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How Key Care Factors Influence the Educational Achievement of Children Looked After At Home and Away from Home in Two Local Authorities in Scotland.

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis was to explore the key care factors that influence the educational achievement of children looked after at home and away from home in Scotland. Traditionally there has been less research conducted in Scotland than in the rest of the United Kingdom. The research analysed a large new sample - one fifth of the care leaving population in Scotland - and spans a five year period. The thesis makes an original research contribution. A unique features of the research is that it investigates the experiences of children looked after at home, alongside those looked after away from home. In addition, the research involved two large local authority areas in Scotland that had not previously participated in such research on looked after children.

What emerged from the research was that the Corporate Parent (local authorities and partner agencies) had not yet successfully prioritised the educational achievement of looked after children in policy and practice, despite education being identified by the government as a mechanism for combating social exclusion. The key findings of the research demonstrated that looked after children perform less well academically than the general school population. In particular, placement type, the reason for becoming looked after and the age on becoming looked after were significant factors in determining educational achievement. Other factors such as gender and number of placements were also found to be associated with educational achievement. Empirical results further indicated that looked after

children suffered from discrimination and social exclusion in all aspects of their lives, including school and where they lived. This was a significant finding as the disadvantage experienced by many looked after children continues to impact on their lives into adulthood, making them some of the most socially excluded adults in Scotland and the United Kingdom today.

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FOREWORD AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It was a combination of positive and negative forces that resulted in my embarking on a PhD at this stage in my life. Positively, I wanted to produce a large scale piece of applied research in an area where, from my work experience, I knew there were gaps, and where I hoped to make a difference to the lives of those concerned. Negatively, I felt frustrated and constrained by the limitations of being a local authority researcher and wanted the experience and intellectual rigour of an academic framework for a significant research exercise on a key social policy issue. As such, the undertaking of this thesis has been a journey for me where I have developed academically, professionally and personally.

On reflection, the one part of this journey that will remain with me is the experiences that looked after children and care leavers shared through the interviews and, although I did not conduct the interview with these individuals myself, their responses keenly demonstrated their disadvantage, vulnerability and misfortune. This part of the process was powerful. It made me realise that at the level of the individual child, just how awful it can be to be looked after. It also made me realise how much has to be tackled by local authorities, partner agencies and the Scottish Government before we can start to improve the chances of looked after children.

On an academic and professional level, I have further developed my qualitative and quantitative research skills in the undertaking of this thesis in areas such as

research design, building large datasets, sampling techniques and research analysis. My negotiating skills have also been enhanced through having to negotiate research access with my employers in an area that is particularly research sensitive in Scotland currently. I have become more politically astute and developed a greater understanding of the policy making process in larger organisations. Indeed, the process of undertaking this thesis has made me more aware of how internal politics and individual working relationships within local authorities, at a departmental and inter-departmental level, shape policy. Moreover, I have been able to evidence how important it is for local authorities and government agencies to be able to access applied social research for the purposes of policy making.

I carried out this PhD on a part-time basis, whilst working full time. This was challenging for me. I also changed jobs half way through, yet another challenge. I have been extremely fortunate in my change of job, as the Executive Director in my new workplace has been particularly interested and encouraging in my undertaking of this research. Indeed, prior to completion, my undertaking of this PhD has enhanced my career and has resulted in my involvement in a selection of projects and tasks relating to looked after children. All of this has helped to affirm my career aspirations and my passion for research. On a personal level, the process of undertaking this thesis has led to the self confirmation that I have the determination to see something through to the end, irrespective of how many tasks I have to juggle and regardless of what ever else is going on in my life at that time.

I am aware that the completion of this PhD would not have been possible, firstly, without the input and support of looked after children and my work colleagues. I am grateful to those people who agreed to participate in the interviews and focus groups and express my sincere gratitude to all of the children and young people who contributed to my research. I would like to thank all of those people in Authority 1 and Authority 2 who made this research possible. Thanks also go to the Who Cares? Scotland Officer and the Children's Rights Officer.

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Looked after children - children who are under the statutory supervision of a local authority. These children can be looked after at home or away from home.

Looked after at home - children who are under the statutory supervision of a local authority and live in their family home. This is also referred to as home supervision.

Looked after away from home - children who are under the statutory supervision of a local authority and live away from their family home in foster care or residential care.

Residential care - this refers to residential schools where children live and attend school. It also refers to residential units where children live. These are also referred to as children's homes.

Foster care – children who are looked after away from home in the community in a family setting.

Care leavers – children who have previously been looked after or are in the process of being discharged from being looked after.

Throughcare and aftercare services - services provided by local authorities to prepare children for being discharged from being looked after and to support children who have previously been discharged from being looked after.

Corporate Parenting – this highlights the collective responsibility of councils for all children in their care and constitutes the formal and local partnerships needed between all local authority departments and services, and associated agencies, who are responsible for working together to meet the needs of looked after children and young people.

Practitioners – teachers, social workers and other professionals who work directly with looked after children in a care, health or education setting.

Policy makers – those employed by government agencies, local authorities and elected members who are responsible for devising and implementing policies to improve the outcomes of looked after children.

Care plan – this details the type of care that looked after children receive from the local authority. This is reviewed from time to time by a social worker or key worker and generally looked after children will be involved in the review.

ICSP – The Integrated Children’s Services Plan outlines the shared vision for children’s services within each Local Authority/ Health Board area. It is the main children’s services local planning document for Local Authorities, Health Agencies and partner agencies in Scotland. On a 3 year cycle, it outlines the planned action for improving service provision and monitors any previous planned action.

Case file/ records – the paper or electronic record that is held for each looked after child. It contains information such as personal details, care history and services provided.

Compulsory education – all children in Scotland aged between 5 and 16 years are required to attend full time education.

Primary education – the first level of compulsory education. Primary schools have children aged from 5 years to 12 years (P1 to P7).

Secondary education – the second level of compulsory education for children who are aged 12 to 16-18. This depends on when the individual child chooses to leave school (S1 to S6).

5-14 curriculum – this is the curriculum in Scottish schools for children from Primary 1 through to 2nd year at secondary school.

Post 14 curriculum – this is the curriculum in Scottish secondary schools for children from 3rd year in secondary education through to 6th year. Children usually work towards SCQF awards at this stage.

SCQF framework – the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework is the examination framework for Scotland.

HMIE – Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Education has been an integral part of the Scottish Education System for over 160 years. HMIE became an Executive Agency in April 2001, reflecting the changing emphasis given to independent, rigorous evaluation of the Scottish Education System.

SWSA- Scotland's Social Work Inspection Agency (SWIA) works with partners in the public, private and independent sectors to promote excellence in Social Work Services. In all SWIA's inspections and reviews, the focus is on the positive impact of Social Work Services on people's lives

CHCP’s – Community Health and Care Partnerships are a new and innovative partnership responsible for delivering all Health, Care and Education Services to people living within each Local Authority/ Health Board boundary.

SCRA - Scottish Children's Reporter Administration is at the centre of the Children's Hearings System – the child protection and youth justice system for children in Scotland. The Children's Hearings System aims to protect the safety and welfare of children and address their behaviour including offending

Social Inclusion Unit - a government agency set up to improve the life chances of those who suffer, or may suffer in the future, from social exclusion.

SEED - Scottish Executive Education Department.

Performance Indicators (PI's) - Since 1993/94, local authorities have been required by law to provide information on how well they are carrying out their activities. The Local Government Act 1992 places upon the Accounts Commission the duty each year to direct local authorities to publish information which will, in the Commission's opinion, assist in the making of appropriate comparisons - by reference to the criteria of cost, economy, efficiency and effectiveness. These measures are referred to as PI's or Performance Indicators.

CLAS Return – this is a statistical return that local authorities make to the Scottish Government each year in relation to the children that they have a Corporate Parent responsibility for.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Definition of the Research Problem

'The crisis of looked after children within the education system is a sadly familiar story and the outcomes are stark' (Holmstrom, 2000:8).

In Britain there is widespread concern about social inequality. The present government has indicated that education is one mechanism for combating social exclusion (Scottish Government, 2001a), as educational achievement is associated with good outcomes (Daniel, Wassell and Gilligan, 1999a). Indeed, the government's underlying philosophy is that education must be a force for opportunity and social justice *'and not for the enrichment of the privileged'* (Gayle *et al*, 2003:10). However, there has been a growing concern in the last decade about the poor educational experience and achievement of the many children looked after by local authorities in the United Kingdom. Studies conducted by Barnardo's (2006); Borland *et al* (1998); Borland (2000); Fletcher (1993); Jackson (1999); Jackson and Thomas (2000); Jackson and McParlin (2006); Maxwell *et al* (2006); Morris (2000); and the Social Inclusion Unit (2003) illustrate, first, the extent to which looked after children are disadvantaged in the opportunities and support they are provided with and, second, how the experience of being looked

after manifests itself, arguably making these children some of the most vulnerable in society.

In Scotland, children who are in the care of local authorities are described as 'looked-after'¹ under the Children (Scotland) Act 1995. Children can be looked after at home (looked after), or away from home in residential care, or in foster care (looked after and accommodated). The majority of children in Scotland are looked after at home (Scottish Government, 2005c). When a child becomes looked after it becomes the responsibility of the local authority to ensure that the care the child is receiving is better than the care given before it became looked after. This includes the educational dimension of their care (HMI and SWSI, 2001). For Bradshaw and Mayhew (2005), educational achievement is fundamentally important to the life chances of most children. The right to education is enshrined in the UN convention on the 'Rights of the Child', and attaining success in education is a '*graduated staircase*' to success in adulthood in terms of occupation, income and life style (Bradshaw and Mayhew, 2005:232). However, whilst children in public care span a full range of educational potential they do not, on average, do as well as other children living in their local area. Jackson (1999) and Jackson and McParlin (2006) demonstrate through their research that even those looked after children who attend school regularly are unlikely to reach their educational potential, unless active measures are taken to compensate for earlier disadvantages. However, the

¹ For the purposes of this thesis, unless stated otherwise, the term 'looked after' will be used to refer to all children who are looked after at home and away from home.

minimum educational aim that looked after children do as well as all other children is not enough as looked after children have so many disadvantages that they need to perform a good deal better than other children to succeed in life. This is particularly significant as care leavers without qualifications are at a high risk of a variety of forms of social exclusion (Jackson, 1999; Jackson and McParlin, 2006).

Maxwell *et al* (2006) identified that there are four underlying causes for the educational under achievement of looked after children:

- **Poor educational outcomes** have been attributed to placement instability with children having too many placement changes, and school changes, which can be unsettling.
- **Poor school attendance** has also been identified as contributory factor along with the lack of support that children receive at school.
- **The lack of sufficient support and encouragement** where looked after children live has been identified as another factor contributing to the educational under achievement of the looked after population.
- **The lack of adequate support with emotional, mental and physical health and wellbeing** has been identified as a contributing factor to the poor educational achievement of looked after children.

There are those who hold the view that the care system is failing looked after children because there is a general lack of shared knowledge between Social Work and Education Services in local authorities about each other's services, and that they do not currently work well together to communicate regularly about the children in their care (Barnardo's, 2006; Bullock *et al*, 2006; Fletcher-Campbell, 1998; Francis, 2000; Jackson and McParlin, 2006; Walker, 1994; and Who Cares? Scotland, 2003). In the past, local authorities have accepted no responsibility for the educational failure of looked after children. Instead, they have blamed the low achievement of the looked after population on the disadvantaged backgrounds that these children have come from. However, research has begun to demonstrate that the poor educational achievement of looked after children is more related to weaknesses within the care system rather than individual children (Jackson, 1999).

Research demonstrates that it is not difficult to see why looked after children lack the emotional and psychological support needed to grow and succeed in education (Cashmore *et al*, 2007; Courtney and Dworsky, 2006; Fernandez, 2007; Jackson and Sachdev, 2001; and Pecora *et al*, 2006). The stress and trauma of family break-up, even when the child is able to recognise the potential advantages, can have a negative impact upon a child's life. Often the child's needs are not considered and generally there is a lack of sensitivity by teachers, social workers, peers and society at large to the position of these vulnerable children. In addition, the experience of being looked after is too frequently characterised by a lack of

continuity and this occurs at many levels. Firstly, there is a lack of continuity in social workers allocated to individual cases. This is caused by a huge turnover in social workers in local authorities and the frequent reorganisation within Social Work Departments (Hazel, 1981). This means that over time various people are involved with the child and no one person has a complete overview of the child's life. Secondly, many children experience multiple changes in placement (Morris, 2000). Often this occurs through no fault of the child and this can subsequently involve a change in schooling when a new placement cannot be found in the area where the child has been living.

Current literature would suggest that the Scottish Government, Westminster Government and local authorities are aware of these problems as the under achievement of looked after children has been well documented in a range of recent government studies and reports (OFSTEAD/SSI, 1996; OFSTEAD, 2000; HMI and SWSI, 2001; Social Inclusion Unit, 2003; Scottish Government, 2006b; and Scottish Government, 2007c). Nevertheless, national statistics demonstrate that such government reports fall far short of providing any successful policies to date which improve, even slightly, the educational achievement of looked after children. Statistical returns collected by local authorities in Scotland for the period 2004/05 demonstrate the extent of the problem. For instance, it has been reported that 45% of looked after children attained 1 or more awards at SCQF level 3² or above (Scottish Government, 2005f). This compares to 91% of the general school

population attaining, not 1, but 5 or more awards at SCQF level 3 or above (Scottish Government, 2005b). The Scottish Government's report further reveals that children looked after away from home perform significantly better than those looked after at home, with 55% of those children looked after away from attaining 1 or more awards at SCQF level 3 or above compared to only 37% of those looked after at home (Scottish Government, 2005f). Whilst 90% of the general pupil population in Scotland attained English and Maths at SCQF level 3 or above (Scottish Government, 2005b), only 30% of the looked after population attained these levels (Scottish Government, 2005f). Again, children looked after at home performed less well than those looked after away from home. Indeed, only 22% of children looked after at home attained English and Maths at SCQF level 3 or above compared to 39% of children looked after away from home (Scottish Government, 2005f).

It seems appropriate to consider why education has become so important in the United Kingdom over the last 20 years. MacDonald and Coffield (1991) argue that education has become very important as a direct result of structural changes in the economy, which have greatly transformed the careers followed by children as they leave school and search for jobs. In the main, this has been as a result of the collapse of the youth labour market over the past 20 years (Gayle *et al*, 2003; MacDonald, Banks and Hollands, 1993; MacDonald, 1999; and MacDonald and

² The SCQF Framework is detailed in Appendix 3.

Marsh, 2005), where traditional routes such as apprenticeships are being replaced by low paid skill seeker positions. In addition, changes to the benefits system have resulted in many children not being entitled to any form of benefits, thus forcing them to take skill seeker positions.

Jackson and Sachdev (2001) advocate that a decent education is one of the most reliable ways to ensure a child's success in the future and this is especially true for children who are looked after. For Jackson and Sachdev (2001), a good education is the key to social mobility and transition to a successful adult life. However, Social Work Services in Scotland, and more widely in the United Kingdom, have been unable to keep pace with the rapidly changing education system. This has meant that for many looked after children reaching the age of 16 has signalled the end of education. Borland *et al* (1988) suggests this neglect on the educational dimension of care by local authorities is reflected in the widespread practice of moving young people into semi-independent or independent living by the age of 17. Studies by Biehal *et al* (1995); Dixon and Stein (2002); and Stein and Carey (1986) into the outcomes of young people who have left care, report findings which suggest that these young people remain disadvantaged and that their educational achievement has an impact on other areas in their lives.

Research shows that children looked after away from home are:

- 12 times more likely to leave school with no qualifications
- 10 times more likely to be excluded from school
- 4 times more likely to be unemployed
- 60 times more likely to be homeless
- 50 times more likely to be sent to prison
- 4 times more likely to have mental health problems

(Morris, 2000: v)

There is a need to place these problems in context as looked after children constitute a tiny minority of children who do not reach their academic potential, or have a limited capability in terms of obtaining academic qualifications (Hayden *et al*, 1999). For example, in Scotland there were 12,185 children aged between 0-17 being looked after in the 12 months leading up to March 2005. These children make up only 1% of the total population in Scotland aged between 0-17 (Scottish Government, 2005f). It can't be stressed enough that what is significant here is the uniqueness of the situation these looked after children find themselves in. They do come from vulnerable circumstances, but most crucially, we are able to use their experiences and outcomes to assess and evaluate the parenting skills of the local authority and its partner agencies- 'the Corporate Parent' (Hayden *et al*, 1999).

On a personal level, in my position as a researcher within Social Work Services and Education Services in local government, I have become increasingly aware over the last 12 years that the educational achievement of looked after children continues to be an issue that is inadequately addressed. Currently, there is little research in Scotland which considers the educational experience and educational achievement of the looked after population in any great detail. Where research does exist, it tends to be based on a fairly small sample of the looked after population across Scotland. Additionally, there is a dearth of research which considers the educational experience and achievement of children looked after at home. Those research studies that do consider children on home supervision orders do not generally consider the educational achievement of these children.

The research I conducted for this PhD thesis aims to help rectify this gap in that it examined the educational achievement of one fifth of the care leaving population in Scotland between 2000 and 2005. The research considered children looked after at home and children looked after away from home. Consequently, for perhaps the first time in Scotland, this thesis provides a large scale detailed piece of research which not only considers educational achievement of looked after children, but also considers the differences in the educational achievement of children looked after at home (compared with those children looked after away from home). This research will complement existing research and enhance current research knowledge pertaining to the educational experiences and achievement of children looked after

by local authorities in Scotland. In addition, my research will be highly beneficial to the participating local authorities as it will provide them with a large and accurate profile of the educational achievement of children in their care. My research will also assist in planning for future services and in the development of policy and practice within both the participating local authorities and across all local authorities in Scotland.

My study used mixed methods to analyse data from two sample local authorities in Scotland, which were given the pseudonyms Authority 1 and Authority 2. In respect of the quantitative aspect, the research considered multiple cohorts of children who were looked after by Authority 1 and Authority 2 and were discharged from care between 2000 and 2005. In total, the educational achievement of 1407 children was reviewed. Through this component of my thesis reflection was given to the relationship between key care factors at three junctures in the looked after process: becoming looked after; being looked after; and being discharged from care. Following this, consideration was given to the association that key care factors had on academic achievement at various stages within the SCQF framework. The research gave particular consideration to key care factors such as placement type; given that little is known about the educational achievement of children looked after at home. Other key care factors such as the reason for becoming looked after, age on becoming looked after, placement details and discharge details were also considered. In the qualitative element, forty four policy

makers, practitioners and looked after children participated. The purpose of this aspect of the research was two-fold: first, to examine the role of the Corporate Parent; second, to report upon the experiences of children who were, or had been, looked after.

The research conducted for this thesis is unique and original. The data was extracted from different sources, manual and computerised, over a 3 year period. Given the complications associated with gathering the data, the data would not have otherwise existed had I not undertaken the research. It would have been impossible for individuals outwith either of the local authorities to gather similar data in terms of data protection and ethics codes. Moreover, within Authority 1 and Authority 2, information pertaining to looked after children is not universally available, therefore only individuals, such as myself, would have unrestricted access to be able to gather such detailed information.

Outline of the Thesis

This thesis will be divided into a further 12 Chapters:

1. In Chapter 2 there is a review of literature and research pertaining to the looked after population, with emphasis on the educational element of care.
2. Chapter 3 provides a brief description of the care system and the education system in Scotland. Following this, reflection is given to the relevant

legislation and policy affecting looked after children in Scotland and principally those children looked after by Authority 1 and Authority 2.

3. In Chapter 4, reflection is given to research methodology.
4. In Chapter 5, consideration is given to the Corporate Parent and their responsibilities, policies, implementation strategies and their impact on educational achievement.
5. In Chapter 6, there is an analysis of the quantitative research sample by key research indicators and a profile of looked after children and care leavers who participated in the qualitative element of the research.
6. Chapter 7 assesses the relationships between care factors and discusses their influence on the lives of looked after children.
7. The influence that key care factors have on educational achievement is considered in Chapter 8.
8. Chapter 9 focuses on other educational experiences which impact on the lives of looked after children.
9. In Chapter 10, I discuss all of my research findings and consider the conclusions that can be drawn from my research.
10. Chapter 11 considers the theoretical implications of the research findings.
11. Reflection is given to the journey that I have undertaken in the process of completing this PhD in Chapter 12.
12. Finally, in Chapter 13 wider recommendations are made for policy and practice.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In this review there is an examination of research that has been conducted in relation to the educational experiences of looked after children. Whilst there has been a significant amount of research conducted in this area, much of the research has been undertaken by a small group of experts in the field. Therefore, the work of those such as Barnardo's; Borland; Carey; Dixon; Jackson; the Scottish Government; Shaw; Stein; and Who Cares? Scotland is referred to continually throughout this review. Overall, I was able to determine through the research examined for this review that looked after children perform less well academically than the general school population. This is a clear message emerging from the materials presented in the literature review.

This review has been divided into 7 parts. To put the educational achievement of looked after children into perspective consideration will briefly be given to the underachievement of the general school population. Reflection is then given to research which examines the association that socio demographic factors such as gender, socio economic background prior to care and intelligence levels have on the educational achievement of looked after children. Other research pertaining to socio demographic factors such as experience prior to care and the reason for

becoming looked after has been taken into account. Following this, research relating to care factors such as the impact of coming into care, stability of placements, placement type and number of placements has been considered. Moreover, health, mental health, the problems faced by care leavers and how all of these care factors are associated with educational achievement has also been taken into account.

Thereafter, the review moves to examine research which considers educational factors such as motivation, aspirations, attendance, exclusion and bullying and how these factors are associated with educational achievement. Thought has then been given to other educational factors such as government initiatives and educationally successful looked after children. The review then illustrates the detrimental impact that the Corporate Parent can have on the educational achievement of looked after children: areas such as lack of collaboration, poor care planning and a lack of responsibility from professionals have been considered. Following this, international and cross-national research studies have been reflected on in this review to allow for comparison with UK research studies. Last, a summary of the chapter has been given.

Underachievement within the Whole School Population

This thesis concerns looked after children, but prior to considering the educational achievement of the looked after population, it seems appropriate to briefly take a wider perspective on educational achievement, or rather educational underachievement, of other groups of children within the general school population. This will help provide a context for the educational achievement of the looked after population. Before, we consider how education underachievement occurs and which groups in society are most likely to underachieve, let us first define educational underachievement. The term 'underachievement' has been widely used by politicians, journalists, academics and practitioners and it describes the relatively poor academic performance of groups of people or of individuals (Smith, 2003).

The questions we then must ask are what factors are associated with educational achievement in the general population and which groups underachieve educationally? In 2006, the Department of Education and Skills identified that the drivers of the attainment gap fall into 3 broad categories (DfES, 2006). These are Individuals' Characteristics (gender, ethnicity, special needs and looked after status), Social Factors (parental education, parental involvement, parental expectation and peer effects) and Educational Factors (curriculum, teacher expectations, resources and school type). It has been identified that these drivers are multiple and complex and that their impact can vary for individuals, and that

they tend to compound each other to produce an overall downward effect on achievement. Nevertheless, it has been recognised that the most significant factors behind a child's achievements are social factors, and particularly, parental factors (DfES, 2006). Indeed, research conducted by Burgess *et al* (2001) found that family had the strongest explanatory power and that extensive overlaps existed between schooling and family background, which suggested that the disadvantage associated with family background was compounded by a child's experience of school.

In respect of Individuals' Characteristics, DfES (2006) were able to ascertain that underachieving pupils were disproportionately from lower social classes and were thought to get caught in a cycle of underachieving. It was also determined that there was a gender gap between boys and girls overall but that there was very little variation when gender and social class were considered in conjunction. Moreover, children who had Chinese and Indian ethnic backgrounds performed at a higher level than all other ethnic groups. It was also determined that children from deprived backgrounds were more likely to have special educational needs and that looked after children were more likely to come from poorer backgrounds (DfES, 2006).

In respect of social factors, it has been ascertained that there is a positive correlation between parental occupation, parental attainment and levels of achievement in their children. Moreover, children who come from homes where there are 2 parents/ guardians tend to attain at higher levels (Youth Cohort Study, 2005). In essence, children who have parents who are professionals and are educated to at least A level standard are less like to underachieve than children who parents have routine occupations, are unemployed and/or have no educational qualifications. This has been corroborated in the work of Smyth and McCabe (2000) who have determined that the effect of social background is apparent in relation to both the level of education reached and academic performance at various stages within the educational system (Smyth and McCabe,2000). Nicaise (2000) demonstrates that the poorest children fail and that large numbers of them end up in the least well performing schools and that half way through their school careers they still score extremely low in terms of numeracy and literacy. It has also been determined that they leave school with few qualifications (Nicaise, 2000). The vicious circle of social exclusion is thus perpetuated, because uneducated young people become the first victims of unemployment and poverty (Nicaise, 2000).

Now that we have briefly considered the different groups of children that underachieve, this leads us on to considering why particular groups underachieve. According to Munn (2000), underachievement can be explained not only in terms

of a lack of material resources such as good housing, a good diet and so on; nor only in terms of a lack of cultural capital; but also in terms of a lack of access to familial, peer and other networks which reinforce aspirations to learning (2000:173). One explanation for this could be that working class parents have different values on education or have different expectations of it. Whilst parents want the best for their children, working class parents may not automatically expect certain outcomes in the same way that middle class parents do (British Social Attitudes Survey, 2004). Moreover, if we try to explain this within the parameters of social capital, then working class parents may have less personal knowledge, and fewer skills and contacts to help their children effectively; children may not have role models within their immediate families who have succeeded in education (DfES, 2006:50).

Then there is the school itself. School is the main meeting place for children from different social backgrounds and for many children it is their first experience of socialisation – or of exclusion and conflict (Nicaise and Smyth, 2000). According to Nicaise and Smyth (2000) schools are in fact caught up in a paradox: as they are supposed to educate their pupils in mutual respect and tolerance and solidarity, whilst at the same time preparing them for a competitive economy (2000:2). The present picture of the education system is unflattering as schools are blamed for: alienating pupils and teachers; providing low standards and poor quality education;

having differential expectations of pupils; having high non completion rates; and being unresponsive to students (Nicaise and Smyth, 2000).

Attempts to remedy the educational underachievement of Scotland's children have already been made and there is a longstanding government commitment to raising standards of achievement for all children in schools throughout Scotland. This has been re-affirmed in 'Ambitious, Excellent Schools' (Scottish Government, 2004b) and 'Curriculum for Excellence' (Scottish Government, 2004d) where focus has been given to raising the educational achievement of the lowest attaining pupils. However, the issue here is the extent to which the Scottish Government is focused on improving the educational outcomes for vulnerable children from socially excluded families.

Recent government statistics from Scotland, as illustrated below in Table 2.1, demonstrate that there are significant differences in the average tariff scores of children with different characteristics and social factors across Scotland. For instance, females are out performing males and Chinese and Indian children are out performing children from all other ethnic groups, as they did in the DfES study (2006). Deprivation was also identified as a factor impacting on educational achievement in both deprivation measures (deprivation and free school meals). For example, children who lived in the 15% most deprived areas in Scotland

performed less well academically than those children not living in these areas and children in receipt of free school meals performed less well than those who did not receive free school meals. Similarly, children who had additional support needs did not perform as well academically as those who were recorded as not having additional support needs (See Table 2.1 below).

Table 2.1: Average Tariff Score of S4 pupils, by Characteristic of Pupil: 2006/07

Characteristic	Tariff Score³
<u>Gender</u>	
Male	164
Female	179
<u>Ethnicity</u>	
White	171
Chinese	224
Black Caribbean	85
Indian	195
<u>Deprivation</u>	
15% Most Deprived Area	124
85% Least Deprived Area	181
<u>Free School Meal</u>	
Receiving Free School Meal	111
No Free School Meal	181
<u>Additional Support Need</u>	
Additional Support Need	83
No Additional Support Need	175
<u>Looked After</u>	
Not Looked After	173
Looked After at Home	45
Looked After away from Home	78

(Scottish Government, 2008)

In terms of looked after children, as illustrated above in Table 2.1, it was determined that looked after children performed less well academically than all other children, including those from minority or marginalised groups. Indeed, children looked after away from home had an average tariff score of 78 and

³ The tariff score of a pupil is calculated by allocating a score to each level of qualification and award, using the Unified Points Score scale.

children looked after at home had an average tariff score of 45. This perhaps sets the position of looked after children in context and demonstrates the need for us to examine their experiences further. Consequently, the remainder of this review concentrates on research and literature pertaining to looked after children, unless stated otherwise.

Socio Demographic Factors

Gender

There is currently a gender gap in the education system in the United Kingdom with females out performing their male counterparts in school examinations at all levels (Scottish Government, 2005b). For Burgess *et al* (2004) and Connolly (2006) this gender gap is a direct consequence of factors external to school such as social class, ability and poverty rather than observable school characteristics. However, there is a dearth of research which takes into account the impact that gender has on the educational achievement of the looked after population. National statistics fail to address the issue of this gender gap, even though national statistics concerning the general school population are reported by gender.

In a study I conducted in 2001 I addressed this issue and was able to determine that females attained more standard grades than males, for instance looked after females on average attained 3 standard grades compared to males who attained 2 (McClung, 2001). Whilst my research findings were representative of the male and female population nationally, I found that looked after males and females still performed less well than the general school population. National statistics for 2005 pertaining to the general population show that 89% of the male S4 school roll attained 5+ SCQF awards at level 3 compared to 91% of female S4 school roll (Scottish Government, 2005b). Despite the lack of research and statistics on the educational achievement of looked after children by gender, research indicates that

there is a significant difference in aspirations between looked after males and females. In a study by Who Cares? Scotland (2004) it is interesting to note that there appeared to be very real gender differences. For instance, 72% of all children aspiring to third level education were female in comparison to 28% of males. However, this difference appeared to be even more pronounced when it was found that not one of the males who participated in the research aspired to university. This is reflected in Shaw's study (1998), where it could be determined that, unlike males in the study, females had a multi-faceted vision of their future, hoping for both a family and a career. For Shaw the most surprising factor was that looked after females were more focused on having a career than the looked after males. She argues that this is the opposite of what would be found within the general population with males generally being more focused on having a career (Shaw, 1998).

Original Socio Economic Background

The original socio economic background of a child has not generally been considered in contemporary research. As such, this is a limitation of existing studies but it is widely accepted that there is a well established link between deprivation and children coming into care (Stein and Carey, 1986). Research conducted by the HMIE and SWSI (2003) illustrates that children looked after by local authorities are much more likely to come from disadvantaged backgrounds than better off circumstances and that their families are likely to have experienced

multiple social and economic disadvantages. This is reflected in work by Sinclair and Gibb (1996) and Gibb *et al* (2005) who argue that children from poor and disadvantaged families are much more likely to enter the care system and that the risk of coming into care increases if the family is in receipt of state benefits. A study by Bebbington and Miles (1989) found that the families of almost three quarters of children being admitted to care were in receipt of income support. Bebbington and Miles (1989) were also able to determine that only a quarter of children coming into care lived with both parents and that only 1 in 5 lived in owner occupied houses.

Challenging Intelligence Levels

Each child is born with potential and a successful childhood can be seen in terms of the achievement of that potential (Daniel, Wassell and Gilligan, 1999b). There is a common, but inaccurate, assumption however that all looked after children have some form of learning disability preventing them from performing well academically. This results in teachers, carers, social workers and society at large having little expectation of looked after children. It also results in looked after children having little expectation of themselves (Jackson, 1999). In spite of this, Jackson (1999) challenges this assumption as the intelligence of many looked after children falls within the normal range. For her the educational failure of looked after children cannot be attributed to the individual child, instead her research illustrates that the care system is to blame and that the educational failure of

looked after children has arisen out of a lack of appropriate input and encouragement from those responsible for the education and care of looked after children.

Experience Prior to Care

It has been argued that the experiences a child has before coming into care can impact on their long term educational performance. Aldgate *et al* (1993, 1994, and 1995) conducted a longitudinal study that examined the extent to which experience prior to care impacted on the long term educational performance of looked after children. The study followed the progress of 2 groups of children aged between 8 and 14 years old. Group 1 had been admitted to care because of neglect or suspected child abuse and group 2 had been admitted to care for reasons other than neglect or suspected child abuse. All of the children had been in care for at least 6 months and many of them had been in care for several years. The research was conducted using several standard instruments that measured achievement and behaviour at yearly intervals for the duration of the study. Overall, the results showed that group 1 performed less well than group 2. For the researchers the behavioural and emotional difficulties that group 1 had when they came into care had continued to impact upon their achievements. Yet, whilst group 2 fared better than group 1, the research illustrates that those children in group 2 still scored well below national average in reading, vocabulary and Maths (Aldgate *et al* , 1993, 1994, 1995).

Reasons for Being Looked After

Often the reasons for children becoming looked after are quite common. This is reflected in current research. Two Scottish Studies by Kendrick (1992) and Triseliotis *et al* (1995) found that among secondary school age children being admitted to care around 50% presented school related difficulties. For many, school problems had been a major factor in precipitating admission to care. This is not surprising as many children have a problematic time and find it difficult to conduct themselves in a way that is deemed acceptable. Other common reasons for children becoming looked after are identified by Gibb *et al* (2005). In their research, between a third and half of children who were in care came from families where marital/ partner relationships were dissonant and often marked by violence and where there was a repeated history of psychiatric problems, alcohol misuse or drug misuse. Despite the reasons for coming into care, research indicates that most children have found coming into care scary and confusing. Many children said it would have been easier if they had been told more about what to expect when coming into care (Shaw, 1998).

Care Factors

Are the Effects of Being Looked After A Downward Spiral?

According to Jackson and Sachdev (2000) becoming looked after away from home in the United Kingdom has been found to initiate a downwards spiral, even for children previously doing well in school before they become looked after in residential care or foster care (although, children looked after at home still perform least well educationally (Scottish Government, 2008)). Interestingly, whilst part of the findings of the Humberside Study (Borland *et al*, 1998) suggest that children looked after for many years perform better than those children admitted to care in their teens, further investigation confirms Jackson and Sachdev's (2000) argument that coming into care can be a downward spiral. In the Humberside study (Borland *et al*, 1998) 25% of children who began to be looked after before they were 10 years old obtained 1 GCSE (grade A-C) compared to 11% of those who became looked after as a teenager. In spite of this, no difference was found in the low proportions obtaining 5 GCSE passes (3% gained 5 passes at grades A-C). Some children had obtained other qualifications or made other achievements in music or sport. Nevertheless, just under half left with no qualifications compared to an estimated 7% of the whole school population in Humberside County leaving school with no qualifications.

In the Shaw Study (1998) almost half of all looked after children who participated stated that they had done better at school since becoming looked after. However,

Shaw (1998) found that the number of placement changes a child had experienced affected their perception of how well they thought they had done at school since being admitted to care. For example 60% of those who had 1 placement indicated that they had done better at school since coming into care compared to only 31% of those with more than 11 placements. Children who participated in the study did not perceive that the type of placement they had affected their educational progress (Shaw, 1998).

Stability and Length of Time Looked After

The stability of placements for looked after children in the care system is extremely important, especially since local authorities are not good at addressing this issue: Jackson and Thomas (2000) assert that the common practice of moving children from one placement to another is not good enough parenting. For them, children not receiving the consistent care other children would normally receive results in them not having comparable prospects. Moving house is well known to be one of the most stressful experiences in life and Jackson and Thomas (2000) consider, if one move is felt so intensely, what it must be like to 'suffer' this experience over and over again, as so many looked after children do. Biehal *et al* (1995) and Jackson and McParlin (2006) demonstrate that placement changes without close attention to continuity can lead to many deficits in the care of looked after children. It can result in looked after children being out of schools for long periods of time, a drop in achievement levels and disruption of examination courses. Repeated placement moves can make good school adjustment almost impossible and this in

turn increases the instability of placements. Indeed, being bombarded with a number of life stresses at once can be overwhelming for looked after children (Daniel, 2007).

Over the last 20 years it is difficult to know if instability has increased or decreased for the looked after population as there is so little information on the subject (Jackson and Thomas, 2000). However a large scale study by Rowe *et al* (1989) examined admissions, discharges and moves for looked after children within the care system in 6 English local authorities. The research demonstrated that half of the children had no moves and the remaining 43% had between 1 and 5 moves. Biehal *et al* (1995) carried out a similar study with children leaving care. The results showed that only 1 in 10 had remained in the same placement throughout their time in care and 1 in 10 had been placed 10 times. What Biehal *et al* (1995) found most alarming was that children in care who have unsettled placement experience tend to continue this pattern of instability and frequent movement after care, thus, affecting the quality of their adult life. This pattern of movement and disruption corresponds with the empirical evidence found in research carried out by Millham *et al* (1986); Pecora *et al* (2006); and Berridge and Cleaver (1987). For Hughes (1996) the risk of extreme instability is greatest for those who children who entered care at an earlier age, as they grew not to rely on stability earlier in their lives.

In respect of number of placements, studies carried out in England in the 1980's show that at least 50% of looked after children left care within the first 6 months of becoming looked after, with the majority doing so within 6 weeks. After 6 months the chance to go home had fallen rapidly and those who remained beyond the period constituted an increasing proportion of the total. These children were on average older and likely to have been looked after for reasons other than difficult situations within their families (Gibb *et al*, 2005). Similar research carried out by Biehal (2006) supported this finding. The situation in Scotland is not so dissimilar to the findings of Gibb *et al* (2005) and Biehal (2006). National statistics for 2003/2004 indicate that 27% of those who had been in care in the previous year had been looked after for less than 6 months and 17% had been looked after for between 6 months and 1 year. However, more than half (56%) of all looked after children in Scotland had been looked after for more than 1 year (Scottish Government, 2005c).

Research demonstrates that the length of time in care can have an impact on educational achievement (Cashmore *et al*, 2007 and Shaw, 1998). In her research, Shaw (1998) was also able to identify a link between length of time in care and attendance at school, which eventually impacts upon achievement. She found that those children who had been looked after for less than 6 months generally had poorer attendance (60% attending) than those who had been looked after for longer. She identified that along with stability came a gradual increase in

attendance, with 80% those in care for 5 years or more attending school regularly. In addition, Shaw (1998) was able to determine that the total number of placements that a looked after child had could have a negative impact on general welfare and school attendance. In her study, 53% of children who had had only 1 placement were positive about their education compared to only 32% of children who had had 11 or more placements.

Placement Type

While social workers have an important case management role, it has been argued that the environment in which looked after children live has a more immediate impact on their school experience (Borland, 2000). Indeed, it has been determined that a child's development, and thus their ability to achieve academically, is shaped by their family, peer group and their involvement in the wider community (Croll, 2004). Current research primarily considers the impact that placement type has on the educational achievement of children looked after away from home. Whilst it has been acknowledged that far more children are living in foster care than in residential care (Scottish Government, 2005c), there has been more research conducted concerning the experiences of children living in residential care (Jackson and Sachdev, 2000). Overall, residential care continues to be seen as a problem rather than a solution. There are some residential resources that have worked well but these are '*well kept secrets*' as the facilities are expensive (Hayden *et al*, 1999:193). Conversely, foster care is identified as providing a more

educationally favourable environment compared to other types of placement, with children in foster care more likely to be able to access the resources they need to assist them with their homework (Shaw, 1998). As previously mentioned in this chapter, there is little or no research directed towards the educational achievement of children on home supervision, nevertheless, Audit Scotland (2003) were able to determine that children looked after at home had lives that were characterised by poverty, poor housing, domestic abuse and alcohol and drug misuse. Consequently, it is no surprise that the educational achievement of children looked after at home is so dismal.

Looked After Away from Home

One of the major problems for children in residential care is that they are not typical of their peer group and not even typical of looked after children as a whole. In residential homes the behaviour of children can be chaotic and children can be unwilling to go to school. Characteristically children in residential care have a sense of being lost and of having no support from those people they encounter in their daily lives (Rickford, 2000). For Jackson and Sachdev (2001), residential care can have an anti-educational atmosphere, where often children have no access to study facilities or study materials or an understanding of the sustained effort and concentration required for serious educational work. For example, in the Shaw study (1998) the research findings demonstrate that only half of all children were always able to study, although there was a distinction between those in foster

care and those in residential care, with 59% of those in foster care always able to study compared to 26% of those in residential placements. A similar study conducted by Who Cares? Scotland (2004) divided the research findings into foster care, residential home and other residential setting. A disparity in the number of standard grades (SCQF level 4 or above) achieved across care setting was identified in the research. The proportion attaining at least 1 standard grade in a residential home (29%) was far lower than for those attaining at least 1 standard grade in foster care (67%) and residential school (57%). Research conducted in 2 local authorities in Scotland arrived at a similar conclusion, finding that children in foster care passed more standard grades than those in residential care (McClung, 2001).

Who Cares? Scotland (2003) carried out a research project examining the views and experiences of children in residential and foster care. For those in residential care, the main issues concerned individuality and group living. Essential points such as concepts of equality, individual identity and individual preferences were raised by looked after children. A common plea from looked after children is that not everyone understands they are not always to blame for being in care and that they became looked after as a result of wider issues within the family home over which they had no control. Particularly, children in residential care believed that staff in residential units did not understand that they were not always to blame for becoming looked after. Other issues identified through their research related to

relationships that children had with staff in units where they had previously been accommodated, and how the maintenance of such relationships was not always encouraged. Similarly, children commented on the unsettling effect that the high staff turnover in residential units has on them (Who Cares? Scotland, 2003). This is reflected in the study by Ridley and McCluskey (2003) who found that those in residential care were less happy with their placements than those in foster care. The critical factor was the quality of relationships the children had with staff and other residents. The perception of not seeing or missing family contributed to the lack of satisfaction with placement.

Hayden *et al* (1999) found that many social work managers, practitioners and academics had an ambivalent attitude towards residential care. This is because many people would argue that residential care can have a detrimental impact on the lives of looked after children. This view often has direct consequences for children living in residential units as care staff, often too frequently, perceive themselves as being unable to provide a stable and positive environment for these children to thrive and succeed. This has led to residential staff being criticised for failing to maximise the educational potential of looked after children, being ill informed about the education system and having low expectations of the children in their care (Hayden *et al*, 1999). In residential care, staff morale affects the experience for looked after children. There are three significant factors which impact upon this. Little (1998) found that staff morale was likely to be more

positive when residential workers were receiving regular supervision, when they had a role in care planning for looked after children and when they were provided with satisfactory training.

Foster care has become the dominant placement of our childcare system (Kelly and Gilligan, 2000) and some of the problems identified with residential care are considered to be less applicable to foster care. For example, children in foster care are given the opportunity to live in a family setting and in a community setting. Also, children looked after in foster care are given the opportunity to make attachment relationships with a foster family and this attachment can continue into adulthood (Kelly and Gilligan, 2000). However, foster care is still problematic, especially since more and more children with a greater degree of difficulty are drawing on and diminishing the pool of foster carers that we have (Kelly and Gilligan, 2000). Morris (2000) argues that there are not enough foster carers and enough recognition of the skills required to be a good foster carer. The need for a general improvement in foster care services has been recognised by the Scottish Government and they have launched a consultation into foster care services in Scotland (Scottish Government, 2006c).

When Who Cares? Scotland (2003) considered the experiences of children in foster care the findings illustrated that, as with those in residential care, children in

foster care were concerned with the perception that they were brought into care because of something they had done, rather than as a result of a wider issue in their family home. Another concern identified in the research was that children in foster care felt they were not treated the same as the foster families' biological children. In many instances foster children felt they were treated less fairly (Who Cares? Scotland, 2003). In terms of educational achievement, whilst Borland (2000) reports that children in foster care do better educationally than their peers in residential units, she was also able to determine that children in foster care did not perform as well as the general school population. Moreover, Biehal *et al* (1995) found that those children in foster care who did get qualifications had intensive support from foster carers, having been encouraged to stay at school for another year or go to college.

Looked After at Home

'Given the fact that home supervision is the most common disposal of the children's hearings, the dearth of research about the topic is somewhat surprising' (Murray, 2006:213).

However, what is of greater concern is that little consideration has been given to the educational achievement of children looked after at home under a home supervision order, despite them being the most vulnerable and least supported (Connelly and Chakrabarti, 2007). In essence, the difference for this particular

group of looked after children is that generally Social Work Departments have little control over their day-to-day attendance at school and in encouraging their educational progress on a day-to-day basis, although it is a requirement that the educational element of their care is considered at reviews. Nevertheless, national statistics for 2004-05 show that children looked after on a home supervision order perform less well than those living in a residential or community setting. Statistics illustrate that just over one third (37%) of children on home supervision orders attain at least 1 SCQF qualification at level 3 compared to 55% of those who are looked after away from home in a residential or community setting (Scottish Government, 2005c).

Murray *et al* (2002) conducted a study of home supervision between 2000 and 2002, funded by the Scottish Government. Whilst the study did not directly investigate the educational achievement of children looked after at home, the findings help explain the poor achievement of this group of children. In almost all instances, Murray *et al* (2002) found that there had been previous Social Work Services involvement for those children on a home supervision order. For many children involved in the research, the supervision order had been related to difficulties in the family such as financial and housing problems, mental health problems, domestic abuse and drug and alcohol misuse. Kendrick (1992); Triseliotis *et al* (1995); and Gibb *et al* (2005) support that such factors can have a significant impact on the lives of all looked after children and that in many

instances these difficulties have resulted in children being received into care. It could then be expected that these issues are likely to manifest themselves in the same way for those children looked after at home and those children looked after away from home, as the children will have similar experiences. Arguably, children looked after at home are at a further disadvantage as they continue to live in the family home and are never actually removed from the problematic situations at home.

Moreover, research suggests that local authorities are not providing children looked after at home with the support and guidance required, as the statute dictates. Murray *et al* (2002) identified a lack of close monitoring of home supervision cases. Murray *et al* (2002) also found that one fifth of cases were identified as having no allocated social worker. Also it appeared from case files that some key statutory requirements were not being implemented in the course of home supervision, particularly care plans. Care plans were found in only 17% of cases. Additionally, problems were identified with the timing of first visits and holding internal case reviews. The Social Work Inspection Agency (SWIA, 2006) conducted a comparable study. Through examining the quality of assessments, it was determined that the overall standards in important areas needed to be raised significantly, with just under half of those cases examined meeting a minimum standard. Also, SWIA found that case recording standards needed to be improved

upon and information about service performance was required to be routinely collected and used to plan and review services.

However, in the Murray *et al* study (2002) there were positive views expressed about the effectiveness of home supervision. Children referred on the grounds of care and protection were considered to have the most successful outcomes, followed by those referred on offence grounds. Home supervision worked least well for those referred on grounds of non-attendance at school. Despite the findings in the Murray *et al* study (2002), research by Fletcher-Campbell (1990); Walker (1994); and White (1996) suggests a link between poor educational achievement and the inadequate approach to care management by social workers.

Health Needs of the Looked After Population

Difficulties often experienced as a result of being looked after can affect children's health and behaviour (Gibb *et al* 2005). This in turn can impact on educational achievement. In a study conducted by Ridley and McCluskey (2003), children had little concept of health with their definition linked to physical fitness or absence of illness. For instance, Ridley and McCluskey (2003) found high levels of smoking (75%) and drinking to excess, with 14% stating they were drunk most days. In terms of drugs, 4 in 5 suggested they had taken drugs at least once. Moreover, the children themselves identified being in care, especially residential care, as a

barrier to a healthy life style. The children in residential care stated that residential staff did not view incidents of drug taking, smoking and drinking seriously. Moreover, the study showed that 27% of children started smoking whilst in residential care, 31% started taking drugs and 29% started drinking alcohol. Primarily, children stated that they started smoking, taking drugs and drinking alcohol to relive them of the stresses of being in care (Ridley and McCluskey, 2003).

Mental Health of the Looked After Population

There have been high levels of mental health needs found amongst the looked after population, although there is limited research which deals specifically with the impact that being looked after can have on the mental health of these children (Courtney and Dworsky, 2006; Fernandez, 2007; Koprowska and Stein, 2000 and Stanley, 2002). Richardson and Joughlin (2000) argue that children need consistency and continuity of care as a means of securing good mental health. Their research findings indicate the importance of clear boundaries being set for children. In addition, they highlight problems that can be encountered by looked after children relating to consistency in care and over matters concerning confidentiality. Richardson and Joughlin (2000) are able to demonstrate that a child who experiences even one extended separation from their primary carer is at risk from psychological ill effects. They go further and state that, when this experience is repeated many times, the child is placed in a state of chronic

insecurity and learns not to form any attachments or relationships in order to avoid the pain of losing that attachment or relationship.

Moreover, research suggests that the experience that many looked after children have at school can have a significant impact on their mental health. Richardson and Joughlin (2000) found that children could not discuss problems at school as a result of the hostility from other children with regards to their looked after status. They argue that this hostility has a high psychological impact on looked after children and that schools needed to take positive steps to examine this. What is more, Richardson and Joughlin (2000) found that on comparing their results with other clinical samples of depressive moods and low self esteem in the adolescent population, the results for the looked after population were much higher. In their study, they found a link between self harming behaviour and high scores on the depression scale. Also they found a link between self harm and low esteem. Females were found to be at higher risk of major depressive illness than males. These findings are comparable to Ridley and McCluskey (2003) who uncovered significantly high levels of depressive moods and low self esteem as well as deliberate self harm (45%) amongst the looked after population. Little (1998) also found that 2 in 5 looked after children had contemplated suicide.

Problems faced by Care Leavers

There is now a general emphasis on the importance of educational outcome for care leavers (Dixon and Stein, 2002; Gibb *et al*, 2005; Pecora *et al*, 2006). Over the last 20 years research has highlighted the problems faced by children leaving care. Largely, these studies have found that the preparation to adulthood has been variable and often concentrated on practical issues rather than the psycho-social issues that these children will face (Dixon and Stein, 2002; Stein and Carey, 1986; and Biehal *et al*, 1995). The transition from care into independent living tends to be accelerated for this group of children compared to the general population, in that, children leaving care tend to be 16/17 whereas the average age to leave home for others is 22 (Scottish Government, 2002:a). A study by Triseliotis *et al* (1995) highlighted the need for improved throughcare and aftercare services and the study also identified difficulties experienced by care leavers when dealing with agencies which helped them get money, work, education or housing. The research also pointed out the lack of consistency and continuity in the support offered by Social Work Services teams and foster carers. Particularly in Scotland, care leavers felt that the system was ready to discharge them before they were ready to be discharged from care. Under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, there were 2,245 care leavers entitled to aftercare services in Scotland in 2004-2005. On leaving care three quarters of these children were still in contact with Social Work Services. Just under half (41%) of these children were known to be economically active or be in training or education, 8% had moved three times

since leaving care and 11% had experienced at least one spell of homelessness (Scottish Government, 2005c).

Dixon and Stein (2002) undertook a research project commissioned by the Scottish Government, which examined the way in which local authorities are discharging their duties and powers to promote throughcare and aftercare of looked after children. The research showed that 40% of all care leavers did not have a strategy or formal arrangements in place in terms of education, training or employment. Additionally, one quarter of all social workers in the study had no knowledge of the qualifications of the children with whom they were throughcare and aftercare planning (Dixon and Stein, 2002). All of the children had left care before the age of 18, with three quarters of them having legally left care and moved into independent living at age 15 or 16 (21% and 52% respectively). The research concluded that children's care plans need to be more clear, comprehensive and accessible, with more prominence being given to throughcare and aftercare. In addition, it was found that whilst Social Work Departments had strong links with Housing Services, more consideration needed to be given to having formal arrangements set with Education Services, Health Agencies and Careers Services, especially since 43.8% of care leavers in the study were unemployed. Although eligibility for throughcare and aftercare services is contained within the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 and the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, half of the local authorities surveyed experienced difficulties in accessing and collating data on the

number of children who are eligible for throughcare and after care services. The research demonstrated that one third of children looked after at home were not assessed as eligible for throughcare and aftercare services, despite being eligible (Dixon and Stein, 2002).

Barnardo's (2001) have also participated in research ascertaining the views of looked after children. They found that children who had experience of the care system felt that it did not treat them with the respect they deserved or provide them with the support they needed. In addition, Barnardo's (2001) found a major concern to be that children in care thought that they should be made aware of issues that would affect them when they left care. The children saw being fully informed of aftercare procedures and benefit entitlements as a right. In many cases it was felt that this right was not met (Barnardo's, 2001). Gilligan (1999) argues that this concern and confusion could be avoided if looked after children were better prepared for life after care. Gilligan (1999) stresses the importance of helping looked after children rehearse, observe and discuss problem solving skills and strategies that they can use when they leave care. Whilst Gilligan (1999) identifies that the development of strategies and problem solving skills can be done through customized courses, he also argues that the support of a mentor may also provide important opportunities in this regard.

Education Factors

Motivation and Aspirations

Many looked after children live in situations where material and financial resources are limited and often well below a reasonable standard (Borland *et al*, 1998; Jackson, 1999; and Morris, 2000). It has been illustrated that the disadvantage detrimentally influences the motivation and aspirations of looked after children. Who Cares? Scotland conducted a study (2003) which examined motivations and aspirations for children who were looked after in Scotland. Over half of those who participated (56%) expressed their aspirations in terms of achieving academically, as many saw a link between educational success and success in employment. Other factors for motivation included the enjoyment of a subject and a positive relationship with teaching staff. For the younger participants their aspirations lay in the social aspect of school life. In terms of educational aspirations, only 7.7% of the children who participated aspired to further or higher education. This is far from the findings of research conducted by Ridley and McCluskey (2003) who found that 50% of the looked after children participating in their research thought that they would go to college or university by the age of 22. Whilst there has been a massive expansion in the United Kingdom in student numbers to Higher Education (Gayle *et al*, 2003), it is still an exceptional achievement for young people in care to go to university education (Jackson *et al*, 2003). Whilst there are no reliable figures it has been estimated that no more than 6% of care leavers go into higher education (Jackson and Ajayis, 2007) compared to 30% of the general school leaving population (Scottish Government, 2007e).

School Attendance

For some time now, it has been recognised within Social Work Services and Education Authorities' that a high percentage of looked after children do not attend school on a regular basis, either full-time or part-time, thus impacting upon their academic achievement (Dixon and Stein, 2002). In a study conducted by Who Cares? Scotland (2004), 24% looked after children who participated in the research were not attending school. Of these, 10% described themselves as unofficial school leavers, with the mean unofficial school leaver's age for males being 13.6 compared to 15.1 for females. Similarly, a 1 day census conducted by the Audit Commission (1994) reported that 40% of children looked after were not in school for reasons other than sickness. In Shaw's study (1998), three quarters of those who participated said they always attended school. For those children in the most stable placements, the research indicated that almost all (83%) attended school regularly and virtually none were excluded from school (3%) compared to the most disrupted (11 or more placements) where 61% reported attending school regularly and 10% were excluded (Shaw, 1998).

Exclusion from School

Research over the last 20 years demonstrates that looked after children are massively disadvantaged within the education system (Jackson, 1999; Jackson and McParlin, 2006; Fletcher-Campbell, 1998; Borland, 2000; Morris, 2002; and Barnardo's, 2006). The scale of the problem is highlighted in the number of exclusions, with over one third of looked after children being denied their right to

education altogether. Since coming into power, New Labour have made reducing the number of exclusions from school one of its key educational policies - a trademark policy - as is the drive to promote educational achievement amongst the disadvantaged groups. School, after all, is one of the first in a long line of situations in which individuals can become socially excluded, and often with long term consequences. In view of the drive to promote educational achievement amongst disadvantaged groups, the UK government set up the Social Inclusion Unit to co-ordinate research and policy on countering social exclusion. School exclusion is one area that has been researched by the Social Inclusion Unit. A report by the Social Inclusion Unit illustrated that looked after children are the most vulnerable to exclusion and truancy and are 10 times more likely to be excluded or play truant (Social Inclusion Unit, 2003). Similarly, in research conducted by Barnardo's (2006), 62% of looked after children had been excluded at least once compared to 7% of the general school population. These findings are reflective of national statistics which illustrate that 253 per 1,000 looked after population experienced exclusion compared to only 53 per 1,000 non looked after population (Scottish Government, 2005a).

Moreover, a study conducted by the Scottish Government expresses a concern about the numbers of looked after children who were excluded from school. Even though looked after children made up only 1.1% of the population in the study, they made up 8.1% of the total number of exclusions (Scottish Government, 2001a). It

has been argued that this is the result of the needs of this group of children being overlooked, and that there is an urgent need for co-operation between local authorities and other agencies to address the needs of looked after children who are over represented amongst those being excluded from school (Osler *et al*, 2001). Correspondingly, research undertaken by the Children's Society investigated the experiences of 80 families in England and their experience of school exclusion. The research identified that exclusion had a serious effect on the lives of the children involved and put the family under incredible stress. The research illustrated that travelling children and children with special needs were 6 times more likely to be excluded from school than other children but that looked after children were 10 times more likely to be excluded from school. The majority of these children were excluded as a result of physical aggression or disruption in the classroom. The research reports that exclusion leaves children feeling angered and sad and in many instances, children felt that they had not been treated fairly and that their behaviour did not merit exclusion (The Children's Society, 2001).

Unlike other children, many looked after children are not in a position to challenge their exclusion, especially if there are no adults who can support them in this. This acceptance of the education system reinforces their disadvantage through their inability to make demands for a fair education that considers and makes concessions for their material and cultural weaknesses. In my view, Jenkins

provides an excellent explanation of this which suggests that looked after children are *'too conscious of their destiny and too unconscious of the way in which it is brought about'* (1992:112). This does not mean that individual children are to blame for their educational failure. Instead it can be more subtly proposed that looked after children generally accept the legitimacy of the education system, including their position within it, and reinforce their disadvantaged position unconsciously by reducing their expectations for a satisfactory and fair level of education (Jenkins, 1992).

Bullying

Research has shown that children who are bullied can lack confidence and feel bad about themselves (Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2004). Following on from the Anti-Bullying Network funded by SEED, the Scottish Government has recently funded a 3 year Scotland wide project – Respect Me. This was launched in March 2007 with the primary aim of stamping out bullying in schools. However, research has highlighted that bullying is particularly problematic for the looked after population. In a study by Who Cares? Scotland (2003) three quarters of children stated that bullying was a serious concern for them with children suggesting that staff in schools did not appreciate the amount of bullying that took place. Many children in care find that school, amongst other places, can be an uncomfortable place where they experience physical and psychological bullying on a daily basis (Audit Commission, 1994). Research by Little (1998) stated that 40% of looked

after children participating in the research had been bullied. This is concerning, as a correlation between bullying and school attendance has been found by Rigby (1996) and Smith and Sharp (1994). Research has found that many children looked after thought that the only way to avoid bullying was to stay away from school all together. Bullying impacts upon the self worth of looked after children and cause their behaviour to spiral out of control (Who Cares? Scotland, 2003). In some instances, the effects of bullying can continue long after the bullying has stopped (Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2004). Bullying has been found to lead to self harm, or in the worst case scenario suicide (Sinclair and Gibb, 1996).

Government Initiative for Additional Resources

The Scottish Government provided local authorities with additional funding in 2001 to ensure that all children looked after away from home were provided with an educationally rich environment. Particularly, the money was to be targeted towards improving educational achievement. This was considered in research carried out by Who Cares? Scotland (2004). The research illustrated that more than half of the looked after children involved in their research were unaware of this recent investment and that few had been consulted on how their education could be improved upon. In total, 22% had been consulted by the local authority that was responsible for their care on how the money should be spent, with almost all of these suggesting that the money had been spent in the way they requested. Still, many of the children reported no direct benefit to them (18%) and others reported

only short terms benefit. This is especially true for those in foster care, who reported that that equipment bought for them did not follow them when they moved placement (Who Cares? Scotland, 2004).

Educationally Successful Looked After children

There are a small minority of children looked after who are considered to be educationally successful and show a greater ability to overcome the disadvantage of being looked after. Jackson (1999) conducted a retrospective comparative study of adults who had spent part or all of their childhood in care. She attempted to identify and determine what influences and experiences resulted in looked after children becoming educationally successful adults. Two separate groups were researched, one group that was regarded as educationally successful (educational qualification from 'A' level to degree level) and another group that was regarded as educational underachievers (few or no educational qualifications). The results demonstrated that those who left care with no educational qualifications encountered a whole range of problems that included unemployment, homelessness, early parenthood and social exclusion in general. By contrast, the key difference with the educationally successful group was that they had established a stable life in mainstream society. When asked to explain their success almost all participants in the study put it down to their own determination and motivation and many suggested their experience of being looked after was one that lacked encouragement and support. A staggering 92% said that Social Work Services played no part in planning for their higher education.

Poor Corporate Parenting Skills

Whilst Berridge (2007) argues that it is disingenuous to simply attribute the poor academic achievement of looked after children to Social Work Services and Education Services, in 2006 the Scottish Government concluded that local authorities still need to improve how they act as parents for looked after children in Scotland (Scottish Government, 2006b). It has been recognised that one of the problems with an integrated approach is the general acceptance that this is a progressive approach and that this will be successful. As Allen (2003) argues, often there is little evidence of the positive consequences of integrated service provision. For instance, Barnardo's (2006); Connelly and Chakrabarti (2007); Jackson and McParlin (2006); Fletcher-Campbell (1998); Walker (1994) and Bullock *et al* (2006) attribute almost all of the factors leading to the poor educational achievement of looked after children as being a direct consequence of the lack of collaboration between Social Work Services and Education Services. This emerges as a key factor at each level, from work with individual children at a local level to strategy and planning of services at a corporate level. This was found by Francis (2000) and Bullock *et al* (2006) who determined that the difficulties experienced by looked after children arose from an inter-play of a variety of social, structural and professional factors and that any attempt to redress the disadvantage must take account of such factors. White (1996) considers the reasons for what seems to be this lack of co-operation between Social Work Services and Education Services. She suggests that the problem may be more

related to the confusion within Social Work Services about their responsibility for the education of children in their care, rather than a lack of co-operation. Nevertheless, whilst it has been acknowledged that changes are required in social work practice to enable practitioners to deal with children whose complex problems can be overwhelming (Daniel, Wassell and Gilligan, 1999b), Jackson (1999) asserts that co-operation is still vital at a structural, attitudinal and practical level in order to improve the educational attainment of looked after children.

Indeed, it has been argued that one of the greatest failures of local authorities has been their inability to secure effective inter-departmental co-operation (Maxwell *et al*, 2006; Morris, 2000; Blyth and Milner, 1999; and Bullock *at al*, 2006). This is primarily because resources tend to be allocated to particular services rather than directed towards particular needs. Blyth and Milner (1999) see the requirements to produce children's service plans as an opportunity to ensure a much greater level of co-operation and recognise that some local authorities have taken the opportunity to develop integrated local authority services for children. However, they do recognise that government initiatives, encouraging collaborative inter-agency and inter-professional endeavours, have had to compete with legislative and policy developments promoting fragmentation and competition within and between public services, making such co-operation much more difficult. Furthermore, it is recognised that given the pressurised nature of social work

training and teacher training, there are few programmes that provide opportunities for teachers and social workers to appreciate each others value.

These findings are reflective of a report conducted by HMI and SWSI (2001). The first report of its kind in Scotland, it targeted children who were at the later stages of primary school education and at standard and higher grade level at high school. The report corroborated current research findings by acknowledging that the children looked after away from home were educationally disadvantaged in comparison to their peers. They tended to be behind in achievement, leaving school with fewer qualifications and were more at risk of being excluded from school. The report states that within Social Work Services it was unusual for any form of assessment to be carried out on any child within their sample, at the time they became looked after. It was even less likely, if an assessment had taken place, that it addressed the educational needs of the child. Where educational progress was described in an assessment, it was often inaccurate. Formal explanations for the relatively low priority given to education for looked after children by Social Work Services include a view that education is only one factor among many and that placement availability takes precedence over other factors. Another reason suggested relates to social worker's lack of awareness of how education and schooling might contribute to the child's overall development and long-term future (HMI and SWSI, 2001). A similar study by OFSTEAD (2000) ascertained that Social Work Services is failing looked after children. The report

highlights many instances where local authorities fail to ensure that children looked after away from home have care plans and placement agreements as specified in the legislation. Similarly, Hayden *et al* (1999) illustrate that there are still too many gaps in basic record keeping about looked after children, such as whether or not they achieved any examination passes.

An additional cause for concern in the report conducted by HMI and SWSI (2001) was found to lie within education. In a survey of school staff (including head teachers) the majority of respondents did not consider that they had a special role in relation to looked after children beyond the general responsibility they had for all children in their school. A few teachers even felt that children looked after were not a disadvantaged group. This is reflected in research carried out by Barnardo's (2001), where many children living in care had experienced negativity from teachers because they were looked after. Hayden *et al* (1999) suggest that whilst looked after children are a central part of child care in Social Work Departments, they are not a major issue for Education Services and Health Agencies when viewed against the very large population for which they are responsible (Hayden *et al*, 1999).

International Research

The majority of the international studies that I examined demonstrate that looked after children underachieve educationally compared to the non looked after population (Burley and Halpern, 2001; Fernandez, 2000; Fernandez, 2007; Weyts, 2004; Courtney and Dworsky, 2006; and Cashmore *et al*, 2007). However, in a longitudinal study conducted by Pecora *et al* (2006) concerning the educational outcomes of 1087 children who had been placed in foster care through the Casey Programme, empirical results demonstrate that focusing on educational progress can produce good results. Across 23 communities in the USA, Pecora *et al* (2006) were able to determine that high school graduation rates and college enrolment rates for those children placed in foster care through the Casey Programme were comparable with that of the general population in the USA at that time. By the time those who had been in foster care reached their 25th birthday, 87.8% of them a gained a high school diploma in comparison to 80.4% of the general population.

Despite good educational outcomes, Pecora *et al* (2006) found that the experience those in the Casey Programme had prior to coming into the programme was not so dissimilar to the experience that children looked after in the UK have. For instance, 50% of case files examined by Pecora *et al* (2006) indicated the presence of a psychiatric disorder at some point in childhood. Indeed, mental health services were the most common service provided to the children in the programme. Over one third of the children in the programme required extra help at school and over

one third had repeated a year at school. Empirical evidence also demonstrated that two thirds of the children had attended 3 or more schools and one third had attended four or more schools.

The significance of this research is that Pecora *et al* (2006) are able to determine that the main success factor is that the Casey Programme regards education as an integral aspect of care and places great emphasis on support for school progress and remedial intervention, where necessary (Pecora *et al*, 2006). For example, programme staff and foster carers were trained to help children overcome educational skills gaps. As a result of the programme having an integrated social work and educational management team, educational outcomes were continuously monitored for individual children. Through the use of attachment theories and development theories the programme also helped young people build healthy relationships with adults and provided them with the opportunity to live in a nurturing and supported environment. Pecora *et al* (2006), suggest providing this type of support may be significant in ameliorating the effects of earlier abuse and neglect that children experienced prior to becoming looked after.

Elsewhere in the United States the outcomes for looked after children are less favourable. The 2000 Washington State Legislature directed the Washington State Institute for Public Policy to review the problems and barriers to improving

educational achievement for children in long term foster care (Burley and Halpern, 2001). The findings of the research show that children in foster care score significantly lower than those not looked after in state-wide achievement tests. Moreover, the research shows that only 59% of those children in foster care complete high school compared to 86% of their non foster care population. In addition, at both elementary and secondary schools, twice as many children in foster care had repeated a grade at school, changed schools during the year or had enrolled in special education programmes. A child's length of stay in foster care and other placements did not however appear to be related to educational achievement in the research findings, as children in short-term care had on average the same educational deficits as children in long term foster care.

This echoes the findings of Smithgall *et al* (2004) who examined the educational experience of children in foster care, in Illinois, and found that almost all children struggled educationally and that their achievement was well below their year group. This often resulted in the children being held back a year or dropping out before the end of high school. The research findings suggest that this is a direct result of a child's experience prior to care. This is further compounded by the fact that looked after children are placed in lower performing schools and that there is poor communication between the school staff, case workers and foster parents, all compounding the poor progress and low levels of achievement of looked after children.

Another study from the USA by Courtney and Dworsky (2006) examines early outcomes for 603 young adults transitioning from foster care one year after leaving care. Whilst Courtney and Dworsky (2006) were able to determine that a number of the care leavers were living in stable situations where they were in some form of paid employment or in education, they found that the majority of care leavers were having problems during the early stages of the transition to adulthood. Courtney and Dworsky (2006) found that over 60% care leavers were not enrolled in education, and although 92% had been in paid employment in the year since they had been discharged from care, at the time of the research only 40% of the care leavers were in some form of paid employment. One third of the care leavers were also found to be suffering from mental health problems or were alcohol and/or substance dependant. Courtney and Dworsky (2006) conclude that care leavers making the transition to adulthood from foster care in the USA are faring worse across a number of domains than their peers, and that given the challenges these care leavers bring with them, and the relatively poor system of public support in place, it is not surprising that they struggle to make the transition (Courtney and Dworsky, 2006:217).

Similar research was conducted in Australia by Fernandez (2000) for Barnardo's. The study initiated an in-depth longitudinal study of children in long term care to identify placement outcomes in relation to education, health, emotional and behavioural difficulties. The research incorporated the views of children, carers

and caseworkers. Results show that the mean number of school changes for those children participating in the study was 5, with 13% having over 6 school changes. Half of the children stated that their experience of changing school was a negative one, with some having a sense of loss in leaving old friends behind and worrying about making new friends. Others recounted experiences of strong negative emotions and anxiety related to issues such as bullying. Only 14 % viewed the experience of changing school as positive. What is more Fernandez (2000) found that a quarter of the sample was identified as having learning difficulties and less than 70% were in mainstream school. In particular, for 37% of the sample, their educational performance was judged to be seriously 'below potential'. Also, the research found there to be a link between the number of unscheduled school changes and achievement, with one fifth of those whose achievement was seriously below ability being amongst those who experienced 6 or more school changes. Fernandez (2000) concludes that the education system and the care system are placing children looked after at increased risk of educational disadvantage.

In a report concerning another strand of this longitudinal study, Fernandez (2007) considers the emotional, behavioural and educational outcomes of children in foster care in the Barnardos 'Find a Family' programme in Australia. This programme is a long term foster care programme that is intent is on permanent placements with a committed family in which the child can establish a secure

psychological base (Fernandez, 2007:3). The research examines the impact of permanent placements on the lives of those children. Prior to coming to the 'Find a Family' programme, empirical research by Fernandez (2007) demonstrate that the majority of the 59 children in this study had experienced significant instability in their young lives. The children were first separated from their biological families at a mean age of 6 years old and more than half of the children had had multiple placements prior to entering the Barnardo's programme. Fernandez (2007) found that the children had particularly high levels of psychological need, with multiple problems affecting their emotions, mood behaviour and relational capacities. Children were also found to have significant problems with attention, social interactions, anxiety and aggression (2007:13). Overall, the Fernandez (2007) study indicates that despite concerns over emotional and behavioural development, academic performance and placement instability prior to coming to the family programme, there was evidence of emerging gains in academic, emotional and behavioural outcomes as children progressed in permanent placements (2007:17). Whilst acknowledging the views of others such as Thoburn (1990), that long term and intended permanent placements can still breakdown, these research findings go some way to supporting the optimistic trends noted in resilience studies concerning child development (Fernandez, 2007:17).

In an Australian longitudinal study by Cashmore *et al* (2007) focus was given to the educational and employment pathways and outcomes for 47 children leaving care.

Consistent with empirical evidence from other studies (Smithgall *et al*, 2004; Jackson, 1994; Biehal *et al*, 1995), the research findings demonstrate children leaving care were less likely to have completed secondary schooling than the general school population (35% and 80% correspondingly). Moreover, 4 or 5 years after leaving care, they were much less likely than their peers to be in full time employment or education. In many instances Cashmore *et al* (2007) were able to determine that many care leavers had a history of poorly paid and low skill jobs. However, those care leavers who had finished high school were more likely to be employed or studying and more generally doing better across a number of areas of their lives. In essence, Cashmore *et al* (2007) found that the more years of schooling completed the more stable and secure care leavers were 4 to 5 years after leaving care.

In European countries educational achievement for looked after children is not so dissimilar to those in the United States, Australia and in the UK. Weyts (2004) conducted cross national research in Belgium, England, Norway and Spain which considered the impact that different welfare systems had on the educational achievement of looked after children. Each of the chosen countries represented one of the four welfare models delineated by international social policy analysts such as Esping-Andersen (1990). For Weyts (2004) the underlying assumption was that welfare outcomes would vary according to the apparent differences in the scale, entitlement and scope of the public provision in each welfare model (Weyts,

2004:8). A sample of 50 looked after children were selected from each of the four countries. To qualify children had to be over 10 years old and have been looked after for more than 6 months. In order to ensure valid cross-national comparisons Weyts (2004) classified children into groups with similar fundamental needs to ensure a 'like-with-like' comparison was made across the countries. In terms of the empirical findings, Weyts (2004) was able to determine that children in foster care and residential care displayed similar needs across the four countries, irrespective of the welfare system. It was also determined that if children's educational needs were adequately met, outcomes in other areas of their lives improved and vice versa (Weyts, 2004:16). However, Weyts (2004) was unable to determine if there was a discernable variation in achievement levels for looked after children across different welfare systems and whether being looked after in foster care or residential care affected educational achievement.

In a cross national research project, Eurydice (2005) examined the educational achievement of looked after children in Germany, Greece, Finland, Netherlands, Poland and Spain. Across all of these countries it was found that looked after children did not generally receive the support that they required to reinforce the basic areas for their social and personal integration. In respect of school, it was found that schools did not always have the resources to meet the needs of looked after children and that this resulted in the under achievement of looked after children. Whilst this research did not consider children who were looked after at

home, it was found that children living in residential homes were particularly at risk of under achievement.

Summary

In summary, this review reflects on the underachievement of the general school population and demonstrates that looked after children in Scotland perform less well than other minority or marginalised groups. The review indicates that the experiences that many looked after children have in the care and education system is far from ideal. Not only do the vast majority of them leave school without any qualifications, a high percentage of them leave the care system at 16 years old with a damaged self-image, disillusioned as to what society has to offer them. This review considered the factors that are routinely identified as contributing to the poor educational achievement of looked after children and illustrated the importance of education as a means of ensuring social inclusion and success into adulthood. The factors that were identified and considered as impacting on the poor educational achievement of looked after children were: socio demographic factors; care factors; educational factors; and the role of the Corporate Parent. This experience is not unique to either Scotland or the UK. Findings from international studies show similar results despite the differences in education systems, family life and national cultures.

Through my review, I have highlighted that there is a lack of research pertaining to the educational achievement of children looked after at home. The research for my thesis was designed to address this issue and to further explore the educational achievement of children looked after in Scotland. My literature review led to

particular interest being given, first, to exploring the role of the Corporate Parent and specifically policy makers perceptions, knowledge and understanding of the areas that they are responsible for and the impact that their input can have on the lives of looked after children. Similarly, my literature review led to consideration being given to practitioner knowledge of relevant policies and practitioners perceptions of the position of looked after children. Furthermore, my review led to particular interest being given to the views of looked after children regarding their care and educational experiences. This review led to an exploration of the relationship between key care factors and the influence that these key factors have on educational achievement. It informed my exploration into theories of social capital and competing social theories, as I determined if they provided an explanation for the poor educational achievement of looked after children in Scotland today.

CHAPTER 3

LEGAL AND POLICY CONTEXT

Introduction

In Scotland, the ministerial vision for children's services is one where the Scottish Government aims to provide the highest quality of services to all children in Scotland and to provide vulnerable and disadvantaged children with the additional support they need. It has been made clear to local authorities and partner agencies (Health Agencies, Police, Children's Reporter Administration and the Voluntary Sector) by the Scottish Government, that better services and more effective use of resources can be only achieved by adopting a model of joint working across the full range of professional and support staff groups. This vision is identified in reports such as 'For Scotland's Children' (2001a)', 'Getting Our Priorities Right' (2001b), 'It's Everyone's Job to Make Sure I'm Alright' (2002b), 'Getting it Right for Every Child' (2006a) and the roll out of the 'New Community School Approach' (Scottish Government, 2001a). With this in mind, local government and its partners have begun to develop integrated service models.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide background information on legislation and policy pertaining to the education of looked after children in Scotland, providing a context for the research study of those living in Authority 1 and Authority 2. The chapter has been divided into parts. Part 1 is an essential part as it defines the

looked after population: the research population for this thesis, and provides background information on the process for becoming looked after in Scotland. This has been illustrated diagrammatically. As this thesis considers the educational achievement of looked after children, reflection has been given to the education curriculum in the public education system in Scotland. This is important for the analysis and interpretation of the research findings. To set the scene, there is also a brief discussion regarding the origins of the legislative framework for looked after children in Scotland. Following this, reflection has been given to legislation and policy pertaining to the looked after population, particularly the educational achievement of looked after children. Specific policies within Authority 1 and Authority 2, that can be associated with the educational achievement of looked after children at a local authority level, have then been taken account of. Last, a summary of the chapter is provided.

Becoming Looked After in Scotland

As noted in earlier chapters, children who are in the care of local authorities are described as 'looked-after' and are one of the most vulnerable groups in society. Under the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 looked after children are subject to the supervision of the local authority, where each local authority has a responsibility under the act to safeguard and promote the welfare and education of all children it looks after (Government, 2001a). A duty of Corporate Parenting requires the authority to do all that a good parent would. The majority of children looked after are looked after because they have suffered abuse or neglect and are in need of care and protection. Others become looked after as a result of offences they may have committed.

In Scotland, the process for becoming looked after is unique as local authorities do not automatically acquire parental responsibilities when a child becomes subject to compulsory measures of supervision, as they do in England and Wales (Connelly and Chakrabarti, 2007). The uniqueness of the Children's Hearing System in Scotland, which was established by the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968, means that a child's care and protection take primacy over juvenile justice (Connelly and Chakrabarti, 2007:83). As such, the Children's Hearing System in Scotland is managed through the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (SCRA), where a referral is made for all children who may need a compulsory measure (see Appendix 1). The main source of referral is usually the Police or Social Work Services but other

agencies such as Health or Education Services also make referrals, as well as any member of the public or the child themselves. When SCRA get a referral, an initial investigation is undertaken by a children's reporter to determine what action, if any, is necessary in the child's interests. The children's reporter, who generally has a law background, must consider whether there is enough evidence to support grounds for referral and decide if a compulsory measure of supervision is required. The reporter has 3 options available to them. First, they can decide that no further action is required. Second, they can refer the child to the local authority so that advice guidance and assistance can be given on an informal or voluntary basis from Social Work Services. Last, where the reporter considers that a compulsory measure of supervision is required, a children's hearing will be arranged. The hearing is a lay tribunal of three members, where the decision will be taken on whether or not a compulsory supervision measure is required. A compulsory measure is statutory legislation from the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 (SCRA, 2006). Whilst local authorities review cases and care plans regularly, supervision requirements are reviewed by the Children's Hearing System, usually annually, and can only be ended as a result of a children's hearing (Government, 2001b). The hearing has wide scope to insert conditions in the supervision requirement, and the local authority is responsible for ensuring it is carried out (SCRA, 2006).

Generally, under a supervision requirement most children are allowed to stay at home under the supervision of a social worker. For some children a

condition of the supervision order is that they live away from the family home either in a community or residential setting. This is illustrated in Appendix 1. However, the looked after community is neither a homogenous nor a static group. Children may be in care for a short time before going back to their families or discharged from their home supervision order. Alternatively they may move between residential care, foster care and being on a home supervision order for many years. Some children even go from being looked after to being adopted (Government, 2001b).

The Education System in Scotland

The Scottish education system has long enjoyed a high reputation worldwide (Scottish Government, 2005f). According to the Scottish Government this is due to a number of factors including the high calibre of individuals recruited for teacher training and the quality of teacher training course in Scotland's universities and teacher training colleges (Scottish Government, 2005f). The Scottish Government identify that this high reputation is also about having good quality leadership teams in schools, and about supporting learning for young people and helping each of them realise their own potential (Scottish Government, 2005f). However, there are those who do not necessarily agree that that the Scottish Education system is distinctive (Bryce and Hume, 2003). Indeed, Bryce and Hume (2003) argue that as the Scottish Education system becomes more complex, it is difficult to compare the differences between the Scottish education system and education systems throughout Europe. Therefore, it is difficult to argue with any certainty that that Scottish education system merits is high reputation worldwide (Bryce and Hume, 2003).

Currently there are 704,341 children attending 2748 public funded schools in Scotland (Scottish Government, 2007a). Almost all children in Scotland attend public funded schools, albeit there are self governing, independent and grant aided schools in Scotland. In the main, 1% of children attending public funded schools at any one time are children who are looked after by local authorities across Scotland

(Scottish Government, 2005f). As educational achievement is one of the primary focuses of this research, I consider it important to briefly examine the education curriculum in Scotland. This provides a framework for the analysis of the research data collected for the thesis and provides a context for the discussions that follow the analysis.

There are 3 types of compulsory education, primary, secondary and special. Primary schools have children aged from 5 years to 12 years (P1 to P7). Secondary schools are for children who are aged 12 (S1) to 16-18 (S4-S6). This depends on when the individual child chooses to leave school. In addition to primary and secondary schools there are public funded special schools for children with a wide variety of special needs. In Scotland some special schools provide either primary or secondary education and others provide both primary and secondary education.

Currently, there are approximately 382,783 children attending primary school in Scotland (Scottish Government, 2007a). In Scotland, like England and Wales, the age a child starts compulsory education differs from most European and Commonwealth countries, in that compulsory education starts at age 5 (Eurydice, 2006). In terms of structure, primary schools are organised in classes, by age, from primary 1 (P1) to primary 7 (P7). There are 3 broad stages in primary schools

in Scotland. These are: P1 to P3 (the early education stage); P4 and P5 (the middle stage); and P6 and P7 (the upper stage). In larger schools there will usually be more than one class at each stage. By regulation the normal maximum class size for P1 is 30, although the Scottish Government recommends a P1 class size of no more than 25. In P2 and P3 it is 30 and for P4 to P7 it is 33. In smaller schools a teacher often teaches children from 2 or more age groups in 1 class. As far as possible, the Education Authorities try to keep such composite classes to a limit of 25 children (Eurydice, 2006).

Most commonly, public funded primary school classes include both males and females and cover the full range of abilities. There is no selection or streaming by ability in primary schools and children are automatically promoted by age from one class to the next. Moreover, there is no requirement to achieve any particular level of achievement to progress to the next class in Scotland's primary schools and there is no system of repeating a year to enable children to redo a year's work. Instead, the schools system of support for learning addresses the needs of low attaining children as they move from class to class with children of their own age (Eurydice, 2006). Within primary schools each class is normally the responsibility of a class teacher who teaches all or most of the curriculum. Teachers often have additional resources such as classroom assistants and peripatetic teachers for art, drama, music and physical education. These peripatetic teachers normally teach in several different schools.

Presently there are 312,979 children attending Scotland's secondary schools (Scottish Government, 2007a). In Scotland, secondary education takes place between the ages of 12 and 18, with the compulsory element ending when children are aged 16⁴. Secondary schools operate in year groups (S1 to S6) and classes are usually organised by subject areas (e.g. Maths, History etc.). In secondary schools each day is divided into periods where children move around the school on a period by period basis studying different subjects each period. Secondary school children can be divided into 2 distinct groupings, lower secondary (S1 to S4) and upper secondary (S5 and S6). In S1 to S4, children in different years are normally taught separately. However, in some schools adults may join secondary classes and be taught with school age children (Eurydice, 2006). As with public funded primary schools, public funded secondary school classes usually include both males and females and cover the full range of abilities. In secondary schools it is not uncommon for streaming to occur on the basis of ability for all levels (S1 to S6) (Eurydice, 2006).

In Scotland there are 6,975 children in special schools (Scottish Government, 2007a). As noted previously, children aged between 2 and 19 can attend public funded special schools and school attendance is mandatory for those aged 5-16, as it is for those children in mainstream schools (Clark and Munn, 1997). Children

⁴ The school leaving age is generally sixteen (after completion of standard grades) but this is dependent on date of birth. Those children who will be aged 16 between March and September can leave school at the end of May and those who will be 16 between October and February can leave school at the end of December.

attending special schools usually do so as they require additional care, attention and support for a number of reasons. Generally speaking, children attending special schools have a physical disability or a social, emotional or behavioural difficulty. Also, children with an additional support need can also attend mainstream primary and secondary schools. This often comes down to parental choice.

The School curriculum in Scotland aims to *'equip children with the skills, knowledge and experiences they need to realise their potential, fulfil their ambitions and succeed in later life'* (Scottish Government, 2007b:1). The curriculum in Scotland can roughly be divided into 2 parts. First, there is the 5-14 curriculum covering children from P1 through to S2 and then there is the post 14 curriculum which considers children from S3 through to S6. The curriculum is non-statutory in Scotland and is not dictated by the Government. Therefore, responsibility for what is taught lies with local authorities and schools, taking into account national guidelines and advice (Scottish Government, 2007b). Whilst all public funded primary and secondary schools follow the 5-14 curriculum and the post 14 curriculum, not all children in special schools are able to follow these. Usually this is dependant on the particular additional support needs of individual children.

As noted, the structure, content and assessment of the 5 to 14 curriculum is governed by non-statutory national guidelines. These help local authorities and head teachers decide what is taught in their primary schools and during the first two years of lessons at their secondary schools. The 5 to 14 curriculum is divided into five broad areas: language, maths, environmental studies, expressive arts and religious and moral education. It is expected that children in particular year groups will attain specific levels (Scottish Government, 2007b). This is documented in Appendix 2. Achievement at specific levels is measured through class testing, although children are assessed when it is thought that the child has reached a particular level rather than at the end of a school year.

Secondary education for children in Scotland begins when they are around 12 years old. The first 2 years of secondary school is covered by the 5-14 curriculum. Following this, in S3 children begin working towards national qualifications (NQs). The national qualifications system, known as the 'Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework' (SCQF), is administered and quality assured by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA). National qualifications take the form of continuous assessment and examinations and include standard grades and national units/courses at seven levels. These levels are as follows: Access (1, 2 and 3); Intermediate 1; Intermediate 2; Higher; and Advanced Higher. Generally standard grade courses are normally taken in S3 and S4 and take two years to complete. These are offered at 3 levels; credit (SCQF level 5), general (SCQF level 4), and foundation (SCQF level 3). Some schools now offer intermediate courses (SCQF

3 and 4) in place of standard grades in S3 and S4 (Scottish Government, 2007b). In S5 and S6, in the main, children study for highers and advanced highers (SCQF levels 6 and 7), although less able children may well study at Intermediate level in S5 and S6. The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework is illustrated in Appendix 3. Appendix 3 also provides a comparison of qualifications across all other countries in the United Kingdom.

The current 5-14 and post 14 curriculum has undergone a lot of changes over the last few years and many schools now see the curriculum as too cluttered and disjointed. As a result there are changes afoot, with a major review of the curriculum in Scottish schools being undertaken (Scottish Government, 2007b). This is known as 'Curriculum for Excellence'. For the first time in Scotland this will create a seamless curriculum from age 3 to age 18, offering children greater choice and opportunity and giving teachers more professional freedom (Scottish Government, 2004d). Nevertheless, it is still too early to determine how this will operate and whether or not it will be successful in improving the school curriculum in Scotland.

Appendix 4 provides a diagrammatic overview of the current education system in Scotland.

The Legislative and Policy Framework in Scotland and its Origins

'Like most things in the United Kingdom, services for children and families have long historical antecedents and reflect a preference for piece-meal reforms rather than radical policy shifts'

(Colton and Hellinckx, 1993:212)

For Colton and Hellinckx this means that much of what exists today both legislatively and at a practice level within the childcare field has evolved slowly over the years. Indeed, most of the present day childcare services have been identified as originating from the poor law (The Poor Law Amendment Act 1834 and 1845 Scottish Poor Law Act) and many of the features of these laws can still be identified in current social work policy and practice (Colton and Hellinckx, 1993). However, it was at the start of the 20th century in the United Kingdom that there was a real growing social concern for children from the disorderly lower classes (Hayden *et al*, 1999). This provided the government with motivation for intervening positively in the childcare field. As well as the 1908 Social Welfare Act the wider social reforms of the 1906-1914 liberal government were an important focus on general child welfare. The introduction to school meals in 1907 had already signified a growing concern with the state's responsibilities in relation to childcare. Although there had been other indicators of growing public concern about the welfare of children earlier than this which included the foundation of various voluntary organisations such as Dr Barnardo's (1870), National Children's Home

(1869) and NSPCC (1884). However, for Hayden *et al*, examining histories of these societies suggests an element of competition to '*protect the faith*' as much as philanthropy (1999:20).

It was not until the end of the Second World War that there was a real flurry of activity in relation to child welfare in the United Kingdom. The post war years were a period where children began to be considered as a '*positive asset to be cherished, supported and provided for*' (Hayden *et al*,1999:21) and much of the development of current statutory legislation is more likely to be descended from the Children Act 1948 (Colton, 1988). The Children Act 1948 was part of the post war settlement that we call the 'welfare state'. This act was very significant and can be credited with first introducing the concept that children might be looked after not as a punitive response to their own misbehaviour or as a result of the inadequacies of their parents, but as a service to families. For Jackson and Thomas (2000), this was the first act that worked towards children being returned to the family home unless their families showed themselves unsuitable to have their children back home. Where children could not be returned home, the Children Act 1948 was arguably the first piece of legislation which attempted to ensure that children who were looked after would be provided with good care and should be able to expect the same standard of care, education and maintenance as ordinary children in the community. Over the 55 or so years since the historic children's Act (1948), changes both in social services and wider society have had an effect on the way in

which the care system provides for children. The aim of the care system has ostensibly been to make life for children as normal as possible (Jackson and Thomas, 2000). This can be identified in the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968, where it was deemed the responsibility of local authorities to *'promote social welfare'*. This duty still underpins Social Work Services in Scotland today. Amongst other factors, it places a responsibility on local authorities for supporting children and their families and in protecting children. It also made way for the establishment of the Children's Hearing System in Scotland in 1971.

It was with the advent of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 that considerable advancement in childcare law, policy and practice has taken place. The act reflects a number of key articles from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), which were ratified in the United Kingdom in 1991. This act is the primary legislation for governing the welfare, protection and supervision of children in Scotland and its provisions include: parental rights and responsibilities; provision of services by local authorities; children's hearings; child assessment orders; child protection; supervision; and adoption. Quite significantly, the act is clear about the educational rights of looked after children. The Children (Scotland) Act 1995 states that *'children who are looked after should have the same educational opportunities as all other children for education, including further and higher education, and access to other opportunities for development* (HMI and SWSI, 2001:2).

Following on from the Children (Scotland) Act 1995, one of the pivotal pieces of work to come out of the newly created Scottish Parliament was 'For Scotland's children' (2001a). This was an action plan that set the agenda for the Scottish Government to reform children's services in Scotland. Most notably, it was the impetus that encouraged progress between Local Authorities, Health and other stakeholder agencies in Scotland by pushing for a more integrated approach to children's services. Whilst 'For Scotland's Children' (2001a) concerns all children in Scotland, this action plan is about ensuring that all children have the necessary support to widen their opportunities for the future. The Scottish Government have already implemented initiatives that promote a more integrated approach to providing services for children through schemes such as Sure Start, Integrated Schools and Social Inclusion Partnerships.

Despite it having being widely recognised by researchers in the field that looked after children have been performing less well than their peers for the last 20 years (Aldgate *et al*, 1993; Borland *et al*, 1998; Fletcher-Campbell, 1990; Stein and Carey, 1986; and Walker, 1994) and specific references being made in respect of the educational achievement of looked after children in the Children (Scotland) Act 1995, arguably it took the government until 2001 to research and acknowledge the extent of the problem in Scotland and to come up with an action plan for combating this. This is what is commonly known as know as 'Learning with Care' (HMI and SWSI, 2001). It is a report of an inspection that was undertaken in 1999-2000 by

HMI and SWSI relating to the educational achievement of children looked after away from home. Evidence from the inspection indicates that children looked after away from home are disadvantaged educationally. The report makes a number of recommendations to improve the educational achievement of children looked after away from home (HMI and SWSI, 2001). These recommendations are considered later in this thesis. Following this, in 2003 HMIE and SWSI produced a 'Learning with Care' information pack for those involved in the care and education of all looked after children, providing more practical advice on improving educational outcomes (HMIE and SWSI, 2003).

The 'Learning with Care' policy (HMI and SWSI, 2001) is supported by additional standards pertaining to the educational achievement of children looked after away from home. This is as a direct result of the formation of the Scottish Commission, which was set up following the Regulation of Care Act (Scotland) Act 2001. The Scottish Commission has set standards which includes local authorities being responsible for making looked after children aware of the care and services they are entitled to. The most significant standard is standard 13 '*staff support you to make sure you achieve your potential at school*' (Who Cares? Scotland, 2003:76). Whilst 'Learning with Care' (HMI and SWSI, 2001) does not consider the educational achievement of children looked after at home, 'Getting it Right for Every Child' (Scottish Government, 2006a) provides details and recommendations based on a review of the Children's Hearing System. The review has much wider

implications than had first been anticipated. Amongst proposals related to the Children's Hearing System, there are proposals for new statutory duties on all agencies to first, identify children who are in need, and second, to seek and record children's views. There was also a proposal for an Integrated Assessment Framework (IAF) for those services working with children and families (Health Agencies, Education Services, Police, Social Work Services and the Voluntary Sector), all ensuring that the outcomes for children are good. Relating specifically to education, in the guidance it has been recognised that '*children and young people should have access to positive learning environments and opportunities to develop their skills, confidence and self esteem to the fullest potential*' (Scottish Government, 2006a:Vision).

After the research for this thesis was completed the Scottish Government launched a framework called 'Looked After Children and Young People: We Can and Must Do Better' (Scottish Government, 2007c). This framework complements 'Learning with Care' (HMIE and SWSI, 2001) and pledges the commitment of the Scottish Government, working in partnership with local authorities, Health Agencies and other partner agencies, to improving the outcomes for all looked after children. Unlike 'Learning with Care' (HMIE and SWSI, 2001), 'Looked After Children and Young People: We Can and Must Do Better' (Scottish Government, 2007c) is a framework that considers children who are looked after at home along side those looked after away from home. Whilst the framework is primarily concerned with the

educational achievement of looked after children, it also considers areas beyond the traditional sphere of education that impact on the lives of looked after children, which in turn impacts on their educational outcomes. Five key themes are identified in the framework. These are: working together; becoming life long learners; developing into successful and responsible adults; being emotionally, mentally and physically healthy; and feeling safe and nurtured in a home setting. The themes fit in with the Scottish Ministers' vision for children in Scotland in 'For Scotland's Children' (2001a). Overall the Scottish Government identify 'Looked After Children and Young People: We Can and Must Do Better' as a catalyst in driving forward positive solutions for looked after children (Scottish Government, 2007c).

The government has also begun to emphasise the importance of support for care leavers through the Children Leaving Care) Act 2000. Again, research over the last 20 years has indicated that children leaving care face many problems with housing, employment and general social inclusion. It has been identified that these issues are directly affected by the poor academic achievement of the looked after population (Dixon and Stein, 2002; Stein and Carey, 1986; Biehal *et al*, 1995). The government passed the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 as a result of a Scottish Government working group set up to advise on the improvement of throughcare and aftercare services for care leavers in Scotland. The act made significant changes to the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 by extending the duties of local

authorities. Until the act of 2000, local authorities were responsible for looked after children until their 16th birthday or until they were discharged from care sometime after this. This act now makes sure that those discharged from care remain the responsibility of local authorities. However, the act is very complex and imposes different duties on local authorities. One of the most important parts of the act is section 6. Prior to the act, care leavers could claim welfare benefits in the form of income based job seekers allowance, income support and housing benefit. Section 6 removes the rights of the majority of care leaver's entitlement to such benefits. Instead the local authority is under a new statutory duty to assess and meet the needs of care leavers through a pathway plan, including determining and paying allowances that replace benefits. The principle behind this is that the local authority assists the care leaver in making a successful transition from care in to a stable environment where they are living independently and are self sufficient (Scottish Government, 2002a).

Other more general education legislation pertaining to all children in Scotland, including looked after children, is the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000 and the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004. The Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000 supersedes the Education (Scotland) Act 1980. It is the first piece of legislation put in place which gives all children a legal entitlement to an education. This act gives local authorities the duty to make suitable arrangements for the provision of education where a child is

unable to attend school for reasons such as exclusions. The research outlined in my Literature Review in Chapter 2 demonstrated that looked after children were more likely to be excluded than those not looked after (Social Inclusion Unit (2003), Osler *et al* 2001) and the Children's Society (2001)) and for the first time Social Work Services in Scotland finally have legislation to ensure that Education Departments across Scotland take the responsibility for providing suitable educational placements for looked after children. Moreover, the act also gives individual children 'with a legal capacity' the right to appeal against exclusion (HMIE and SWSI, 2003). Similarly, the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 introduces a new system for identifying and addressing the additional support needs of children who face a barrier to learning. Again, it is part of the agenda for action aimed at improving Scottish education as set out in 'Ambitious, Excellent Schools' (Scottish Government, 2004b). It also aims to improve the outcomes for all children, including the looked after population, through effective multi-agency working and it is part of the vision contained in 'For Scotland's Children' (Scottish Government, 2001a).

The Policy Context within Authority 1 and Authority 2

Section 19 of the Children's (Scotland) Act 1995 requires all local authorities and their partner agencies in Scotland to prepare and review children's services plans. These plans specify three-year targets for service provision and are the reference point for action in Education Departments, Social Work Departments and Health Authorities for improving the life circumstances of local children. In more recent years, as set out in the '*Local Government in Scotland Act 2003*', in planning for services, providing services and policy making, local authorities have been directed by the government to take account of their detailed '*Guidance for Integrated Children's Service Plans 2005-2008*' (Scottish Government, 2005e). With this in mind, consideration is given to childcare policy within Authority 1 and within Authority 2. Particular consideration is given to childcare policy that impacts on the looked after population, especially the educational element of their care. However, as the Scottish Government provided detailed guidance to local authorities for service planning, other than the use of slightly different terminology, there was very little disparity in the individual approaches taken in Authority 1 or Authority 2.

In line with national policy, in both Authority 1 and Authority 2, developments have taken place between each local authority and their partner agencies where they have begun to move towards integrated service provision. Already in Authority 1 there are joint planning structures in place for services to children. This is also the situation in Authority 2. The primary reason for this is to improve local service

delivery and to synchronise and bring together coherence amongst partners through Community Health and Care Partnerships (CHCPs). The purpose of joint working is to reach agreement on the way to resolve particular challenges or barriers to the support necessary to deliver better services to children. This challenge is set out in a number of joint plans, for example, Joint Health Plan's and Integrated Children's Service Plans. Additionally, an Integrated Assessment framework (IAF) is being developed locally in Authority 1 and Authority 2 through partnership working with Social Work Services, Health Agencies, Education Services and the Scottish Children Reporters Administration (SCRA). Amongst other things this is to encourage a consistent approach, reduce duplication of effort and encourage better record keeping and inter-agency information sharing.

Within Authority 1 and Authority 2 the local authority and partner agencies have two almost identical overall aims in providing children's services. First, to provide excellent services to all children and their families (universal services) and second, to identify at the earliest stage, vulnerable children who require additional support (targeted services). In terms of universal services, both Authority 1 and Authority 2 identify that the needs of most children and their families will be met by universal services such as Education Services, Health Agencies, Housing Services and Community services. However, for the most part, the local authorities and partner agencies will target services that are aimed at supporting the most vulnerable children. This includes children looked after at home and away from home.

In respect of service planning and provision for the looked after population, in both Authority 1 and Authority 2, as is the case in other local authorities, children looked after at home are considered as a separate target area from those looked after away from home. Nevertheless, within their plans, both Authority 1 and Authority 2 have a set of key service objectives that they are working towards to benefit children who are looked after. By and large this includes ensuring an integrated approach is taken in assessment and care planning where Education Services, Health Services and Social Work Services are involved, and where appropriate, other services are involved as and when required. In addition, both Authority 1 and Authority 2 state they will strive towards providing an array of support/care provision and ensure that alternatives to care provision are available for children looked after away from home. Another key service objective set by Authority 1 and Authority 2 is that children aged over 16 years leaving care will have access to flexible support which meets their overall needs, including housing, careers and health provision. Related to this, both have a set of key targets including developing learning opportunities for all children living in Authority 1 and Authority 2 and the commitment to developing or further developing multi-agency support for care leavers. Specifically, in terms of academic achievement of looked after children, both Authority 1 and Authority 2 have a key target, which is to improve the educational achievement of looked after children.

Each Integrated Children's Service Plan (ICSP) has to be monitored and reviewed by local authorities and partner agencies on an annual basis, with each planning cycle lasting 3 years. Not surprisingly, both Authority 1 and Authority 2 propose to monitor and improve the educational outcomes and achievement of all looked after children in similar areas. This includes monitoring and improving on the attendance of looked after children at school and monitoring and increasing the number of looked after children aged 15-18 attending school. Reducing the number of exclusions in the looked after population is another outcome both are trying to achieve. Moreover, Authority 1 and Authority 2 intend to monitor and increase the number of children with individual education plans. In terms of care leavers, the aim of both local authorities and their partner agencies is to monitor and increase the number of children leaving care who have a training or employment place, thus reducing the number of care leavers who are unemployed.

Summary

In summary, in this chapter I have provided background information regarding the process for becoming looked after in Scotland. The chapter described the process from the child being referred to the Children's Reporter through the journey to a children's hearing and then, where deemed necessary, a statutory supervision order being made. An explanation has been given as to where the child may live whilst being looked after. In addition, this chapter gives a brief account of the public education system in Scotland. It is recognised that the compulsory age for education in Scotland is between 5 and 16 years old and that there are 3 types of public funded schools in Scotland. First, there are primary schools, where children attend from ages of 5 to 12 years old, progressing on an annual basis from primary 1 (P1) to primary 7 (P7). In primary schools, children follow the 5-14 curriculum. Then, there are secondary schools, where children between the ages of 12 and 16-18 attend, progressing on an annual basis from 1st year to 6th year (S1 to S6). In secondary schools children in S1 and S2 follow the 5-14 curriculum and children in S3 onwards follow the post 14 curriculum. The post 14 curriculum concerns national qualifications within the SCQF framework, such as standard grades and highers. Children between the ages of 2 and 19 can attend special schools, although the statutory age for children attending special schools is still 5 to 16 years old. Whilst special schools do follow the 5-14 and the post 14 curriculum, not all children in special schools are able to be tested in either of these areas.

Following this, reflection was given to the legislative and policy framework in Scotland for looked after children, with particular consideration being given to educational achievement. This part of the chapter examined the origin of current day legislation and policy, dating as far back as the Scottish Poor Law Act in 1845 and the 1948 Children Act. I also reviewed relevant current day legislation and policy where it had a bearing on the educational achievement of the looked after population in Scotland. Lastly, in this chapter I explored the policy context within Authority 1 and Authority 2. From a close examination of their ICSP it is apparent that both local authorities, and their partner agencies, are working towards integrated service planning and provision for children's services. This is as a direct result of a framework laid out by the Scottish Government. Consequently, the key service objectives for Authority 1 and Authority 2 are very similar in particular; those pertaining to the educational achievement of looked after children (including the action plan for monitoring and improving these).

Reviewing the legal and policy context surrounding the lives of looked after children led to particular interest being given to the role of the Corporate Parent. Specifically, it has led me to consider the extent to which the legal and policy context can be associated with the experiences and educational achievement of looked after children. Consequently, I have examined policy makers and practitioners knowledge of the most relevant policies and frameworks pertaining to the educational achievement of looked after children. I have also considered their

perceptions of the impact that these policies have on the lives of looked after children. Following this, I have explored the experiences that looked after children had at school and where they lived, to determine the efficacy of national and local policy implementation and service delivery.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

Introduction

'There are 3 major ingredients in social research: the construction of theory, the collection of data, and no less important, the design methods for gathering data. All of them have to be right if the research is to yield interesting results'.

(Gilbert, 1998:18)

The theoretical context for my research is considered in this chapter. Following this, the research design has been set out and details are provided on the methodology I used to undertake the research. Details are also provided on the research questions which helped form and determine the approach that was taken throughout my research. There were formal procedures that had to be taken into account in order to secure access to data and research respondents and these procedures are detailed in this chapter. Consideration has then given to defining the sample groups involved in the research. The methodology employed to undertake the research, information on the research tools used and data construction are detailed in the chapter. The process of undertaking the analysis on the research data has also been established in this chapter and reflection has been given to ethical issues surrounding the research, with particular thought being given to the multiple responsibilities I faced as a researcher.

Theoretical Context

Whilst applied policy related child welfare research in the UK is arguably amongst the strongest in the world, empirical child welfare research in the UK fails to take account of wider social theory (Berridge, 2007). However, social understanding, social theory and social research are intrinsically connected and they consist of a 'triad' of characteristics that make sociology a distinct approach to investigating society (Gilbert, 1998). All social research is theory dependant (Harvey, 1990) and throughout this research I have endeavoured to recognise the importance of making a connection between theory and research. This is because social theory helps define patterns and give some meaning to the sorts of observations that social researchers make when investigating the social world (O'Brien, 1998). As well as providing explanations, social theory additionally provides predictions of what we might expect to find in the social world (Gilbert, 1998). In terms of the structuring of social theory, generally, theory is constructed through induction where common elements or instances are extracted and are applied to explain other instances by the means of logical deduction (Gilbert 1998). This approach was adopted in my research. Moreover, in order to test such theories, indicators for each concept need to be developed and the data collected needs to be able to be compared to the predictions made from the theory (Gilbert, 1998). Again, this approach was taken in this research as both qualitative and quantitative indicators were devised to measure the concepts.

It seemed appropriate to use social capital theory to explore the educational achievement of looked after children for several reasons. First, the government and policy makers identify the development of social capital as a way of combating social exclusion (Bassani, 2007). Second, social capital has been used to help understand the educational underachievement of groups of poorer children (Munn, 2000). Third, the concept of social capital has never been used before to explain the position of looked after children. My aim was to investigate the extent to which the experience of being part of the looked after community and the experience of being identified as a looked after child in places such as school, care placements and the community at large, impacts on social capital. Specifically, I wanted to consider if social capital theory provided a theoretically sound explanation as to why looked after children leave school with fewer qualifications, are more likely to be unemployed, more likely to be homeless and generally more likely to face social exclusion throughout their lives.

Social capital is an attractive and useful idea for attempting to make sense of a range of outcomes, processes and social institutions and part of its appeal is the way in which it helps us to think about these aspects in new or innovative ways (McGonigal *et al*, 2007). This is why social capital could be a useful theoretical framework for explaining the low educational achievement of children looked after in the UK today. The concept of social capital was developed in sociology and political science to describe various resources that people may have through their

relationships in families, communities, groups or networks (Catts and Ozga, 2005 and Kawachi, 2000): by resources, I am referring to social, personal and economic assets (Healy, 2001). Whilst there are many possible approaches to defining social capital, much to the exasperation of anyone trying to research it (ONS, 2001), the general consensus in the social science world is towards the definition that emphasises the role of networks and civic norms (Healy, 2001 and Li *et al*, 2003), where networks serve to mobilise the resources that individuals have (Lin 2001).

It has only been in the last 20 years or so, since Bourdieu, Coleman and Putnam began to conceptualise social capital (ONS, 2001), that its value as a theory for explaining social life has been recognised. Each of them has played a different role in the development of the theory. Bourdieu (1986) was the first significant figure to recognise the usefulness of social capital as a theory for explaining social phenomena. Coleman (1998 and 1990) followed by providing a theoretical framework for social capital, subjecting it to empirical scrutiny and developing ways of using it for research purposes (Baron *et al*, 2000). Putnam was responsible for exporting the concept out of academia in to the wider media with his book '*Bowling Alone*', which examines the decline of social capital in American society, as people chose to undertake individualised activities rather than be part of groups and organisations (Putnam, 2000).

In the UK, social capital has become firmly established in the political lexicon and has generated a significant amount of interest within government research, statistics and policy (ONS, 2001). For instance, the Department of Health, the Department for Education and Skills and the Home Office have conducted research to measure and analyse the impact of various aspects of social capital. Social capital has been applied in a variety of contexts. In particular, social capital has a well established relationship with the outcomes concerning policy makers, namely economic growth, social inclusion, better health and more effective government (Kawachi, 2000 and ONS, 2001). Hence, my interest in researching its relevance as a framework for considering the educational achievement of looked after children.

Social capital is developed in our relationships through doing things for one another and in the trust that we develop in one another. Social capital helps in bonding fragmented social life, in the bridging of communities to contacts beyond their immediate environment and in the linking of people to formal structures and agencies that they may need for help with opportunities and advancement (Putnam, 1995 and Catts and Ozga, 2005). Notwithstanding the competing views regarding the definition of social capital (ONS, 2001), it is generally accepted that trust and networks are the two key components of social capital (Baron *et al*, 2000). In respect to networks, it has been determined that there are three forms of social capital connecting people together. These are bonding social capital,

bridging social capital and linking social capital. Those attempting to put the concept of social capital on a more rigorous footing have demonstrated that it is important to distinguish between the different types of social capital. Indeed, it is argued that the three types of social capital will produce different outcomes (Li *et al*, 2003). Furthermore, a person's social capital is affected by trust (Baron *et al*, 2000 and ONS, 2001). Trust is defined as the expectation within a community for regular, honest, co-operative behaviour based on community shared norms. These do not require contracts or legal regulation because prior moral consent gives members of the group mutual trust (Fukuyama, 1995). There are 2 types of trust. First, there is the trust we have for individuals we know. For instance, the trust that looked after children have for their family and friends (ONS, 2001). Then there is the trust we have for individuals we don't know in the community (ONS, 2001). For looked after children, this refers to the trust that they have for people such as teachers and social workers.

In terms of education, social capital has been identified as a useful concept in relation to understanding school practices, especially those aimed at combating social exclusion. For Fukuyama (1999), education is the one area where the government has the direct ability to generate social capital. Similarly, Putnam (2000) and Halpern (1999) identify education as key to the creation of social capital and Munn (2000) demonstrates that the concept of social capital helps explain the low educational achievement of poorer groups of children. Munn (2000) argues

that this underachievement is a consequence of the lack of access to familial, peer and other networks which reinforce aspirations and overcome any problems with achieving.

Munn's (2000) explanation for poorer children having low social capital is applicable to looked after children. As discussed, research has demonstrated that looked after children leave school with fewer educational qualifications (Morris, 2000; McClung, 2001; and Scottish Government, 2005b). Existing research also illustrates that looked after children have little access to the positive family and peer networks that reinforce and encourage aspirations. In many instances, the lack of access to positive family and peer networks is reinforced at school and in care (Shaw, 1998 and Jackson, 1999). This is very important since success in examinations is identified as a positional good and the key to further and higher education and to the labour market (Munn, 2000).

Let us further consider the different forms of social capital and how these can impact on the lives of looked after children. Bonding social capital refers to the strong ties that we have with people in similar situations to ourselves, such as immediate family and friends (ONS, 2001 and Woolcock, 2001). Bonding social capital is valuable in that it helps individuals develop a sense of shared identity. Bonding social capital may also be developed and recognised in different ways in a

school setting (Catts and Ozga, 2005). For looked after children, bonding social capital would be the ties that they have with their family and friends. In my view, this may be irrespective of whether or not the child is looked after at home or away from home and whether or not the looked after child still maintains contact with their family. This is because research demonstrates that a child's experience prior to becoming looked after significantly impacts upon the rest of their lives (Aldgate *et al*, 1993, 1994 and 1995). Close friendships they have with others, such as other children who are looked after or school friends, would in this instance, be regarded as bonding social capital ties, as would their ties with foster families.

Bridging social capital is a resource that helps individuals build relationships with a wider, more varied, set of people than their circle of family and friends (Catts and Ozga, 2005). It relates to the ties that looked after children have with distant friends or associates. Bridging social capital is far more important for getting on and helping with career advancement and employment (ONS, 2001 and Woolcock, 2001). Looked after children would have bridging social capital ties with people such as other pupils, teachers, head teachers, social workers, residential carers who are from the same type of social background as them.

The last form of social capital, linking social capital, enables connections with people in different social strata (Cote and Healy, 2001). The most crucial element

of linking social capital is the connections between people with different levels of power. As such, linking social capital reaches out to unlike people in dissimilar situations from outside the individual's community. For looked after children, this would refer to their connections with children who are from different backgrounds, most notably those not looked after. It would also refer to children who are from different social backgrounds. It may also apply to the connections that parents or foster carers have with teachers and social workers, where they come from different social backgrounds. The advantage of linking social capital is that it allows individuals to leverage a far wider range of resources than are available in their own community (Woolcock, 2001).

Research demonstrates that social capital has as much of an impact on people's lives as other socio demographic factors, such as gender and ethnicity (Li *et al*, 2003). By its very nature, social capital is available to all members of the community (Woolcock, 2001) and it powerfully shapes a child's development (Putnam, 1995). This is because trusts, networks, and norms within a child's family, peer group, school and larger community have been found to have far reaching impact on opportunities, choices and educational achievement (Putnam, 1995). Research by Jackson (1999); Morris (2000); Shaw (1998); and the Social Inclusion Unit (2003) clearly report that the lives of looked after children are characterised by deprivation, significant family problems, poor school attendance, higher rates of school exclusion, low educational achievement, too many care

placements, a lack of continuity in their care, a lack of social and emotional support and general social exclusion from society. Therefore, one could argue that a child's experience of being looked after has a wholly detrimental impact on all aspects of their lives, shaping their development in a negative fashion and thus affording them poorer levels of social capital. Indeed, for all its advantages, it has been recognised that social capital has a negative side, with social networks such as schools and care systems acting as a foundation for negative actions and the exclusion of particular groups in society (Portes, 1998 and Kawachi, 2000).

Research Questions

The main research question to be addressed was:

Which key care factors influence the educational achievement of children looked after at home and away from home in two local authorities in Scotland?

Quantitative Research

The research questions addressed in the quantitative element were:

- **Are there relationships between key care factors?**
- **What impact do key care factors have on educational achievement at different SCQF levels?**
- **What impact do combined key care factors have on educational achievement at different SCQF levels?**

In Appendix 5 there is a model detailing the care and education variables considered in this element of the research.

Qualitative Research

The qualitative element considered the views of policy makers, practitioners and children who had experience of being looked after. The research questions to be addressed were:

- **How effective is the Corporate Parent in undertaking their Corporate Parent duties?**
- **What impact does being looked after have on a child's educational experience and wider educational achievement?**

A full account of the research questions considered by the policy makers and practitioners can be found in Appendix 6 and Appendix 7. Appendices 8A and 8B provide a detailed list of the research questions considered by the looked after children who participated in the research.

Access

'Gaining access to most organizations is not a matter to be taken lightly but one that involves some combination of strategic planning, hard work and dumb luck' (Van Maanen and Kolb, 1985:11).

Despite being employed by both participating local authorities, I had to make an application for research access to both local authorities. Separate applications were made to Authority 1 for the qualitative and quantitative elements. For various reasons, such as procedures and timing, only Authority 1 was formally approached to participate in the qualitative element of the research. I had to submit my draft research tools to Authority 1 along with my application for research access. At the initial stages there was some debate over some of questions I would be able to ask. For instances, I had to remove any questions that would make policy makers and practitioners feel awkward or would compromise their positions. I also had to remove any questions that could potentially upset the looked after children. Once the research tools were agreed, access was permitted and the process moved very quickly, with Authority 1 agreeing that I could directly contact policy makers, practitioners and elected members to invite them to be involved in the research. It was made clear to me that any involvement on the part of these individuals would be on a voluntary basis and that anonymity would be assured.

It is worth considering here that gaining access to an organisation does not necessarily mean that one will gain access to individuals who will participate in the research and that gaining access can be an ongoing process (Bryman, 2004). This was a matter of consideration in the research conducted for this thesis, particularly in respect of the Education Department with Authority 1. As agreed by the gatekeeper who approved access, I approached policy makers, practitioners and elected members with a responsibility for Education within Authority 1. However, despite this approach, I met barriers to access from a senior member of the management team within the Education Department, who took the decision that this department would not participate in the research. This occurred, despite the Head of Social Work Services within Authority 1, who herself participated in the research, trying to encourage this individual to allow the Education Department to participate in the research.

Bryman (2004) highlights that research can sometimes become embroiled in internal politics within organisations and considers that researchers can become pawns in clashes. In my view, access to policy makers, practitioners and elected members was refused by the senior policy maker in the Education Department as a result of inter departmental issues between the Social Work Department and the Education Department. A contributing factor may have been that I was employed by the Social Work Department in Authority 1 and, despite my assurance, the senior policy maker was unsure of my motives for the research. Fortunately, all of

the policy makers and practitioners in Social Work Services, who were approached, agreed to take part in the research. In addition, the Children's Rights Officer and the Who Cares? Officer agreed to be interviewed. I am aware that the ease with which people from Social Work Services agreed to participate is likely to be related to the fact that I had a good working relationship with these individuals and that they were aware of my research credentials.

However, Authority 1 was far less keen for me to interview looked after children and care leavers. Understandably, the Social Work Department was concerned about the nature and sensitivity of the questions that I wanted to explore and about the support that those children participating might require following their interviews. Finally, it was agreed that the research could go ahead and the set questions could be asked but that the interviews had to be undertaken by the Children's Rights Officer and by the Who Cares? Officer. Fortunately, both of these people were willing to conduct the interviews and had the time to undertake the interviews. As with the policy maker interviews and the practitioner focus group, all children who participated in the research participated on a voluntary basis. The recruitment of the children who participated in the research was undertaken directly by the children's Rights Officer and by the Who Cares? Officer, although I discussed my requirements in detail with both of the officers.

Authority 1 and Authority 2 were both involved in the quantitative element of the research. Separate applications were made to both local authorities requesting to use the care and education data that I had access to on a daily basis in my paid employment. The process in Authority 1 was more formal than in Authority 2 but access was granted by both local authorities. The access never really presented much of a problem for the quantitative element of the research. The most significant problem related to where the data was recorded, how it was recorded, if it was recorded and how the data could be extracted and pulled together in a meaningful way. This will be discussed later in the chapter.

Defining the Sample Group

‘The first step in most research studies is to define the population to be covered’ (Arber, 1998). Indeed, one of the first tasks undertaken for this thesis was the defining of the sample group. This was formed as a result of earlier work undertaken by myself and through wider reading of literature and discussions with gatekeepers in Authority 1 and Authority 2.

Quantitative Sampling

This element of the research considered the educational achievement of 1,407 children aged 15 or over who were discharged from care between 2000/01 and 2004/05. All of these children were eligible, usually by age, to sit Scottish Qualification Authority examinations (SCQF level 3 or above) at fourth year level,

as a minimum, whilst still looked after. With the exception of 2000/01 data from Authority 2, the research considered all children aged 15 or over who were looked after at home or away from home and had been discharged from care by either of the local authorities, over the 5 year period. For 2000/01, the data from Authority 2 excluded those children who had been looked after at home as the local authority was unable to provide this information. Appendix 9 provides a diagram of the criterion applied for this element of the research.

In general, my survey data are cross-sectional but contain some temporal measures. The potential for using cross-sectional data with temporal information is well documented (Davies and Dale, 1994). I appreciate that the analytical possibilities presented are more restricted than data from a full-scale longitudinal data resource (for example, a panel or cohort study). However, the temporal ordering of some aspects of my data adds robustness to many of the associations reported. The temporal ordering of some measures strengthens some substantive conclusions regarding the 'impact' of certain experiences.

Qualitative Sampling

In respect of the sampling of the policy makers, I identified 6 individuals who had a specific responsibility for looked after children and had direct input into policy making with Authority 1. Those people interviewed ranged from the Head of Social Work Services, to service managers and specialist workers with a specific remit for

looked after children. As such, this element of the research considered all policy makers within Authority 1 who were involved in policy making in respect of the educational achievement of looked after children. A purposive sampling technique was employed to recruit practitioners for the focus group. In order to generate a sample of practitioners willing to participate in the focus group, I contacted senior management within locality teams asking them to nominate a practitioner who would be willing to be involved in the research. I needed to ensure that there was a good balance of practitioners from across all parts of the service. This was achieved through the help of senior management within locality teams. Thus all practitioners who participated were qualified social workers who either worked in an area team office, a residential unit or led a team of practitioners working with looked after children in a particular area, for example, adoption and fostering. As has been previously mentioned, the participation in the focus group was on a voluntary basis.

Whilst I was not involved in the actual recruitment of looked after children for the in-depth interviews, I was informed that the children who participated were made up of a random sample of children who were receiving on going support from the Children's Rights Officer and the Who Cares? Officer. It would have been ideal had I been able to ensure that a stratified random sample had been undertaken but this was not possible. Nevertheless, in total there were 30 children who were

interviewed. These were children who were looked after at the time of the interview or who had been looked after in the previous 2 years.

Methodology

As discussed, the research conducted for this thesis incorporates both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Historically it has been unusual to construct projects that combined qualitative and quantitative research. However, mixed methods approaches are becoming increasingly methodologically desirable (Burton, 2000; Creswell, 2003; and Bergman, 2008). This is a process known as triangulation. For Cohen and Manion (1986:269), '*Triangulation may be defined as the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behaviour*'. Indeed, I identified a mixed methods approach as the most appropriate approach to the research problem that I was investigating because of the accepted benefits and advantages of a mixed methods approach. For instance, I was able to recognise that the interviews with policy makers and looked after children and the focus groups with practitioners (the qualitative data) would help validate the quantitative dataset that I had collected and compiled. Also, I was aware that the qualitative data would assist in the interpretation of the statistical relationships determined through the quantitative analysis. Moreover, I was confident that the quantitative dataset that I had collected and compiled would assist with the qualitative element of the research. In the main, this would provide me with a large scale dataset to explore any salient research findings from the interviews and focus groups.

Quantitative Methodology

This element consisted of the quantitative analysis of secondary data, from multiple official sources, relating to care and educational aspects of the lives of children looked after by Authority 1 and Authority 2. In this element of the research I had to be innovative in my approach to the collection of the data, bearing in mind that the research data could not be collected from one single source. The collection of the research data involved me extracting official data from various sources manually and electronically to compile one large dataset that would otherwise not have existed. This whole process took a number of years and was the most time consuming, and arguably, the most difficult task undertaken within this thesis. The end result of this work was the final dataset, which was made of multiple cohorts of data over a 5 year period from Social Work Services and Education Services within both local authorities. From the outset a quantitative approach was identified as the mechanism for this element of the research. Whilst the benefits of qualitative research have come into the fore within social research more recently, quantitative research continues to make a significant impact and remains a sound method for investigation into the social world. Bryman argues that quantitative research is far more pervasive than qualitative research (Bryman, 1988). Also, Bryman and Cramer (1999) suggest that qualitative research cannot avoid drawing upon quantitative methodology.

There has been a fast growing importance in the use of secondary data analysis in recent years (Gilbert, 1998). One of the advantages of using secondary data in my research was that I was able to consider more closely the theoretical aims and objectives and the substantive themes of my study rather than the practical and methodological problems associated with gathering new data (Burton, 2000). However as Burton highlights, secondary data analysis can involve the use of more than one dataset and often these datasets are used to address a completely different set of issues than was originally intended (Burton, 2000). Nevertheless, the advancement of information technology has largely outdated many of the problems associated with secondary data analysis in the past. For Sapsford and Jupp (1996) information technology developments make the distinction between first and secondary data tenuous and redundant. This is because the advent of information technology makes it easy to exercise central control over data and software programmes can be written to facilitate data accuracy checks and can deal with unanticipated queries in a more sophisticated manner than individuals can. Today the same dataset can be made available to anyone anywhere in the world as long as they have suitable computing and communications equipment. In the UK there are an increasing number of major surveys collected primarily to facilitate secondary data analysis (e.g. The General Household Survey and the British Household Panel Survey).

Data Construction

'Inputting data is time consuming and labour intensive' (Gayle, 2000:414). Indeed, I cannot stress enough that the process of preparing the raw data was the most difficult and time consuming element of this thesis. Overall, it took me 3 years to gather all of the data for the quantitative dataset. Had I not undertaken this task, the data would not have been available and I would have been unable to undertake this research. However, I am aware that there were advantages in having to gather the data in this laborious fashion. Indeed, I have been able to tune into meanings and messages in the data. This helped build up ideas for possible analysis. On the other hand, I was cautious in my approach in the data preparation stages, as I was aware of the extent to which interpretation and manipulation can take place in the data preparation stages. In my opinion, a similar standard of data could not have been achieved other than through the approach used. Moreover, the term secondary analysis assumes that there is a first report on the enquiry as a whole (Sapsford and Jupp, 1996) but I collated the data for the sole purpose of this research, hence it being an original and unique study using secondary data from multiple official sources.

In respect of the actual data collected, this came from Authority 1 and Authority 2 and considered educational achievement information for all children included in the research and partial care information, for those children where it was available. The amount of care information available to me depended on the year that the

child was discharged from care, the local authority they were looked after by and the level of detail recorded in each child's case file. In both local authorities, case files are recorded on electronic client based information systems by practitioners with a responsibility for that child. In Authority 1 and in Authority 2 the Social Work Departments use different in house developed client based information systems. The data pertaining to educational achievement was extracted from a pupil based information system from within the Education Department of each local authority. Whilst both local authorities use the same information system to record pupil details, the information for children looked after by each of the local authorities was extracted separately.

The fundamental goal at this juncture in the research was to construct a single dataset containing care and educational information for all looked after children involved in the research. Initially, I had hoped to collect a wide range of information on all children, including personal details, family details prior to care, full placement history, full education history, child protection information and recorded offending behaviour. However, this was not possible for different reasons. In Authority 2, I was unable to access the information in a meaningful format within reasonable timescales. In Authority 1 I was able to access the information although, as a result of information system changes and poor recording practice, there was a substantial amount of missing data. As the process for

gathering data was different in both local authorities each will now be briefly considered.

Data Construction - Authority 1

In Authority 1 there were a total of 7 fragmented datasets that went to making up the master dataset for the analysis. Initially there were 5 different datasets containing all of the care data required for the study. All information was derived from a client based information system and considered factors such as personal details, placement information, education information and discharge from care information. Offending behaviour, child protection and family composition details were also available, although on close examination, there was a substantial amount of data missing. Consequently, these factors were not considered in the research. Moreover, other than school attended, educational information, strictly speaking, is not recorded on the Social Work Services client based information system. Therefore, academic information had to be obtained from an education pupil based information system. This came in the form of a further 2 datasets. What is more, a small proportion of the children attended residential schools and secure units in Authority 1, and as residential schools and secure units do not record pupil information on the education pupil based information system, I had to gather educational details for these individuals directly from the school they attended or from their social workers. It was assumed that where a candidate number and/or examinations results could not be obtained electronically or manually, that the looked after child had not been presented for any examinations.

A list of the variables considered in this element of the research can be found in Appendix 5.

Data Construction - Authority 2

As less information was available for the children looked after by Authority 2, the data gathering and data construction was somewhat easier. In total there were 5 datasets accessed from Authority 2 which provided information on personal details, placement information, education information and discharge from care information. Whilst gender, last placement and academic information was available for all children looked after by Authority 2, as previously discussed, other information such as placement history and age on becoming looked after was not available for all children.

Problems with Quantitative Element

As considered by Burton (2000), one of the significant problems to be found with secondary data analysis is data handling. This was certainly the single most problematic issue with this research and this occurred for many reasons. First, it was impossible to extract the data from one single source and this involved a significant amount of work preparing the data prior to data merger. Additionally, the quality of the data was pretty poor in parts so this had to be tidied up before it could be merged to make 1 dataset. Moreover, once the data was merged into a single dataset, there was a significant amount of work required in trying to gather

missing data for particular individuals. Consequently, I had to manually check individual electronic case files for some children. In some instances the information was found in the electronic case file, in other instances the practitioner had simply not recorded the information in the electronic case file.

Equally, had the Education Department's electronic information systems in both local authorities been up to date, then it would have been far easier to extract educational information for the looked after children involved in the research. As it is, in both Authority 1 and Authority 2, the recording of children as looked after is not consistent or accurate. For instance, it is widely accepted in both local authorities that not all staff in schools are wholly familiar with or understand the term looked after. This has resulted in looked after children not being recorded as looked after and children who have had some form of intervention identified as being looked after, when they are not. As has been noted earlier in the thesis, a child becomes looked after as a result of statutory legislation resulting from a children's hearing under the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 and not just as a result of Social Work Services intervention. Moreover, the construction of the dataset required a certain level of IT skills using packages such as Microsoft Access, Microsoft Excel, SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Scientists) and a number of in house information systems. At times this presented me with a challenge.

Qualitative Methodology

There have been many attempts made to define qualitative research and how it differs from quantitative research (Bryman, 1998 and Silverman, 2000). However, there is still no general consensus on either of these issues. All that can be said is that qualitative research is important as it engages the researcher with issues that really matter, in ways that matter. Indeed, through qualitative research a wide array of dimensions of the social world can be explored (Mason, 2002). This approach was selected as the best method to examine the complexity and multi dimensionality of the research area and to determine how things worked within the particular context of the educational achievement of looked after children. Although, as argued by Mason (2002), often the strength of qualitative research can be forgotten in the face of criticism that qualitative research is merely anecdotal or at best illustrative. This is not of such concern in the research conducted for this thesis as a triangulation approach has been taken.

In the qualitative element of this research, policy makers and children with experience of being looked after were interviewed and practitioners participated in a focus group. Overall the aim of this element of the research was to determine the effectiveness of the Corporate Parent within Authority 1 and to determine the views and experiences of the care system from those who were or had been looked after. The tools were devised on the basis of knowledge and experience that I had gained through my paid employment and as a result of earlier research I

conducted examining the educational achievement of looked after children. Prior to the research being undertaken, I submitted the interview schedules and focus group schedule, along with my application for research access to Authority 1. In addition, prior to the fieldwork being undertaken the research tools were also reviewed by colleagues (researchers and practitioners) and by my PhD supervisor. The interview schedules and focus group schedule can be found in Appendix 6, Appendix 7, Appendix 8A and Appendix 8B.

Interviews

In-depth interviews are flexible so they are probably the most widely employed method in qualitative research (Bryman, 2004). For both policy makers and looked after children a semi-structured in-depth interview was the chosen method over a structured in-depth interview. This involved having a list of set questions which were open ended, thus allowing the policy makers and looked after children flexibility and control over the direction of conversation within the interview. The advantage to this approach was that the flexibility of a semi-structured interview allowed for the interview to evolve in such a way that it enabled the interviewer and interviewee to establish a rapport and discuss some fairly sensitive issues. This approach was time consuming and the interviewer always had to be aware of the risk of interview bias due to the level of control they have in asking the questions (Bournemouth University, 2006). Again, it is hoped that such factors were controlled through triangulation in this research.

A further consideration in respect of the interviews was that it was mostly children being interviewed. Therefore, I had to consider the practice and methodological problems in carrying out research with children. For Scott (2000), the sentiment that children should be seen and not heard could not be more inappropriate for the current era, where there is a general demand for research that involves children. It would have been less complicated for me to have not involved looked after children directly in the research but as Scott (2000) argues, it is only by interviewing children directly that we can understand their social world. This must especially be the case for looked after children. As suggested by Scott (2000), in the designing of the interview schedule for the looked after children, I gave particular consideration to factors such as the use of language, literacy levels and different stages of cognitive development.

Policy Maker Interviews

This aspect of my research is important because senior managers (policy makers) have a Corporate Parent responsibility for all areas of the lives of looked after children. In practice, they are making policy decisions that impact on the care and education of every single looked after child. Whilst I recognise that there will be some factors external to the policy making process that impact on the educational outcomes of looked after children, it is necessary to consider the policies and the policy making process pertaining to the educational achievement of looked after children, as research has shown that this also impacts on their educational

achievement (Scottish Government, 2006b; Bullock et al, 2006; and Allen, 2003). Consequently, through this aspect of my research, policy makers were asked to consider the following areas: Corporate Parent responsibilities, policy, policy implementation and the impact of policy on educational achievement.

In total I undertook 6 semi-structured in-depth interviews with individuals in Authority 1 who were involved directly in the policy making process. Each interview lasted between 1½ and 2 hours. I agreed that none of the interviews would be recorded and therefore had to rely on the written notes I took in the interview. On writing up the notes from my interviews, I invited the policy makers to verify that the transcript reflected the interview they had given. In all cases, the policy maker accepted the account of the interview.

Looked After Children Interviews

There were 30 semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted by the Children's Right Officer and the Who Cares? Officer with children who were looked after at that time or had been looked after in the previous 2 years. The interviews were conducted with children looked after at home and away from home and lasted between 1 and 2 hours each. I designed the interview schedule and met with the 2 officers who were conducting the research. This allowed me to discuss the approach to be taken in the interviews and to ensure consistency in the approach

taken by the officers. The semi-structured interview I devised considered areas such as experiences at school and in care. Other factors such as bullying, exclusion and the levels of support received by looked after children were also considered. I had agreed with Authority 1 that the interviews with children would not be recorded. I therefore had to rely on the interviewing skills of the officers who undertook the interviews. The children who participated in my research participated on a voluntary basis. These were children that the Children are Rights Officer and the Who Cares? Officer were already working with, and the interviews were carried out during a planned appointment. The main advantage to the officers undertaking this element of the research was that they were able to provide the children with any support that was required as a result of issues raised in the research.

Focus Group

There is some confusion as to the nature of focus groups and how it distinguishes from other forms of interviews (Oates, 2000). For Kitzinger (1994) focus groups are group discussions organised to explore a specific set of issues. Whilst focus groups can provide insight into the experiences of individual participants, the real value of focus groups lies in the opportunity to analyse the interaction between participants (Catterall and Maclaran, 1997). For Oates, this is the key to focus group research and what makes it so insightful (Oates, 2000). I was interested in undertaking a focus group approach with practitioners to gain insight into the interaction between practitioners across settings, albeit I was aware of the

concerns over focus groups being artificial situations constructed for the purposes of gathering data (Oates, 2000). However, all research methods have limitations and I tried to keep this in mind throughout my research.

In this element of my research, the overall aim was to gain better insight into the efficacy of the Corporate Parent, particularly the area concerning the transition of policy into practice. For example, the focus group concentrated on areas such as practitioner knowledge of relevant policies, the role looked after children have in the policy and planning process and the role that looked after children have in the decisions made about their own care and education. It was also important to gather some views on the experiences of looked after children from a practitioner perspective, so my focus group also gave consideration to this area. In total eight practitioners volunteered to take part in the focus group. The focus group lasted 2½ hours. I led the focus group aided by a research assistant. As agreed when I negotiated research access, the focus group would not be recorded, so I took a hand written account of the focus group discussion on a flip chart that the group could view and my research assistant took hand written notes to supplement the flip chart account of the focus group discussion. As with the policy maker interviews, participants were presented with an account of the discussion within the focus group and asked to verify it. In all cases this was accepted.

The matrix below provides as summary of the themes and areas within themes that were considered by all who participated.

Table 4.1: Analysis Matrix

Theme	Policy Makers	Practitioners	Children
Corporate Parenting			
Corporate Parent Responsibilities	X	X	
Main Policies	X	X	
Transition of Policy to Practice	X	X	
Policy Targets	X	X	
Reviewing and Monitoring of Policy			
Factors Impacting on Educational Experience and Achievement			
<i>Care Experiences</i>			
Perceptions of the Looked After Population		X	X
Support in Care		X	X
Placement and School Changes		X	X
Participation in Decision Making	X	X	X
Bullying			X
Promotion of Achievements	X	X	X
Information Sharing	X	X	X
Participation in Planning	X	X	X
<i>Educational Experiences</i>			
Exclusion		X	X
Attendance		X	X
Achievement and Expectation		X	X
Alternative Education		X	X
Treatment at School		X	X
Enjoyment of School		X	X
Friends at School		X	X
After and Out of School Activities		X	X
Homework		X	X
Study Space		X	X
Access to ICT		X	X
Access to Books		X	X

Problems with Qualitative Element

Whilst the qualitative research does provide further insight into the lives of looked after children, I am aware that there are significant gaps. Indeed, this element of the research would have been more balanced had the Education Department within Authority 1 agreed to participate in the research. Similarly, it would have been advantageous if Authority 2 had been involved in the qualitative aspect of the research. Due to timing and access restraints this was simply not feasible. Moreover, had I been able to record the interviews and focus group this would have further enhanced the data obtained. Also, this would have been less time consuming in terms of writing up the transcripts. Last, whilst I understood the reasons for not undertaking the interviews with children myself, I cannot be sure of the extent to which the children's responses in the interview were affected by knowing the officers who undertook the research.

Analysis

As the secondary dataset was being constructed, at each stage some thought went into the implications of the decisions being made in respect of the proposed analysis and the techniques that would be required to undertake the analysis. The quantitative data was analysed in the statistical software package for social scientists SPSS. There were 3 levels of analysis conducted with regards to the secondary data. First, univariate analysis was undertaken to profile the looked after children and to compare these children with looked after children nationally

and with the general school population in Scotland. Following this, bivariate analysis was conducted where reflection was given to the statistical significance of particular care factors in relation to other care factors. Consideration was then given to the statistical significance that care factors had on academic achievement at specific SCQF levels. Multivariate analysis (statistical modelling) was also conducted to determine the association between combined care factors and educational achievement of children looked after by Authority 1 and Authority 2. A statistical modelling approach was deemed necessary as it is theoretically implausible that educational achievement would be effected by a single variable (Gayle *et al*, 2003). However, it has to be acknowledged that univariate and bivariate analysis is still very useful for describing patterns within data, and therefore invaluable within this thesis.

In respect of the qualitative element of the research, following the transcription of all interviews and the focus group, the analysis for this element of the research was undertaken manually. I took a theme based approach in order to identify clusters and links amongst participant's responses and to isolate concepts. These themes very much related to the research questions. Whilst this was time consuming, the themes helped structure a framework for the analysis chapters. I was particularly interested in the similarities and differences in policy makers' and practitioners' views and in the similarities and differences in practitioners' and looked after children's views on what it is like to be looked after.

The primary purpose of the qualitative element was to explore the lives of looked after children through an examination of the role of the Corporate Parent and through an examination of the care and educational experiences of looked after children. Consequently, the qualitative and quantitative research chapters have been intertwined. There are 6 analysis chapters. In the first analysis chapter (Chapter 5) I have considered the role of the Corporate Parent, as policy and policy making drives service delivery, which then impacts on the care experiences and educational achievement of looked after children. I have then provided an analysis of my quantitative research sample and a profile of the children who participated in the qualitative element of my research in Chapter 6. This sets the scene for the remaining analysis chapters. I have then focused on the relationship between key care factors in Chapter 7 and then in Chapter 8, I have considered the influence that key care factors had on academic achievement. As a way of providing some further explanation, in Chapter 9 reflection is given to other care and educational factors which impact on achievement. In the final analysis chapter (Chapter 10), I have considered my empirical research findings in their entirety and discuss the implications of these.

Ethics

There are 2 overarching theories in ethical philosophy: deontological theory and consequentialist theory. The term deontological theory has been derived from the Greek 'deon' meaning duty. The most famous advocate of this approach was

Immanuel Kant, who argued that morals ought to be based on obligations to others (Kent, 2000: 62). According to this method, we would follow the natural law, and researchers should respect every human being, even if this could have some unfortunate circumstances (Kent, 2000). Consequentialist theory is different; it holds that we ought to produce the greatest possible balance of value over disvalue. The utilitarian philosopher John Stuart Mill is perhaps the best known advocate of this approach. He argued that people should seek to act in accordance with the consequences of their behaviour and minimizing suffering and maximise well being (Kent, 2000: 62). Generally, I adopted a consequentialist approach in my research.

A great deal of social research is controversial and raises ethical issues which need to be addressed seriously (Hornsby-Smith, 1998). Indeed, some of the most acute and ethical dilemmas are posed by applied research: that is, research where the primary aim is to produce practical or policy conclusions, and contribution to scientific knowledge is secondary (Kent, 2000). I was very conscious of the implications of conducting applied research where I was employed and am aware that the ethical codes in place were important as they not only protected those who participated in my research, but they also protected me as an employee conducting my own personal research. Consequently, I strictly adhered to the ethics codes within Authority 1 and Authority 2, albeit these were dealt with at the research access stage. I also kept the university up to date and fully informed of any ethical

issues concerning the research. In effect, my multiple role and informed consent were the main ethical considerations in this thesis.

Multiple Responsibilities of the Researcher

I had multiple responsibilities in conducting this study. This included wider responsibilities to look after children in the sample and to Authority 1 and Authority 2. More specifically, I had to be aware of my relationships with work colleagues and management within Authority 1 and Authority 2, where I was employed. Increasingly, local authorities are likely to take a close interest in research that they are participating in or funding, and want a role in determining what happens to the research once it is finished (Kent, 2000). Hence, it was important from the outset that this was clearly defined in my research contract with Authority 1 and 2. This primarily involved ensuring that everyone participating in the research understood the distinction between my work for both local authorities and my work for this PhD thesis. In addition, throughout my research I have had to be aware of the impact that any controversial findings may have on myself career wise. I have also been aware of the impact that my empirical findings may have on Authority 1 and Authority 2 and their partner agencies.

I also had to be aware of my relationship with the academic community, albeit that this was secondary to my responsibility to Authority 1 and Authority 2.

Informed Consent

Confidentiality concerns the right to control information about oneself (Kent, 2000). A person may grant access to information about him or her self, but this does not mean that they relinquish control over the information obtained. Indeed, a researcher should not divulge what has been learned about research findings without the permission of individuals involved in research. According to the British Sociological Association (1991) informed consent implies a responsibility on the sociologist to explain as fully as possible, and in terms meaningful to participants, what the research is about, who is undertaking it, why it is being undertaken and how it is being disseminated (Hornsby-Smith, 1998).

Whilst informed consent was not required for the quantitative element of this research, I did appreciate that I was bound by a work confidentiality code and this has been adhered to throughout this study. I also ensured that all means of identification was removed from the quantitative element of the research. Conversely, informed consent was necessary for all in-depth interviews and the focus group. This was obtained in advance of the fieldwork being undertaken. It was made very clear to all that participation was on a voluntary basis, and that individuals could choose not to be involved in the research at any stage. Unless a matter concerning the safety of a child was disclosed, confidentiality was assured to all who took part in qualitative part of the research. However, there were no such matters disclosed in the research. Moreover, I thought it necessary to

ensure that children were not asked to participate in the research if it was likely to put them under undue stress or pressure. I had to rely on the Children's Rights Officer and the Who Cares? Officer to do this. There were no reports of children being under stress or pressure as a result of their participation in the research. All means of identification was also removed from the qualitative research findings.

CHAPTER 5

THE CORPORATE PARENT

THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES, POLICIES, IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES AND IMPACT ON ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

Introduction

Research demonstrates that local level policy making impacts on the educational achievement of looked after children (Scottish Government, 2006b; Bullock et al, 2006; and Allen, 2003). Therefore, it seemed appropriate to give a little consideration to this in my research. Essentially, this element of my research examined the role of the Corporate Parent in relation to the educational achievement of the looked after children. The rationale behind this was to investigate a key contributing environmental factor to the educational achievement of looked after children. As such, I have considered the corporate responsibility to looked after children and have examined Authority 1's approach to relevant policy, as discussed in Chapter 3. Additionally, reflection has been given to the strategies used for the implementation of these policies. Some consideration has been given to the impact that the approach taken by the Corporate Parent might have on the academic achievement of the looked after population.

There were 2 groups involved in this element of the research, policy makers and practitioners. A brief profile of both groups will now be considered.

Profile of Policy Makers

I conducted six interviews with people who had a specific responsibility for looked after children and had a direct input into policy making. Those people interviewed ranged from the Head of Social Work Services, to service managers and specialist workers with a specific remit for looked after children. This breakdown is illustrated in Table 5.1 together with the key used for the analysis.

Table 5.1: Policy Maker Interviews by Position and Key

Role	Key
Head of Service	PM6
Service Manager 1	PM2
Service Manager 2	PM3
Specialist Worker 1	PM4
Specialist Worker 2	PM5
Team Manager	PM1
Total Policy Makers	6

Profile of Practitioners

In total there were 8 practitioners who participated in my focus group. These practitioners were all qualified social workers who either worked in an area team, a residential unit or led a team of practitioners working with looked after children in a particular area, for example, adoption and fostering. As has been previously mentioned, participation in my focus group was on a voluntary basis. As my research will consider only collective responses no key is required for the

individuals who participated. All practitioners will be denoted by (FG). The breakdown of participants is illustrated in Table 5.2 below.

Table 5.2: Focus Group Participants by Position within Council

Role	Number
Adoption and Fostering Team Leader	1
Residential Schools/Units Team Leader	1
Childcare Social Worker	3
Residential Unit Manager	1
Residential Unit Worker	2
Total	8

Corporate Parent Responsibilities

The guidance in national childcare frameworks, such as 'For Scotland's Children' (Scottish, Executive, 2001a) and more specifically 'Learning with Care' (HMI and SWSI, 2001), outline steps for local authorities, Health Agencies and other agencies to take more of an integrated approach to children's services and thus be equally accountable. Consequently, I tried to determine the extent of partnership working within Authority 1 to explore the role of the Corporate Parent.

Responsibility of the Local Authority

The practitioners and policy makers identified Social Work Services, Education Services, Chief Executive's Services, Community Services and Psychological Services as being responsible for looked after children. However, all of those who participated in my research perceived the extent of the involvement from each of these council services differently. For example, the most senior member of staff, the Head of Service (PM6), recognised that the largest input and lead responsibility was being taken by Chief Executive's Services. Other policy makers interviewed were more of the opinion that Social Work Services were taking the lead responsibility (PM2 and PM3). A few of those interviewed argued that the input of Community Services was limited.

'Chief Executive's services have an overarching responsibility with Social Work, Education, Community Services and Health all being involved'. (PM6)

'Social Work and Education but I am not sure to what level'. (PM1)

'I get the feeling that Social Work are left to deal with it'. (FG)

Overall, I was able to deduce from this that the Head of Service was more aware of partnership working than the other policy makers and the practitioners. This could very likely be related to the fact that the Head of Service is more involved in partnership working at a strategic level than the other policy makers and practitioners. However, it does raise questions as to why the others involved in the research have far less of a sense of any joint responsibility that exists. This throws up the question about the degree of joint working that is actually taking place and about the dissemination of policy across Authority 1 and their partner agencies.

Responsibility of Elected Members

In addition, I considered the role that elected members played. One of the policy makers said that:

'Educational attainment of looked after children is the first ministers top priority so elected members should feel under some political pressure'. (PM5)

All of the practitioners agreed that elected members had overall responsibility for the educational achievement of looked after children but that they did not always act in the best interests of looked after children. In contrast, the views of policy makers varied greatly with those in more senior positions being more positive about the actual impact of elected member involvement. This may be related to the fact that policy makers at a more senior level have greater contact with elected

members and generally have more of a strategic overview. The Head of Social Work Services said that in her view:

'Elected members play an overall responsibility for the education of the looked after population implicitly in terms of approving policy and agreeing funding...but they might not appreciate that they are playing a role' (PM6).

Likewise, one of the policy makers said that elected members did have a role in the overall responsibility for the education of the looked after population but this had its advantages and disadvantages. For example, she suggested that elected members took real interest in where residential homes were likely to be placed as it could affect school catchments and thus re-election (PM6). Another policy maker took a more negative view of the role of elected members and said that:

'I do not get the impression that elected members are highly interested, they meddle and ask awkward questions'. (PM1)

One of the policy makers acknowledged that most elected members want looked after children to do well educationally and appreciate that this is the responsibility of the council. She went further and stated that:

'Elected members don't always realise that ensuring improvement in educational attainment involves additional money, resources and committee approval'. (PM3)

It would be fair to deduce from my research that whilst elected members are aware that they have a responsibility towards the looked after population, they may be unaware of the full extent of this responsibility and that matters concerning looked

after children do not necessarily take precedence over other constituency matters. Arguably this is reflected in their refusal to participate in the research.

Responsibility of Health Agencies

Policy makers and practitioners were asked to consider the role that Health Agencies played in policy making and planning for looked after children in Authority 1. Policy makers discussed the involvement of Health Agencies in integrated children's service planning and about Social Work Services being involved in the Local Health Strategy. For example, one of the policy makers (PM1) said that initially the looked after population was not included in the Health Improvement Strategy and that there was a general feeling that there had been a limited contribution to the ICSP from Health. One of the policy makers stated:

'There was little contribution from Health in the children's service plan'. (PM3)

Practitioners and a significant proportion of the policy makers identified that there was a lack of knowledge of each others systems, language and structures between partner agencies and that this contributed to the problems with joint working. This idea of a professional barrier getting in the way of service planning and service delivery is not unique as it was also found in other research by those such as Rees (2001).

However, there are changes taking place in terms of how Health Services are delivered to children in Scotland with the 'Health for All' strategy (HALL 4) (Scottish Government, 2005d). This is as a result of a review conducted by the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (Hall and Eillman, 2003). In effect, in addition to universal services, health services to children will be targeted to support children and families who are affected by disability or disadvantage. This was noted by 2 of the policy makers (PM 2 and PM 3) in my research and both identified this as a positive advance in the provision of health services to looked after children.

Despite the recommendations to come out of HALL 4, I found that care leavers in Authority 1 were often unable to get registered with a GP and Dentist and that often they have to resort to getting health care from a mission in Glasgow. One policy maker stated that this was a priority issue that needed to be addressed with Health Agencies (PM5).

The Responsibilities of Others

In addition to looked after children being the responsibility of the 'Corporate Parent', it was recognised by practitioners and policy makers that others also have a responsibility to the looked after community. The Head of Service stated that:

'Whilst the educational attainment of looked after children is a corporate responsibility, at an individual child level, it is the responsibility of all foster carers, social work practitioners, community services staff, educational psychologists and teaching staff.' (PM6)

Similarly, others who participated in my research agreed with the Head of Service that the care and education of looked after children is also the responsibility of the many who come into contact with looked after children. One of the practitioners in the focus group and one of the policy makers highlighted the responsibility of all of those employed by partner agencies by stating that:

'Employees within departments of all agencies are individually responsible'. (FG)

'We all need to accept that we have a responsibility to looked after children and start to take them seriously'. (PM4)

Main Policies

For Hudson (1993) policy implementation needs to be considered in conjunction with the role of the street level bureaucrat, in this case, the practitioners. Therefore, it seemed appropriate to consider policy makers' and practitioners' knowledge and views of specific policies relating to the educational achievement of looked after children. These are the same policies that I reviewed in Chapter 3.

Recommendation 1 in 'Learning with Care' states that

'Local authorities should develop an integrated policy covering Education and Social Work which ensures that the educational needs of looked after children are met effectively' (HMI and SWSI, 2001:34)

As a starting point, all policy makers and practitioners were able to identify the main policies and frameworks pertaining to the education of looked after children in Authority 1 but they did not all know the content or detail of these policies. For example, the following comments were made:

'I have not read the policy ('Learning with Care') so I don't know what is in it'. (PM1)

'It is a ('Learning with Care') protocol that has been drafted by Social Work and Education. This just clarifies ideas and responsibilities for Social Work and Education staff'. (PM6)

'A Member Officer working group sub group is currently working on a protocol known as 'Learning with Care'. This is a national strategy for improving the education outcome of children in care'. (PM2)

Whilst people were more aware of the overall purpose of the ICSP, there was a mixed response in terms of the understanding of the 'Learning with Care' framework and if it was a proposal for a strategy, a draft strategy or an actual strategy that had been launched within Authority 1. In reality, there was no written local authority 'Learning with Care' framework at the time of the research: it only existed at a national level. Given this mixed response in terms of the content of relevant policies, it is difficult to accept that a consistent policy and strategically delivered approach was being taken by Authority 1 and its partners to combat the poor educational achievement of looked after children. If we adopt the views of those such as Lipsky (1993) and his *bottom up approach*, it could be suggested that due to the lack of co-ordination, the lack of consistent dissemination and the low level of knowledge of such policies, that the practitioners or *street level bureaucrats* in Authority 1, mostly likely unconsciously, form new policies through their day to day practice. This then goes on to impact on academic achievement of looked after children in a sporadic and unstructured fashion.

As previously highlighted, one of the criticisms of the 'Learning with Care' strategy (HMI and SWSI, 2001) is that it only relates to children looked after away from the family home (although the information pack that followed did consider all looked after children). This was highlighted by 2 of the policy makers interviewed and in the practitioner's focus group. One policy maker in particular was aware of the limitations of the policy.

'The policy only considers those looked after away from home. We need a policy that considers those looked after at home as well'. (PM3)

However, despite the knowledge that 'Learning with Care' only related to children looked after away from home, at the time of my research, there were no policies in place that considered the educational achievement of those children looked after at home. Furthermore, there was little consensus over the launch date of 'Learning with Care' within the local authority and policy makers gave different times scales over a 2 year period.

'It was launched a year ago' (November 2004)'. (PM6)

'It was launched early 2004'. (PM3)

'It was launched about 2 years ago' (November 2003). (PM1)

This was a cause for concern and a good example of the confusion over policy within Authority 1. It raises questions over how effective Authority 1 can be as a Corporate Parent.

Transition of Policy to Practice

Policy makers and practitioners were asked to consider the translation of relevant policies and frameworks into practice, thus improving the educational experiences and achievement levels of looked after children. The Head of Social Work Services stated that:

'The 'Learning with Care' policy has been translated into practice through a protocol for developing joint working between Social Work and Education Services'. (PM6)

She gave 2 examples of this, first the new integrated schools approach that should help support children who are looked after. Second, the sharing of client based IT systems between Social Work Services and Education Services. However, the other policy makers did not agree that the 'Learning with Care' policy, in particular, had actually been translated into practice at a local level. Policy makers stated that:

'The 'Learning with Care' policy is the only effective measure of translating policy into practice in terms of improving the academic attainment of children in care.....this has not been achieved yet..... the only way it can be achieved is when ownership of the issues are accepted by frontline Education and Social Work staff and it is the responsibility of senior management to promote this'. (PM3)

'The 'Learning with Care' policy has not been translated into practice.... this can be evidenced through the work of the through care and after care team who are working with care leavers at aged 15 ½ who have had very little educational input from their social worker, key worker, parents or foster parents.....'. (PM1)

'Only on paper does it look as though policy is being translated into practice..... it looks as though everyone is working to the same agenda but in practice this is not the case'. (PM4)

As can be determined from the comments noted above, there was a significant difference of opinion with regards to the extent to which policy had been translated into practice, with the Head of Service being more positive than all other policy makers. The practitioners were not aware of the 'Learning with Care' policy having been translated into practice at all but this may be because they had not been so strategically involved in this process. However, one of the policy makers did recognise the real commitment by senior management in trying to improve the situation but suggested that:

'Often other issues get in the way'. (PM4)

A few of the examples she gave included children being looked after away from home having too many placements, there being a shortage of space in children's homes and the shortage of alternative education placements for those not able to attend mainstream school.

Policy Targets

'Learning with Care' recommended that:

'Local authorities should include explicit and targeted consideration of the education of looked after children in children's services Plans and reviews' (HMI and SWSI, 2001: 43).

With this in mind the policy makers were asked to consider what targets had been set in relation to the educational achievement of looked after children. The government set targets as part of the national priorities agenda (priority 3, outcome 1) which is that all care leavers will attain SCQF level 3 or above in Maths and English. This information is collected by all local authorities in Scotland as part of the annual Accounts Commission performance indicators. Another national target which had been set was that by 2007 50% of care leavers would go into further/ higher education, training, or employment. This target was part of the Closing the Opportunity Gap (CtOG) initiative (Scottish Government, 2004a). At the time of my fieldwork, other than these nationally set indicators, Authority 1 and its partners had set no other targets.

Target Setting

In my interviews the Head of Service (PM6) and 2 of the policy makers (PM2 and PM3) said they were aware of the targets that had been set but did not discuss the specifics of these targets. Other policy makers interviewed were unaware of any specific targets pertaining to the educational achievement that had been set either nationally or locally. One policy maker said:

'We probably evaluate but have no specific targets'. (PM3)

The Head of Services (PM6) said that it would be her target that all children who were looked after would go into further/higher education, training or employment. She acknowledged that currently very few children from the looked after population go into employment or further/higher education. Furthermore, whilst there are no national or local targets for looked after children in areas such as attendance and exclusion the Head of Service said that:

'My target for the department would be that there will be 100% attendance at school and 0% exclusions'. (PM6)

The practitioners were less aware of any targets that had been set but suggested that there were many people working in the education arena that lacked understanding of what it is like to be looked after. There was general agreement within the focus group that this issue needed to be addressed before any formal target setting could be considered. Indeed, one of the principal concerns emerging from my research was that there were too many policy makers and practitioners who were unaware of whether or not targets had been set in relation to looked after children. This is a crucial finding which I believe does impact on the educational achievement of the looked after community, as how can the educational achievement of the looked after community be improved upon if policy makers are not monitoring achievement or measuring it against set targets?

Communicating Targets

Following on from target setting, policy makers and practitioners were asked to consider the process within Authority 1 for the communication targets to the relevant parties. The Head of Social Work Services stated:

'Targets are communicated to staff at induction and training days..... and to elected members.....to parents and children at the review process'. (PM6)

However two of the other policy makers (PM2 and PM3) stated that the council was not good at communicating targets to staff, looked after children and to parents and carers. The general feeling amongst practitioners, who were unaware of targets that existed, was that targets were communicated to staff but not well enough and that they only have a temporary impact in area teams. This was contradictory but upon further investigation, it became evident that they were referring to the dissemination of policies and frameworks in general rather than specific targets. One practitioner in the focus group stated that:

'Often policies are seen as meaningless to area teams'. (FG)

In corroboration with policy makers, practitioners stated that policies and frameworks were not communicated to looked after children, parents and carers terribly well. I find this all quite concerning as how can practitioners be effective in improving the life chances of looked after children if they are not wholly aware of the Corporate Parent's strategy for doing so. In addition, should service users and their carers not be made aware of these same policies so they know what kind of services and support that they can expect to receive?

Meeting Targets

In terms of meeting the targets that had been set, the Head of Social Work Services said that:

'There is no robust action plan that maps the improvement or deterioration of these targets'. (PM6)

She then advised that Authority 1 would try and meet unofficial achievement, attendance and exclusion targets by providing additional support at school for looked after children. Nothing more solid was mentioned. Also, one of the policy makers (PM 3) advised that there was a corporate group that would work towards meeting the 'unofficial' targets for care leavers going into further/ higher education, training and employment.

Given the confusion about targets being set in the first instance, rather than discussing the strategy for how Authority 1 would meet specific set targets, the majority of policy makers and practitioners discussed targets at a more general level. They highlighted the fundamental problem of target setting for the looked after community as being at the wrong level with the wrong focus. For example, one policy maker said that:

'Targets need to be far more basic than measuring academic attainment... consideration needs to be given to setting targets for placement availability and alternative educational placements for those who are not able to go to school, rather than educational attainment'. (PM1).

This was a pertinent point that was raised and the Corporate Parent might want to consider the indicators they use to measure performance. For instance, it might actually make more sense to measure attendance, absence and exclusion statistics for looked after children and also measure achievement in the broadest sense, rather than academic attainment. If nothing else, this will at least allow the Corporate Parent to build up a baseline profile of their looked after population, which then will assist with the interpretation of attainment statistics.

Reviewing and Monitoring Policies

I attempted to measure the level of monitoring that was being undertaken in relation to policies or strategies affecting looked after children.

Reviewing

The confusion over whether or not Authority 1 had launched its own 'Learning with Care' policy impacted on people views on the reviewing of policy. One policy maker said that:

'The council only launched the policy but it has not yet been fully implemented so a review is not appropriate yet.' (PM2)

'The policy has not been reviewed as it has not been implemented for long enough.' (PM1)

'The policy is still in draft form.' (PM3)

However, the Head of Service (PM6) stated that the policy has not yet been reviewed but that there was a protocol in place for reviewing it. At the time of the interview the Head of Service (PM6) said that a date had been set for a meeting between Social Work Services and Education Services to review the policy and to determine the progress that had been made. None of the other policy makers referred to the protocol for reviewing the policy but this may be the result of poor dissemination of information on the part of the Head of Service.

Monitoring

Another of the recommendations from 'Learning with Care' is that:

'Local authorities should keep accurate statistics on a range of aspects of the education of looked after children as agreed in the Social Work Information and Review Group document "Local and National Information Requirements for Social Work' (HMI and SWSI, 2001:43).

Despite this, there was confusion as to whether or not a planned monitoring process had been devised particularly in relation to the educational achievement of looked after children. The Head of Service (PM6) stated that:

'The policy is not currently being monitored.... but the intention is to monitor it through comparison with national statistics such as performance indicators and through individual reviews, where the robustness of the information recorded would be monitored'. (PM6)

The Head of Service went further and suggested that

'Monitoring usually only happens when things go wrong. (PM6)

In terms of other policy makers I interviewed, one stated that the policy was not currently monitored and that a decision needed to be taken on how best to approach this (PM3). Another of the policy makers was not sure if the policy was monitored but was sure that no policy would be accepted without monitoring and evaluation being part of the process (PM2). Yet, another of those interviewed thought that the policy was monitored by a member officer working group (PM5). The focus group was not aware of any policy monitoring at all.

A point of interest here is that whilst the policy makers were not entirely clear about the level of monitoring that occurred, over half of those who participated acknowledged the Scottish Government annual CLAS return and the Account's Commission performance indicator 6, both which specifically concern and measure the educational achievement of care leavers. As such, it would appear that policy makers were unable to identify that PI6, the CLAS return and the ICSP were actually a means of locally and nationally monitoring the educational achievement of the looked after population.

IT Systems for Monitoring with Partners

As part of the e-care agenda encouraging an integrated approach to services, the Scottish Government have invested a large sum of money to aid local authorities in sharing client assessment based information across IT systems within partnerships. As part of the discussion on policy monitoring and review, I discussed the issue of electronic information sharing across agencies. In her interview the Head of Service (PM6) was positive when she talked about how Authority 1 and its partners had been working to develop joint access to IT systems between Social Work Services, Education Services and Health Services. Other policy makers were less convinced that the IT developments that had taken place were either successful or beneficial. Research conducted by Gowar (1999) and Evans (2000) found that communication problems between Social Work Services and Education Services were not alleviated by the increased use of technology,

reflecting the views of the majority of the policy makers in this research. One policy maker stated that:

'The joint access is not of an adequate standard... the devised system is not allowing staff to do their work.....this was causing problems on a daily basis'. (PM3)

The problems identified included issues such as unavoidable duplication of records, not being able to determine if children were known to the partner agencies and not being able to access relevant information on known children.

Following this, I tried to determine how joint information was being used within the council. One policy maker (PM3) was confident that the information was not used at an aggregate level to inform service planning and development but that it was used at an individual level to identify children with additional needs. Other policy makers agreed, as did the Head of Services (PM6) who said that:

'The information recorded on IT systems could be better used for service planning and development'. (PM6)

Despite the large cash injection, my research findings indicate that any partnership working and service planning that does exist, is not currently aided by good IT based information sharing. In addition, it is clear that any information that does exist is only used to inform services for individuals and not used for monitoring or planning purposes. In my view this was a missed opportunity.

In this chapter, I considered how effective the Corporate Parent was at undertaking their Corporate Parent duties. My empirical findings demonstrate that the approach adopted by Authority 1, in respect of the policy process, was essentially incoherent. In the remainder of my analysis chapters, I examine the educational achievement and experience of looked after children. Through these empirical findings, we not only discover more about the lives of the looked after children, but we start to see how the Corporate Parent's approach to policy manifests itself and impacts on the life chances of looked after children.

CHAPTER 6

ANALYSIS OF THE QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH SAMPLE AND QUALITATIVE RESEARCH RESPONDENTS

Introduction

In this chapter I have provided background information that I collected about those who participated in my research. The chapter is divided into 2 sections. In the first section there is a profile of the 1407 children who were considered in the quantitative element of the research. This information ranges from socio demographic information, to key care information and basic educational achievement statistics concerning the looked after children. Following this, there is a profile of the looked after children and care leavers who participated in the qualitative element of my research.

Analysis of Quantitative Research Sample

Sample by Cohort

Table 6.1: Children Discharged from Care (Aged 15 or Over) by Discharge Year

Year Discharged	*Total Discharged in Scotland	Rate per 1,000 15-17 Pop	Total Discharged in Research Sample	Rate per 1,000 15-17 Pop	Research Sample as % of Scottish Total
2000/01	1,545	11.7	209	8.9	13.5
2001/02	1,264	9.6	240	10.2	18.9
2002/03	1,274	9.7	333	14.2	26.1
2003/04	1,245	9.5	337	14.4	27.0
2004/05	1,180	8.9	288	12.3	24.4
Total	6,508	-	1,407	-	21.6

(Source: *Scottish Government, 2005f)

In total 1,407 children were considered in my research. These were children who were aged 15 or over and who were discharged from care between 1st April 2000 and 31st March 2005 by Authority 1 or Authority 2. At the same time, across Scotland, there were a total of 6,508 children aged 16+ discharged from care. As such, the sample of care leavers for my research constitutes approximately one fifth of the care leaving population in Scotland between 2000 and 2005. This is illustrated in Table 6.1 above.

Table 6.2 below illustrates the breakdown of the research sample across both local authorities. Authority 2 had significantly higher proportion of children discharged from care than Authority 1. With the exception of 2000/01, Authority 2's care leavers constituted more than two thirds of the sample from each cohort. There are two reasons for this. First, Authority 2 is a larger local authority and they have

more looked after children. Second, in Authority 2 higher numbers of children per 1,000 population are looked after than are in Authority 1. This is evidenced in Table 6.2.

Table 6.2: Children Discharged from Care (Aged 15 or Over) by Local Authority and Discharge Year

Discharge Year	Authority 1	Rate per 1,000 15-17 Pop	Authority 2	Rate per 1,000 15-17 Pop	Total Children
2000/01	100 (47.8%)	11.5	⁵ 109 (52.2%)	7.3	209 (100%)
2001/02	69 (28.9%)	8.0	171 (71.1%)	11.5	239 (100%)
2002/03	77 (23.1%)	8.9	256 (76.9%)	17.3	333 (100%)
2003/04	92 (27.3%)	10.6	245 (72.7%)	16.5	337 (100%)
2004/05	90 (31.1%)	10.4	199 (68.9%)	13.4	289 (100%)
Total	428 (30.4%)	-	979 (69.6%)	-	1,407 (100%)

(Source: Scottish Government, 2005f)

Authority 1 and Authority 2 are two of the larger local authorities in Scotland and both have significantly high levels of deprivation in their area. In 2004 the Scottish Government identified a link between deprivation levels and the number of looked after children, with higher levels of deprivation leading to higher numbers of looked after children. Whilst the correlation between deprivation levels and numbers of looked after children can be found in Authority 2, this correlation cannot be found in Authority 1. This is because the Scottish Government identified 3 local authorities where the correlation between high deprivation and high levels of looked after

⁵ No home supervision cases were included in the research for Authority 2 for 2000/01.

children could not be found. Authority 1 is one of the local authorities where high levels of deprivation have not led to a large looked after population (Scottish Government, 2004c).

Gender

Gender by Last Placement

Table 6.3: Care Leavers by Gender and Last Placement

Gender		At Home	Foster Care	Residential Care	Total Children
Male	No. %	497 58.6%	130 15.3%	221 26.1%	848 100%
Female	No. %	322 57.6%	110 19.7%	127 22.7%	559 100%
Total	No. %	819 58.2%	240 17.1%	348 24.7%	1407 100%

My research demonstrates that similar proportions of males and females were looked after at home (58.6% and 57.6% respectively). However, a higher proportion of males were looked after in residential care than females, with 26.1% of males being looked after in residential care, compared to 22.7% of females. Conversely, as illustrated in Table 6.3, a higher proportion of females were looked after in foster care (19.7% of females compared to 15.3% of males). At this stage it is difficult to ascertain the reasons for this. It may simply be related to other factors such as the reason for becoming looked after or the age on becoming looked after. However, it may simply be that foster carers are more willing to take females into their homes.

Gender by Discharge Year

Table 6.4: Gender by Discharge Year

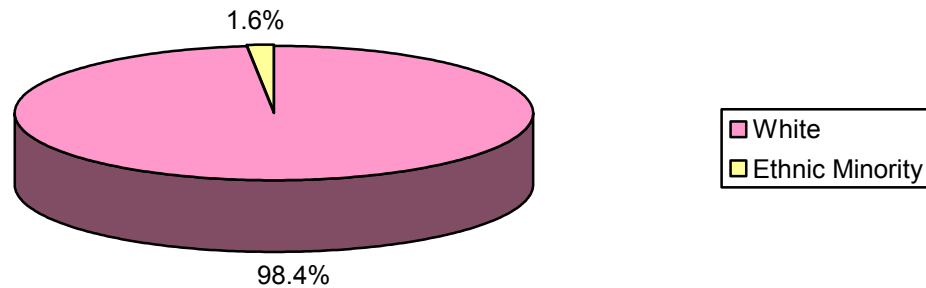
Discharge Year	Male	Female)	Total children
2000/01	139 (66.5%)	70 (33.5%)	209 (100%)
<i>Scotland</i>	<i>(58.0%)</i>	<i>(42.0%)</i>	<i>(100%)</i>
2001/02	152 (63.3%)	88 (36.7%)	240 (100%)
<i>Scotland</i>	<i>(58.0%)</i>	<i>(42.0%)</i>	<i>(100%)</i>
2002/03	195 (58.6%)	138 (41.4%)	333 (100%)
<i>Scotland</i>	<i>(57.0%)</i>	<i>(43.0%)</i>	<i>(100%)</i>
2003/04	200 (59.3%)	137 (40.7%)	337 (100%)
<i>Scotland</i>	<i>(56.0%)</i>	<i>(44.0%)</i>	<i>(100%)</i>
2004/05	163 (56.6%)	125 (43.4%)	288 (100%)
<i>Scotland</i>	<i>(55.0%)</i>	<i>(45.0%)</i>	<i>(100%)</i>
Total	849 (60.3%)	558 (39.7%)	1,407 (100%)

(Scottish Government, 2005f)

Overall a higher proportion of males than females had been looked after in each cohort. On average this equated 60.3% my sample being male and 37.9% being female. However, between 2000/01 and 2004/05 there was an increase in the proportions of females looked after. As reported in Table 6.4 above, over the period this equated to an increase of 9.9% in the proportions of those looked after children who were female. This is reflective of national trends over the 5 year (Table 6.4).

Ethnic Background

Chart 6.5: Care Leavers by Ethnic Background



n=681

I was unable to obtain ethnic background information for half of the children in the sample (51.5%). These children were generally from specific cohorts, where the local authority had not collected reliable ethnicity information that particular year. For those 681 children where the ethnic background was known, 98.4% of these children were white, and 1.6% were from an ethnic minority background (Chart 6.5). This is reflective of national levels where between 1% and 2% of the looked after population were from an ethnic minority background over the research period (Scottish Government, 2005f).

Age Received into Care

Table 6.6: Care Leavers by Age Received into Care

Age		Total Children
Under 1	No.	2
	%	0.3%
1-4 Years	No.	13
	%	1.9%
5-11 Years	No.	142
	%	20.9%
12 Years and Over	No.	523
	%	76.9%
Total	No.	680
	%	100%

The age that children were received into care was not available for half (51.7%) of the sample. This was largely the result of accurate information not being available for specific cohorts from each of the local authorities. For those children where the information was available, the minimum age for children becoming looked after was at birth and the maximum age was 15. As illustrated in Table 6.6, three quarters of my sample had been received into care when they were between the ages of 12 and 15 years old, with the mean age of coming into care being 12.61 years old. However, research has shown that the age a child is when taken into care can have a detrimental affect on their educational achievement, with children becoming looked after in their teens performing less well than those who become looked after at an earlier age (Borland *et al*, 1998).

First and Last Placement

Table 6.7: Care Leavers by First and Last Placement

Placement Type		First Placement	Last Placement
At Home	No. %	172 70.5%	819 58.2%
Foster Care	No. %	30 12.3	240 17.1%
Residential Care	No. %	42 17.2%	348 24.7%
Total	No. %	244 100%	1407 100%

With the exception of last placement, placement information was difficult to collect for all of the children in my sample. This is because accurate placement history information was not available. For this reason, I thought it more appropriate to consider first and last placement only as I wanted to capture movement between placement types (i.e. foster care, residential care and looked after at home) for as many of the children as possible. As illustrated in Table 6.7, I was able to determine the first placement for 244 children (17.3% of the total sample) and I was able to determine the last placement for all of the children in my sample (1407 children).

For those children where first placement was known, I established that just under three quarters (70.5%) of them were looked after at home. For the remainder of the children where first placement was known, on becoming looked after 17.2% were looked after in residential care and 12.3% were looked after in foster care. In

respect of last placement, Table 6.7 demonstrates that the last placement for over half of the children was at home (58.2%). Of the remainder of the children, a quarter (24.7%) had their last placement in residential care and 17.1% had their last placement in foster care. From this it would appear that many more children start off being looked after at home but then move into foster care or residential care as they progress the care system. Further consideration will be given to the relationship between first and last placement at a later stage in this chapter.

Number of Placements

Table 6.8: Number of Placements

Number of Placements		Total Children
1	No. %	50 41.7%
2-4	No. %	57 47.5%
5-8	No. %	11 9.2%
9+	No. %	2 1.7%
Total	No. %	120 100%

In this research, the number of placements that each looked after child had is considered only for those children who, at some point, had been looked after away from home. I was able to collect this information for 120 looked after children, this constitutes 8.5% of my total sample. On average each of these children had 2.29 placements throughout their time of being looked after (1 placement minimum and

11 placements maximum). As has been demonstrated in Table 6.8, 41.7% of the children had only one placement away from home throughout their time of being looked after and 47.5% of the children had between 2 and 4 placements over the period that they were looked after. However, 10.9% of the children had been placed more than 5 times throughout the period that they were looked after. My findings are similar to those of a study conducted by Barnardo's (2006) who found that over half of the children in their research had been placed more than 4 times.

Primary Reason for Becoming Looked After

Table 6.9: Primary Reason for Becoming Looked After

Looked After Reason		Total Children
Carer Neglect/ Abandonment	No. %	127 28.0%
Child's Behaviour	No. %	94 20.8%
Death or Imprisonment of a Carer	No. %	7 1.5%
Carer Alcohol/ Drug Misuse	No. %	37 8.2%
Non Attendance/ School Exclusion from School	No. %	109 24.1%
Offending Behaviour	No. %	38 8.4%
Child Alcohol/ Drug Misuse	No. %	6 1.3%
Child Protection	No. %	35 7.7%
Total	No. %	453 100%

In Table 6.9 the primary reasons for children becoming looked after can be identified. I was able to collect this information for 453 of the children (32.1% of my total sample). I identified that there were 3 primary reasons for children becoming

looked after: neglect or abandonment by a carer, non attendance or exclusion from school and the child's behaviour. Where a child became looked after as a result of their own behaviour, this was often because their behaviour was outwith parental control. I also determined that children also became looked after for reasons such as carer alcohol misuse and parental offending. My research findings are reflective of studies by Kendrick (1992) and Triseliotis *et al* (1995) who found that problems related to school were one of the significant reasons for children becoming looked after. Similarly, Gibb *et al* (2005) found that more than one third of the children in their study became looked after as a result of family related problems. This is interesting as the primary reason for becoming looked after has been found to impact on the educational achievement of looked after children (Triseliotis *et al*, 1995). My research will also show that this is a key factor in determining educational achievement.

Length of Time in Care

Table 6.10: Length of Time in Care

Length of Time		Total Children	Scotland 16+ % at 2005
Less than 1 year	No. %	93 20.0%	29.0%
1 year to under 3 years	No. %	233 50.1%	43.0%
3 years to under 5 years	No. %	78 16.8%	14.0%
5 years and over	No. %	61 13.1%	14.0%
Total	No. %	465 100%	100%

I was able to collect data relating to the length of time looked after for 465 children in my sample (33.0% of the total sample). From the data I was able to estimate that the mean number of years a child was looked after was 2.28 years (minimum less than 1 year and maximum 16 years). As reported in Table 6.10 above, the majority of children had been looked after for between 1 year and 3 years. However, just under one third of the children in my sample had been looked after for more than 3 years. My findings are closely related to position in Scotland at this time, as reported in Table 6.10.

Age on Discharge

Table 6.11: Care Leavers and Age on Discharge

Age		Total Children
15	No. %	567 44.0%
16	No. %	531 41.2%
17	No. %	144 11.2%
18	No. %	46 3.6%
Total	No. %	1288 100%

I was able to gather data relating to age on discharge for 1288 children (91.5% of the total sample). However, I know that all of the children considered in my research met my sampling criteria as they were aged between 15 and 18 years old and had been eligible to sit SCQF level 3 exams prior to being discharged from care. The mean age of discharge was 15.74 years (Minimum 15 years old and

maximum 18 years old) and as illustrated in Table 6.11 the largest proportion of children were discharged from care prior to their 16th birthday. The findings of a study by Dixon and Stein (2002) about care leavers in Scotland is reflective of my research findings as they determine that three quarters of looked after children were legitimately discharged from care by the local authorities between the ages of 15 and 16 years old. In their research, all looked after children were discharged from care by 18 years old.

Destination on Discharge from Care

Table 6.12: Destinations on Discharge from Care

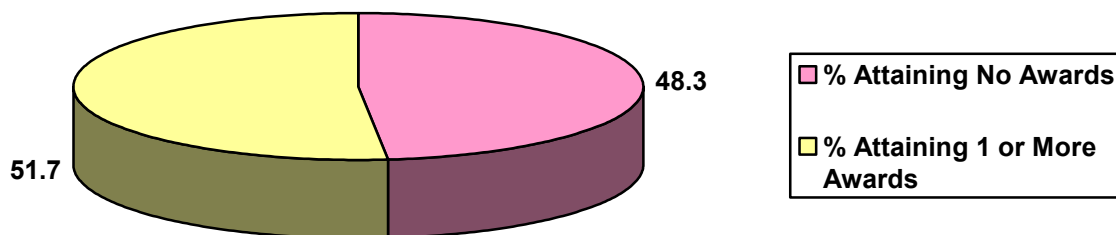
Discharge Destination		Total Children	Scotland 16+ % at 2005
Homeless	No.	4	0.0%
	%	2.2%	
Own Tenancy/ Supported Accommodation	No.	28	21.0%
	%	15.1%	
Parental Home	No.	145	69.0%
	%	78.4%	
Relative/ Friend Home	No.	6	10.0%
	%	3.2%	
Prison	No.	2	0.0%
	%	1.1%	
Total	No.	185	100%
	%	100%	

The destination on discharge is known for only 185 of the children in the sample. As demonstrated in Table 6.12, the largest proportion of children in my sample lived in the parental home on being discharged from care. Following this, the second largest number of children lived in their own tenancies/ supported

accommodation on discharge from care. The proportion of children going to particular destinations on discharge from care is similar to the national position at this time as can be identified in Table 6.12.

SCQF Level 3 Awards

Chart 6.13: SCQF level 3 Awards



As noted previously, the SCQF framework is the current Scottish examination framework. As a minimum, throughout Scotland pupils in fourth year would be expected to attain SCQF level 3 awards. In my research 48.3% (680) of children had not attained any Scottish Qualification Authority awards at SCQF level 3 or above prior to leaving care (Chart 6.13). This means that just under half of the looked after children in my sample left care with no formal qualifications. This is reflective of the 55% of the care leaving population in Scotland who attained no awards at SCQF level 3 or above (Scottish Government, 2005f). The educational

achievement of looked after children is by no means reflective of the general school population. There is not a national measure relating to pupils in the general school population not attaining any qualifications at SCQF level 3 or above. Instead, national publications pertaining to the general school population consider those pupils who, as a minimum, have attained at least 5 SCQF level 3 awards or above. In Scotland in the 2004 exam diet 91% of pupils attained at least 5 SCQF level 3 awards or above (Scottish Government, 2005b). Therefore, even if the remaining 9% of the general school population in Scotland attained no awards at SCQF level 3 or above, looked after children in my research would still perform less well than their peers in the general school population.

Standard Grade Awards (Grades 1-4)

Table 6.14: Standard Grade Awards (Grades 1-4)

Standard Grade Awards (Grade 1-4)		Total Children
No Awards	No. %	947 67.3%
1 or more	No. %	460 32.6%
3 or more	No. %	291 20.6%
5 or more	No. %	188 13.3%
8 or More	No. %	73 5.1%

Table 6.15: Standard Grades Presented for, Sat and Passed (Grades 1-4)

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Presented	0	9	2.58	3.2
Sat	0	9	2.12	2.9
Passed	0	9	1.34	2.4

Largely, national statistics pertaining to the general school population are reported in SCQF levels rather than particular exam types, such as standard grades. Nevertheless, Audit Scotland was still reporting the number of care leavers who attained at least 1 standard grade in 2005. In the period of 2004 to 2005, Audit Scotland reported that 43.9% of children across Scotland who were looked after away from home (residential care or foster care) attained at least 1 standard grade (Audit Scotland, 2005). This compares to 48.4% of the children looked after away from home in my research attaining at least 1 standard grade. In my research when I consider the achievement of all looked after children, including those looked after at home, only 32.6% of looked after children attain 1 or more standard grades (Table 6.14). If Audit Scotland had collected information that also considered those children looked after at home at this time, I would have anticipated that their findings would have been in line with my own findings.

As Table 6.15 demonstrates, children were presented for, sat and passed a range of standard grades (minimum 0 and maximum 9). On average each looked after child in my sample was presented for 2.58 standard grades and each child sat an average of 2.12 standard grades. Overall, an average of 1.34 standard grades per looked after child was awarded. However, as noted above, each child in my sample did not attain the average number of standard grade awards and there was a wide range in the total number of standard grades passed. Indeed, 67.3% of the children in my sample attained no standard grades at all. Whilst one third (32.6%)

of the children attained at least 1 standard grade, only one in ten of the children in my sample attained 5 or more standard grades (13.3%). Audit Scotland does not collect statistics showing the numbers of looked after children attaining 5 or more standard grades so a national comparison cannot be made.

SCQF Level 4 Awards

Table 6.16: SCQF Level 4 Awards

SCQF Level 4 Awards or Above		Total Children
No Awards	No. %	873 62.0%
1 or More	No. %	534 37.9%
3 or More	No. %	335 23.8%
5 or More	No. %	209 14.8%
8 or More	No. %	79 5.6%

Table 6.17: SCQF Level 4 Awards or Above Presented for, Sat and Passed

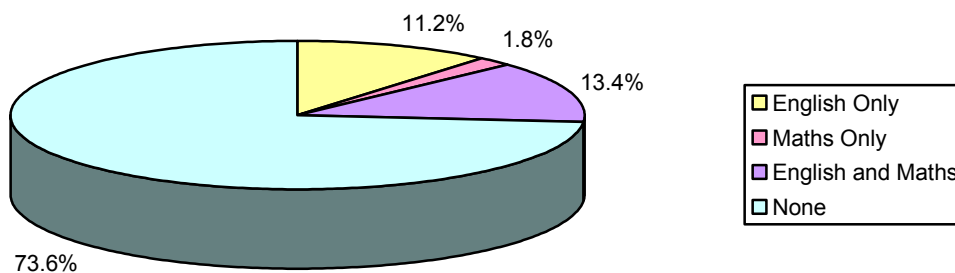
	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Presented	0	19	2.84	3.4
Sat	0	18	2.34	3.2
Passed	0	18	1.54	2.5

In my sample, 62.0% of looked after children gained no awards at SCQF level 4 or above. For those who did attain an award at SCQF level 4 or above, 37.9% gained at least 1 award and 14.8% gained 5 or more awards (Table 6.16). In Scotland in 2004 a significantly higher proportion (77%) of children in the general school population attained 5+ awards at SCQF level 4 or above (Scottish Government,

2005b). As Table 6.17 illustrates, in my sample the mean number of SCQF level 4 or above awards presented for was 2.84 (minimum 0 and maximum being 19). Similarly, the mean number of awards at SCQF level 4 or above sat by the care leavers was 2.34 and the mean number of passes was lower, at 1.54 per child.

English and Maths at SCQF Level 4

Chart 6.18: English and Maths at SCQF level 4



n=1407

English and Maths are core subjects so the proportions of looked after children attaining these is important. As set in Chart 6.18 above, only 13.4% of the children in my sample attained English and Maths at SCQF level 4 or above, and three quarters did not attain either English or Maths at SCQF level 4 or above. There is no direct comparison with care leavers nationally or the general school population as this is reported as those attaining English and Maths at SCQF level 3 or above.

In Scotland in 2005, 36% of looked after children and 90% of the general school population attained English and Maths at SCQF level 3 or above (Audit Scotland, 2005 and Scottish Government, 2005b). However in a study conducted by McClung (2001) around one fifth of care leavers attained English and Maths at SCQF level 4 or above, reflecting the findings of this research.

SCQF Level 6 Awards

Table 6.19: SCQF Level 6 or Awards

SCQF Level 6 Awards or Above		Total children
No Awards	No. %	811 96.5%
1 or More	No. %	29 3.45%
3 or More	No. %	9 1.1%

Table 6.20: SCQF level 6 Awards or Above Presented for, Sat and Passed

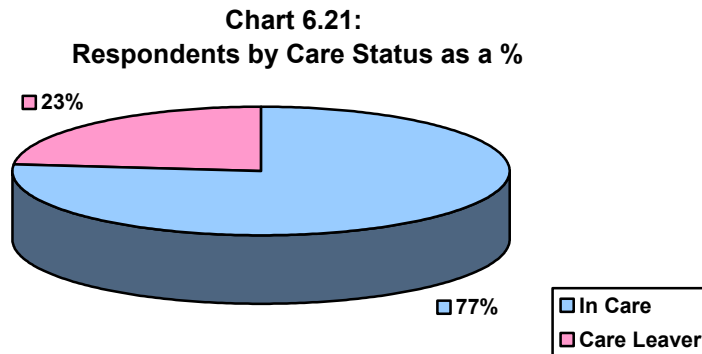
	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Presented	0	7	0.14	0.56
Sat	0	7	0.13	0.56
Passed	0	6	0.08	0.39

Nationally, the percentage of the general population attaining any qualifications at SCQF level 6 or above is calculated using the S4 population as a base. In 2004, 39% of the general school population attained at least one SCQF level 6 award or above and 23% attained at least 3 SCQF level 6 awards or above (Scottish Government, 2005b). In my sample, 840 care leavers were eligible to have been presented for SCQF level 6 awards or above prior to discharge from care. In total,

only 4.52% (38) of those children eligible actually sat exams at this level and only 3.45% (29) of children achieved at least 1 award at this level (Table 6.19). On average, this equates to each eligible care leaver passing 0.08 level 6 or above qualifications (Table 6.20).

Analysis of the Qualitative Research Respondents

Profile of Looked After Children



In total there were 30 individuals interviewed. The chart above illustrates the split between those that were still looked after and those that had been discharged from care at the time of my research. There were 23 children who were looked after at the time of the research and 7 children who had already been discharged from care. As with all of my other fieldwork, participation was on a voluntary basis. There is no key for the looked after population and any reference I make to these looked after children will include their age and placement type. In the case of care leavers I will use their last placement type.

Table 6.22: Respondents by Gender

Care Status	Male	Female	Total
In Care	15	8	23
Care Leaver	4	3	7
Total	19	11	30

In terms of gender, a greater proportion of males agreed to participate in my research than females. Of those in care 15 were male and 8 were female and of those who had left care 4 were male and 3 were female. This is illustrated above in Table 6.22.

Table 6.23: Respondents by Age Band

Age	Number
11-15	15
16-19	15
Total	30

All respondents were aged between 11 and 19, with half of them aged between 11 and 15 and half aged between 16 and 19. This is illustrated above in Table 6.23.

In terms of placement type for those looked after at the time of the interview, 14 children were living in some form of residential care (11 children in a residential unit, 1 in a residential school and 2 in secure accommodation). For those children looked after in the community, 2 were living away from home with foster carers or relatives and 6 were looked after in their parental home at home. One child chose

not to specify where they were living. For those children who had already left care, 2 had been in a residential school and 1 had been in a residential unit. Two of the children had lived with foster parents and 2 had lived at home with their parents on home supervision orders. This is illustrated below in Tables 6.24 and 6.25.

Table 6.24: In Care Respondent by Placement

	Placement	Number
Residential Setting	Residential School	1
	Residential Unit	11
	Secure	2
	Total	14
Community Setting	Foster Carer/Relatives	2
	parents	6
	Total	8
Other	Not Specified	1
	Total	1
	Grand Total	23

Table 6.25: Care Leavers by Last Placement

	Placement	Number
Residential Setting	Residential School	2
	Residential Unit	1
	Total	3
Community Setting	Foster Carer/Relatives	2
	parents	2
	Total	4
	Grand Total	7

Table 6.26: Care Leavers by Living Arrangement

Living Arrangement	Number
Supported Accommodation	3
Family of Friends	2
Own Tenancy	1
Homeless	1
Total	7

Table 6.26 above illustrates where the care leavers who participated in my research were living at the time of my research. Three of the children interviewed were living in a supported setting, 2 were living with family or friends, 1 had their own tenancy and 1 reported being homeless.

Table 6.27: Care Status by School Type

School Type	In Care	Care Leaver	Total
Mainstream	14	5	18
Children's Support Unit	6	0	7
Residential School	1	2	3
Secure Accommodation	2	0	2
Total	23	7	30

One child interviewed was attending a mainstream primary school and 11 were attending a mainstream secondary school. Six of the children interviewed were attending children's support units, 2 were at college (counted as mainstream) and 1 was at a residential school. As 2 of the children who participated in my research were in secure accommodation, they were being educated at the secure unit. In terms of school for the care leavers who participated, 5 of the 7 had attended

mainstream school and 2 had attended residential school. This is illustrated in Table 6.27.

Table 6.28: Time in Care by Care Status

Time Band	In Care	Care Leaver
Less than a year	8	0
1-2 years	4	2
2-5 Years	7	3
More than 5 years	2	2
Not Known	2	0
Total	23	7

Eight of the children had been looked after for less than a year, 4 for between 1 and 2 years, 7 between 2 and 5 years and 2 for more than 5 years. Two of the children did not know how long they had been looked after. For the care leavers, 5 of the 7 had been looked after for more than 2 years (Table 6.28).

CHAPTER 7

ASSESSING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN KEY CARE FACTORS

Introduction

Whilst ultimately this research is concerned with the academic achievement of looked after children, it seems appropriate to first consider the care experiences of looked after children, as research demonstrates that children learn more when they are better prepared (Becker,1991). For instance, children who are looked after away from home often have a history of placement instability where they have had numerous placements. This has been identified as having a knock on effect on schooling (Social Inclusion Unit, 2003). Moreover, the lack of support and encouragement for learning, coupled with inadequate emotional and physical support, can also impact on the ability of looked after children to learn. The motivation and aspirations of looked after children can also be affected (Morris, 2000; Jackson 1999; Maxwell *et al*, 2006). This is especially true for those children looked after at home.

My primary objective in this chapter was to assess the relationships between key care factors and to consider the influence that these key care factors have on the lives of looked after children. One factor I have been particularly interested in is placement type as little is known about the educational achievement of children looked after at home. As gender influences educational achievement in the

general school population, I have also been interested in examining the association that gender has with care aspects. The influence that other key care factors have on each other, such as number of placements, age on becoming looked after and reason for becoming looked after, have also been of interest to me. This chapter takes account of four aspects which have been found to have a bearing on a child's experience of being looked after. The first area I have taken account of concerns the relationship between first and last placement. Following this, care factors which are associated with each other at 3 key stages have been considered. Reflection has given to the stage that relates to children becoming looked after. Consideration has then been given to care factors which have a bearing on a child's life whilst they are looked after. Factors relating to children being discharged from care have been discussed. This aspect of my research is particularly significant as it provides an in-depth Scottish perspective on the impact that care factors can have on the lives of looked after children.

To set my research findings in context, I have considered these within the framework of nationally reported data pertaining to looked after children and the general school population. Additionally, I have taken into account wider research pertaining to looked after children in considering my own empirical findings.

First and Last Placement

Table 7.1: First Placement and Last Placement

First Placement		Last Placement			Total
		At Home	Foster Care	Residential Care	
At Home	No.	170	0	2	172
	Row %⁶	98.8%	.0%	1.2%	100.0%
	Col %	97.1%	.0%	3.7%	70.5%
Foster Care	No.	0	12	18	30
	Row %	.0%	40.0%	60.0%	100.0%
	Col %	.0%	80.0%	33.3%	12.3%
Residential Care	No.	5	3	34	42
	Row %	11.9%	7.1%	81.0%	100.0%
	Col %	2.9%	20.0%	63.0%	17.2%
Total	No.	175	15	54	244
	Row %	71.7%	6.1%	22.1%	100.0%
	Col %	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

As mentioned previously, only first placement and last placement information was collected for the research sample. Whilst the last placement was known for all looked after children, the first placement was known for specific cohorts only. In my research, I was able to estimate that children looked after away from home, at any point, had on average 2.29 placements. As such, it can be assumed that there was little movement in respect of placement type between first and last placement for the majority of children. Indeed, my research shows that there is an extremely strong correlation between first and last placement ($p < 0.001$; Crammer's $V = .710$). This can be identified from Table 7.1 above which illustrates that almost all (98.8%) of the children whose first placement was at home were at home for their last placement. Similarly, a significantly high proportion (81.0%) of children whose first placement was residential care had their last placement in residential care. Table 7.1 illustrates that only 40.0% of those children whose first placement was foster

⁶ Row % is a % of the horizontal total and Col% is a % to the vertical total.

care had their last placement in foster care, with the majority of these children (60.0%) ending up in residential care. There could be two explanations for this but it is likely to be a combination of these explanations. It may simply be the result of the small numbers of children (30) in foster care for whom first and last placement information was available or it may be that a proportion of children who start off being looked after in foster find themselves in residential care as they go through the care system because foster care is no longer appropriate or because appropriate foster care placements cannot be found.

Care Factors Relating to Becoming Looked After

Age on Becoming Looked After and Placement Type

Table 7.2: Age Received into Care and Placement Type

Age Received into Care		Placement Type			Total
		At Home	Foster Care	Residential Care	
Under 12	No.	57	64	36	157
	Row %	36.3%	40.8%	22.9%	100.0%
	Col %	14.1%	66.7%	19.9%	23.1%
12 and Over	No.	346	32	145	523
	Row %	66.2%	6.1%	27.7%	100.0%
	Col %	85.9%	33.3%	80.1%	76.9%
Total	No.	403	96	181	680
	Row %	59.3%	14.1%	26.6%	100.0%
	Col%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Empirical evidence demonstrates that the environment where a child lives impacts on how well they perform at school (Borland, 2000). What is more, the age a child is received into care can impact on their academic achievement and their experience in care. Borland *et al* (1998) found this in her research and suggested that children looked after for many years perform better educationally than those who become looked after in their teens. This is significant as I found in my research that the age a child became looked after was correlated to the type of placements they were likely to have ($p < 0.001$; Crammer's $V = .423$). As has been illustrated in Table 7.2, three quarters (76.9%) of all children in my sample became looked after at age 12 or over and one quarter (23.1%) became looked after when they were less than 12 years old.

In terms of placement type, two thirds (66.2%) of all children aged 12 or over in my sample were looked after at home compared to only one third (36.3%) of all looked after children under the age of 12 being looked after at home. In respect of children looked after away from home, significantly higher proportions of those aged under 12 when they were received into care were looked after in foster care as opposed to residential care (40.8% and 22.9% of all children under 12). This is reversed when consideration is given those who were received into care when they were 12 or over, as a significantly higher proportion of those aged 12 or over were looked after in residential care as opposed to foster care (27.7% and 6.1% respectively) Whilst this is likely to be related to the Scottish Government's drive to reduce the number of children under the age of 12 who are in residential care, it is concerning given we know that the educational achievement of children looked after at home is less favourable. Essentially, it raises questions about the effectiveness of government policies to support looked after children,

Received into Care Reason and Age on Becoming Looked After

In my research I was able to estimate that the primary reasons for a child becoming looked after was correlated to the age that the child was when they became looked after ($p < 0.001$; Crammer's $V = .380$). Almost all of the children (94.4%) who became looked after as a result of non attendance or exclusion from school were over 12 years old when they became looked after. Respectively, a significantly high proportion of children who became looked after as a result of their

own behaviour or their offending behaviour were over 12 years when they first became looked after (86.2% and 84.2% correspondingly). Children under 12 years old were more likely to become looked after as a result of death or imprisonment of a carer (71.4%), child protection reasons (41.2%) or carer alcohol and drug misuse (41.7%). This is illustrated below in Table 7.3. There are 2 interconnected issues here that I find to be a matter of significance. First, the implication that educational problems and behavioural problems are not deemed serious enough to merit removal from the family home, whereas death or imprisonment of a carer, child protection issues and carer alcohol and drug issues are serious enough to merit removal from the family home. Second, whether consciously or not, older children under supervision orders are being looked after in their family homes and are never actually removed from the problems that cause the supervision measure in the first instance. I can't help but wonder if this is more related to the lack of residential and foster care resources available for children, than about meeting the needs of all looked after children.

Table 7.3: Received into Care Reason and Age Received into Care

Received into Care Reason		Age Received into Care		Total
		Under 12	12 and Over	
Carer Neglect/ Abandonment	No.	50	77	127
	Row%	39.4%	60.6%	100.0%
	Col %	45.9%	22.6%	28.2%
Child's Behaviour	No.	13	81	94
	Row%	13.8%	86.2%	100.0%
	Col %	11.9%	23.8%	20.9%
Death or Imprisonment of Carer	No.	5	2	7
	Row%	71.4%	28.6%	100.0%
	Col %	4.6%	.6%	1.6%
Carer Alcohol/Drug Misuse	No.	15	21	36
	Row%	41.7%	58.3%	100.0%
	Col %	13.8%	6.2%	8.0%
Non Attendance/School Exclusion	No.	6	102	108
	Row%	5.6%	94.4%	100.0%
	Col %	5.5%	29.9%	24.0%
Child's Offending Behaviour	No.	6	32	38
	Row%	15.8%	84.2%	100.0%
	Col %	5.5%	9.4%	8.4%
Child's Alcohol/ Drug Misuse	No.	0	6	6
	Row%	.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	Col %	.0%	1.8%	1.3%
Child Protection	No.	14	20	34
	Row%	41.2%	58.8%	100.0%
	Col %	12.8%	5.9%	7.6%
Total	No.	109	341	450
	Row%	24.2%	75.8%	100.0%
	Col %	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Primary Reason for Becoming Looked After and Placement Type

Table 7.4: Received into Care Reason and Placement Type

Received into Care Reason		Placement Type			Total
		At Home	Foster Care	Residential Care	
Carer Neglect/ Abandonment	No.	62	36	29	127
	Row %	48.8%	28.3%	22.8%	100.0%
	Col %	21.6%	53.7%	29.3%	28.0%
Child's Behaviour	No.	61	4	29	94
	Row %	64.9%	4.3%	30.9%	100.0%
	Col %	21.3%	6.0%	29.3%	20.8%
Death or Imprisonment of Carer	No.	2	1	4	7
	Row %	28.6%	14.3%	57.1%	100.0%
	Col %	.7%	1.5%	4.0%	1.5%
Carer Alcohol/Drug Misuse	No.	18	16	3	37
	Row %	48.6%	43.2%	8.1%	100.0%
	Col %	6.3%	23.9%	3.0%	8.2%
Non Attendance/School Exclusion	No.	102	1	6	109
	Row %	93.6%	.9%	5.5%	100.0%
	Col %	35.5%	1.5%	6.1%	24.1%
Child's Offending Behaviour	No.	19	0	19	38
	Row %	50.0%	0%	50.0%	100.0%
	Col %	6.6%	0%	19.2%	8.4%
Child's Alcohol/ Drug Misuse	No.	4	0	2	6
	Row %	66.7%	0%	33.3%	100.0%
	Col %	1.4%	0%	2.0%	1.3%
Child Protection	No.	19	9	7	35
	Row %	54.3%	25.7%	20.0%	100.0%
	Col %	6.6%	13.4%	7.1%	7.7%
Total	No.	287	67	99	453
	Row %	63.4%	14.8%	21.9%	100.0%
	Col %	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

In my research I have been able to identify that the reason for a child becoming looked after was strongly correlated to placement type ($p < 0.001$; Crammer's $V = .377$). As illustrated in Table 7.4 above, carer neglect and abandonment was the primary reason for over half (53.7%) of the children in foster care becoming looked after. For those children in residential care, they had largely become looked after as a result of carer neglect or abandonment (29.3%) or through their own behaviour (29.3%), whereas children who were looked after at home were

more likely to have become looked after as a direct consequence of non attendance at school or as a result of school exclusion (35.5%). This disengagement from learning, combined with children not actually being removed from the problems that were likely to lead to them becoming looked after, may indeed be relevant and could be one of the significant reasons why children looked after at home perform so poorly academically.

Care Factors Relating to Children Whilst Being Looked After

Primary Reason for Becoming Looked After and Length of Time Looked After

Table 7.5: Received into Care Reason and Length of Time Looked After

Received into Care Reason		Length of Time				Total
		Less than 1 Year	1 to under 3 Years	3 to under 5 Years	5+ Years	
Carer Neglect/ Abandonment	No.	10	30	12	7	59
	Row %	16.9%	50.8%	20.3%	11.9%	100.0%
	Col %	27.0%	25.2%	28.6%	46.7%	27.7%
Child's Behaviour	No.	15	36	15	2	68
	Row %	22.1%	52.9%	22.1%	2.9%	100.0%
	Col %	40.5%	30.3%	35.7%	13.3%	31.9%
Death or Imprisonment of Carer	No.	0	1	1	3	5
	Row %	.0%	20.0%	20.0%	60.0%	100.0%
	Col %	.0%	.8%	2.4%	20.0%	2.3%
Carer Alcohol/Drug Misuse	No.	1	3	3	3	10
	Row %	10.0%	30.0%	30.0%	30.0%	100.0%
	Col %	2.7%	2.5%	7.1%	20.0%	4.7%
Non Attendance/School Exclusion	No.	7	29	4	0	40
	Row %	17.5%	72.5%	10.0%	.0%	100.0%
	Col %	18.9%	24.4%	9.5%	.0%	18.8%
Child's Offending Behaviour	No.	3	13	2	0	18
	Row %	16.7%	72.2%	11.1%	.0%	100.0%
	Col %	8.1%	10.9%	4.8%	.0%	8.5%
Child's Alcohol/ Drug Misuse	No.	1	0	1	0	2
	Row %	50.0%	.0%	50.0%	.0%	100.0%
	Col %	2.7%	.0%	2.4%	.0%	.9%
Child Protection	No.	0	7	4	0	11
	Row %	.0%	63.6%	36.4%	.0%	100.0%
	Col %	.0%	5.9%	9.5%	.0%	5.2%
Total	No.	37	119	42	15	213
	Row %	17.4%	55.9%	19.7%	7.0%	100.0%
	Col %	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

I was able to estimate that there was a correlation between the reason for a child becoming looked after and the length of time a child was looked after ($p < 0.001$; Crammer's $V = .290$). From Table 7.5 above, it can be identified that just over half

of those children (50.8%) who had been become looked after as a result of carer neglect and abandonment had been in care for between 1 and 3 years. This is similar to those children who became looked after as a result of their own behaviour, with 52.9% of them being looked after for between 1 and 3 years. Conversely, children who became looked after for reasons such as the death or imprisonment of a carer (60.0% looked after for 5 or more years) or as a result of child protection issues (36.4% looked after between 3 and 5 years) or carer alcohol and drug misuse (30.0% being looked after for 5 years or more) tended to be looked after for longer periods of time. My research findings are comparable with Gibb *et al* (2005) who found that the primary reason for a child becoming looked after was correlated to the length of time that they would looked after. In the Gibb *et al* study (2005), those children who had been looked after for longer periods of time were children who had been taken into care for reasons other than difficult situations with families such as death and imprisonment.

Length of Time Looked After and Placement Type

Research indicates that children perform better at school the longer they have been in care (Jackson and Sachdev, 2001) but this is assuming that stability comes with longevity. What is more, research demonstrates that children in foster care perform better educationally than those in residential care (Who Cares? Scotland, 2004 and McClung, 2001) and snapshot national statistics demonstrate that children looked after at home perform the worst in comparison to those looked

after away from home (Scottish Government, 2005f). On considering placement type in conjunction with the length of time looked after (Table 7.6 below), my findings suggest that whilst placement type is associated with the length of time a child is looked after, it is not strongly correlated ($p < 0.001$; Crammer's $V = 0.016$). Although, as illustrated in Table 7.6 below, many more children looked after at home were looked after for 1 year and over compared to those in foster care and residential care. Again, this is significant because children who are looked after at home are arguably looked after for longer but we know that they perform least well educationally. Subsequently, is their performance a consequence of the type and level of support that they receive under their supervision orders?

Table 7.6: Length of Time Looked After and Placement Type

Length of Time	Placement Type			Total	
	At Home	Foster Care	Residential Care		
Less than 1 Year	No.	48	10	35	93
	Row %	51.6%	10.8%	37.6%	100.0%
	Col %	16.6%	25.6%	25.7%	20.0%
1 to under 3 Years	No.	161	9	63	233
	Row %	69.1%	3.9%	27.0%	100.0%
	Col %	55.5%	23.1%	46.3%	50.1%
3 to under 5 Years	No.	45	8	25	78
	Row %	57.7%	10.3%	32.1%	100.0%
	Col %	15.5%	20.5%	18.4%	16.8%
5+ Years	No.	36	12	13	61
	Row %	59.0%	19.7%	21.3%	100.0%
	Col %	12.4%	30.8%	9.6%	13.1%
Total	No.	290	39	136	465
	Row %	62.4%	8.4%	29.2%	100.0%
	Col %	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Age on Being Received into Care by Number of Placements

Table 7.7: Age Received into Care and Number of Placements

Age Received into Care		Number of Placements				Total
		1	2-4	4-8	9+	
Under 12	No.	8	14	4	2	28
	Row %	28.6%	50.0%	14.3%	7.1%	100.0%
	Col %	16.0%	24.6%	36.4%	100.0%	23.3%
12 and Over	No.	42	43	7	0	92
	Row %	45.7%	46.7%	7.6%	.0%	100.0%
	Col %	84.0%	75.4%	63.6%	.0%	76.7%
Total	No.	50	57	11	2	120
	Row %	41.7%	47.5%	9.2%	1.7%	100.0%
	Col %	100.0	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

In examining the relationship between the total number of placements a child had and the age that a child became looked after, I was able to estimate that there was a correlation between the two factors ($p < 0.05$; Gamma = $-.381$). I was able to ascertain that children who become looked after at age 12 or over tended to have fewer placements than those who become looked after before they were 12 years old. As illustrated in Table 7.7 above, children who were under 12 years old when they became looked after were more likely to have 4 or more placements (21.4%) than those who became looked after when they were 12 years old or more (7.6%). Similarly, a significantly smaller proportion (28.6%) of children who were under 12 years old when they became looked after had only one placement compared to just under half (45.7%) of all children who were aged 12 and over when they became looked after. This is a crucial finding as my empirical evidence demonstrates that Authority 1 and Authority 2 are not paying close attention to reducing the number of placements that looked after children have. This will have had serious

consequences for these children, as it has been demonstrated that placement changes without close attention to continuity, can result in looked after children being out of schools for long periods of time, and it can also result in a drop in achievement levels (Jackson and Thomas, 2000; and Biehal *et al*, 1995). This becomes evident later in the thesis (Table 8.4).

Number of Placements and Last Placement Type

Table 7.8: Number of Placements and Placement Type

Number of Placements		Placement Type			Total
		At Home	Foster Care	Residential Care	
1 Placement	No.	11	12	27	50
	Row%	22.0%	24.0%	54.0%	100.0%
	Col %	68.8%	50.0%	33.8%	41.7%
More than 1	No.	5	12	53	70
	Row%	7.1%	17.1%	75.7%	100.0%
	Col %	31.3%	50.0%	66.3%	58.3%
Total	No.	16	24	80	120
	Row%	13.3%	20.0%	66.7%	100.0%
	Col %	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

As illustrated above in Table 7.8, I was able to estimate that there was a significant correlation between the total number of placements that a child had and their last placement type ($p < 0.05$; Crammer's $V = .251$). For those children who were looked after away from home in residential care I found that two thirds of them (66.3%) had more than one placement compared to only half (50.0%) of the children in foster care having more than 1 placement. Again, this is another significant finding, and it raises questions about the different environments that these children are

living in (i.e. family setting over group living), and about how effective each setting is at nurturing, supporting and providing these children with a stable environment. From my research findings I could speculate that generally residential care is unable to provide looked after children with the same kind of stability that foster care can generally provide.

Fernandez (2007) found that despite emotional and behavioural development, academic performance and placement instability early in a child's care experience, that there was evidence emerging suggesting that there were gains in academic, emotional and behavioural outcomes as looked after children progressed in permanent placements. I find this to be a matter of interest as it illustrates the point that I am trying to make above about the benefits of stable placements for looked after children.

Care Factors Relating to Discharge from Being Looked After

Primary Reason for Becoming Looked After and Discharge Accommodation

Table 7.9: Received into Care Reason and Discharge Accommodation

Received into Care Reason		Discharge Accommodation		Total
		Home	Not Home	
Carer Neglect/Abandonment	No.	32	10	42
	Row %	76.2%	23.8%	100.0%
	Col %	30.5%	33.3%	31.1%
Child's Behaviour	No.	39	7	46
	Row %	84.8%	15.2%	100.0%
	Col %	37.1%	23.3%	34.1%
Death or Imprisonment of Carer	No.	0	2	2
	Row %	0%	100.0%	100.0%
	Col %	0%	6.7%	1.5%
Carer Alcohol/Drug Misuse	No.	3	3	6
	Row %	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%
	Col %	2.9%	10.0%	4.4%
Non Attendance/School Exclusion	No.	24	2	26
	Row %	92.3%	7.7%	100.0%
	Col %	22.9%	6.7%	19.3%
Child's Offending Behaviour	No.	4	5	9
	Row %	44.4%	55.6%	100.0%
	Col %	3.8%	16.7%	6.7%
Child's Alcohol/ Drug Misuse	No.	0	1	1
	Row %	0%	100.0%	100.0%
	Col %	0%	3.3%	.7%
Child Protection	No.	3	0	3
	Row %	100.0%	0%	100.0%
	Col %	2.9%	0%	2.2%
Total	No.	105	30	135
	Row %	77.8%	22.2%	100.0%
	Col %	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

The primary reason for children becoming looked after has been found to be significant alongside other care factors such as age on becoming looked after, placement type and the length of time in care. As a result, I attempted to identify the bearing that the primary reason for becoming looked after had on where a child

lived on discharge from care. Through my research I have been able to demonstrate that the primary reason for a child becoming looked after significantly affected where a child lived on discharge from care ($p < 0.001$; Crammer's $V = .425$). In fact, the majority of children who were looked after remained or returned to the family home when they had been discharged from care (77.8%). In respect of the reason for becoming looked after, as illustrated in Table 7.9 above, significantly higher proportions of children who were looked after as a result of carer neglect or abandonment (76.2%), their own behaviour (84.4%) and non attendance at school or school exclusion (92.3%) were more likely to be living at home on discharge from care. This compares to higher proportions of children who were looked after as a result of offending behaviour (55.6%), death or imprisonment of a carer (100.0%) and as a result of carer alcohol and drug misuse (50.0%) living outwith the family home when discharged from care. These children lived in a range of places such as supported accommodation and their own tenancies. Others became homeless on discharge from care.

Overall, I find it quite interesting that that the majority of looked after children return to their family homes (or remain at home for those on home supervision orders) on discharge from care, and with this are returning to many of the issues associated with them becoming looked after in the first instance. This could perhaps explain why many people who have been looked after are still found to be at a higher risk of social exclusion on into their twenties. The long term affects of being looked

after have been evidenced in studies, for example Dixon and Stein (2002); Courtney and Dworsky (2006); and Cashmore *et al* (2007).

Placement Type and Discharge Accommodation

Empirical results demonstrated that placement type was a significant factor in determining where a child lived on discharge from care ($p < 0.001$; Crammer's $V = .636$). As illustrated in Table 7.10 below, almost all (98.3%) children who were looked after at home remained at home on discharge from their home supervision order. Just under half (45.5%) of all children looked after in a residential setting returned home on discharge from care.

Table 7.10: Placement Type and Discharge Accommodation

Placement Type		Discharge Accommodation		Total
		Home	Not home	
At Home	No.	115	2	117
	Row %	98.3%	1.7%	100.0%
	Col %	79.3%	5.0%	63.2%
Foster Care	No.	5	8	13
	Row %	38.5%	61.5%	100.0%
	Col %	3.4%	20.0%	7.0%
Residential Care	No.	25	30	55
	Row %	45.5%	54.5%	100.0%
	Col %	17.2%	75.0%	29.7%
Total	No.	145	40	185
	Row %	78.4%	21.6%	100.0%
	Col %	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

As illustrated in Table 7.10 above, the remainder of those children discharged from residential care (54.5%) had their own tenancies, lived in supported

accommodation, stayed with friends or were homeless on discharge from care. However, children who had been looked after in foster care were the least likely to return to the family home on discharge from care, with just under two thirds (61.5%) of all children discharged from foster care having their own tenancies, living in supported accommodation or living with friends. This is interesting and makes me wonder if somehow the level of support and care that children in foster care receive influences the choices they make on being discharged from care. Nevertheless, irrespective of where a child lives on discharge from care, research has shown that throughcare and aftercare services need to be improved upon (Triseliotis *et al*, 1995). This is especially the situation in Scotland where there is a lack of consistency and continuity in the support offered to children on discharge from care, particularly children who have been looked after at home (Dixon and Stein, 2002).

Placement Type and Age on Discharge

Table 7.11: Placement Type and Discharge Age

Placement Type		Discharge Age		Total
		Under 17	17 and Over	
At Home	No.	699	115	814
	Row%	85.9%	14.1%	100.0%
	Col %	63.7%	60.2%	63.2%
Foster Care	No.	129	49	178
	Row%	72.5%	27.5%	100.0%
	Col %	11.8%	25.7%	13.8%
Residential Care	No.	269	27	296
	Row%	90.9%	9.1%	100.0%
	Col %	24.5%	14.1%	23.0%
Total	No.	1097	191	1288
	Row%	85.2%	14.8%	100.0%
	Col %	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

The age that children are discharged from care has been considered recently by Dixon and Stein (2002) and the Scottish Government (2002a). Dixon and Stein (2002) found that three quarters of all care leavers had been discharged from care by the age of 16 and the research I conducted for this thesis corroborates these findings. This is concerning as the Scottish Government (2002a) have found that the average age for someone in the general population to leave the parental home is not 16 years old but 22 years old. What is more, in my research I considered the bearing that placement type had on the age a child was when they were discharged from care. As demonstrated above in Table 7.11, 85.2% of all looked after children were discharged from care prior to their 17th birthday irrespective of whether or not they were looked after at home or away from home. However, significantly higher proportions (27.5%) of children looked after in foster care were discharged from care at aged 17 or over in comparison to the proportions of children aged 17 or over discharged from home supervision or residential care (14.1% and 9.1% respectively). Even though I have demonstrated that placement type does have a bearing on discharge age, the impact is not wholly significant ($p < 0.001$; Cramer's $V = .154$). Therefore, it is likely that the age a child is discharged from being looked after is more likely to be related to other factors.

Discharge Accommodation and Age on Discharge

Table 7.12: Discharge Accommodation and Discharge Age

Discharge Accommodation		Discharge Age		Total
		Under 17	17 and Over	
Home	No.	113	32	145
	Row %	77.9%	22.1%	100.0%
	Col %	77.9%	80.0%	78.4%
Not home	No.	32	8	40
	Row %	80.0%	20.0%	100.0%
	Col %	22.1%	20.0%	21.6%
Total	No.	145	40	185
	Row %	78.4%	21.6%	100.0%
	Col %	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

As placement type did not have a significant bearing on the age a child was discharged from care, I tried to identify the extent to which discharge age was associated with where a child lived on discharge from care. As can be identified in Table 7.12 above, over three quarter (78.4%) of all children lived at home on discharge from care and 21.6% did not live at home on discharge from care. However, there was not a significant correlation between discharge age and discharge accommodation (($p > 0.05$). For instance, there was little significant difference in the proportions of children living at home or away from home that were under the age of 17 when they were discharged from care. Similarly, there was little significant difference in the proportions of children living at home or away from home who were aged 17 or over when they were discharged from care. This has been demonstrated in Table 7.12.

The majority of looked after children in my research were discharged prior to their 17th birthday's, however research indicates that the educational outcomes for

children who remain in care are significantly better than they are for those children who are discharged from care. In a USA study Courtney and Dworsky (2006) were able to estimate that children who remained in care were twice as likely to be enrolled in school or a training programme as those who had been discharged from care. Similarly, in an Australian study Cashmore *et al* (2007) found that those who completed high school had better outcomes as adults across a number of areas compared to those who did not complete high school. This leads me consider, would educational achievement levels be higher for looked after children if they remained under a supervision order until the end of 6th year at high school or until they completed a modern apprenticeship?

CHAPTER 8

HOW CARE FACTORS INFLUENCE THE EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

Introduction

Thus far, I have reflected on the role of the Corporate Parent in relation to the policy making process for the educational achievement of looked after children. I have also examined the relationship between key care factors. In this chapter I have considered the influence that key care factors have on the educational achievement of the looked after population. For the purposes of my research, academic achievement has been considered within the SCQF framework as outlined in Chapter 4. My intention was to examine the association that key care factors had on academic achievement at SCQF level 3, SCQF level 4 and SCQF level 6. Particular emphasis on placement type has been given, especially since there is little research pertaining to the educational achievement of children looked after at home. Other care factors that I had previously demonstrated were significant have also been considered, for example, primary reason for becoming looked after, number of placements, length of time in care and the age children became looked after. Gender has also been considered.

SCQF Level 3 Awards or Above

SCQF Level 3 Awards and Placement Type

Table 8.1: SCQF Level 3 Awards and Placement Type

SCQF Level 3 Awards or Above		Placement Type			
		At Home	Foster Care	Residential Care	Total
No Awards	No.	517	51	112	680
	Row %	76.0%	7.5%	16.5%	100.0%
	Column %	63.1%	21.3%	32.2%	48.3%
1 or More Awards	No.	302	189	236	727
	Row %	41.5%	26.0%	32.5%	100.0%
	Column %	36.9%	78.8%	67.8%	51.7%
Total	No.	819	240	348	1407
	Row %	58.2%	17.1%	24.7%	100.0%
	Column %	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Placement type was significantly correlated to educational achievement at SCQF level 3 or above ($p < 0.001$; Crammer's $V = .356$). As illustrated above in Table 8.1, there were a significantly higher proportion of children looked after at home who did not attain any awards at this level compared to those looked after in residential care and foster care. For example, 63.1% of children looked after at home left care without attaining any formal qualifications at school compared to 32.2% of those who had been in residential care and 21.3% of those who had been in foster care. This is concerning as my research estimates that children looked after at home are far less likely to leave care with any academic qualifications than those looked after in foster care and residential care. The Scottish Government is well aware of the position of those looked after at home and yet they have not been successful in raising the achievement of this group of children to the same level as those looked

after away from home. For instance, in 2004/05 local authorities reported that 63% of those who had been looked after at home in 2004/05 did not attain any SCQF level 3 or above qualifications and 45% of those looked after away from home, in foster care or residential care, did not attain any SCQF level 3 or above qualifications (Scottish Government, 2005f).

SCQF Level 3 Awards and Age Received into Care

Table 8.2: SCQF Level 3 Awards and Age Received into Care

SCQF Level 3 Awards or Above		Age Received into Care		
		Under 12	12 and Over	Total
No Award	No.	58	289	347
	Row %	16.7%	83.3%	100.0%
	Column %	36.9%	55.3%	51.0%
1 or More	No.	99	234	333
	Row %	29.7%	70.3%	100.0%
	Column %	63.1%	44.7%	49.0%
Total	No.	157	523	680
	Row %	23.1%	76.9%	100.0%
	Column %	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

In my research I found a correlation between academic achievement at SCQF level 3 and the age a child became looked after ($p < 0.001$; $X^2 = 16.210$; $df = 1$). As can be identified in Table 8.2, just under two thirds (63.1%) of children who had become looked after under the age of 12 attained at this level and less than half (44.7%) of those children who had become looked after when they were 12 years old or over attained at this level. If I were to try and explain this, I would speculate that it was directly related to the fact that many of the children who become looked after when they are 12 years old or over are looked after at home, and that children looked after at home perform less well than those in foster care and residential care at

SCQF level 3 or above. The effects of placement and age on becoming looked after are considered later in the chapter.

SCQF Level 3 Awards and Gender

Table 8.3: SCQF Level 3 Awards and Gender

SCQF Level 3 Awards or Above		GENDER		
		Male	Female	Total
No Awards	No.	433	247	680
	Row %	63.7%	36.3%	100.0%
	Column %	51.1%	44.2%	48.3%
1 or More	No.	415	312	727
	Row %	57.1%	42.9%	100.0%
	Column %	48.9%	55.8%	51.7%
Total	No.	848	559	1407
	Row %	60.3%	39.7%	100.0%
	Column %	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

As reported by the Scottish Government (2005b), in the general school population a higher proportion of females (91%) attained 5 or more awards at SCQF level 3 or above compared to males (89%). In terms of the looked after population, in earlier research I conducted (McClung, 2001), I was able to determine that looked after females out-performed looked after males. This is corroborated by my research for this thesis, where gender was identified as being significantly correlated to academic achievement at this level ($p < 0.05$; $X^2 = 6.377$; $df = 1$). For example, just under half (48.9%) of all males attained at least one award in comparison to 55.8% of females (as illustrated in Table 8.3 above). Despite this being reflective of national trends in the general school population, in that females tend to out perform

males at this level, overall achievement for looked after males and females falls way short of that for the general school population.

It has been argued that educational achievement is affected by other factors. For example, Burgess *et al* (2004) argued that the gender gap is not related to observable school characteristics but to factors external to school such as ability and poverty. Indeed, research conducted by Who Cares? Scotland (2004) found that looked after males and females have different aspirations which may be affected by their experiences at school. Almost three quarters (73%) of looked after females in the Who Cares? Scotland study (2004) had aspirations to attend third level education compared with only a quarter of males in the study (28%). This is similar to Shaw's (1998) research which found that looked after females had a multi-faceted vision of their future combining family and career. Shaw (1998) acknowledges that her findings are the opposite of what would be found in the general school population, where it would be expected that males would have more focus on their future career.

SCQF Level 3 Awards and Number of Placements

Table 8.4: SCQF Level 3 Awards and Number of Placements

SCQF Level 3 Awards or Above		Number of Placements				
		1	2-4	5-8	9+	Total
No Awards	No.	27	46	8	2	83
	Row %	32.5%	55.4%	9.6%	2.4%	100.0%
	Column %	54.0%	80.7%	72.7%	100.0%	69.2%
1 or More	No.	23	11	3	0	37
	Row %	62.2%	29.7%	8.1%	0.0%	100.0%
	Column %	46.0%	19.3%	27.3%	0.0%	30.8%
Total	No.	50	57	11	2	120
	Row %	41.7%	47.5%	9.2%	1.7%	100.0%
	Column %	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

In my research I was able to establish that there was a correlation with academic achievement at SCQF level 3 and number of placements ($p < 0.05$; Crammer's $V = .287$). As demonstrated in Table 8.4, just under half (46.0%) of the children who had 1 placement attained at this level compared to less than a fifth (19.3%) of children who had between 2 and 4 placements. Again, this is another crucial finding that would suggest that instability in care placements and in a child's life in general can have a detrimental impact on educational achievement. Shaw (1998) and Biehal *et al* (1995) were also able to identify a correlation with academic achievement and number of placements in their research. This matter is concerning as the lack of stability in the lives of looked after children not only affects their educational achievement but their ability to have stable lives in adulthood (Biehal *et al*, 1995).

SCQF Level 4 Awards or Above

SCQF level 4 and Placement Type

Table 8.5: Summary of SCQF Level 4 Awards and Placement Type⁷

SCQF Level 4 Awards or Above		Placement Type				Sig
		At Home	Foster Care	Residential Care	Total	
No Awards	No. %	622 75.9%	66 27.5%	185 53.2%	195 13.9%	p<0.001 Crammer's V=.377
1 or More	No. %	197 24.1%	174 72.5%	163 46.8%	534 38.0%	p<0.001 Crammer's V=.377
3 or More	No. %	115 14.0%	152 63.3%	68 19.5%	335 23.8%	p<0.001 Crammer's V=.424
5 or More	No. %	73 8.9%	107 44.6%	29 8.3%	209 14.9%	p<0.001 Crammer's V=.379

In my research I found a correlation between educational achievement at SCQF level 4 and above and placement type. As demonstrated in Table 8.5 above, children who were looked after at home performed significantly less well than those looked after away from home, as they did at SCQF level 3, with only 24.1% attaining 1 or more awards at this level. However, children in residential care did perform less well than those in foster care, for example 72.5% of children in foster care attained 1 award or more at this level compared to 46.8% of children in residential care. In considering a higher number of passes at this level, I was able to ascertain that the proportion of children in residential care attaining 3 or more awards or 5 or more awards is reflective of those children looked after at home. For instance, 8.3% of children in residential care attained 5 or more awards and

⁷ Tables such as 9.5 are summary tables that provide achievement data. The data reported are cumulative therefore children who attained 3 or more awards will be counted in both the 1 more awards and 3 or more awards categories. The same rule applies to those attaining 5 or more awards. Whereas, children who attained no awards will be only be counted in the no award category and children attaining only 1 award will only be counted in the 1 or more category.

8.9% of those looked after at home gained 5 or more awards. Whereas, just under half (44.6%) of those looked after in foster care attained 5 or more SCQF level 4 or above awards ($p < 0.001$; Crammer's $V = .379$). This transition for children in residential care is indeed an important observation in my research and needs further investigation as the implication could be that differences may be more related to the populations of children who go into specific placement types rather than the placement type causing the differences.

SCQF Level 4 and *Received into Care Reason*

Table 8.6: Summary of SCQF Level 4 Awards and Received into Care Reason

SCQF Level 4 Awards or Above		Received into Care Reason									Sig
		Carer Neglect/ Abandonment	Child's Behaviour	Death or Imprisonment of Carer	Carer Alcohol/ Drug Misuse	Non Attendance/ School Exclusion	Child's Offending Behaviour	Child's Alcohol/Dug Misuse	Child Protection	Total	
No Awards	No. %	62 48.8%	65 69.1%	4 57.1%	12 32.4%	79 72.5%	21 55.3%	3 50.0%	13 37.1%	259 57.2%	p<0.001 *V=.277
1 or more	No. %	65 51.2%	29 30.9%	3 42.9%	25 67.6%	30 27.5%	17 44.7%	3 50.0%	22 62.9%	194 42.8%	p<0.001 *V=.277
3 or more	No. %	50 39.4%	16 17.0%	2 28.6%	21 56.8%	20 18.3%	9 23.7%	1 16.7%	19 54.3%	138 30.5%	p<0.001 *V=.309
5 or more	No. %	38 29.9%	7 7.4%	1 14.3%	18 48.6%	12 11.0%	4 10.5%	1 16.7%	17 48.6%	98 21.6%	p<0.001 *V=.356

* Crammer's V

A child's experience prior to becoming looked after has been found to impact on their educational achievement (Smithgall *et al*, 2004). Aldgate *et al* (1993,1994 and 1995) found that children who had become looked after as a result of neglect or abuse performed less well than those children who had become looked after for

other reasons. Aldgate *et al* (1993, 1994 and 1995) identified that the emotional problems that children had on becoming looked after continued to impact on their lives and affected their academic achievement. Whilst I was not able to consider the experience that children had prior to becoming looked after, I was able to consider the primary reason for becoming looked after and I expect that a child's primary reason for becoming looked after is indicative of their experience prior to care.

Despite the findings of my research not fully corresponding with those of Aldgate *et al* (1993, 1994 and 1995), I have been able to identify that the primary reason for becoming looked after is correlated to academic achievement at SCQF level 4 or above. As illustrated in the Table above, there was a moderately strong correlation between the primary reason for becoming looked after and achievement of 1 or more passes at this level ($p < 0.001$; Crammer's $V = .277$). For example, children who had become looked after as a result of their own behaviour or as a result of non attendance or exclusion from school were far less likely to achieve 1 or more awards at this level than any other looked after children (30.9% and 27.5% respectively). Those children who had become looked after as a result of child protection issues or as a result of carer alcohol or drug misuse were far more likely than any other children to attain 1 or more awards at this level (62.9% and 67.6% respectively). In considering children who received higher number of awards at this level, I was able to determine that there was a stronger correlation between

educational achievement and the reason for becoming looked after than there had been when considering 1 or more awards (at 3 or more awards $p < 0.001$ and Crammer's $V = .309$ and at 5 awards or more $p < 0.001$ and Crammer's $V = .356$). As can be identified from the Table above, significantly higher proportions of children who were received into care for reasons such as child protection and carer alcohol and drugs misuse attained 3 or more and 5 or more awards at this level in comparison to those who were received into care for reasons such as offending behaviour, death or imprisonment of a carer, their own behaviour or as the result of non attendance or exclusion from school.

SCQF Level 4 Awards and Age Received into Care

Table 8.7: Summary of SCQF Level 4 Awards and Age Received into Care

SCQF Level 4 Awards or Above		Age Received into Care			Sig
		Under 12	12 and Over	Total	
No Awards	No. Row %	65 41.4%	351 67.1%	416 61.2%	p<0.001 X²=33.610 df=1
1 or More	No. Row %	92 58.6%	172 32.9%	264 38.8%	p<0.001 X²=33.610 df=1
3 or More	No. Row %	73 46.5%	114 21.8%	187 27.5%	p<0.001 X²=36.949 df=1
5 or More	No. Row %	56 35.6%	76 14.5%	132 19.4%	p<0.001 X²=34.487 df=1

As determined earlier in this chapter, there was a correlation between the age received into care and educational achievement at SCQF level 3. Correspondingly, I have been able to ascertain that there was also a correlation

between educational achievement at SCQF level 4 and the age of a child when they became looked after. Children who became looked after when they were 12 years old or over are far less likely to attain at this level than those who became looked after before they were 12 years old. I found this when considering SCQF level 4 achievement at 1 or more awards, 3 or more awards and 5 or more awards, where $p < 0.001$ in all instances and the χ^2 value was high in all instances. As illustrated in Table 8.7 above, over half (58.6%) of the children who became looked after when they were under 12 years old attained 1 or more awards at this level compared to a third (32.9%) of those who were 12 years old or over when they became looked after. Correspondingly, 35.6% of those who had been looked after from under 12 years old attained 5 or more awards at this level compared to 14.5% of all children who had been looked after since they were aged 12 or over. These findings are similar to what I was able to ascertain about the correlation between achievement at SCQF level 3 and the age a child was when they became looked after.

In the general school population in Scotland 80% of females attained 5 or more awards at SCQF level 4 or above compared to only 73% of males (Scottish Government, 2005b). In line with the general school population the looked after females in my research out-performed their male counterparts at SCQF level 4 ($p < 0.001$ on all occasions and χ^2 having a high value in all instances), although they did perform significantly less well than the general school population. As

demonstrated in the table below, 44.7% of females attained 1 or more awards this level in comparison to 33.5% of males. Similarly, 19.7% of females attained 5 or more awards at this level compared to 11.7% of males.

SCQF level 4 Awards and Gender

Table 8.8: Summary of SCQF Level 4 Awards and Gender

SCQF Level 4 Awards or Above		Gender			
		Male	Female	Total	Sig
No Awards	No. %	564 66.5%	309 55.3%	873 62.0%	p<0.001 X²=18.050 df=1
1 or More	No. %	284 33.5%	250 44.7%	534 38.0%	p<0.001 X²=18.050 df=1
3 or More	No. %	170 20.0%	165 29.5%	335 23.8%	p<0.001 X²=16.655 df=1
5 or More	No. %	99 11.7%	110 19.7%	209 14.9%	p<0.001 X²=17.063 df=1

SCQF Level 4 Awards in English and Maths or Above

SCQF Level 4 in English and Maths by Placement Type

Table 8.9: English and Maths at SCQF level 4 and Placement Type

SCQF Level 4 or Above in English and Maths		At Home	Foster Care	Residential Care	Total Children
English and Maths	No. %	55 29.3% 6.7%	103 54.8% 42.9%	30 16.0% 8.6%	188 100% 13.4%
English Only	No. %	63 39.9% 7.7%	39 24.7% 16.3%	56 35.4% 16.1%	158 100% 11.2%
Maths Only	No. %	10 40.0% 1.2%	6 24.0% 2.5%	9 36.0% 2.6%	25 100% 1.8%
None	No. %	691 66.7% 84.4%	92 8.9% 38.3%	253 24.4% 72.7%	1036 100% 73.6%
Total	No. %	819 58.2% 100%	240 17.1% 100%	348 24.7% 100%	1407 100% 100%

I was able determine that there was a correlation between placement type and achievement of English and Maths at SCQF level 4 ($p < 0.001$; Crammer's $V = .309$). As Table 8.9 shows, less than 1 in 10 children looked after at home (6.7%) or in residential care (8.6%) attained Maths or English at this level compared to just under half (42.9%) of those in foster care attaining both English and Maths. However, there were subtle differences between those looked after at home and those looked after in residential care as a significantly higher proportion of children looked after in residential care (16.1%) attained English only compared to those looked after at home (7.7%). In effect my research demonstrates that a far higher proportion (84.4%) of children looked after at home leave care having not attained English or Maths as SCQF level 4 compared to 72.7% children in residential care

and 38.3% of those in foster care. This again is a crucial finding as English and Maths at SCQF level 3 is often a requirement to gain entry to low level employment and foundation level college courses and my results demonstrate that children looked after at home are the least likely of all looked after children to gain entry to either.

SCQF Level 4 in English and Maths and Age received into Care

Table 8.10: English and Maths at SCQF level 4 by Age Received into Care

SCQF Level 4 or Above in English and Maths		Age Received into Care		
		Under 12	12 and Over	Total children
English and Maths	No.	48	56	104
	Row %	46.2%	53.8%	100%
	Col %	30.6%	10.7%	15.3%
English Only	No.	11	38	49
	Row %	22.4%	77.6%	100%
	Col %	7.0%	7.3%	7.2%
Maths Only	No.	10	12	22
	Row %	45.5%	54.5%	100%
	Col %	6.4%	2.3%	3.2%
None	No.	88	417	505
	Row %	17.4%	82.6%	100%
	Col %	56.1%	79.7%	74.3%
Total	No.	157	523	680
	Row %	23.1%	76.9%	100%
	Col %	100%	100%	100%

I was also able to determine that the age a child became looked after had a bearing on their achievement of English and Maths ($p < 0.001$; Crammer's $V = .261$). As can be identified in the Table above, children who became looked after when they were 12 years old or over were less likely to attain English and Maths than those who had become looked after when they were under 12 years of age (10.7%

and 30.6% respectively). Similarly, a far higher proportion (79.7%) of children who became looked after when they were 12 years old or over did not attain English or Maths in comparison to those children who became looked after when they were under 12 years old (56.1%). This is not surprising as I have been able to determine that it is mostly children who are looked after at home that become looked after when they are 12 years old or over, and as has been noted previously, children looked after at home perform the least well overall. This raises the issue about the suitability of home supervision for those children requiring supervision orders.

SCQF level 6 Awards or Above

As has been discussed earlier, only 29 of the children in my research attained SCQF level 6 awards so it has been difficult to undertake any form of meaningful analysis. Additionally, as full care data was not available for all of the children in my sample who were eligible to sit SCQF level 6 awards, it was impossible to determine if factors such as the reason for becoming looked after and the age on becoming looked after had a bearing on academic achievement at this level. Placement type data was available for all children in the research so I have been able to consider this in relation to achievement at SCQF level 6.

Table 8.11: Summary of SCQF level 6 Awards by Last Placement

SCQF Level 6 Awards or Above		At Home	Foster Care	Residential Care	Total Children	Sig
No Awards	No. %	448 98.9%	163 88.1%	200 99.0%	811 96.5%	p<0.001 Crammer's V=.247
1 or More	No. %	5 1.1%	22 11.9%	2 1.0%	29 3.5%	p<0.001 Crammer's V=.247
3 or More	No. %	2 0.4%	6 3.2%	1 0.5%	9 1.1%	p<0.05 Crammer's V=.113

As illustrated in Table 8.11 above, placement type was correlated to achievement of 1 award at SCQF level 6 ($p < 0.001$; Crammer's $V = .247$) with higher proportions of children in foster care attaining at this level (11.9%). Whereas, only 1.0% of children in residential care and 1.1% of children who were looked after at home attained 1 award at this level.

Overall, the performance of the looked after children in my research was significantly poorer than the performance of the general school population in Scotland where 44% of children attained 1 or more awards at SCQF level 6 and 31% of the general school population attained 3 or more awards at SCQF level 6 (Scottish Government, 2005b). However, there is little research which considers education post 16 for the looked after community (Hayden *et al*, 1999) so it is difficult to make comparisons within the looked after community. As for children in foster care performing better at SCQF level 6 than all other looked after children, a plausible explanation for this is that children in foster care are given support from foster carers and encouraged to stay at school in a way that all other looked after children are not (Biehal *et al*, 1995). Nevertheless, Courtney and Dworsky (2006) found that children making the transition from foster care to adulthood were still fairing worse across a number of domains than their same age peers who were not looked after. Indeed, Courtney and Dworsky (2006) were able to determine that few of those children who had been in foster care were on a path that would provide them with the human or social capital to survive in today's economy. They were less likely to be employed and were at higher risk of developing or further developing mental health problems.

The Effect of Multiple Care Factors on Academic Achievement

Thus far, in my research I have been able to determine the impact that a number of care factors have on each other and on the academic achievement of looked after children in my sample. Whilst this is revealing, I have conducted additional analysis which sets out to determine the combined affects that specific factors have on academic achievement. As gender and placement information was available for all 1407 children in the study and both factors were significant at SCQF level 3 and SCQF level 4, I intend to give further consideration to these. Additional analysis relating the age on becoming looked after and the reason for becoming looked after will also be considered for those children where the data was available⁸. However, there will be no further analysis relating to the number of placements and length of placements, as the small amount of data that was able to be collected relating to these factors made it difficult to find any reasonable level of significance. Similarly, no further analysis will be undertaken in relation to awards at SCQF level 6 as the number of looked after children attaining awards at this level is too few.

⁸For the purposes of this analysis, it is my intention to interpret my binary logistic regression models through a process known as estimated probability. A discussion on the appropriateness of this model can be found in Gayle and Davis (2000). An illustration of the empirical value of this method can be found in Gayle *et al* (2003).

Combined Effects of Gender, Placement and Achievement of 1 Award at SCQF Level 3

Table 8.12: Logistic Regression – Achievement of 1 Award at SCQF Level 3 by Gender and Placement Type

Variables in the Equation

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Foster Care	2.18	0.24	80.20	1.00	<0.001	8.83
Residential Care	1.30	0.14	91.18	1.00	<0.001	3.69
Female	0.38	0.13	9.20	1.00	<0.001	1.47
Foster Care * Female	-0.75	0.34	4.79	1.00	<0.05	0.47
Constant	-0.69	0.09	59.62	1.00	<0.001	0.50

Cox and Snell R²=.130 ; Nagelkerke R²= .173.

Probability

1 or More at SCQF Level 3 or Above	Male at Home	Female at Home	Male in Residential Care	Female in Residential Care	Male in Foster Care	Female in Foster Care
Probability	0.33	0.42	0.65	0.73	0.82	0.75

Who Cares? Scotland (2003) conducted a small study which demonstrated that 44% of children looked after away from home attained at least one standard grade but that children in foster care performed on average 2 times better than those children in residential care. As demonstrated in Table 8.12 above, Who Cares? Scotland's findings are indicative of my empirical results, as I was able to ascertain that children looked after at home performed least well and children looked after in foster care performed significantly better than all other looked after children. Overall gender was significant as females out-performed their male counterparts in

all settings except foster care. Males in foster care out-performed females in foster care, with males 7% (estimated probability) more likely to attain 1 award at SCQF level 3. Indeed, males in foster care were the most successful and males looked after at home were the least successful, with a male in foster care being 49% (estimated probability) more likely to attain 1 award at SCQF level 3. Nevertheless, females looked after at home were 9% (estimated probability) more likely than males looked after at home to attain 1 award at SCQF level 3 and females in residential care were 8% (estimated probability) more likely than males in residential care to attain 1 award at SCQF level 3.

Combined Effects of Gender, Placement and Achievement of 1 Award at SCQF Level 4

I found that there was a correlation between placement type, gender and academic achievement of 1 award or more at SCQF level 4 or above (Table 8.13 below). I determined that at this level the least successful child was a male looked after at home and the most successful child was a male looked after in foster care. Indeed, a male in foster care was 53% (estimated probability) more likely to attain 1 award at SCQF level 4 compared to a male looked after at home. Correspondingly, whilst males in foster care were 1% (estimated probability) more likely than females in foster care to attain 1 award at SCQF level 4, females looked after at home were 11% (estimated probability) more likely to attain 1 award at SCQF level 4 than males looked after at home and females in residential care were

15% (estimated probability) more likely to attain an award at this level than males in residential care.

Table 8.13: Logistic Regression – Achievement of 1 or More Awards at SCQF Level 4 or Above by Gender and Placement Type

Variables in the Equation

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Foster Care	2.41	0.22	116.53	1.00	<0.001	11.11
Residential Care	1.06	0.14	60.02	1.00	<0.001	2.89
Female	0.60	0.13	20.55	1.00	<0.001	1.83
Foster Care * Female	-0.67	0.32	4.37	1.00	<0.05	0.51
Constant	-1.41	0.10	186.26	1.00	<0.001	0.24

Cox and Snell R²= .146; Nagelkerke R²= .198.

Probability

1 or More at SCQF Level 4 or Above Probability	Male at Home	Female at Home	Male in Residential Care	Female in Residential Care	Male in Foster Care	Female in Foster Care
	0.20	0.31	0.41	0.56	0.73	0.72

Combined Effects of Gender, Placement and Achievement of 3 Awards at SCQF Level 4

Table 8.14: Logistic Regression – Achievement of 3 Awards at SCQF Level 4 by Gender and Placement Type

Variables in the Equation

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Foster Care	2.36	0.17	195.08	1.00	<0.001	10.55
Residential Care	0.42	0.17	5.99	1.00	<0.001	1.51
Female	0.50	0.14	12.65	1.00	<0.001	1.64
Constant	-2.03	0.12	280.27	1.00	<0.001	0.13

Cox and Snell R²=.15; Nagelkerke R²= .23.

Probability

3 or More at SCQF Level 4 or Above	Male at Home	Female at Home	Male in Residential Care	Female in Residential Care	Male in Foster Care	Female in Foster Care
Probability	0.12	0.18	0.17	0.25	0.58	0.70

As demonstrated in Table 8.14 above, gender was significant in the model with females out performing males at this level. Placement type was also found to be significant with those looked after at home performing least well and those looked after in foster care performing best. For example, the most successful child was a female looked after in foster care and the least successful child was a male looked after at home, where a female in foster care was 58% (estimated probability) more likely to attain 3 awards at SCQF level 4 compared to a male looked after at home. Moreover, children looked after in residential care performed better than those

looked after at home with a female in residential care being 7% (estimated probability) more likely to attain 3 awards at level 4 than a female looked after at home. Likewise, a male looked after in residential care was 5% (estimated probability) more likely than a male looked after a home to attain 3 awards at this level. Whilst this is of interest, the most significant factor is that in considering a higher number of awards at SCQF level 4, the performance of children in residential care begins to move closer to that of children looked after at home.

Combined Effects of Gender, Placement and Achievement of 5 Awards at SCQF Level 4

Table 8.15: Logistic Regression – Achievement of 5 or More Awards at SCQF Level 4 or Above by Gender and Placement Type

Variables in the Equation

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Foster Care	2.10	0.18	135.91	1.00	<0.001	8.15
Residential Care	-0.06	0.23	0.06	1.00	>0.05	0.95
Female	0.58	0.16	12.59	1.00	<0.001	1.78
Constant	-2.59	0.15	303.11	1.00	<0.001	0.08

Cox and Snell R²=.12; Nagelkerke R²=.20.

Probability

5 or More at SCQF Level 4 or Above	Male at Home	Female at Home	Male in Residential Care	Female in Residential Care	Male in Foster Care	Female in Foster Care
Probability	0.07	0.12	0.07	0.11	0.38	0.52

As illustrated in Table 8.15, in my research children in foster care performed significantly better than all other children. Indeed the most successful child was a female in foster care who was 45% (estimated probability) more likely to attain 5 awards at SCQF level 4 compared to the least successful child (male at home). Moreover, in all placement settings females performed significantly better than males. However there was little difference in the performance of females looked after at home and looked after in residential care (females at home 1% more likely to attain 5 awards at SCQF level 4) and there was no difference in achievement levels for males looked after at home or in residential care. In considering the percentage difference across all SCQF levels at 1, 3 and 5 awards, what has become evident to me is that somewhere a transformation begins to take place. Whilst children looked after in residential care performed more closely to that of children in foster care at the lower levels (1 at SCQF level 3), by the time I considered awards at higher levels (5 at SCQF level 4) those children in residential care performed as poorly as those children looked after at home. In some instances children in residential care performed less well than those looked after at home. This further raises questions about differences in care types and about the support that children across different care setting receive to help them at school.

Combined Effects of Gender, Placement and Achievement of English at SCQF Level 4

Table 8.16: Logistic Regression – Achievement of English at SCQF Level 4 by Gender and Placement Type

Variables in the Equation

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Foster Care	2.16	0.17	167.12	1.00	<0.001	8.65
Residential	0.70	0.16	18.88	1.00	<0.001	2.01
Female	0.66	0.14	23.99	1.00	<0.001	1.94
Constant	-2.08	0.12	292.92	1.00	<0.001	0.13

Cox and Snell R²=.14; Nagelkerke R²=.20.

Probability

English at SCQF Level 4 or Above Probability	Male at Home	Female at Home	Male in Residential Care	Female in Residential Care	Male in Foster Care	Female in Foster Care
	0.11	0.20	0.20	0.33	0.52	0.68

As demonstrated in the table above, I found that gender and placement were significant factors in determining the achievement of English at SCQF level 4 in my sample. Females were the most successful overall at attaining English at SCQF level 4, as were children looked after in foster care. For example, in my model a female looked after at home was 9% (estimated probability) more likely than a male looked after at home to attain an award in English at SCQF level 4. Equally, a female in residential care was 13% (estimated probability) more likely to attain an English award than a male in residential care and a female in foster care was 16% (estimated probability) more likely than a male in foster care to attain English at

SCQF level 4. In terms of overall success, a female in foster care was deemed to be the most successful and a male looked after away home was deemed to be the least successful. Indeed, a female in foster care was 57% (estimated probability) more likely than a male at home to attain English at SCQF level 4 or above.

Combined Effects of Gender, Placement and Achievement of English and Maths at SCQF Level 4

Table 8.17: Logistic Regression - Achievement of English and Maths at SCQF Level 4 by Gender and Placement Type

Variables in the Equation

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Foster Care	2.34	0.19	147.77	1.00	<0.001	10.36
Residential Care	0.29	0.24	1.48	1.00	>0.05	1.34
Female	0.57	0.17	10.96	1.00	<0.001	1.77
Constant	-2.89	0.17	304.87	1.00	<0.001	0.06

Cox and Snell R²=.12; Nagelkerke R²=.22.

Probability

English and Maths at SCQF Level 4 or Above	Male at Home	Female at Home	Male in Residential Care	Female in Residential Care	Male in Foster Care	Female in Foster Care
Probability	0.05	0.09	0.07	0.12	0.38	0.49

The results of the regression model relating to the achievement of English and Maths at SCQF level 4 are somewhat different from in the model that examined English only. As demonstrated in Table 8.17 above, females in foster care were

the most successful and males looked after at home are the least successful children. Females in foster care were 44% (estimated probability) more likely to attain English and Maths at SCQF level 4 than a male looked after at home. Moreover, males in residential care were only 2% (estimated probability) more likely to attain English and Maths than those males looked after at home. However, males in foster care were 31% (estimated probability) more likely than males in residential care to attain awards in both English and Maths. Correspondingly, a female in residential care was only 3% (estimated probability) more likely than a female looked after at home to attain awards in both English and Maths. However, a female in foster care was 37% (estimated probability) more likely than a female in residential care to attain awards in English and Maths.

Through the examination of the combined effects of gender and placement type on the educational achievement of all 1407 looked after children in my sample, I have been able to demonstrate some of the significant subtleties. Specifically, I have been able to determine that there is a transition in the pattern when high level awards are examined which suggest that those looked after in residential care perform more like children looked after at home. Whilst this is indeed an important observation, it is perhaps the regression models which follow that provide the greatest insight into the impact that combined care factors have on educational achievement in the looked after population. In these regression models, where

significant, I have considered age on becoming looked after and reason for becoming looked after in conjunction with placement type and gender.

Combined Effects of Gender, Placement, Received into Care Age and Achievement of 1 Award at SCQF Level 3

Table 8.18: Logistic Regression – Achievement of 1 or More Awards at SCQF Level 3 or Above by Gender, Placement Type and Received into Care Age

Variables in the Equation

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Foster Care	0.83	0.27	9.54	1.00	<0.001	2.29
Residential Care	0.11	0.18	0.35	1.00	>0.05	1.11
Received into Care Under 12	0.46	0.21	4.99	1.00	<0.05	1.59
Female	0.51	0.16	9.79	1.00	<0.001	1.66
Constant	-0.49	0.12	15.64	1.00	<0.001	0.61

Cox and Snell R²=.05; Nagelkerke R²=.07.

Probability

1 or More at SCQF Level 3 or Above			Probability
Foster Care	Male	Under 12	0.69
Foster Care	Male	Over 12	0.58
Foster Care	Female	Under 12	0.79
Foster Care	Female	Over 12	0.70
Residential Care	Male	Under 12	0.52
Residential Care	Male	Over 12	0.41
Residential Care	Female	Under 12	0.64
Residential Care	Female	Over 12	0.53
At Home	Male	Under 12	0.49
At Home	Male	Over 12	0.38
At Home	Female	Under 12	0.62
At Home	Female	Over 12	0.50

As illustrated above in Table 8.18 above, the most successful child was female in foster care who became looked after when she was under 12 years old (estimated probability of 79%) and the least successful child was male looked after at home who became looked after when he was over 12 years old (estimated probability of 38%). However, with the addition of received into care age data into the regression model, females who became looked after when they were under 12 years old, who lived at home or in residential care, performed better than their male counterparts. They also performed better than their female counterparts who became looked after when they were over 12 years of age. Whilst it would be fair to argue that overall, children in foster care still performed best at this level, the received into care age very much impacts on educational achievement. For instance, a male in foster care who became looked after when he was over 12 years of age (estimated probability of 58%) performed less well than a female living at home (estimated probability of 62%) or in residential care (estimated probability of 64%), who became looked after when they were under 12 years of age. The reason for becoming looked after was not significant at 1 or more awards at SCQF level 3 or above. Nevertheless, the estimated probability scorings within this regression model are certainly interesting and start to raise questions over the impact that other factors have on a child's academic achievement.

Combined Effects of Placement, Received into Care Age, Received into Care reason and Achievement of 1 Award at SCQF Level 4

Table 8.19: Logistic Regression – Achievement of 1 or More Awards at SCQF Level 4 or Above by Placement Type, Received into Care Age and Received into Care Reason

Variables in the Equation

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Foster Care	0.99	0.36	7.47	1.00	<0.05	2.70
Residential Care	0.25	0.25	1.04	1.00	>0.05	1.29
Received into Care Under 12	0.89	0.27	10.69	1.00	<0.001	2.44
Parental Reasons	0.47	0.22	4.64	1.00	<0.05	1.61
Constant	-0.93	0.15	36.78	1.00	<0.001	0.39

Cox and Snell R²=.12; Nagelkerke R²=.16.

Probability

1 or More at SCQF Level 4 or Above			Probability
Foster Care	Child	Under 12	0.72
Foster Care	Child	Over 12	0.52
Foster Care	Parent	Under 12	0.81
Foster Care	Parent	Over 12	0.63
Residential Care	Child	Under 12	0.55
Residential Care	Child	Over 12	0.34
Residential Care	Parent	Under 12	0.67
Residential Care	Parent	Over 12	0.45
At Home	Child	Under 12	0.49
At Home	Child	Over 12	0.28
At Home	Parent	Under 12	0.61
At Home	Parent	Over 12	0.39

In the remainder of the regression models, gender was not significant but it was determined that the reason for becoming looked after and the age on becoming looked after were significant. Indeed, through my empirical findings I have been able to demonstrate that other factors have more of a bearing on academic

achievement. This correlates to the research findings of a study conducted by DfES (2006) where it was determined that other social factors related to poverty had a far greater bearing on educational achievement than gender did.

My empirical findings demonstrate that, overall, children in foster care are more likely to attain 1 or more awards at SCQF level 4 or above than those looked after at home or in residential care. However, the age a child is when they become looked after very much impacted on their achievement at this level, irrespective of whether or not they became looked after as a result of their own actions or the actions of their parents. The least successful child at this level was a child looked after at home, who became looked after when they were 12 years of age or over, as a result of their own behaviour (estimated probability of 28%). The most successful child at this level was a child looked after in foster care who became looked after before they were 12 years of age, as a result of parental behaviour (estimated probability of 81%). A matter of interest is that children in residential care who became looked after when they were under 12 years of age, as a consequence of the behaviour of their parents, performed better than children in foster care who became looked after when they were over 12 years of age, irrespective of whether their behaviour or the behaviour of their parents resulted in them becoming looked after. Another significant finding is that children looked after at home, who became looked after when they were under 12 years old, as a result of the behaviour of their parents, performed very closely to children in foster

care who became looked after when they were over 12 years of age, as a result of the behaviour of their parents (estimated probabilities of 61% and 63% accordingly). This starts to raise questions over whether it is children who have specific key factors when they come into care, resulting in them being placed in specific destinations, that can be associated with educational achievement, rather than the experience that children have when they are looked after at home, in residential or foster care influencing their academic achievement.

Combined Effects of Placement, Received into Care Age, Received into Care reason and Achievement of 3 Awards at SCQF Level 4

Overall, children in foster care performed better than all other looked after children, with children in foster care, who became looked after when they were under 12 years of age, as the result of the behaviour of their parents being most successful (estimated probability of 75%). Children who were looked after at home as a result of their own behaviour, who became looked after when they were 12 years old or over were the least successful (estimated probability of 16%). However, children in residential care and children looked after at home, who became looked after when they were under 12 years old, as a result of their parents behaviour, were more successful than those children in foster care who had become looked after as a result of their own behaviour when they were 12 years old or over. This further highlights the need for closer examination of children's lives prior to becoming looked after and the impact that this can have on academic achievement (see Table 8.20 below).

Table 8.20: Logistic Regression – Achievement of 3 or More Awards at SCQF Level 4 or Above by Placement Type, Received into Care Age and Received into Care Reason

Variables in the Equation

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Foster Care	1.28	0.35	13.00	1.00	<0.001	3.59
Residential Care	0.15	0.28	0.31	1.00	>0.05	1.17
Received into Care Under 12	0.85	0.28	9.33	1.00	<0.001	2.33
Parental Reasons	0.64	0.24	6.93	1.00	<0.05	1.90
Constant	-1.66	0.18	81.12	1.00	<0.001	0.19

Cox and Snell R²=.15; Nagelkerke R²=.21.

Probability

3 or More at SCQF Level 4 or Above			Probability
Foster Care	Child	Under 12	0.62
Foster Care	Child	Over 12	0.41
Foster Care	Parent	Under 12	0.75
Foster Care	Parent	Over 12	0.57
Residential Care	Child	Under 12	0.34
Residential Care	Child	Over 12	0.18
Residential Care	Parent	Under 12	0.50
Residential Care	Parent	Over 12	0.30
At Home	Child	Under 12	0.31
At Home	Child	Over 12	0.16
At Home	Parent	Under 12	0.46
At Home	Parent	Over 12	0.27

Combined Effects of Placement, Received into Care Age, Received into Care Reason and Achievement of 5 Awards at SCQF Level 4

Table 8.21: Logistic Regression – Achievement of 5 or More Awards at SCQF Level 4 or Above by Placement Type, Received into Care Age and Received into Care Reason

Variables in the Equation

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Foster Care	1.64	0.37	19.86	1.00	<0.001	5.16
Residential Care	-0.41	0.37	1.28	1.00	>0.05	0.66
Received into Care Under 12	0.64	0.31	4.11	1.00	<0.05	1.89
Parental Reasons	0.96	0.29	10.58	1.00	<0.001	2.61
Constant	-2.30	0.23	97.08	1.00	<0.001	0.10

Cox and Snell R²=.19; Nagelkerke R²=.29.

Probability

5 or More at SCQF Level 4 or Above			Probability
Foster Care	Child	Under 12	0.49
Foster Care	Child	Over 12	0.34
Foster Care	Parent	Under 12	0.72
Foster Care	Parent	Over 12	0.57
Residential Care	Child	Under 12	0.11
Residential Care	Child	Over 12	0.06
Residential Care	Parent	Under 12	0.25
Residential Care	Parent	Over 12	0.15
At Home	Child	Under 12	0.16
At Home	Child	Over 12	0.09
At Home	Parent	Under 12	0.33
At Home	Parent	Over 12	0.21

The least successful children were those looked after at home and in residential care who became looked after as a result of their own behaviour, when they were 12 years old or over (estimated probabilities of 6% and 9% correspondingly). The

most successful children, by far, were those children in foster care, who had become looked after when they were under 12 years of age, as a result of parental behaviour (estimated probabilities of 72%). As I start to examine educational achievement at a higher level (5 or more awards at SCQF level 4), it is interesting to note that all children in foster care, irrespective of age on becoming looked after or reason for becoming looked after, perform better than those children looked after at home or in residential care. However, the achievement of those children looked after at home (estimated probabilities of 33%) and in residential care (estimated probabilities of 25%), who were under 12 when they became looked after as a result of parent behaviour, is not so dissimilar to that of children in foster care who became looked after when they were 12 years old or over as a result of their own behaviour (estimated probabilities of 34%).

Combined Effects of Placement, Received into Care Reason and Achievement of English at SCQF Level 4

Table 8.22: Logistic Regression – Achievement of English at SCQF Level 4 by Placement Type and Received into Care Reason

Variables in the Equation

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Foster Care	1.46	0.32	21.31	1.00	<0.001	4.32
Residential Care	0.04	0.30	0.02	1.00	>0.05	1.04
Parental Reasons	0.65	0.26	6.29	1.00	<0.05	1.91
Constant	-1.79	0.19	85.46	1.00	<0.001	0.17

Cox and Snell R²=.10; Nagelkerke R²=.15.

Probability

English at SCQF Level 4 or Above		Probability
Foster Care	Child	0.42
Foster Care	Parent	0.58
Residential Care	Child	0.15
Residential Care	Parent	0.25
At Home	Child	0.14
At Home	Parent	0.24

The age on becoming looked after was not associated with the achievement of those looked after children attaining English only at SCQF level 4. As illustrated in Table 8.22 above, children in foster care were the most likely to attain English only at SCQF level 4, with those who had become looked after as a result of parental behaviour being most likely to attain (estimated probability of 58%). The children who were least likely to attain at this level were those who were looked after at home or in residential care, who had become looked after as a result of their own behaviour (estimated probabilities of 14% and 15%). The regression model above (Table 8.22) is starting to demonstrate the impact that the reason for becoming looked after, and therefore a child's experience prior to becoming looked after, has on educational achievement.

Combined Effects of Placement, Received into Care Age, Received into Care Reason and Achievement of English and Maths at SCQF Level 4

Table 8.23: Logistic Regression – Achievement of English and Maths at SCQF Level 4 by Placement, Received into Care Age, Received into Care Reason

Variables in the Equation

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Foster Care	1.08	0.37	8.28	1.00	<0.001	2.94
Residential Care	-0.31	0.38	0.67	1.00	>0.05	0.73
Received into Care Under 12	0.86	0.32	7.06	1.00	<0.05	2.36
Parental Reasons	0.68	0.31	4.72	1.00	<0.05	1.97
Constant	-2.42	0.24	98.65	1.00	<0.001	0.09

Cox and Snell R²=.119; Nagelkerke R²=.198

Probability

English and Maths at SCQF Level 4 or Above			Probability
Foster Care	Child	Under 12	0.38
Foster Care	Child	Over 12	0.21
Foster Care	Parent	Under 12	0.55
Foster Care	Parent	Over 12	0.34
Residential Care	Child	Under 12	0.13
Residential Care	Child	Over 12	0.06
Residential Care	Parent	Under 12	0.23
Residential Care	Parent	Over 12	0.11
At Home	Child	Under 12	0.17
At Home	Child	Over 12	0.08
At Home	Parent	Under 12	0.29
At Home	Parent	Over 12	0.15

As with many of the other regression models, children looked after in foster care were the most successful over all. The most successful children were those looked after in foster care who became looked after before they were 12 years old as a result of parental behaviour (probability estimation of 55%). The least

successful children were those in residential care and those looked after at home, who became looked after when they were 12 years old or over as a result of their own behaviour. However, children in residential care (estimated probability 23%) and children looked after at home (estimated probability 29%) who became looked after when they were under 12 years of age, as a result of parental behaviour, were generally more likely to attain English and Maths at level 4 than those children in foster care (estimated probability 21%) who became looked after when they were 12 years old or over as a result of their own behaviour.

The regression models are some of the most crucial findings in my research. They raise questions over the extent to which care setting impacts on academic achievement. The implications from my empirical findings are that educational achievement might be more related to what happens to a child prior to becoming looked after, which then seems to influence where a child is placed on becoming looked after.

CHAPTER 9

OTHER FACTORS IMPACTING ON EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE AND ACHIEVEMENT

Introduction

Thus far, I have considered the role of the Corporate Parent in the educational achievement of looked after children. I have also reflected on the relationships between key care factors and the influence that these key care factors have on academic achievement. In this chapter, the wider experiences that children have whilst looked after have been considered, as research demonstrates these experiences impact on academic achievement (Cashmore *et al*, 2007 and Fernandez, 2007). The views of policy makers and practitioners have also been considered in this element of the research. Many of the areas considered in the qualitative element of my research could not be considered in the quantitative element due to the data not being available to me. Therefore, through my qualitative research I have endeavoured to fill in some of the gaps.

In this chapter, consideration has been given to areas relating to the care and educational experiences of the looked after community. For instance, reflection has been given to care issues such as placement changes and the involvement of looked after children in issues and decisions that directly affect their lives. The experience that looked after children have at school is also considered, with

particular emphasis on areas such as school exclusion and school attendance. I have also chosen to examine areas such as homework, support with homework, study space, and access to ICT and books in order to determine the level of educational resources made available to looked after children. Overall, this chapter further explores why looked after children perform less well academically.

Care Experiences

Perceptions of the Looked After Population

A significant number of looked after children have a sense that the general public are prejudiced and discriminating towards them because they are in care. They identify that these attitudes are related to people believing that they are in care as a result of their behaviour, rather than as a result of circumstances beyond their control (Who Cares? Scotland, 2003). In my research I was able to determine that all policy makers, practitioners and looked after children all highlighted the lack of public awareness over the issues and problems related to being looked after. For example, one practitioner said that:

'In communities where there is a children's home, every time something happens within the community, it is blamed on the children from the home.... in some situations Social Work have had to hold public meetings to try and calm such situations down'. (FG)

Similarly, one of the looked after children stated:

'People slag me off because I live in a residential unit. They think I am a troublemaker'.

(Residential Unit. Aged 12)

Understandably, this is concerning as practitioners identified this prejudice and discrimination as having a damaging impact on looked after children, leaving them with feelings of isolation. Practitioners thought this prejudice and discrimination could also be found in schools. Specifically, it was recognised by the practitioners in the focus group that the Education Department within Authority 1 often lacks understanding of how being looked after manifests itself. There were a few areas highlighted by the practitioners, for instance the lack of understanding of what it is like when a child is moving from placement to placement. One member of the focus group stated that:

'Education does not take these changes into account when supporting the child'.
(FG)

Another practitioner said that:

'Education fails to see that living with new people is a process and not an event'.
(FG)

A further issue raised in the focus group was that schools can often single out looked after children simply because they are looked after and that this can have a negative impact on the child's experiences at school, which in turn impacts on social inclusion and educational achievement.

Support in Care

Three quarters (73%) of children who participated said they had someone to talk to and whom they felt supported by. This included parents, carers, teaching staff, other school staff, social workers, and key workers. The children (27%) who said they had no one to talk to or no one to support them were mostly living in residential accommodation. Moreover, just over half of the children said someone regularly asked them about school (60%) and this was usually a parent, carer, social worker, or key worker. Fewer children said that someone had contact with their school on their behalf (50%) and even fewer said that someone attended parent evenings on their behalf (43%). There was no correlation between placement type and these factors. Whilst practitioners were especially critical about birth parents, detecting a general lack of parental interest in the education of their children, they seemed unaware that policy makers and practitioners within Authority 1 could equally be accused of this.

In my view these findings are significant because, as well as poor educational achievement being the result of frequent placement changes and frequent school changes, poor educational achievement is also the result of inadequate support from parents and carers. It is also related to a lack of awareness on the part of educationalists (Pecora *et al*, 2006). As demonstrated above, some of the children who participated in my research highlighted the lack of support from both of these arenas.

Placement and School Changes

The impact that placement changes have on children can be very detrimental to them in many areas of their lives, including their education, especially when this involves a change in school (Biehal *et al*, 1995). In my research 80% of children had changed school at least once. Mostly they had changed school between 1 and 3 times, although 10% of the children interviewed had each changed school more than 5 times. Children gave reasons such as placement changes and exclusion for the change in school.

*'My (old) school was too far from my foster home so I had to go to a new school'.
(Foster Care. Aged 11).*

As far back as 1991, The Department of Health identified a lack of continuity as a major factor in the poor outcomes for children who spent any length of time in care (Parker *et al*, 1991). More recently, Fernandez (2007) was able to determine that 62% of those in her study who had been looked after had experienced 3 or more unscheduled school changes. She found that children struggled to keep up with their peers as a result of this and that they were conscious of the disruption caused by the many moves (Fernandez, 2007).

Participation in Decision Making

Practitioners stated that children were involved in decision making about their care but that they were not involved to a satisfactory standard in the decision making

process regarding their education. This was the general consensus amongst policy makers.

'Children are encouraged to be involved at an individual review level but usually the decision is based more on need than choice'. (PM5)

'The Council is not good at involving children in the planning and decision making about their education'. (FG)

'Judgements are made on behavioural issues and not educational issues'. (FG)

One of the fundamental flaws of the system, as identified by practitioners in my focus group, was that decision making about a child's education is often needs led and this would not necessarily consider the child's decision or wishes. The children themselves confirmed this with one third (33%) of those interviewed stating that their social worker had not asked for their views on their education. Additionally, around one quarter (23%) of children thought that their social worker had no contact with their school on their behalf. Primarily these were children living in residential units who attended mainstream schools. However, one policy maker did raise the issue that generally little choice is given to the general school population over their education (PM3) and this seemed a valid point.

As my sample from foster care was so small, it is difficult to make any correlation between placement and children being asked for their views on their education. However, research by Shaw (1998) and Who Cares? Scotland (2003) determined that children in foster care had more say in their daily lives than those in residential

care. Indeed, those children who had not been asked their views on their education were either living in residential care or at home (Shaw, 1998 and Who Cares? Scotland, 2003).

Bullying

In a study by Who Cares? Scotland (2003), three quarters of children raised the issue of bullying as a matter that seriously concerned them. Children indicated that staff in schools did not appreciate the amount of bullying that took place. Similarly, 49% of looked after children in the Cashmore *et al* (2007) study reported that they had also been victims of bullying. I considered bullying in my research and was able to ascertain that of the 30 children who participated, just under half (43%) reported being the victim of bullying. Children identified many reasons for being bullied including being looked after, their behaviour and just generally not fitting in at school.

'I was bullied because I am slow to learn and have an accent'.

(Foster Care. Aged 11)

'I think the other kids pick on me because I am in a residential unit'.

(Residential Unit. Aged 13)

Of the children who experienced bullying, just over three quarters (76%) told someone about the bullying. Generally they told parents, carers, teachers, guidance teachers, key workers and friends. By telling someone, the bullying

stopped for 46% of children but for the 53% for whom the bullying did not stop, children gave reasons for this such as they didn't tell anyone or they told someone but it still did not stop. For some children the fact that teachers or parents had got involved made the bullying worse.

'I didn't tell so it (the bullying) never stopped until I left school'.
(Foster Care. Aged 19)

'I told my mum but it didn't stop'.
(At Home. Aged 18)

'It hasn't stopped. I am just trying to ignore it'.
(Residential Unit. Aged 13)

The number of children who experienced bullying in the study should be of grave concern to Authority 1, as research has shown that bullying can have profoundly upsetting consequences on a child's physical and mental health. Research has shown that children who are bullied can lack confidence and feel bad about themselves. Additionally, concentration levels have been found to suffer and children often do not want to go to school (Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2004). This of course impacts further on the academic achievement of a group of children who are already disadvantaged. In some instances the effects of bullying can continue long after the bullying has stopped (Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2004).

Promotion of Achievements

Recognition and celebration of the achievements of looked after children not only raises their self esteem but provides other children with role models. In my research, around half (53%) of the children were able to identify someone who was proud of their achievements. A few identified many people who were proud of their achievements. This ranged from parents and family to teachers and social workers. The other half of the children either did not answer the question or said that no one was proud of their achievements. These children were accommodated across all settings. One child said:

'No one is proud of my achievements'.

(At Home. Aged 13)

Within Authority 1, the Head of Service stated that the council formally promotes and acknowledges the achievements of children who are looked after away from home. Other policy makers were not so confident that there was a strategy in place for promoting achievement and stated that there was little evidence of achievement being recognised. Similarly, practitioners suggested the council needed to get better at acknowledging achievement and that they needed to start promoting achievements other than formal educational qualifications. Practitioners identified the lack of joined up working between Social Work Services and Education Services as being the problem. There is evidence here of potential disconnection between the Head of Service and the other policy makers and

practitioners. The conflict is over whether or not a formal strategy is in place for acknowledging the achievements of the looked after population. In a sense, it does not matter as 47% of those children who participated could not identify one person who was proud of their achievements. This very much speaks for itself.

Information Sharing

In considering the issue of who at school needed to know that children were looked after, children stated that primarily the head teacher and guidance teachers were the only people who should know they were looked after. The vast majority of children said that other school staff, pupils and their friends should not automatically be told that they were looked after. Only a few children thought that no one at school should be told they were looked after. What is more, just over half (56%) of the children stated that they were unsure of the information that had been shared about them. The majority of these children were living in a residential setting. Also just over half (56%) said that no one had helped them work out what they were going to tell people at school about where they lived. One child said:

'No one helped me'.

(Residential Unit. Aged 14)

For those who were given support on how to tell others they were looked after (44%) primarily this help came from teachers, guidance teachers, social workers and key workers. One child said:

*'My teacher helped me work out what I was going to tell my friends'.
(Foster Care. Aged 11).*

Participation in Planning

As supported through the ICSP, the policy makers stated that engagement and consultation with looked after children takes place at a number of levels. One of the policy makers (PM2) talked of a youth council with a representative from the looked after population. The same policy maker mentioned targeted consultations with looked after children and children at risk of offending. However, only one of the looked after children who participated in my research had any memory of being involved in any events relating to planning for services for looked after children.

School Experiences

Exclusion

There is little support around which helps looked after children question their exclusion from school. Jackson and Sachdev (2001) found that local authorities have failed to take steps to pre-empt the exclusion of looked after children and when children have been excluded, local authorities are providing little or no support to them. This is corroborated in a study by Cashmore *et al* (2007) who found that 49% of looked after children in the study had been excluded from school. Indeed, in research by Fernandez (2007) empirical evidence suggests that 20% of looked after children who were reported to be behind their age appropriate grade were so as a result of exclusion from school.

In my research all of the practitioners (100%) agreed that children who were looked after are excluded more from school than their peers. Whilst it was acknowledged by practitioners that looked after children can have behavioural problems, it was argued that often looked after children are labelled by schools as being problematic simply because they are looked after. Consequently schools have little tolerance for looked after children. One practitioner stated:

'Children are often aggrieved as they know that are not being treated fairly'. (FG)

'Accommodated children have more behavioural problems than other children but they are labelled and there is no tolerance for them'. (FG)

'There are big issues with exclusion as many children feel they are treated differently and excluded more quickly'. (PM5).

I have been able to evidence this in my research as 80% of children who participated had been excluded from school and almost all of them had been excluded more than once. One child reported being excluded 7 times, others reported being excluded and then expelled. In many instance children identified that the primary reason for their exclusion was their behaviour. This ranged from verbally abusive behaviour, threats of violence towards staff and other pupils, acts of violence towards staff and other pupils, smoking and truanting.

'I was excluded for being an arse'.

(Residential Unit. Aged 15)

'I was suspended for fighting'.

(At Home. Aged 12)

'Dogging it (truanting) and bad language to teachers'.

(Foster Care. Aged 17)

'Threatening someone'.

(At Home. Aged 17)

In my research other children said that they had been excluded from school because they had become the victims of bullying.

Moreover, when asked if there was anything that their school or social worker could have done to prevent these children from being excluded the majority said that nothing that could have been done to keep them in school.

'Nothing would have kept me in school'.

(Foster Care. Aged 17)

'I don't know what would have kept me in school'.

(Residential Unit. Aged 15)

Those children who were able to identify support that may have prevented them from having been excluded said:

'Teachers who understand'.

(Foster Care. Aged 17)

'For people to have understood what I was going through. I was very stressed'.

(Residential Unit. Aged 13)

However, almost all of the children who participated in the research said that an improvement in their behaviour would have prevented them from being excluded. On further investigation, some highlighted the lack of understanding on the part of teachers and pupils of what it is like to be looked after.

'I was excluded because I am in care'.

(Residential Unit. Aged 13)

'I get suspended easily as I am looked after'.

(Residential Unit. Aged 15)

'I was badly behaved but the teachers were hard on me'.

(Residential Unit. Aged 16)

This is a crucial finding as children who are not attending school can fall behind and this will most certainly have an impact on educational achievement.

My findings are similar to the Cashmore *et al* (2007) study where looked after children also reported that it was the failure of social workers and teachers to understand the problems they had, that led them to becoming excluded. Other issues such as not having someone to listen to their views and not providing additional support and tutoring to ensure that looked after children worked at the same level as their classmates were also identified as issues which led to exclusion (Cashmore *et al*, 2007).

One of the significant problems when a child has been excluded from school is that it can be difficult to find another educational placement, especially if the child has been excluded from school previously. In my research practitioners highlighted the growing numbers of children who went without educational placements for long periods of time following exclusion. This is indeed concerning as children will fall behind, so that even when a suitable school placement can be found, there is an increased chance that the child will not be able to perform or attain at academically at an age appropriate level. Furthermore, practitioners stated that even after children had been excluded from school that schools often kept them on the school

roll as a means of inflating their schools roll, thus influencing resource allocation. Perhaps local authorities need to review enrolment practice.

Attendance

Just over three quarters (76%) of children who were interviewed stated that they almost always attended school. There were a few different reasons for this.

'School was my escape from what was going on where I lived'.
(At Home. Aged 16)

'I like my teachers and friends'.
(Residential School, Aged 14)

Those children who did not attend or only attended sometimes said that they did not attend because they did not enjoy school.

'I didn't go to school as I did not like it'.
(At Home, Aged 18)

'I didn't go to school because I didn't get on with my teachers'.
(Residential Unit. Aged 15)

In research conducted by Shaw (1998) three quarters of the sample reported attending school always. However, a higher proportion of children in foster care than residential care reported attending school always in her study. In my research there was no correlation between school attendance and placement type. Again, this could be related to the small number of children in foster care in the sample.

Achievement and Expectation

'Learning with Care' recommends that

'Local authorities should carry out a full, multi-disciplinary assessment involving Education and Social Work personnel, and others as appropriate around the time a child becomes looked after. This assessment should provide a baseline for future educational progress. Points for action should be identified in the care plan and placement agreement' (HMI and SWSI, 2001:18).

In spite of this, it is widely accepted that the education of looked after children is a low priority for local authorities. Moreover, social workers and teachers can have low educational expectations of children looked after (Jackson and Sachdev, 2001). This was reflected in my practitioner's focus groups. Whilst it was acknowledged that children who are looked after perform less well than their peers, it was argued that many people expect less of this group of children. For example, it was suggested that social workers expect less from looked after children educationally because they are aware of the difficulties involved with being looked after. Similarly, schools were seen to expect less from looked after children. Practitioners also stated that looked after children themselves have low expectations of what they can achieve.

'Education, Social Work and the children themselves expect less. Social work expects less, as they know the hurdles the children have to overcome. Targets should be set to let children make their own choices'. (FG)

In my research, the experience of looked after children did not necessarily correspond with the views of practitioners, with less than a quarter (23%) of the children stating that teachers expected less of them because they were looked

after. Arguably, this may be related to the low expectations that looked after children have of themselves.

Alternative Education

In 'Learning with Care' it states that:

'Except in exceptional circumstances, all looked after children should have permanent full-time education, however that may be organised' (HMI and SWSI, 2001:20).

Authority 1 was able to access an educational support resource for looked after children that promotes inclusion and acts as a liaison between schools, social workers and carers. The practitioners involved in my research stated that, in principle, this was a good service but in practice the service was being used inappropriately. First, schools were using the services to teach children and keep them excluded from school, rather than as a support to reintroduce the child to school. Second, there were not enough spaces to provide a service to all those looked after children who require one. This meant there were still many children without an educational placement. Last, the service is only provided to those children looked after away from home. This view was corroborated by policy makers (PM 2 and PM3). In view of these issues it would be fair to argue that Authority 1 seem unable to meet the recommendation that looked after children should be in full-time education, other than in exceptional circumstances, as practitioners suggest that looked after children not having educational placements is more the norm than the exception.

Treatment at School

Children often refer to the stigma attached to being looked after. One place this is likely to be felt is at school (Buchanan *et al*, 1993 and Lynes and Goddard, 1995). In my research, one third (30%) of the looked after children stated they were treated differently at school by teachers. Almost all of these children were living in residential units and all were attending mainstream schools. All of the children identified being treated differently as a negative because they wanted to be treated like all other pupils. Slightly fewer (20%) children thought that were treated differently by pupils because they were looked after. Largely these were children who had said they were treated differently by teachers. Two children said that the other pupils in their school automatically thought that they would be troublemakers because they lived in residential units. Another child resented the questions that other pupils asked about living in a residential unit.

'Nobody should be treated differently but I am always being asked about living in a children's unit'.

(Residential Unit. Aged 12)

The majority of the other children who said they were not treated differently by teachers and pupils either lived in a residential school setting or in the community with parents, relatives or foster carers. All of the children who said they were not treated differently preferred it this way.

'Friends and teachers know (I am looked after) but they treat me no differently'.

(Foster Care. Aged 11)

These findings are similar to Shaw's findings (1998) where different treatment at school was not widely reported, with three quarters of the respondents reporting being treated the same as other children. However, in Shaw's study (1998), those children who did report being treated differently were also in residential care. In my research children stated that factors such as gender and ethnicity did not affect how they were treated in school. For them the only factor affecting how they were treated at school was the fact that they were looked after.

Enjoyment of school

More than half of the children interviewed enjoyed school (53%). It seemed that those children in support units, residential schools and secure accommodation enjoyed school more than those in mainstream schools. Those who enjoyed school looked forward to learning and enjoyed particular activities. These children were also able to see school as a route to getting a good job and tended to be the children who made reference to their friends in the interviews.

*'I enjoy school and staying in a residential unit but I miss my mum and dad'.
(Residential Unit. Aged 14).*

*'I am really enjoying school because I get help when I get stuck.... the classes are smaller'.
(Residential School. Aged 14)*

'Since starting my new school, I have begun to enjoy school. I like all of the staff and pupils and I am looking forward to sitting my exams'.

(Residential Unit. Aged 13)

Those children who did not enjoy school disliked the teachers, found school boring and felt that it was a waste of time. Some had been bullied and were generally negative about their whole school experience.

'School is a waste of time'.

(At Home. Aged 13)

'I don't want to go to school I just want to get a job'.

(Residential Unit. Aged 15)

Given that the vast majority of those children who did not enjoy school attended mainstream school, their enjoyment of school could be related to the type of school they attended.

Friends at School

A child with no friends is an isolated child who is likely to become an isolated adult (Daniel, Wassell and Gilligan, 1999a). Therefore, helping a looked after child to make and sustain friendships will improve the quality of their lives. In my research, all of the children interviewed said they had friends at school, with 60% having contact with their friends outside school. The majority of the 40% who had little or no contact with friends outside school were those children who were living in residential units or living at home with parents. This is concerning as it has been

identified that friendship is very important to children looked after. In the *'Let's Face It'* study (2003) three quarters of children said that friendship was very important to them. Thus, as a means of supporting social inclusion consideration may need to be given to encouraging and supporting looked after children, particularly those in residential care, to have contact with their school friends outside of school.

After and Out of School Activities

Research has demonstrated that that improving some parts of a young person's life can have a spill over effect into other areas of their life (Gilligan, 1997). Indeed, it has been demonstrated that the progress of looked after children can be greatly enhanced when attention is given to the value of cultural, sporting and other activities (Gilligan, 1999). Furthermore, it has been evidenced that leisure time experiences, such as cultural pursuits, can also act as protective factor for looked after children (Jackson and Sachdev, 2001). However, in my research, just over half (53%) of the looked after children were aware that after and out of school activities and clubs were available to them and only a quarter (23%) of the children in my sample had attended extra curricular activities or after school clubs.

Homework

It has long been recognised that homework is important to a child's educational progress (Jackson and Sachdev, 2001). In my research, I found that 83% of children reported receiving homework and 17% said they did not receive homework. All of the children claiming not to get homework were attending a residential school or living in a residential unit. This may be one of the factors affecting achievement levels for children in residential care. Moreover, just under half (43%) of those children who said they received regular homework reported receiving no help with their homework when they needed it. The 57% of children who received help with their homework when they needed it received help from guidance teachers, teachers, parents, and carers. In addition, some of the children in residential care said that their social worker or key worker sometimes helped with homework. However, one issue highlighted by a child was that there was a lack of support with college courses.

'I think that children in care should also get help with college work. I am at college and am struggling with the work'.

(Residential Unit. Aged 16)

Study Space

It is widely recognised that the expectation is that children will undertake their homework and exam revision in their own homes. Despite this, a quarter (26%) of the children interviewed did not have access to quiet study space where they lived. All of these children lived in a residential setting. This adds extra barriers to

learning for children in residential care especially since we know that children who are unable to study outside of school are less likely to achieve success or to be entered for examinations (Shaw, 1998). My research also highlights that even though children looked after at home reported having study space where they lived, they were less likely than all other looked after children to use this study space. This was concerning as children looked after at home perform less well academically than all other looked after children and this could perhaps be a contributing factor to the low achievement levels of these children.

Access to ICT Equipment

Over the last 7 years there has been additional funding made available to local authorities by the Scottish Government to provide books, ICT equipment and homework materials for all looked after children. In line with the Scottish Government investment, a significant number of children considered in my research reported having access to a PC where they lived. Those children who did not have access to a PC where they lived (36%) were primarily looked after at home. In effect my research highlights the divide between those looked after away from home and those looked after at home. This is of grave concern as there have been national developments that have recognised that ICT can raise the standard of achievement and achievement of children in Scotland. This recognition is manifestly evident, at a cost of 50 million, in the recently procured Scottish School Digital Network (SSDN).

Furthermore, in my research all children who had access to PC's used them on a regular basis. There were a few children in residential care who stated that although there was a PC where they lived they currently did not have access to it. The reasons for this included the PC room being used as a bedroom due to overcrowding or the PC being broken and not being fixed. Practitioners and one of the policy makers also highlighted this issue.

Access to Books

Almost all children had access to books where they lived (86%). All of those children who said they did not have access to books where they lived were living at home with their parents. Similarly, the majority of children who reported having access to book and not using them were children who were looked after at home. Interestingly, none of the practitioner or policy makers raised this as a concern. Instead, they raised the issue of children in residential having poor literacy and suggested that wider educational opportunities for those in residential care was being neglected. For example, a practitioner stated that:

'This group of children do not have the opportunity and are not encouraged to embrace the arts... they never get to go to the theatre'. (FG)

As with access to ICT equipment, it is of concern that there are many looked after children who do not have access to books where they live or do not read the books where they live. This will most certainly have implications in the development and achievement of these children, particularly those looked after at home.

CHAPTER 10

DISCUSSION OF THE EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

Introduction

'Second best is not good enough for Scotland's looked after children and young people. As Corporate Parents, local authorities have a challenging role, and acting like good parents and being aware of the needs of their children and young people must be a key priority' (Scottish Government, 2007c:8).

The purpose of this research was to explore the key care factors that influence the educational achievement of children looked after at home and away from home, particularly in Scotland, where less research has been conducted. What emerged from my literature review was that the educational achievement of looked after children has been a low priority for local authorities and partner agencies, with the overall picture being one of low achievement and a general lack of concern and encouragement from those responsible (Jackson and Sachdev, 2001). This has also been acknowledged in the work of others such as Borland (2000); Bullock *et al* (2006); Cashmore (2007); Fernandez (2007); and Jackson and McParlin (2006), who all illustrate the extent of the disadvantage and the vulnerability that looked after children experience on a day-to-day basis. Largely, it has been accepted that the poor academic achievement of the looked after population is more related to flaws within the system, rather than as a result of the personal capacities of looked after children. Subsequently, as the quote above indicates, there is a responsibility

on those people, or those organisations, with a Corporate Parent responsibility to ensure that looked after children are provided with the support and resources they require to do as well as other children. This is especially important as research demonstrates that the impact of this disadvantage and vulnerability remains with looked after children throughout the rest of their lives, making them some of the most socially excluded adults in the United Kingdom today (Jackson and McParlin, 2006; Morris; 2000; and Barnardo's, 2006).

There were 2 components to my research. In the quantitative component I examined the educational achievement of looked after children through an investigation of a combination of key care factors and educational qualifications achieved in 2 sample local authorities in Scotland, over a period of five years. My sample consisted of a subset of the looked after population, namely care leavers, who were aged 15 years or over and were qualified to sit SQA examinations prior to being discharged from care. Overall, the research considered approximately one fifth of the care leaving population aged 15+ in Scotland (1407 children). As such, I believe this to be one of the largest studies of its kind to be conducted in Scotland, if not the UK. Moreover, my research is particularly distinctive in that it considers the educational achievement of children looked after at home, as well as those looked after away from home.

The qualitative component enhanced the quantitative part of my research. In the qualitative component, I reviewed the role of the Corporate Parent in relation to policy making, in recognition that policy would impact, even partly, on the educational achievement of looked after children. Following this, I considered the care and educational experiences that looked after children had. I also considered policy makers and practitioner's perceptions of what it is like to be looked after in the qualitative element of the research.

In the remainder of this chapter, I have considered my research findings as a whole. Reflection has also been given to the limitations of my research and suggestions that I have for further research.

But What Does It All Mean?

There are 3 big take home messages that can be deduced from my empirical research findings. These are that:

1. Looked after children are being polarised as they continue to perform less well academically than the general school population.
2. The Corporate Parent has been ineffective in improving the educational achievement and life chances of looked after children and that this is, in part, a consequence of their approach to policy.

3. There is a relationship between key care factors and educational achievement. When we take a multi dimensional view of the relationship between key care factors and educational achievement, it is a specific combination of key factors that determine different levels of educational achievement within the looked after population.

In my research, I was able to ascertain that there was a lack of co-ordination and cohesion on the part of the Corporate Parent and that not all services were fulfilling their parental responsibilities. Arguably, this would have impacted on academic achievement, where the Corporate Parent was not providing a holistic approach to assessment and service delivery and meeting the needs of the whole child. For example, despite guidance from the government on integrated services my research findings suggest that the local authority had to take the main responsibility for policies pertaining to the looked after population, including the educational element of their care. Indeed, there was a general feeling amongst policy makers and practitioners that within the council Social Work Services took the lead on all policies pertaining to the looked after population. However, the contribution that Chief Executive Services, Education Services and Community Services made was recognised, albeit it was a lesser contribution. Whilst elected members were identified as having a responsibility for policies pertaining to the looked after community, my research highlighted the lack of awareness that elected members have about the looked after community and how the policies they

make impact on the lives of looked after children. In addition, the research highlighted the inadequate response that had been taken by local Health Agencies, although it was noted by policy makers that this was in the process of changing as a result of increased government intervention. Essentially, there is little excuse for local authorities not taking an integrated approach to assessment and service delivery for looked after children. Integrated service delivery for children's services is one of the Scottish Government's priorities, as laid out in 'For Scotland's Children' (Scottish Government, 2001a). Whilst it would be unfair to deduce anything significant from the fact that Education Services within Authority 1 declined the opportunity to participate in this research, I cannot help but wonder the extent to which this refusal to participate is a symptom of the underlying issue of Education Services not taking their Corporate Parenting responsibility seriously in Authority 1.

Furthermore, I was able to determine that there was a lack of clarity amongst policy makers and amongst practitioners about the policies and frameworks that existed in relation to the academic achievement of the looked after population in Authority 1. This is a crucial finding as policies and plans clearly existed in Authority 1 that concerned the education of looked after children (as discussed in Chapter 3), yet policy makers were unable to make the link or identify these. This raises questions over the efficacy of policy process and the Corporate Parent in Authority 1 and the extent to which this confusion has impacted on the educational achievement of

looked after children. For instance, there was ambiguity over the implementation, reviewing, monitoring and target setting of such policies. The Head of Service was the most positive with other policy makers and practitioners being less positive. Policy makers and practitioners were aware of the ICSP and its overall purpose, although there was confusion as to whether or not 'Learning with Care' was a strategy, a proposal for a strategy or a draft strategy. Similarly, there was confusion as to whether or not Authority 1 had a local level 'Learning with Care' policy or whether or not the policy existed at a national level only. Whilst a few policy makers highlighted that the 'Learning with Care' policy does not incorporate those looked after at home, at the time of the research these gaps had not been considered at local level. Moreover, there was no general consensus regarding if and how policies had been translated into practice amongst policy makers and practitioners. Whilst I can appreciate the demands that are put upon policy makers and practitioners on a day to day basis, in terms of actual service delivery, it is vital that policy makers, in particular, are aware of policies and are actively monitoring these policies. It is wholly unlikely that the educational achievement of the looked after population will be improved upon until this approach is adopted.

My research examined the role of the Corporate Parent for only one local authority and their partner agencies, but given that looked after children perform less well educationally across Scotland, the role that the Corporate Parent plays nationally might not be so dissimilar to that of Authority 1 and their partner agencies. This is

an area for further research. Additionally, the concept that a corporation can parent is a concept that is generally accepted, however whilst I did not set out to examine the Corporate Parent as a concept, my research has led me to consider whether or not is indeed possible for a corporation to parent. Fundamentally, the concept of the Corporate Parent is a tautology, and many of the parental responsibilities that the corporation assumes can actually only be delivered by individuals working with looked after children. However, full responsibility is rarely assigned to those individuals. Further discussion relating to this issue can be found in Bullock *et al* (2006) and Berridge (2007).

In terms of the care experiences and educational achievement, largely my research findings were as I had anticipated, as looked after children in Authority 1 and Authority 2 performed less well academically than the general school population. This mirrored the educational achievement of looked after children throughout Scotland. I was able to identify that care factors and educational achievement were inter-connected and that looked after children with a specific set of care factors were likely to perform better educationally than other children with another set of care factors. For instance, where a child was looked after (placement type) proved to be significant in terms of academic achievement. However, I was able to determine that a number of care factors actually led to a looked after child being placed in a particular placement setting. Indeed, I established that the age a child became looked after and the reason for becoming

looked after had a bearing on placement type. Children who became looked after when they were under 12 years old were more likely to be looked after away from home and children who became looked after when they were 12 years old or over tended to be looked after at home or in residential care. Similarly, children who became looked after as a result of non attendance at school or school exclusion were mostly being looked after at home. This is likely to have had some bearing on the educational achievement of children looked after at home and in residential care (see Appendix 10 for a summary of all measures of association).

In considering other care factors that were inter-connected I was able to determine that the primary reason for a child becoming looked after was associated with the length of time that a child would be in care, with children who had become looked after as result of carer alcohol and drug misuse, child protection issues and death or imprisonment of a primary carer being looked after for longer periods of time. I was also able to establish that children who became looked after when they were under 12 years old were likely to have more placements than those children who became looked after when they were 12 years old or over. Additionally, I found that there was a correlation between number of placements and placement type with children in residential care having more placements than those in foster care. This may help explain why children in residential care feel less settled and supported by those around them and why they do not perform academically as well as those children in foster care.

On discharge from care, the majority of looked after children remained or returned to the family home but I found that the reason for becoming looked after had a bearing on whether a child returned home or whether they lived elsewhere. I was able to ascertain that significantly higher proportions of children who had become looked after as a result of offending behaviour or carer alcohol and drug misuse lived outwith the family home when discharged from care. Other care factors such as such as placement type were found to contribute to discharge destination, with almost all children on home supervision remaining in the family home on discharge from care. Whereas, I determined that the majority of children who had been in residential care were living in supported accommodation or had their own tenancies on leaving care. I found that children who had been in foster care were the least likely to return to the family home on discharge from care. This could be related to expectations of family life following time in foster care, or that family ties were not as strong for those who had been in foster care, especially where they have been offered a good substitute family.

In my research, I was able to determine that looked after children performed less well than the general school population across all SCQF levels and that children looked after at home performed less well than all other looked after children at all SCQF levels. I found that children in residential care performed as poorly as those looked after at home when I considered higher level awards such as 5 or more awards at SCQF level 4 or above. At specific SCQF levels, other care factors such

as the age a child was when they became looked after, gender, and in some instances the primary reason for becoming looked after, were also significant factors in determining educational achievement. For example, children who became looked after when they were younger (under 12) out performed older children across all SCQF level awards. This might be because children who became looked after when they were younger tended to live in foster care and have more settled lives. Generally, this meant they were more equipped for learning. My empirical findings also demonstrated that females out performed males across all SCQF level awards, as they do in the general school population. Generally, the number of placements a child had was not significant but I anticipate that this a result of the low numbers of children in my sample that I was able to collect this information for, rather than it not being a significant factor in determining educational achievement.

In addition to non subject specific awards being taken into account, I determined that placement type and age on becoming looked after were both associated with the achievement of English and Maths. For instance, in comparison to all other looked after children, a far higher proportion of children in foster care attained English and Maths at SCQF level 4 or above. Children in residential care performed as poorly as those looked after at home. Nevertheless, greater proportions of children in residential care attained English only at SCQF level 4 compared to those looked after at home. Correspondingly, children who became

looked after when they were younger (under 12) were more likely to attain English and Maths than those who became looked after when they were 12 years old or over.

In considering the association that multiple care factors had on the academic achievement of the 1407 looked after children, I was able to determine that gender and placement type were significant. Indeed, across all levels children in foster care out performed children in residential care and children looked after at home. A matter of significance was that at lower levels (1 or more at SCQF level 3 or above and 1 or more at SCQF level 4 or above) males in foster care out performed all other looked after children, including females in foster care. However, females out performed their male counterparts in all other placement settings. Additionally, whilst children in residential care out performed their male and female counterparts who were looked after at home, in lower level SCQF awards (1 or more at SCQF level 3 or above and 1 or more at SCQF level 4 or above), they performed as poorly as their male and female counterparts who were looked after at home when consideration was given to higher level awards (3 or more at SCQF level 4 or above and 5 or more at SCQF level 4 or above).

Some of my most crucial findings have arisen out of consideration being given to the relationship between educational achievement and multiple key care factors

such as last placement type, gender, age on becoming looked after and reason for becoming looked after, for those children where the data was available. First, I was able to determine that when all of these factors were considered together in a statistical model that gender was not significant. However, placement, age on becoming looked after and the reason for becoming looked after were jointly significant in determining educational achievement. For instance, children in foster care were generally the most successful, especially those who became looked after as a result of parental behaviour, when they were less than 12 years old. Those children looked after at home and in residential care who became looked after when they were under 12 years old, as a result of parental behaviour, performed better overall than children in the same placements, who became looked after when they were over 12 years old as a result of their own behaviour. In some instances, they performed better than children in foster care who had become looked after when they were over 12 years old as, a result of their own behaviour.

Essentially, my empirical findings demonstrate that becoming looked after as a result of parental behaviour before the age of 12 can have a positive impact on educational achievement for looked after children. The reverse is also true, as becoming looked after as a result of their own behaviour, at aged 12 or over, can have a negative impact on educational achievement of looked after children. As previously noted, this raises wider questions about whether the differences are

related to placement types or the populations of children that go to these destinations. Indeed, there may also be independent factors that affect educational achievement that I have not considered in my research.

My qualitative data provided further explanation for the poor educational achievement of looked after children. In my research only three quarters of looked after children said they could talk to and felt supported by teaching staff, care staff, parents and carers. The quarter who said they had no one to talk to were mostly living in residential units. Of all the children involved in the research for this thesis, only 60% said that there was at least one person who asked them about school on a regular basis. This included teaching staff, care staff, parents and carers. When asked who should know that a child was looked after, mostly children thought that head teachers and guidance teachers are the only people who should be told they are looked after. Albeit, over half of the children did not know what their school had been told about them being looked after and over half of the children stated that no one had helped them work out what they were going to tell other children at school about being looked after. Moreover, only one third of looked after children stated that their social workers had asked them for their views on their education. The research illustrated that children are more likely to be involved in decision making about their care rather than their education. Though, practitioners stated that this involvement in their care is not necessarily to a satisfactory standard. Interestingly, just under one quarter of looked after children thought that their social

worker had no contact with their school about them. The majority of these children attended mainstream school and lived in residential units.

In Authority 1, the Head of Service stated that the council formally promoted achievement but other policy makers and practitioners argued that the council did not have a formal process for acknowledging achievement. I was however able to establish that even when the council did promote achievement there was too much emphasis placed on academic achievement. In my research only 53% of children were able to identify at least one person who was proud of their achievements and one third of the children felt that they were treated more negatively by teachers because they were looked after. The majority of these children lived in residential units and were attending mainstream schools. Albeit, less children (one fifth) thought they were treated more negatively by pupils because they were looked after. Interestingly, those children who enjoyed school (53%) were more likely not to attend a mainstream school and whilst all children reported having friends at school, 40% reported having no contact with their school friends outside of school. These children were primarily living in residential units or at home with their parents.

In my research stability proved to be an issue with 80% of looked after children participating in the research having changed school at least once and 10% having

changed school more than 5 times. The primary reasons given by children for school changes were exclusion and placement changes. Indeed, in my research I was able to determine that 80% of the children who participated in the research had been excluded from school at some point and that a significantly high proportion of them had been excluded more than once. Almost all children said that an improvement in their behaviour would have prevented them from being excluded from school. As highlighted by the children, this was directly related to the lack of understanding by teachers and pupils over what it was like to be looked after. I find this to be of real concern especially since school exclusion is the most serious sanction a school can use in response to disruptive behaviour (Baron *et al*, 2000).

A correlation between enjoyment of school and school attendance was established in my research with 76% of children stating that they enjoyed school and attended almost all of the time. However, practitioners and policy makers highlighted the low expectations that many people have of looked after children, especially teachers, although less than one quarter (23%) of children thought that teachers expected less of them because they were looked after. In addition, bullying was identified as a problem in the research, with just under half (43%) of the children who participated in the research reporting that they had been bullied. Of those who reported being bullied 76% had told someone about the bullying but it had only stopped for 46% of these children.

Authority 1 had an alternative Education Service provision for looked after children, nevertheless my research highlighted that this was under resourced and did not provide services to all factions of the looked after community. What is more, Authority 1 had developed a resource to help looked after children with homework but this resource did not provide support to all looked after children, especially those on home supervision and at college. Indeed, just under half (43%) of those children who said they received homework had no one to help them with their homework and just over a quarter of looked after children did not have a quiet place to study where they lived. Primarily, these were children living in residential units. However, almost all of those children who reported having access to study space but reported that they did not use it were children who were looked after at home. Also, children looked after at home were far less likely to have access to a PC at home than all other looked after children. However, it was reported that children living in residential units were not always able to access PC's in the units where they lived. This was due to study rooms being made bedrooms because of over crowding or broken PC's not being repaired. Additionally, I was able to ascertain from my research that almost all children had access to books where they lived (86%). The 14% who did not have access to books where they lived were all looked after at home. In considering these findings across placement type, this perhaps begins to provide some explanation as to why children in foster care perform significantly better at school than children who are looked after at home or in residential care.

My empirical findings illustrate that the looked after population is not a homogenous group. From the Integrated Children's Service Plan in Authority 1 and Authority 2 (as referred to in Chapter 3), it can be determined that those looked after at home and those looked after away from home are considered separately, however in terms of policy, this is as far as it goes and I am actually not sure how well this is approached. I would argue that the Corporate Parent needs to further consider how to improve the life chances of specific groups of looked after children to ensure that they are, at least, equal to those of all other looked after children. The Corporate Parent needs to take cognisance of the negative experiences that some looked after children have. More consideration needs to be given to where children are placed when they become looked after, and also to the emotional and practical support needed by children who are looked after at home and in residential care, to ensure that they have the same experiences as those in foster care, as a minimum. Similarly, those who became looked after when they were over 12 years of age and those who became looked after as a result of their own behaviour may benefit from additional support to compensate for the experiences that they had prior to becoming looked after. Research which closely examines the psychological impact for looked after children across all 3 placement types could help with this and perhaps provide some insight, particularly about those looked after at home. Generally, research has been less concerned about the psychological impact of being looked after at home.

The experience that looked after children have in school requires further consideration by the Corporate Parent. Looked after children can have a negative experience at school, this is often associated with the stigma of being looked after. Also their relationships with teachers and other children had been found to impact on their experience, particularly for those children in residential care who attend mainstream schools. Additionally, many more looked after children face exclusion from school and some for long periods of time. A scheme which prevents looked after children from being excluded could potentially help with this. Further research into the practicalities and benefits of this is required.

I am aware that there are limitations to my research. The array of social factors I considered were limited and it would have been interesting to know more about the impact that factors such as whether or not their were sibling, what amount and type of contact did the children have with their parents and what other activities the children were engaged in. This is an area that would benefit from further research. Additionally, the fact that only Authority 1 was involved in the qualitative element of my research, and that Education Services refused to participate is also another limitation in my research. Further investigation in these areas would be useful. However, in Chapter 13, I give further consideration to my empirical findings and explore how childcare policy might move forward, thus improving the life chances of looked after children in Scotland.

CHAPTER 11

SOCIAL CAPITAL AND LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

Introduction

Whilst ultimately this thesis has been about a piece of applied research, I recognise the importance of making a connection between theory and research. As such, in this chapter it is my intention to consider my research findings within the context of social theory, and in particular social capital theory, to explain the poor educational achievement of looked after children. As noted in Chapter 4, the two key components of social capital theory are networks (bonding, bridging and linking) and trust (trust for those people we know and trust for those we do not know). The central idea underlying social capital is that the social relationships and personal networks that we create are a resource which can be used to generate outcomes that are of value (Croll, 2004). Social capital is developed through the things we do for one another and in the trust we develop for one another (Catts and Ozga, 2005). Social capital can be used as a mechanism for combating the social disadvantage that children have throughout their lives, and whilst I did not set out to directly measure social capital, I still feel that it is worthwhile considering the concept of social capital as a way explaining the low educational achievement of looked after children.

Children live out their daily relationships in a number of domains. This includes domains such as a family setting, a school setting, within their peer group, in their neighbourhood and through their leisure time interests and activities (Gilligan, 1999). For looked after children this also includes their care setting. Each of these domains can potentially make a positive contribution to the lives of children (Gilligan, 1999) and can contribute to their accumulation of social capital. Whilst I recognise that looked after children's social capital can be developed through their relationships with this range of people across all of these domains, social capital for children is primarily developed through relationships with family, friends and with people they interact with at school. In this chapter I consider how such interactions impact on the accumulation of social capital for the looked after community. I also explore how social capital theory can help us understand the approach taken by the Corporate Parent in terms of policy and practice. Following this, there is a brief discussion regarding the usefulness of social capital as theory for helping us examine and interpret the educational achievement of looked after children.

Family Life and Placement Life

Children first start to develop their social capital at home with their parents. For those children looked after away from home, they also develop social capital in their care placements, although their experience at home serves as the foundation to their development of social capital. Children develop bonding social capital

through their relationships with families, carers and friends. This type of social capital is valuable for children as it helps them build a sense of shared identity and provides them with security (Catts and Ozga, 2005). Indeed, close interaction between a parent and child is seen as crucial to the development of social capital and it is the key mechanism by which human capital is transmitted to the child (Coleman, 1998). Families that are rich in social capital are families that have strong family ties and communicate well with each other (Schneider and Stevenson, 1999).

In view of my empirical findings, it could be argued that looked after children do not necessarily have lives that are characterised by positive interaction with their families and carers. Nor do they always live in environments where they are able to develop trust with family and carers. For instance, I was able to determine from my qualitative and quantitative research that many looked after children have lives that are characterised by instability. The looked after children in my research lived in families or had lived in families where there was a history of neglect, abuse, alcohol abuse, drug abuse, imprisonment, unemployment and deprivation. Others had lived in a number of care settings resulting in disruption to their lives. If we accept that these factors influenced the relationships that children had with their family and carers, and that social capital is about the relationships we have in the networks we are part of, could it then be suggested that this would have had some impact on their accumulation of social capital?

Furthermore, a significant proportion of looked after children in my qualitative research reported not receiving support or encouragement to do well at school from their families or carers. In some instances, children reported not having study facilities at home or access to resources to help them study. A number of children reported that no one where they lived asked them about school or that no one was proud of their achievements. In my view, the experience that these looked after children had did not reflect traditional family life in the UK today, where the majority of children are cared for and supported to do well at school. For these reasons, could it be argued that looked after children are generally not able to develop the same level of bonding social capital that other children are, and that this not only affects their ability to develop bridging and linking social capital, but that it affects their ability to achieve academically?

It has been claimed that the social capital offered by families varies to different degrees and extents and that families add to this their own history and identity (Schools and Social Capital Network, 2005). This might help explain why looked after children develop different levels of social capital. For example, I found in my qualitative research that children in foster care, who mostly became looked after before they were 12 years old, as a result of parental behaviour, had the most enriching lives and the greatest capacity to develop their bonding social capital, albeit not to the same levels as children in the general population. This might be because the support children in foster care receive, by living in a family setting,

helps compensate for their experiences prior to becoming looked after and that this creates a more stable family environment. Where as, other looked after children who mostly became looked after when they were 12 years old or over, as a result of their own behaviour, do not necessarily live in supportive and stable environments. This is evidenced in my quantitative research findings where overall, children looked after in foster care were the most successful academically.

In actual fact, I found in my qualitative research that children looked after at home and children looked after in residential care were less likely to develop in the areas that contributed to bonding social capital as they had much less support and encouragement where they lived. In general, those children looked after at home and in residential care had far less enriching lives. These children also had less emotional and educational support and had less access to study help and resources. One of the fundamental issues for children looked after at home is that they are never actually removed from the problematic situation within their family home and often Social Work intervention does not have a positive impact on their lives. For those children looked after in residential care, rather than living in family settings they live in group situations with many other looked after children and this can be disruptive. Additionally, children in residential care have multiple carers at any one time who work on a rota basis and we know that this can also be difficult for looked after children to manage. As a result, could it be argued that these children are not able to form the same bonds and trust that other children

form and that this impacts on their ability to develop social capital and on their ability to achieve academically?

Schooling

For a child to succeed in education their social capital has to be developed and resourced, not only through their relationships with family, carers and friends, but through their relationships with people at school. This is why the relationship that children have with teachers and fellow pupils at school is important for the development of their social capital (Schools and Social Capital Network, 2005). Moreover, even if a child does not achieve a high academic level, he or she can still derive considerable support from positive school experiences, especially since school is often a bridge into other community resources such as clubs and activities (Daniel, 2007). Therefore, if social capital acts in schools as it does elsewhere, then its role is to assist in the full development of both human and cultural capital in each individual (Schools and Social Capital Network, 2005). Social capital is provided by schools through social networks of association and it also provides entry into a range of intellectual and social activities, allowing the child to profit from the culture into which he or she is being inducted (Schools and Social Capital Network, 2005). As such, at school children are able to further develop their bonding social capital but they can also develop their bridging and linking social capital. Bridging social capital is a resource that helps children build relationships with those outwith their immediate environment (Catts and Ozga,

2005). Linking social capital is also important as it helps people get ahead and enables connections between people from different backgrounds (Catts and Ozga, 2005).

It is well rehearsed that a child's academic success is determined by more than their academic ability (Bourdieu, 1986). Academic success is also determined by the overall experience a child has at school. My qualitative research highlighted that looked after children do not have the same experience at school that other children have, as their experience tends to be more disjointed and negative. Could it therefore be argued that looked after children are not able to develop social capital at school in the same way that other children can? Through my qualitative research I found that in many schools the ethos was one that discriminated against looked after children. For example, in comparison to the general school population, looked after children were found to have an increased chance of being excluded and were far more likely to have changed school. Moreover, some teachers were found to expect less of children because they were looked after and it was determined that some pupils and teachers treated looked after children more negatively. Whilst social capital concerns networks and personal associations, it does also concern values, norms and social attitudes (Croll, 2004). Consequently, the experience that these children had at school may have impacted on their development of social capital and on their ability to attain academically.

If we accept that children looked after in foster care have better access to social networks and that there is a link between different types of social networks, different types of social capital and academic achievement (Schools and Social Capital Network, 2005), it is not surprising that children looked after in foster care perform significantly better academically than all other looked after children. This may be because children looked after in foster care are more equipped to develop social capital and have an increased chance of receiving the same type of support that children in the general population receive. In my qualitative research, whilst I found that children in foster care had the most positive experience at school, I found that those children living in residential units, who attended mainstream school, had the least positive experience at school. It could then be argued that this less positive experience reflected on the ability of these children to attain academically.

Maintaining friendships outside of school and participation in extra curricular activities is something that is common practice in the general school population. Both of these activities are important in the development of social capital and general educational achievement. However, in my qualitative research, children looked after in residential care and children looked after at home were less likely than those in foster care to have contact with school friends outside of school. Consequently, these children did not have the same access to social networks that

children in foster care had access to and were arguably at greater risk of becoming disengaged from the learning process in general (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977).

Care and Educational Practice

In Chapter 5 of my research I gave consideration to the Corporate Parent role that Social Work Services, Education Services and other partner agencies take in respect of policy making, service planning, service provision and service monitoring. In doing this, I was able to determine that an improvement was required in all policy and practice areas to raise the educational achievement of looked after children. At this juncture, I intend to use social capital theory to explore my empirical findings. Indeed, it seems relevant to take this approach as the concept of social capital has also be linked to broader terms such as social cohesion, democracy, economic wellbeing and sustainability (Stone, 2003) and it therefore provides us with another way of thinking about the different types of relationships between policy makers, practitioners, looked after children and their families.

Public agencies such as local authorities can help individuals, families and communities accumulate social capital. Two of the ways in which this can be achieved is when the philosophy underlying the delivery of service aims to strengthen those individuals, families and communities and when the local

authority works towards having effective early intervention and prevention strategies (Stone, 2003). National and local policies and frameworks (as discussed in Chapter 3) set out to achieve many of the principles underlying social capital theory such as social inclusion, promoting citizenship, raising educational achievement for all, being respectful to service users and taking a participatory approach, albeit not explicitly. However, my empirical evidence in the qualitative element of my research demonstrated that the Corporate Parent is failing looked after children and that there are gaps in policy making, service planning, service provision and service monitoring. I believe that this could be one of the factors contributing to the low social capital and low educational achievement of looked after children. For instance, I was able to determine that policy makers and practitioners were not clear about the policies and frameworks that existed in relation to the educational achievement of looked after children, and that there was ambiguity over the implementation, reviewing and monitoring of policies. I find this to be a matter of significance; as how can policy makers and practitioners work towards improving the social capital and the educational achievement of looked after children, if they are not well informed about the policies and frameworks for doing so?

In order to develop social capital in the looked after community (and other individuals, families and communities) there has to be an increased awareness about the importance of providing services that meet the needs of looked after

children. If successful, this can help facilitate bonds, bridges and links between service users (looked after children) and other members of the community which are sustainable beyond the bounds of the service (Stone, 2003). However, for local authorities working with looked after children this requires time and resources; commitment; being inclusive; sharing power and responsibility; being local; having respect; and being trustworthy (Stone, 2003).

In my qualitative research there was a general acknowledgement about the importance of these factors but empirical evidence demonstrated that the Corporate Parent was not always able to provide looked after children with the services they required, which ensured that they had the same support and opportunities as other children. For example, looked after children were not always treated respectfully by the local authority and local authority practitioners were not always good at asking them for their views on their care and education. Another example is that, because of resourcing issues, looked after children were not always provided with long term stable placements in a placement setting that best met their needs. Additionally, the Corporate Parent did not always provide all looked after children with the emotional and educational support they required to have a wholly inclusive experience at school and in the community at large. Indeed, some looked after children felt they were treated differently at school by teachers and pupils and some looked after children were not given appropriate levels of emotional support from teachers, carers, families and social workers.

This was evident in my quantitative data where looked after children did not perform as well as the general school population, and that within the looked after community specific groups of children with a combination of key care factors performed less well academically than other groups of children with a different combination of key care factors.

In terms of the role of the Corporate Parent and sharing responsibility for looked after children, I would argue that this is an area that local authorities and partner agencies very much need to improve on if we are to raise the social capital of looked after children. The approach taken by different services was inconsistent and there was a lack of co-ordination and cohesion within and across services and partnerships. I was able to determine that Social Work, Educational Services and other partners did not always take an equal responsibility for policy, service planning and in general little attention was paid to service monitoring by all. Consequently, I would argue the role of the Corporate Parent has to some extent attributed to the low educational achievement of looked after children and has impacted on the accumulation of social capital for these individuals.

Usefulness of Social Capital

I will now critically reflect on the usefulness of social capital in theorising and explaining the low educational achievement of looked after children. One of the

instrumental functions of social capital is that it helps explain the different access that children have to education and how this different access helps sustain social and economic stratification (Munn, 2000). This understanding of social divisions may help us understand the underachievement of particular groups of children (Bourdieu, 1986 and Coleman, 1998) but does it help us explain the educational achievement of looked after children?

Whilst I acknowledge that I did not set out to measure social capital directly, I would propose that, overall, the theoretical conception of social capital has been useful for exploring the educational achievement of looked after children. Yet, I am aware of its limitations and restrictions. An emerging position is that social capital is a rather nebulous concept and that it has begun to generate scepticism because of its wide and variant range of definitions (Schuller *et al*, 2000 and Morrow, 1999). Social capital has the same foundation argument, however the unit of analysis differs across disciplines and this has resulted in the theory being developed separately across social science disciplines (Bassani 2007). Portes (1998) comments that the point is approaching where social capital has been applied to so many aspects of social life and in so many contexts that it is starting to lose any distinctive meaning.

My position concurs with Schuller *et al* (2000), who argue that a fundamental problem with social capital theory is its circular nature. I conclude that social capital can be used as an explanatory variable in many social science applications. However, at the same time social capital is also the outcome of an often similar set of social processes. Allied to this problem, it can be difficult to determine if social capital itself is an outcome characteristic of a flourishing society or a means of achieving a positive outcome (Schuller *et al*, 2000). On reflection, this issue of circularity (or feedback) has presented me with problems in my research as it has been difficult to determine if the low social capital that looked after children have is the result of low educational achievement or the cause. In most instances, I have referred to low social capital as being the result of the low educational achievement of looked after children but I do recognise that low social capital, especially in families, can also be the cause of low educational achievement of looked after children.

Another area of concern is the measurement of social capital. This issue has been highlighted by Catts and Ozga (2005). The use of social capital theory in social policy and practice requires the development of reliable indicators that take account of key social and cultural features of a particular society. Valid and reliable social capital indicators can only be collected when systematic protocols of measurement have been developed. One of the significant problems with theorising the role of social capital is that it is often difficult to measure social

participation and social engagement amongst those groups disengaged from more obvious formal civic engagement. I argue that this is particularly acute in relation to looked after children. I also agree with Catts and Ozga's (2005) assertion that many routine indicators are not appropriate since they are not able to identify informal forms of social participation.

In the UK context, a political rhetoric has been generated about the harmful effects of family breakdown on children. In my view this position has not necessarily emerged from a clear evidence base. I observe that increasingly public debates are beginning to draw loosely on ideas emerging from social capital literature. Morrow (1999) suggests that a popular image is being generated which suggests children who live in the wrong types of families are damaged. This position is obviously informed by social science thinking. However, it has the potential to be made more palatable when it is couched in the language of low social capital.

Another important reflection, which partly emerges from Catts and Ozga (2005), is that the language of social capital may be promoting a particular moral agenda which suggests that middle class values are intrinsically good and that any deviation away from this is undesirable. At this juncture, I conclude that whilst policy makers are interested in social capital as a resource that combats social

exclusion, the rhetoric of social capital is often used to distract attention from the inequalities in wealth and resources and to distract from the problems of poverty.

As part of the intellectual exercise of reflecting on the propriety and role of social capital as an explanation for the low achievement of looked after children, I consider that it is appropriate to briefly evaluate the merits of alternative social theories. In particular, two theories were suggested to me by fellow academics, these are social exclusion theory and attachment theory. The concept of social exclusion came to the fore in the policies of new labour in the 1990's (Percy-Smith, 2000). Accounts of social exclusion are advanced in Sparks (1999), Stein (2006) and Hills *et al* (2002).

Social exclusion is a shorthand label for what happens when individuals or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low income, poor housing, high crime, bad health and family breakdown (Munn and Lloyd, 2005 and Orr, 2005). After much reading and due consideration, I would have to conclude that the concept of social exclusion is less helpful than social capital theory for exploring and understanding my research findings for 3 reasons. First, I argue that social exclusion is not a unified social theory; it is merely a collection of social policy ideas that have their foundations in the popular rhetoric of the Blair Government. Second, the concept of social exclusion is a multi

dimensional measurement of poverty, whilst many looked after children have backgrounds that are characterised by poverty, it would be inaccurate to argue that the poor educational achievements of looked after children are a direct consequence of poverty only. Third, it would be inaccurate to argue that combating social exclusion is all that is required by the Corporate Parent to improve the educational achievements of looked after children.

In essence my study is a sociological investigation of the educational achievement of looked after children in two local authority settings. However, I have considered some wider theoretical explanations. An alternative class of theories, known as attachment theory, are advanced by Fahlberg (1994); Howe and Fearnley (1999); and Klaus and Kennell (1976). Howe (1998) suggests that attachment theory may potentially have some utility in explaining the shorter and longer term outcomes of looked after children. Generally, attachment theory highlights the importance of the existence and formation of emotional bonds between children and their care givers (Kanieski, 2007). It is arguable that ideas of attachment are significant because it has been recognised that the psychological, behavioural and academic performance of looked after children can be improved upon if children are supported to form attachments (Kanieski, 2007). However, having reviewed attachment theory I have concluded that it provides less explanatory power than concepts from social capital theories for the sociological understanding of the educational achievement of looked after children. Attachment theory is primarily a

psychological theory and whilst it may have utility in explaining psychological aspects of children's experience, it has far less value in understanding the patterns within my empirical data

In summary, through the examination of concepts such as bonding social capital, bridging social capital, linking social capital and trust, in this chapter social capital theory has been used to explore the low educational achievement of looked after children. It has also been used to consider the differing levels of achievement for children looked after at home and children looked after away from home, in foster care and residential care. Additionally, in this chapter I explored the use of social capital theory as a means of understanding the approach taken by the Corporate Parent in terms of policy and practice pertaining to looked after children. To conclude, notwithstanding the flaws and limitations of social capital theory, the effects of the interface of the family, school and the community remain ill-understood from a child's perspective (Morrow, 1999). Consequently, whilst theories of social capital may not provide a wholly adequate sociological explanation of the educational experiences and achievements of looked after children, they can be usefully deployed as what Giddens (1984) terms 'sensitising devices' which help to theoretically interpret my empirical results.

CHAPTER 12

REFLECTIONS

When I registered at Stirling University for a PhD in Sociology and Social Policy, I always assumed that I would get to the end of the process and hoped that I would be awarded a doctorate for my endeavours. I started this process with a reasonably detailed research proposal and a plan for undertaking the necessary work involved, and largely I have been able to follow this for the duration. However, I had given less thought to the more personal side of the process of undertaking a PhD and about how I would manage working on my thesis on a part-time basis, whilst working full time. What I have since come to realise is that the road to completing a PhD can be a lonely one. I do not necessarily see this as a negative though, and as I approach the end of this journey I can truthfully say that I have enjoyed the experience and that with hindsight I would have still chosen to study for a PhD.

The whole process of undertaking this PhD has taken over 5 years and this has seemed slow at times, though in hindsight this was probably the right pace, because my thesis evolved as I went through different circumstances in my career and life. In terms of the journey I have been on, I have asked myself two questions: First, what I have learned academically, professionally and personally in the undertaking this large scale piece of social and research? Second, did I

achieve what I set out to achieve? The first question seems somewhat easier to answer as academically and professionally I am aware that my qualitative and quantitative research skills have been further developed. I am also conscious of the fact that I have a far greater understanding of Social Work Services and Education Services policy and practice than I did when I first embarked on this journey. Additionally, I have a greater understanding of what it is like to be looked after. Working towards this PhD has also had a positive impact in my career. It has led me to be involved in various projects pertaining to the educational achievement of looked after children that I would have not otherwise been involved in. On a personal level, I have further developed many transferable skills that have helped me in my career and personal life. These skills include self direction; self discipline; tenacity; self motivation, resilience; and the ability to prioritise.

Conversely, the second question is not so easy for me to answer. I hope I have achieved what I set out to achieve, which was to produce an in-depth piece of applied research that profiled the educational achievement of looked after children and the key factors that influenced this achievement. I also set out to explore how the Corporate Parent's role, in terms of policy, impacted on educational achievement. I hope that I have been successful providing insight into this. Most importantly, I wanted to explore and share the experiences that looked after children had at school and where they lived and I believe that I have done this.

Ironically, as I approach the end of the thesis, I now realise that this is only the start for me and that the big challenges are yet to come. Indeed, the most important part now for me is about dissemination of the findings of this piece of applied research to key players such as local authorities, the Scottish Government, voluntary agencies and academia. It is also about pushing forward my recommendations that follow in Chapter 13 into the public arena in the hope that I can at least generate some conversation which will work towards improving the lives of looked after children in Scotland.

CHAPTER 13

WIDER RECOMENDATIONS

Introduction

In this last chapter, I will consider how childcare policy in Scotland might move forward to ensure that looked after children are given the best possible chance in life. The recommendations that I have made in this chapter have been drawn from my empirical findings and from my wider work experience over the last decade or so. These recommendations both stimulate and contribute to a wider discussion about general childcare policy models in Scotland and the establishment of a national framework for improving the educational achievement of looked after children. Indeed, my recommendations were used in a presentation that was given by the Executive Director of Education and Social Work Services from Glasgow City Council at the ministerial launch of 'We Can and Must Do Better' in the Autumn of 2008.

To be effective and have any positive impact on the educational achievement of looked after children, any policy model or framework would have to be developed at a number of levels. First, at a national policy level consideration has to be given to alternative or new policy models that would be more effective generally and could help ensure better outcomes for looked after children. Following on from this, reflection should be given to more specific recommendations at a local level

by local authorities and partner agencies. Then attention would be given to more specific recommendations required at an institutional level, particularly in schools and residential units. Last, reflection would have to be given to specific recommendations at an individual child level, if we are to improve upon the experiences of looked after children in Scotland. A discussion will follow that considers relevant recommendations at each one of these levels.

National Policy Level

Improved Data

The quality of official data desperately needs to be improved upon if we are to measure performance from administrative data collected by local authorities. For data quality to improve, local authorities would be required to have a management information strategy in place which ensures that all workers know they have a responsibility to take ownership of the data recorded on management information systems about their clients. Such a strategy would also strive for improved accuracy of data recording and more timely data recording. Additionally, Social Work Services and Education Services need to be able to access each others management information systems. The development of a joint Social Work Services and Education Services management information system would be the best approach as this would reduce duplication of effort and reduce error. A management information champion in each service or at a council level would help move this forward. Moreover, further consideration needs to be given to the current performance measures that are in place and how these can be improved

upon. As has been the tendency in the past, there is no benefit to be had from just getting a description of the problem. There is a pressing need for the collection and reporting of official data to go beyond collecting and reporting on unconnected statistics.

Indeed, the establishment of a comprehensive national baseline, replicating the approach used in this thesis, would provide a more accurate account of the extent of the problem currently and would give a better indication of variation across local authorities in Scotland. It would also raise the profile of the issue in local authorities across Scotland. This could feasibly be a joint project between the Scottish Government, COSLA, local authorities and academic institutions. In the longer term, a longitudinal research study that considers the educational achievement of looked after children in Scotland would be very valuable. This would provide the government, local authorities and partner agencies in Scotland with a far better indication of the long term impact the care system has on the educational achievement looked after children.

As I write these recommendations, the Scottish Government has issued a draft framework to all local authorities in Scotland about the collection of data which will be used to measure and improve the educational achievement of looked after children across Scotland. I have been responsible for drafting a response to the

Scottish Government regarding this proposal on behalf of the local authority that I am currently employed by. The proposed framework is certainly an improvement on what is currently collected nationally, yet it is rather disappointing as local authorities will still only be required to provide descriptive measures that do not necessarily facilitate the forms of detailed multivariate analyses that my empirical investigations have shown are critical. More detail will be provided by local authorities than has been previously reported, however the Scottish Government has missed an opportunity to collect nationally representative longitudinal data from local authorities that would have provided a greater insight into issues affecting looked after children. In my response to the Scottish Government I detailed these issues. This would have not been possible had I not undertaken this research. Subsequently, I have been invited to meet with representatives from the Scottish Government to further discuss their proposal and I hope to have an input into the final framework that specifies the types of data that local authorities will be required to collect.

Development of a New National Approach to Childcare Policy

In my view, the Scottish Government, local authorities and partner agencies in Scotland need to develop a policy model that will go some way to improving the educational achievement of looked after children in Scotland. One model worth considering is a policy model, known as a 'pedagogy model' (Boddy *et al*, 2005:2) which may indeed be the policy model which finally provides children in Scotland

and especially vulnerable children, such as those looked after, with the support they require to live happy, health and rewarding lives.

In Scotland, the term pedagogy has been used in the context of formal education. However, in mainland Europe the word pedagogy relates to the overall support for children's development and covers a broader set of services covering childcare, early years, youth work, family support, secure units for offenders, residential care and play work (Petrie *et al*, 2005). One of the main advantages of a pedagogic model is that it is a model where care and education genuinely meet. Whilst parents are often referred to as the first pedagogues, pedagogy is also the foundation concept that informs many services, providing a distinctive approach to practice, training and policy. In mainland Europe, the use of the terms education and pedagogy imply work with the whole child: body, mind, feelings, spirit, creativity and social identity (Moss and Petrie, 2002). Crucially the child is seen as a social being connected to others and at the same time with their own distinctive experiences and knowledge (Petrie *et al*, 2005). For Petrie *et al* (2005) this is what is referred to as social pedagogy as it is conducted on behalf of society, rather than the more private pedagogy performed by parents. In mainland Europe, this type of model has been found to be very successful when working with more vulnerable groups in society (Petrie *et al*, 2005), hence the benefit of such a model being used in Scotland.

Let us briefly consider what a pedagogic approach has to offer Scotland. First and foremost, it is an overarching concept that would bring greater coherence to children's services as expressed in general childcare policy such as 'For Scotland's Children' (Scottish Government, 2001a) and in policies specific to the educational achievement of looked after children such as 'Learning with Care' (HMI and SWSI, 2001) and 'Looked After Children and Young People: we can and must do better' (Scottish Government, 2007c). Moreover, it would provide a framework for discussing the aims for children in society as a whole and the recent development of integrated schools and CHCP's sits well within the pedagogic framework (Petrie *et al*, 2005). A pedagogic approach has the potential to be inclusive, with the main focus on children as children but taking account of their additional needs. Furthermore, pedagogues think in terms of both the individual and the group and take a holistic view of the child, respecting them as fellow human beings, each with a distinctive viewpoint to make (Petrie *et al*, 2005). This seems to fit in nicely with the Scottish Governments aims for looked after children.

The move to a pedagogic model would require in-depth structural considerations in areas such as the transfer of whole systems of training, qualifications and practice if we are to move towards a pedagogic model (Boddy *et al*, 2005). However, the successful introduction of an occupation model would depend on strong government lead with a commitment to national investment to support the public and private sectors through the transition. Whilst there would have to be a change

in the mindset of people if the pedagogic model was to be explored in Scotland, these changes are possible in Scotland, as they have been in mainland Europe. Indeed, it has been argued that there is no other approach that is so deeply developed and so well suited to the Scottish Government's purposes (Boddy *et al*, 2005).

Local Level

Corporate Parenting and Service Integration

At a local level, local authorities and partner agencies need to take equal responsibility for looked after children. The Children (Scotland) Act 1995 defines the responsibility of looked after children as a corporate responsibility (HMI and SWSI, 2001). Therefore, all departments within local authorities need to be held accountable for the educational achievement of looked after children by each other and the Scottish Government. This includes elected council members. Equally, since 'For Scotland Children' (Scottish Government, 2001a), partner agencies have had an explicit responsibility for looked after children and this must be taken seriously at both a policy and practice level by all. Moreover, Social Work and Education Services within local authorities need to unequivocally consider the education of looked after children by developing fully operational and integrated policies that ensure the needs of looked after children are dealt with most effectively. The response to looked after children by local authorities has to be dominated by a needs led approach rather than a service led approach. Where appropriate, local authorities and partner agencies need to be able and willing to

adapt services to fully meet the needs of looked after children. This would all be incorporated into a pedagogic approach to childcare within Scotland.

Establishing Local Level Policy Frameworks

Local authorities and partner agencies need to get better at policy implementation and policy monitoring in this area. Too often the focus is on mainstream education. Also, the dissemination of policy and policy targets need to be communicated to staff at all levels and to elected members. Moreover, it is vitally important that local authorities and partner agencies use research knowledge from academia and within their own agencies to inform policy and practice. In my experience, local authorities and partner agencies in Scotland are more accustomed to undertaking consultancy and evaluation activities than undertaking baseline research to drive through policy making. This approach needs to be reconsidered if we are to improve the educational achievement of looked after children. Moreover, further work is required to improve communication between local authority departments and partner agencies at a policy and practice level. According to the Scottish Government (2007c) this has already begun in many local authority areas.

Client Based Management Information Systems

Client assessment and management information systems need to be used appropriately within and across Social Work Services, Education Services, other

local authority departments and partner agencies. It is vital that data recording is accurate and up to date and that each worker in each agency knows they have a responsibility to ensure this. Where a single client assessment and management information system does not exist across local authority departments and partner agencies, it is important that a data sharing protocol is drawn up and relevant information pertaining to looked after children shared with the appropriate people.

Institutional Level

Responsibility and Accountability

At an institution level, be it school or a residential establishment, it needs to be made clear to establishment heads that it is their responsibility and the responsibility of their staff to ensure that their establishment promotes a positive ethos by valuing diversity and promoting respect for all children. Establishments also need to be sure they send out a message to all staff and children that they do not tolerate bullying and that there are mechanisms in place to support those who are bullied. Following on from this, as outlined in 'Learning with Care' (HMI and SWSI, 2001), each school needs to have a designated member of staff with the responsibility of overseeing the needs looked after children. In some instances, even where the designated member of staff already exists, there may be a need for clarity regarding the role and responsibilities of the designated person. Additionally, many looked after children worry that personal information about their situation will become widely available. In conjunction with the looked after child,

schools and social workers need to establish a system for passing on relevant information to appropriate people.

Communication Strategy and Training

Given what I was able to determine in my research in respect of policy, local authorities and partner agencies need to ensure that all relevant staff, from senior management down to practitioner level, are wholly aware of the policies and frameworks relating to looked after children. Additionally, people need to be more aware of set targets and of the monitoring of policies. Within this, there is a need for the individual to take responsibility for familiarising themselves with relevant policies and ensuring that policy targets are met.

Before any significant difference can be made in relation to the educational achievement of looked after children, it is essential that social workers, teachers, residential workers and foster carers have training that gives them an understanding of the situation that looked after children find themselves in. Also, there is a training need for social workers, teachers and residential workers to better understand the role that each of them plays in the life of a looked after child. This should be considered at the initial training stages and on an ongoing basis. This training should be fully comprehensive as often where such training takes place, it usually only scratches the surface.

Individual Child Level

Empowering Looked After Children

Local authorities and partner agencies have a responsibility to ensure that looked after children live in a culture where their human rights are recognised at all levels. Likewise, looked after children need to be empowered and well informed of their rights. From the research it was determined that looked after children are discriminated against because many people still believe looked after children are bad children, rather than just being victims of circumstance. There is a responsibility on the Scottish Government, local authorities and partner agencies to take steps to rectify this commonly held view by working towards re-educating society. What is more, local authorities and partner agencies need to be more effective in listening to individual looked after children. Indeed, they need to consider the views and experiences of being looked after from a child's point of view. Looked after children need to be encouraged to participate in the planning and formation of policies pertaining to the education of looked after children. Looked after children need to be encouraged to share their views and these views should be taken account of, particularly where it concerns the child's own education and care.

Meeting the Needs of Looked After Children

Each child should have a designated social worker and teachers should have a responsibility for ensuring that each looked after child has an integrated

assessment, where the educational element of their care is kept up to date. In an ideal world each looked after children would have a pedagogue. Additionally, it is important that the exclusion of looked after children is pre-empted and prevented where possible. Where exclusion cannot be avoided alternative arrangements need to be made quickly to ensure that the excluded child is re-introduced to a school environment as soon as possible. Given my research demonstrated that looked after children did not always have the family support that other children did, local authorities and partner agencies have a responsibility to ensure that support systems are set in place to meet the individual needs of each looked after child. Also, provision needs to be made within these support systems for looked after children to be given the opportunity to freely discuss matters of concern about any aspect of their lives. More specifically, study resources and support need to be made available to all looked after children. This should include a quiet study area, the use of IT equipment and additional tutoring facilities where necessary. This ought to be made available to those children in foster, residential care and those looked after at home. Last, local authorities and partner agencies need to provide financial support, accommodation and emotional support for those looked after children wishing to go on to further education. Looked after children, who attend further or higher education, should also be provided with assistance for studying.

Concluding Remarks

This list of recommendations is not exhaustive and many of the recommendations are not exclusive to one level, nor do they pertain to looked after children only. I acknowledge that the call for further research and the recommendations discussed in this section could be viewed as ambitious. However, there must be policy frameworks that can deliver better results for children. As a nation we need to be tackling this blight on looked after children and to find champions at all levels to raise the profile of this issue and to push forward change to help these 'parentless' children: **we could all do better.**

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