that care experienced participants had access to enhanced funding. Another pandemic initiative, the Apprenticeship Employer Grant, provided enhanced payments to employers who were recruiting apprentices who identified themselves as care experienced.

In 2021, we began undertaking a project with Social Security Scotland to develop and promote a joint service offer in relation to supporting care experienced individuals progress in their career decision making and accessing benefits available.

Commitment Five: Be an Advocate for the Voice of Care Experienced Young People and a Catalyst for Change in Improving their Learner Journey.

In practice, this meant we were committing to:

- continuing to improve our ability to hear and understand the voice of our care experienced customers and ensure that this feedback influenced our actions
- positively promoting our role and activity as a corporate parent to our partners, stakeholders and other employers; demonstrating our commitment to them, and encouraging them to get involved
- promoting positive stories of care experienced young people succeeding through apprenticeships and other positive routes as part of our broader equalities campaigning
- ensuring our senior leadership consistently speak up for care experienced young people when discussing policy development or other decisions that might affect them; using our voice and influence, both internally and externally, to improve their outcomes.

What we Did:

During our 2015-18 plan period, we tested whether it was possible to identify the voice of our care experienced customers through our customer services. During this period, we expanded that work, so that it is now a routine field on our equality monitoring forms for customer feedback (both school and post-school customers). This enables us to extract and track data on the views and experiences of our care experienced customers. For example, in 2018-19, 90% of surveyed care experienced senior phase pupils believed their careers adviser listened to and valued their ideas, and 73% were satisfied with the overall service they received. This compared with 87% and 69%

respectively for non-care experienced young people. More feedback from our customer surveys is shared on page 17.

Working in partnership with the Scottish Government, in 2019 we conducted focus groups with care experienced young people and employability staff from Barnardo's Scotland and Action for Children. The groups explored their perceptions of apprenticeships and the main challenges these customers face in accessing apprenticeship opportunities. This feedback was used to help inform our service design and delivery for this group.

To ensure collaboration and shared learning with other corporate parents, we have joined and attended the Scottish Funding Council Care Experience Governance Group, Centre for Excellence for Children's Care and Protection (CELCIS) and Scottish Throughcare and Aftercare Forum (Staf's) Care Leavers into Employment Group. Many of our operational colleagues form part of local partnerships such as Corporate Parent Boards, while our careers professional routinely collaborates with partners through joint casework for the benefit of the individual.

As part of our newly revised strategic approach to equality, we have recently established a 'Focal Point Group' with representatives from care experience advocacy and support organisations. This provides a direct route for advocacy groups to share insight and feedback on issues affecting the people we both support and helps shape the development of SDS services for our customers. The support offered by key partners, specifically Who Cares? Scotland, CELCIS and Staf, has been exceptional and has helped to increase our understanding of our statutory duties and what 'good' looks like in relation to corporate parenting.

We support Care Experience Week every year through involvement in national and local campaigns and events. In 2019, colleagues attended and sponsored the Love Rally in Glasgow. In 2021, we also marked the first-year anniversary of The Promise through social media and continued to highlight key content from advocacy organisations.

In November 2020, we added the words “Proud to be a Corporate Parent” to our corporate email signature template for all colleagues. This helps to reinforce awareness of our role through all email communications with colleagues, partners, customers and stakeholders.

Case studies are a powerful tool for highlighting the success of care experienced individuals, tackling negative stereotypes and inspiring other care experienced young people. In early 2021, we worked with Who Cares? Scotland to produce a case study of care experienced apprentices for Scottish Apprenticeship Week. This was shared and promoted across all of our communication channels and promoted in our publication [‘Delivering Scotland’s Career Service: 2019/20’](#).

SDS support led to career success for Sammie

Our products and services are all designed to ensure individuals, particularly those most likely to achieve poor learning and employment outcomes, have access to a range of options and pathways which allow them to effectively prepare for, enter and progress in the world of work.

Edinburgh-based Careers Adviser Joanne Holmes knows the challenges care experienced young people face and works at well-attended drop-in and job club sessions. These sessions, delivered virtually in the past year, are held in partnership with Edinburgh Council’s Throughcare and Aftercare Services at their Hub.

One young person who has benefitted from these sessions, is 24-year-old Sammie Armitage who had been in care from the age of 13.

Sammie was referred to SDS career services by her through care worker. That’s when she met Careers Adviser Joanne Holmes in SDS’s Shandwick Place centre. She felt able to access the SDS services in a way that suited her, be that drop-in to use the centre resources, appointments arranged by her support worker to have some in-depth discussions with Joanne, or through the targeted care-leaver sessions.

Thanks to her personal determination and ambition, with solid support from Joanne and her colleague Louise Winsler, SDS and partner organisations, Sammie is now working for a global financial services company.

Sammie said of her experience working with Joanne: “I knew when I met Joanne that I could trust her. When you’ve been in care, you get good at that kind of thing. I could see she was so genuine, she wanted to help, that she really cared and that really helped me”.



Sammie Armitage,
Global Financial Services

3. Developing Our 2021-24 Plan

The development of this plan has been informed by:

- detailed analysis of customer feedback
- findings from our [Equality Evidence Review](#)
- colleague and stakeholder consultation
- awareness of the wider policy context for corporate parenting, including the key objectives set out in The Promise Plan for 2021-24.

This section briefly summarises the outcomes of that activity.

Research with Care Experienced Young People

We analysed feedback from the survey responses of our care experienced customers. Analysis of both quantitative and qualitative responses has provided insight on what care experienced individuals think about:

- our products and services
- the areas we could improve on
- who their greatest career influencers are
- the barriers to careers they face
- the impact of COVID-19 on their educational or career pathways.

We used this intelligence to help shape the content of our plan for 2021-24, targeting any key issues identified.

Senior Phase Survey

The SDS Senior Phase Survey (SPS) is used to gather feedback from school pupils in S4 - S6 on the CIAG services available to them. The most recent data available is from the 2018 survey, as the anticipated 2020 survey was postponed due to COVID-19. Re-branded the Pupil Voice Survey, we were able to conduct the survey in 2021. The output from this is not yet available but will help to inform the implementation of this plan over the next three years.

A total of 5,756 pupils responded to the 2018 survey. Not all respondents answered the question on care experience. Of those that did, 4,409 people identified as non-care experienced while 181 identified as care experienced. Results show that care experienced pupils, who generally form a subset of the targeted pupils' group, respond more positively than the average response rates. Specifically, they were more satisfied than non-care experienced pupils with their ability to access CIAG support when needed, the amount of support available, and the range of careers services offered. Care experienced pupils also had slightly higher (73% vs 69%) overall satisfaction with SDS careers services than non-care experienced pupils. While these results are generally encouraging, we still have room for improvement.

Open-ended responses to the survey revealed that care experienced pupils were extremely positive in relation to:

- their relationship with their careers adviser as being a consistent point of contact in helping them on their career journey
- the support they received in identifying different career options and routes
- having knowledgeable and friendly careers advisers.

Fewer areas for improvement were suggested. However, those highlighted included the need for greater promotion and awareness building of the range of CIAG products and services available, and the provision of more practical support relating to CVs and job applications.

Young People's Career Ambitions Survey

The Young People's Career Ambitions Survey conducted in October/November 2020 aims to understand the choices, influences, and motivations of young people in making career decisions. A total of 2,204 school leavers from the 2019/20 cohort responded to the survey, 90 of whom identified as care experienced.

Headline results from the survey show that care experienced young people:

- are highly influenced by their interests/hobbies, their parent(s)/carer(s), and the need to earn money
- were highly likely to identify the careers adviser as having understood them and the support they needed
- were more likely than their non-care experienced peers to report that not having the right skills is a barrier to their future career
- expressed that the pandemic had significantly impacted on the education or career destination they were (or were not) currently in.

Participants expressed the importance of their Careers Adviser's guidance in exploring their post-school options, although some suggested they would have benefitted from more frequent

engagements with their adviser. Responses highlighted how individuals felt COVID-19 had negatively impacted, and would continue to impact, on either their participation in education at either college or university, their ability to gain employment including an apprenticeship, and more generally, on their mental health.

Modern Apprentices in Training Survey

The Modern Apprentices in Training Survey is a key source of information about the perceptions of apprentices on their training experience. The 2019 survey was distributed via email, with 5,886 respondents completing it online. Within that group, fewer than 50 responses came from care experienced apprentices (the exact number is not included for the purposes of anonymity).

Results from the survey showed that there are significantly different motivations for care experienced individuals when choosing a Modern Apprenticeship. Significantly fewer care experienced apprentices stated that the opportunity to advance within the company was important in selecting their apprenticeship. However, significantly more said the availability of public transport was important.

All Modern Apprentices commonly report approaching their training provider for help and support. However, 21% of care experienced apprentices would also approach their friends for help, compared to 13% of other apprentices.

Feedback also highlighted that there are significant differences between care experienced apprentices and their peers in what they expect to do after their apprenticeship has finished. Significantly fewer care experienced apprentices expect to stay with their current employer after completion, at 68% compared to 80% of other apprentices.

Both care experienced and non-care experienced apprentices reported an overall satisfaction score of 8.6 out of 10 with their apprenticeship, where 10 is 'extremely satisfied'.

Equality Evidence Review

The SDS Equality Evidence Review, published in April 2021, highlights that care experienced children have poorer educational outcomes than their peers. While care experienced children's outcomes have improved over the last five years, there is still a significant gap compared to all pupils. Care experienced school leavers are less likely to go into positive destinations than school leavers in general – 71% compared with 93% of all pupils.

The review also identified a number of barriers facing care experienced young people transitioning from further and higher education into the labour market. These include an absence of informal support networks which can provide access to job opportunities, unstable accommodation, financial pressures, mental and other health issues, and societal stigma. Once care experienced young adults leave education there is still a severe lack of evidence on their labour market outcomes.

Stakeholder Consultation

Through engagements with key stakeholders, including Who Cares? Scotland and the team taking forward The Promise, we were able to benefit from their expertise and knowledge of the young people we are jointly responsible for.

Focal Point Calls

In 2021, we established 'Focal Point Calls' – a means by which SDS and key partner organisations can regularly meet to discuss matters of shared interest. Our first Care Experience Focal Point Call was in August 2021 with representatives from Staf, Who Cares? Scotland, Action for Children, and Barnardo's. These stakeholders provided valuable feedback on our draft 2021-24 commitments, that had been shared in advance. They also offered suggestions for future activity that could be embedded into our new plan. We understand from our partners:

- ongoing efforts are required to support a greater understanding amongst employers that care experienced individuals are not a homogenous group, each having different strengths and needs
- poverty continues to significantly impact on the life chances of care experienced individuals, and we must all focus on tackling its root causes
- the current system of support for care experienced individuals is siloed, overly bureaucratic and inflexible. Significant progress is therefore required by public bodies to enhance inter-agency collaboration, to ensuring the provision of joined up support
- the impact of trauma and the ongoing crisis on the mental health of care experienced individuals cannot be overstated
- the importance of relationship-based practice in helping to support individuals to navigate transitions more successfully.

We can gain valuable insight by speaking with former Modern Apprentices from care experienced backgrounds to understand how they succeeded and overcame the barriers they faced.

Colleague Consultation

We also consulted with a range of SDS colleagues to inform the development of this plan. The SDS Corporate Parenting Monitoring Group, Community of Practice and a sub-group of our Equality Management Group (EMG) were invited to participate in a series of virtual workshops during summer 2021. Each workshop followed the same format, which asked colleagues to assess our achievements against the 2015-18 plan, identify strengths and areas for improvement, and discuss ideas for future activity.

The feedback from all three sessions was collated and common themes identified. Key findings are summarised below.

Identified Strengths:

- **awareness of colleagues:** participants highlighted that all colleagues now have a much stronger understanding of SDS's role as corporate parent, and that this increased awareness has been facilitated by a wealth of training and resources
- **SDS as an employer:** monitoring group members felt that SDS had made good progress in developing pathways for care experienced young people to access and develop careers within the organisation
- **stakeholder engagement:** colleagues felt that SDS had worked well in partnership with other relevant organisations at both a national and local level to products and services.

Identified Areas for Improvement:

- **data sharing:** it was felt that this was still an area where further progress is required – particularly with regard to establishing future data sharing agreements between SDS and local authority social work departments

- **marketing:** the monitoring group highlighted a need for greater visibility, internally and through our external communications, of case studies, celebrating the successes of our care experienced young people
- **communicating our offer:** reflecting on feedback from customers, colleagues from the CIAG EMG felt that SDS needs to better promote its service offer to care experienced customers of all ages, to ensure awareness of the support they can access.

Identified Focus Areas for Future Activity:

- **corporate parent partnerships:** colleagues highlighted an opportunity to deepen our collaboration with other corporate parents to establish a more aligned, joined-up approach to supporting those with care experience
- **voice of the customer:** all participants felt strongly that, in line with SDS's new equality mainstreaming objectives, more opportunities should be created for care experience customers to influence the development of SDS products and services
- **learner journeys:** Careers Advisers from the Community of Practice suggested that improved data sharing between partners would allow for better understanding of the learner journeys of care experienced people. They felt this understanding would help better inform professional practice discussions
- **relationship-based practice:** Careers Advisers shared that, in their experience, some care experienced young people fear leaving school due to a perceived cliff edge of losing support. Advisers emphasised that continued relationships during post-school transitions in these cases is vital, and flexibility is key.

4. Our 2021-24 Commitments

In line with our 2018-21 plan, our commitments for 2021-24 take a thematic approach, highlighting our key priorities as a corporate parent over the three-year period. They take into account our statutory responsibilities, the priorities identified through our development, the ambitions of the Care Review and The Promise, the ongoing challenges of the pandemic, and our ambitions for the next phase of our corporate parenting journey. We have also ensured our prioritised activity for the *2021-24 plan* aligns with the [SDS Equality Mainstreaming Outcomes for 2021-2025](#).

Our five thematic commitments for the period 2021-24 are introduced in this section. In each case, we have added indicative examples of what our activity might look like in practice. These are not intended to be an exhaustive list of forthcoming activity.

Commitment One: Help SDS colleagues understand how to be a good corporate parent in practice.

To keep this commitment, we will:

- review our colleague training materials to ensure they remain fit-for-purpose
- share case studies of good corporate parenting practice, particularly increasing visibility of non-customer facing examples
- continue to develop and support the SDS Care Experience Community of Practice
- ensure our internal communications continue to profile care experience campaigns that colleagues can engage with and support.

Commitment Two: Continue to collaborate with partners to improve the collection and use of data on care experienced customers.

To keep this commitment, we will:

- continue to work towards having data sharing agreements in place between SDS and local authority social work departments in Scotland to improve our ability to identify and deliver services to care experienced young people
- improve records-matching activity between our different customer databases to ensure young people are better supported.

Commitment Three: Ensure SDS benefits from care experienced talent by creating sustainable progression routes into our workforce.

To keep this commitment, we will:

- continue to develop approaches that better support care experienced individuals to access and sustain career opportunities within SDS, including apprenticeships and internships
- develop our employment pipeline to support the career progression and skills development of care experienced people in SDS.

Commitment Four: Develop and deliver products and services that improve the learning and employment outcomes of care experienced people.

To keep this commitment, we will:

- explore opportunities to develop trauma-informed practice principles in the delivery of our face-to-face services and to inform the development of our products
- consider ways to implement best practice approaches to supporting care experienced young people and their families, as set out in The Promise.
- continue to work to increase participation of those with care experience in work-based learning programmes
- explore how we better support care experienced adults to access and sustain learning and employment opportunities through our products and services.

Commitment Five: Put the voice of care experienced young people at the heart of SDS decision making.

To keep this commitment, we will:

- enhance opportunities for care experienced customers to contribute to the development of SDS products and services through co-design and co-production approaches
- develop the Care Experience Focal Point Group further to strengthen partnership working between SDS and care experience advocacy and support organisations
- utilise the Each and Every Child Reframing Toolkit, which aims to change the narrative around care experience across Scotland, to inform our communications approach when talking about care and care experience
- develop further insight and research on care experience, including through the SDS-sponsored PHD programme.

5. Monitoring and Reporting

As committed to in our first Corporate Parenting Plan, we will continue to convene a monitoring group, incorporating key colleagues from across SDS.

The monitoring group is responsible for reviewing activity and progress made against the plan, and for ensuring that our plan remains a live document, with an ongoing profile and prominence within SDS. It meets two-to-four times a year, as appropriate, and provides regular progress updates to both the executive and non-executive boards of SDS.

We understand that ministers may call on us to report progress at any time and we will continue to respond to the best of our ability in these circumstances.

We will report formally against the commitments set out in this plan in 2024.

SDS care experienced summer internship

Fourth year Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU) International Business and Human Resource Management student Natalie Lindsay spent eight weeks working with the SDS Human Resources (HR) team during July and August 2021.

“I’m care experienced, and the Care Experienced Team at GCU had mentioned in a newsletter that there were internships at SDS coming up and we were able to apply.”

“I’ve always known about [SDS] as an organisation because they helped me when I was younger and going through some difficult times in my personal life. There was a Careers Adviser who was always there and I could talk to about anything. She pointed me down the administration route and I did that for a while before progressing onto HR.”

“I was part of the HR team [at SDS] and basically worked as an assistant. I absolutely loved it - it was honestly great! It went beyond my expectations because I was just expecting to shadow someone and get a better understanding of their role.”

“I realised quite quickly that it was all about developing my skills and gaining the confidence to realise I was capable of doing this as a career.”

“Even though I was working from home, everyone was so welcoming and really made me feel part of something. They’re just great people and I would love to return at some point in the future.”



Natalie Lindsay,
GCU student

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