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THE EDUCATIONALLY RICH ENVIRONMENT:

An examination of issues affecting the educational experience of looked after and accommodated children and young people in the Scottish context

by

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DECLARATION OF AUTHOR'S RIGHTS

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines issues which affect the educational experience and attainment of children and young people who are "looked after" by local authorities and is set within a broader context of social welfare policy development in Scotland. The thesis records a process of enquiry using the "action research" approach to develop self-evaluation indicators which can be used by residential child care settings to help them to become more "educationally rich" environments. The use of the indicators within residential children's homes is discussed, concluding, for example, that they can contribute to the identification of clear objectives for education in unit development plans. However, the work shows that managers and carers require considerable additional support and direct assistance to implement the indicators and to institute the consequent changes to unit policy and practice. The review of the literature tells a mainly depressing story of deficits and barriers in relation to the aspirations and attainment of children and young people in public care, but also shows the emergence of more encouraging messages in recent research. Analyses of official statistics on attainment and exclusion from school show the variation in achievement in different local authorities and the apparent higher achievement of children looked after in foster care settings and in residential schools. The study also identifies a number of avenues for further research, including the need to look more directly at the day-to-day educational experience of children and young people in public care, focussing closely on educational and care planning and review, as well as educational and cultural activities, and the relative contributions of particular educational support arrangements, including home-link teachers, private tutors, mentors and university summer schools.

GLOSSARY

5-14 Curriculum	Curriculum in primary schools and the first two years of secondary education in Scotland
Action Research	Research emphasising participation of research collaborators and a cyclical approach to enquiry
After Care	Supporting young person who has left care (usually until aged 21)
Attainment	Assessed performance in 5-14 curriculum or in National Qualifications, e.g. Standard Grades
Care Plan	Official files prepared by social worker, specifying health, welfare and educational needs and placement recommendations
Care Setting	Collective term for care environment, e.g. residential or foster care
Careers Scotland	National agency responsible for providing career and employment advice for young people and particular groups of adults
Children's Hearing	A formal meeting of three trained lay members of the community who "hear" the circumstances where a child aged under 16 is at risk or is accused of offending
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
Corporate Parent	Catch-all term for shared responsibilities which different local authority departments have for care, education, health etc. of "looked after" children and young people
Educationally Rich Environment	Particularly, in respect of children's homes/units: an environment where education is valued and supported both emotionally and in practical ways
Exclusion	Official procedure whereby a pupil is removed from school
Foster Care	A "looked after" child is cared for in a contractual arrangement with another family
HGIOS	*How Good Is Our School*: A self-evaluation framework developed and promoted by HMIE
HMI (HMCI)	Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools (Chief Inspector)

HMIE	Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education
IEP	Individualised Educational Programme: a plan prepared by a specialist "learning support" teacher
IT	Information Technology, i.e. skills in using a personal computer
JAT	(Local authority) Joint Assessment Team
Key worker	Term used to describe the teaching, supporting and co-ordinating roles of a residential care worker
Local Authority	One of Scotland's 32 councils responsible for providing local government services, including education and social work
Looked after	Cared for by a local authority (see also "Public Care")
Looked after and accommodated (away from home)	Cared for in a residential school, children's home/unit or in foster care
Looked after at home	Social work support while living with family
PEP	Personal Education Plan
PGCE (PGDE)	Postgraduate Certificate in Education (now replaced by Professional Graduate Diploma in Education)
Public Care	Cared for by a local authority (see also "Looked After")
Residential Care	Institutional care setting (including residential schools and children's homes) managed by local authorities or voluntary organisations
SCQF	Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework: a system of showing levels of attainment from secondary school to doctorate
Scottish Enterprise	An agency of the Scottish Executive concerned with inward investment and social and economic development
Scottish Executive	Devolved government in Scotland (Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition during the period of this thesis)
Scottish Parliament	Parliament in Edinburgh charged with authority to pass legislation on "devolved" matters, e.g. education, health, housing, social work

SIRCC	Scottish Institute of Residential Child Care
SPSS ™	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (quantitative analysis software)
SQA	Scottish Qualifications Authority
SVQs	Scottish Vocational Qualifications (e.g. in care)
Standard Grades	Public examinations normally taken towards the end of the fourth year of secondary education, i.e. at age 15-16, and gradually being replaced by the Intermediate level of the new framework of National Qualifications – Level 3 of SCQF
SWSI	Social Work Services Inspectorate
Through Care	Helping young person to prepare for leaving care, e.g. by teaching independent living skills

Six months ago I was doing credit work. Now I'm doing thick stuff. I'm not happy. I'm gonnae show them how clever I am.

(from an interview with a 15 year old boy in residential care)

Chapter 1: Outline and Purpose

1.1 Introduction

This thesis examines issues which affect the educational experience and attainment of children and young people who are "looked after" by local authorities and is set within a broader context of social welfare policy development in Scotland. The thesis records a process of enquiry using the "action research" approach to examine the concept of the "educationally rich" environment in residential care settings, and professional development work to develop and test self-evaluation indicators aimed at assisting care staff to assess the educational richness of their settings.

Children or young people aged under 18 are "looked after" when a supervision requirement has been made on their behalf by a children's hearing, or when a local authority has responsibility because of legal procedures, such as child assessment orders, or if they are "accommodated" away from home under arrangements made by a local authority. Looked after children and young people are in public care where a local authority is providing support while they continue to live in the family home or where they live in another family home (relative or foster care) or in institutional settings (residential school or children's home). The terms "looked after" and "accommodated" are explained in more detail in Chapter 2.

The study which is the basis of this thesis is located within both social and educational policy developments in post-devolution Scotland, though the research base is broader. The educational policy developments derive principally from responses by educational planners within the Scottish Executive, HM Inspectorate of Education (HMIE), Social Work Services Inspectorate (SWSI), and the teaching, social work and health professions to the *Learning with Care* report (HM Inspectors of Schools/Social Work Services Inspectorate, 2001). The social policy developments derive in part from this key Scottish report, but also come from a growing body of research and development in the British Isles over the past 15 years or so by respected researchers such as Sonia Jackson, Barbara Kahan, Felicity Fletcher-Campbell and Robbie Gilligan, and by efforts to raise awareness and improve practice by organisations such as the Scottish Institute for Residential Childcare (SIRCC), Barnardo's, British Association for Adoption and Fostering, Save the Children, Who Cares? Scotland and the Who Cares? Trust.

The meeting point for both educational and social welfare policy is the post-devolution Scottish administration's ambitious agenda for social justice, outlined in the report *Social Justice: a Scotland where everyone matters* (Scottish Executive, 1999), and, more particularly, concerns for equity and inclusion in public education. The social justice agenda is arguably a commendable effort to make the defeat of poverty the basis for all social and educational policy development in Scotland. The mechanism for doing this is a set of 10 "targets" for tackling poverty and injustice by 2020. These are supported by 29 "milestones", or shorter term indicators of

achievement. The Scottish Executive in launching its social justice prospectus pledged to report annually on progress, and social justice reports have been published on the Executive web site since 2000. The word "vision" was used frequently in the original 1999 social justice agenda document and the authors themselves described the targets as "ambitious". This is important in political terms since the introduction of devolved government in Scotland also followed a long period during which government policy was characterised by a drive for economic success underpinned by the philosophy of competitiveness. Nevertheless, there appears to have been a subtle change in tone since the first few years of the new Scottish Parliament: the idealism of the social justice agenda seems to have become more muted and policy developments are justified in rather pragmatic terms. As if to symbolise this change, at the time of writing at the end of 2004 the Executive's social justice web site had been inexplicably non-functional for several months[1]. On the other hand, the Executive has also been part-funding a research unit established in 2002 at Glasgow and Aberdeen universities dedicated to research on social justice, which has a current project examining the impact of poverty on 10-14 year olds in relation to access to public, private and voluntary services[2].

The importance of social justice in the context of this thesis is its concern with efforts by education and social work professionals to improve outcomes for a minority - roughly one in a hundred - of the school population who are "looked after" by local authorities. Children and young people in public care tend to have severely

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[1] www.scotland.gov.uk/socialjustice/index.htm - logging on produces the message 'error – page not found'.
[2] www.scrsj.ac.uk/Projects/Children.html

disrupted schooling, are much more likely than most pupils to be excluded from school and to be bullied, typically achieve fewer qualifications than average, and are very unlikely to progress into higher education (Borland, Pearson, Hill, Tisdall, & Bloomfield, 1998). If attainment is taken as a proxy for future happiness and stability in adult life, then this is a section of the Scottish population which, having been identified in childhood as being at risk, appears to be destined to a future characterised by the damaging effects of unemployment, crime, poor health and relationship breakdown. True social justice would mean accepting that these young people represented a marginalised section of society with rights to expect assistance to access services - in this case adequate schooling, preferably in mainstream school provision - and support to enable them to attain to their fullest potential.

The social policy backdrop to this study is expressed in the social justice targets and milestones articulated in *Social Justice: a Scotland where everyone matters* (ibid.) which are specifically related to the needs of young people leaving public care. These are expressed as long-term targets and milestones, as follows:

Long term targets:

Every young person leaves school with the maximum level of skills and qualifications possible.

Every 19 year old is engaged in education, training or work.

Milestone:

All our young people leaving local authority care will have at least English and Maths Standard Grades and have access to appropriate housing options. (ibid., p.11)

Few professionals would argue that these were unreasonable targets, but looked after young people speaking at the Who Cares? Scotland 25th anniversary conference in November 2003, were critical of the attainment milestone which they argued risked conveying the impression that all looked after young people inevitably have low attainments. This, they said, simply risked confirming the low expectations which unfortunately have typically been held by many professionals.

The government's social justice agenda is reflected in legislation and the provisions of the first statute passed by the new parliament, the *Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000* formalised the legal responsibilities of the Scottish Executive and local authorities in respect of raising attainment. Some key requirements which are specified in the Act have particular relevance in respect of the education of children and young people in public care. These are the requirements for local authorities to 'endeavour to secure improvement' in the quality of education, and to publish annually improvement objectives and report on progress. Schools are expected to have development plans linked to the local authority's objectives. The Act also made provision for a set of "national priorities" in education, which include commitments to inclusion and equality (Scottish Executive, 2001a) to:

...promote equality and help every pupil benefit from education, with particular regard paid to pupils with disabilities and special educational needs... (p.4 of 6)

In summary, the context for this work is a political imperative which is sensitive to tackling exclusion and inequality among disadvantaged groups of the community in Scotland, underpinned by a growing body of research and practice experience from throughout the UK over the past 15 years about the difficulties which children and young people in public care face in relation to their education. The following section outlines the particular focus of the study presented in this thesis.

1.2 The purpose and direction of the study

The main purpose of the study was two-fold: firstly, it would help to inform the policy debate about the educational experience of children and young people in public care in Scotland by considering the implications arising from recent empirical research and other relevant forms of enquiry; and, secondly, it should reflect on the particular practice-based experience of developing self-evaluation (or quality) indicators designed to assist practitioners – and more particularly residential care staff – to evaluate the quality of the home environment in educational terms and to plan for making improvements. The first of these aspects arose from the author's

personal interest in the issues, initially stimulated by the experience of involvement in the training of social care staff and more recently strengthened by the intellectual challenges of preparing teaching materials for an elective course for trainee secondary school teachers. The second aspect, which represents a particular focus within this study, came from the author's involvement in a Scottish Executive-funded project to develop support materials in relation to the education of looked after children and young people, including "self-evaluation indicators", for education and social work practitioners and managers.

As is typical in "action research", the study proceeded in a cyclical process in successive phases of research, review, development and reflection, with varying degrees of intensity, over a period of about seven years as the academic and professional aspects of the task intermingled, resulting directly from engaging in the overlapping tasks of seeking out the literature, developing and testing training and support materials, teaching students and taking part in discussions with colleagues at conferences and seminars. Although the professional tasks engaged in were broader than the development of self-evaluation indicators *per se*, it was this element of the work that became the particular focus for this thesis. This occurred for two reasons: firstly, this aspect offered the opportunity to examine an approach linked closely to evaluations of what constitutes good quality care; and, secondly -- and more pragmatically - it was one of the project tasks in which the author had a particularly central role.

1.3 The professional relevance of the study

The professional relevance of the development work presented in this thesis had three different dimensions, expressed as follows:

- the relevance to the professional community, particularly residential care staff;

- the author's own professional development;

- relevance in terms of the requirements of a professional doctorate.

Each of these three dimensions is discussed more fully as the story of the thesis is elaborated in the following paragraphs.

The relevance of the work to the professional community consists in the need for carers, social workers and teachers, and their managers, to have an awareness of the experience of young people in public care, particularly in relation to their education, and of the ways in which professionals can be supportive and encouraging or, alternatively, confirm a young person's negative self-perceptions. This is a particularly sensitive issue in residential child care where, as the *Skinner Report* pointed out, workers: ' ... are faced with meeting needs which are amongst the most complex and challenging of any social work service', yet the work has typically had low status, been performed by a largely unqualified workforce and featured particularly high staff turnover (Social Services Inspectorate for Scotland, 1992). Residential workers are in a unique position to encourage in young people the

development of positive attitudes to education and school attendance, to provide

role-models for learning and study, and to be advocates in engaging with schools.

The relevance of this study of the development and implementation of self-

evaluation indicators lies, at least in part, in examining how an approach which has

been generally well received in schools translates to residential care settings.

The professional relevance of the study is justified in terms of the opportunity

which the academic rigour of a thesis provides for deeper consideration of a complex

issue presenting immense challenges to the social care, education and health

communities, whose members are engaged in courses of both pre-service training

and continuing professional development (CPD) in the author's department. This

aspect relates particularly to Learning Outcome (ix) of the Ed.D. programme which

requires evidence of the facility to: 'communicate ... ideas and conclusions clearly

and effectively to specialised and non-specialised audiences' (University of

Strathclyde Doctor of Education Prospectus, 2004-2005).

The relevance in terms of the requirements of a professional doctorate relates to

the functions of this higher degree in assisting the student both to focus on improving

professional practice and to engage in searching dialogue about professional

development, values and aspirations (Murray, 2002). In other words, although much

of the work would have gone on anyway in the absence of the formal context of

presenting a professional doctorate, nevertheless the discipline of writing a thesis

provides a supportive framework for the key tasks inherent in: 'demonstrating

qualities of intellectual autonomy' and showing competence in the craft skills required to: 'conceptualise, design, implement and disseminate research activity'. The intellectual and craft skill requirements are therefore embodied in the aims of the study and the particular research questions which gave it direction and focus.

1.4 The research questions

Research questions can often be derived from the aims of a study or project (Andrews, 2003). In the case of the particular work outlined in this thesis, the aims flowed naturally from the professional relevance of the study outlined in the previous section. Thus the main aims which guided the work were the desire to:

1. gain a deeper understanding of the issues which impinge on the educational experience and attainment of children and young people in public care in Scotland;

2. examine critically the concept of an "educationally rich environment" in residential care settings; and

3. evaluate the process of developing quality (self-evaluation) indicators as a way of helping to assess and improve the "educational richness" of residential care settings, and investigate perceptions of their use.

These aims helped to generate three key research questions which underpin this thesis and act as conceptual markers for discussion of the emerging practice issues. These are expressed as follows.

Q1. What are the implications of the relevant literature for the aims of politicians and practitioners to improve the educational experience and attainment of children and young people in public care?

Q2. What are the conditions which are likely to make residential units more "educationally rich" places for children and young people to live in?

Q3. How can self-evaluation indicators contribute to improving the "richness" of the educational environment in residential care settings?

Question 1 called for an extensive review of the literature, while question 2 required an analysis of the literature and consideration of evidence arising from reading and by engaging with practitioners in different contexts. Question 3 indicated a combination of practical developmental work and more evaluative approaches. The literature is discussed mainly in Chapter 3. The research design used an "action research" approach and the methodology adopted in support of this approach is described in detail in Chapter 4. The developmental work carried out in relation to the design, piloting and evaluation of self-evaluation indicators is outlined and discussed in chapters 5 and 6 and reflections on their use are provided in Chapter 7. The implications of the work for policy and practice, and for personal professional development, are considered in Chapter 8.

1.5 Conclusion

The underlying purpose of the study outlined in this thesis was the desire to contribute to policy and practice discussions in Scotland about the educational experience of looked after children and young people, and to reflect on the development of self-evaluation indicators designed to help residential care staff, in particular, to evaluate the educational quality of the care home environment. The work was located within broader social welfare policy, legal and professional contexts and these are now discussed more fully in the following chapter.

Chapter 2: The Context

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter introduced the purpose of the study in informing the development of policy and practice discussions. This chapter develops these imperatives by outlining in more detail the broader set of contexts within which the thesis is set, and in particular the social welfare policy, legal and professional contexts. It also defines and explains the key terms used within the research, i.e. "looked after" and "accommodated" children and young people, the educational experience and attainment of looked after children and young people and "educationally rich environments" in residential care settings.

2.2 The social policy context

As has been outlined in the previous chapter, the principal driver in Scotland for improving the attainment of children and young people in local authority care is the Scottish Executive's declared aim of tackling poverty in the first decade of the 21st Century by means of its targets and milestones for achieving social justice. There are, however, some other important considerations in determining public policy, such as the aims of public care provision, the impact of both "rights" and "quality assurance" perspectives, and the practice of inter-professional collaboration.

In the years immediately following the second world-war there was a change in attitude to the form of provision for children and young people in public care throughout the UK, no doubt influenced by the Butler-inspired reforms to public welfare provision generally. The effect of this changed attitude was an acceptance that children and young people looked after in public care settings should experience at least the same standard of care and education as was typically available to other children and young people living with their families in the community. In Scotland, the passing of the *Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968* enshrined in law the primacy of the "welfare principle" in the case of children and young people involved in offending. This principle is also evident in current legislation and the *Children (Scotland) Act 1995* - which for the first time in Scots Law brought together various aspects of the law relating to children (Cleland, 1995) - is underpinned by two other important principles. Firstly, courts, children's panels, local authorities and adoption agencies must take into account the views of the child in making decisions. Secondly, the "no-order principle" requires that courts and panels must be convinced that making an order is better than making none at all. The provisions of the *Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000* provide young people with rights to be consulted in relation to a school's development plan and it is assumed that a young person aged 12 years and older will normally be mature enough to exercise such rights. The legal requirement to consult young people at school resonates with a more general principle of consultation about important matters in planning for care, including meeting educational needs. The legal context which impinges on the work presented in this thesis is outlined in more detail in Section 2.3 below.

At the beginning of the 21st Century the direction of social policy has been significantly influenced by the political imperatives of defining and extending citizenship rights, combating social exclusion, tackling inequalities and seeking to overcome the traditional barriers created by different services and professional groups being organised in different departments and agencies (Chakrabarti, 2001). As Chakrabarti also points out, despite growth in real-terms spending on welfare services, politicians have: ' ... grown increasingly frustrated at the failure to translate these increases into visible improvements in service provision and thus are issuing more directives' (ibid., p. 3). These directives are presented in the form of targets, standards and quality or performance indicators. In late 2004, evidence of the frustration of ministers specifically in relation to the attainment of children and young people in public care was evident in a Scottish Executive news release which quoted the Deputy Education Minister, Euan Robson, as saying: 'We are writing to councils making it clear they must ensure children in care receive the same educational opportunities as their peers' (Scottish Executive Media and Communications Group, 2004). This announcement, which simply reiterated the guidance for interpreting the provisions of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995, accompanied the publication of statistics showing that there had apparently been no improvement in the attainment of care leavers despite the additional attention and resources provided in the previous two years, and clearly this was a major disappointment to ministers and other politicians as well as to education and social work professionals.

The effects of the adoption of European human rights directives within UK

legislation and the work of advocacy organisations such as Who Cares?, Scotland

have resulted in greater attention being paid to the rights of children and young

people in public care, and some commentators have argued that there has been

considerable progress in Scotland in recognising children's rights, despite the

tensions with more paternalistic approaches prompted by understandable concerns

about child abuse (Hill, Murray, & Tisdall, 1998). This greater attention has centred

not only on developing an awareness of entitlements but also on the empowerment of

young people in various ways, such as their involvement in consultation exercises,

being active participants in research, and in self-advocacy[3].

Another development in social policy during the late 20th and early 21st

centuries has been the impact of the culture of quality assurance and self-evaluation.

Originally derived from the worlds of private industry and commerce, the concern

for defining quality and providing evidence of its existence in the public services –

principally through the use of performance indicators – is a sensitive issue because of

the overtones of the politics of the "market". Teachers and social workers in the

1980s learned to be sceptical of the top-down, managerial approach associated with

the Thatcher government's concern for the external monitoring of "standards" but the

more collaborative, grass-roots approach to school "self-evaluation", introduced by

the then Scottish Office Education Department in 1992, gained significantly more

widespread respect in both academic and professional circles. The following

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[3] See for example www.childreninscotland.org.uk/htm/rec_r_co01.htm for descriptions of projects on participation of young people in decision-making and accessing the views of children.

quotation from one of the principal advocates of the approach highlights the qualities claimed for self-evaluation.

> *It took the vision and courage of HMCI McGlynn and his colleagues to move in such a radical direction but it was rooted deeply in a conviction that when people are trusted and allowed ownership they will gratify and surprise (MacBeath, 1999, p.96).*

A further important social policy theme is inter-agency collaboration. Several inquiries following high-profile child abuse cases implicated inadequate sharing of information and a lack of inter-agency working as a key factors leading to ineffective intervention by the authorities (Sinclair & Bullock, 2002). The legal requirements arising from the *Children Act 1989* (England and Wales) and the *Children (Scotland) Act 1995* for local authorities to prepare detailed "children's services plans" firmed up a growing commitment to authority-wide corporate responsibility for supporting children and families in adversity. The effect of this approach is that key agencies, such as education and social work, are expected to plan services jointly, to collaborate with other bodies such as health authorities, and to demonstrate shared concern for all aspects of a child's life. Nevertheless, as Hill and Iwaniec point out, different remits and outlook have made such collaboration a significant challenge.

> *All the evidence suggests that improving inter-professional and inter-agency co-operation in this field is difficult and often slow. Co-operative mechanisms are necessary at structural, practical and attitudinal levels (Hill & Iwaniec, 2000, p.252).*

2.3 The legal context

The main legal and regulatory framework which underpins the care and education of children and young people looked after by local authorities in Scotland is expressed in the key statutes and guidance listed below and which are described in more detail in the paragraphs which follow on:

- Children (Scotland) Act 1995

- Children (Scotland) Act 1995 Regulations and Guidance

- Arrangements to Look After Children (Scotland) Regulations 1996

- Circular 2/98 Guidance on Issues Concerning Exclusions from School

- Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000

- Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act 2001

- Commissioner for Children and Young People Act 2003

The *Children (Scotland) Act 1995* is the principal act governing the welfare, protection and supervision of children and young people in Scotland. For example, the Act defines "looked after children" and "children in need", requires local authorities to provide accommodation for children and young people whose usual carers are unable to provide accommodation or care, and gives powers to a sheriff to grant a "child protection order" to remove children at risk to a "place of safety". An important provision of the Act, contained in Section 19, is the requirement for local authorities to prepare and review "children's services plans". These plans specify three-year targets for service provision and are meant to be the reference points for

action by education, social work and health authorities to improve the life circumstances of local children and young people, as the following extract from one local authority's plan indicates.

> *The strategy includes proposals to improve health and education outcomes for looked after children. Effective data sharing among the agencies is an important dimension of this objective, and the aim is to develop towards a common assessment framework (Glasgow City Council, 2002, p.134).*

The *Children (Scotland) Act 1995 Regulations and Guidance* provide detailed explications of the Act by, for example, identifying responsibilities for provisions in particular circumstances. In relation to looked after children and young people, the Regulations are quite specific in stipulating that these pupils should have the same opportunities for education, including further and higher education, as all other young people, and should be able to access 'additional help, encouragement or support.'

An important provision of the *Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000* is the presumption that a child or young person should be educated in a mainstream (rather than special) school, unless the school:

- would not be suited to the ability or aptitude of the child;
- would be incompatible with the provision of efficient education for the children with whom the child would be educated; or

- would result in unreasonable public expenditure being incurred which would not ordinarily be incurred.

The Act also gives local authorities a duty to make suitable arrangements for provision of education 'without undue delay' where a child is unable to attend school, e.g. through illness or as a result of 'exclusion'. The Act additionally gives a pupil 'with legal capacity' (typically a child aged 12 and over, though younger children may be judged to have capacity)[4] the right to appeal against exclusion.

The *Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act 2001* includes the duty given to Ministers to issue national care standards applicable to all registered care services. In relation to young people, the standards tell them what care and services they are entitled to receive. The figure below shows Standard 13 for care homes, which describes the conditions for an "educationally rich environment". This standard influenced work discussed later in this thesis to develop quality indicators for care settings and schools.

Figure 1: Standards for Care Homes: Standard 13 (Learning)

Staff support you to make sure you achieve your potential at school. You live in an educationally-rich environment.

You know that the care home staff encourage and support you in school and homework activities. They work with the school or college so they know how to help to meet your learning needs. Books, newspapers, computers, and educational, artistic and other cultural materials are available in the care home.

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[4] Age of Legal Capacity (Scotland) Act 1991

You can be confident that staff know the importance of education and can help you to achieve your potential. They are knowledgeable about, and have a clear understanding of, relevant legislation relating to children and young people with special needs.

Staff help you to attend school or college regularly, and work with teachers to deal with any problems.

You have enough quiet space to work in and there are special quiet areas for you to study.

Staff support you to take part in wider educational opportunities such as school trips and clubs, to get financial help and help with travel to events or matches.

Staff members can advise you how you can get grants for further or higher education and how the authority or government will support you financially if you continue with your education after school or college.

You are supported to achieve the targets that are set out in your individualised educational programme.

Where appropriate, staff are in regular contact with your school, including going to parents meetings or other school or community events. They are there for you when you take part in events (for example, sport or music).

Professor Kathleen Marshall was appointed to the new post of Scottish

Commissioner for Children and Young People in June 2004. The principal function

of the Commissioner's post, set up under the *Commissioner for Children & Young*

People Act 2003, is to safeguard the rights of children and young people in Scotland.

As well as generating awareness about rights among the public and professionals, the

Commissioner will initiate research and promote best practice. The Commissioner is

independent of the Scottish Executive and is accountable directly to the Scottish

Parliament. The selection process for the appointment included involvement by

young people, emphasising in a very practical way the importance of rights of

consultation and participation (Scottish Executive, 2004a). This is obviously a key

appointment with the capacity to raise general awareness about all matters relating to

young people, but in particular in respect of highlighting issues specifically affecting looked after children and young people. It is too early to say what impact the existence of the Commissioner's post will have but this is clearly an important function simply because it means there is a statutory position of young person's champion to ensure that all matters pertaining to rights and welfare provision will be subject to independent scrutiny. Nevertheless, with an annual budget of only £1.5 million, and with salaries to pay and an office to run, it is difficult to see how the Commissioner will be enabled to conduct major investigations and to sponsor research. There are also some unresolved constitutional matters: when a Constitutional Commissioner for England is appointed in 2005 the incumbent will have a UK-wide responsibility for children in relation to reserved matters (Dean, 2004). In Scotland this means that matters relating to the children of asylum-seekers will be the responsibility of the English Commissioner rather than the Scottish Commissioner.

What can be concluded from this brief outline of the legal context is that local authorities have unambiguous responsibilities to make specific provision for, and enhance the educational opportunities of, looked after children and young people in their care. The rights of young people to be consulted about – and to participate in – decisions about their care and education represent an important underpinning principle governing education and social work practice. The role of the children's commissioner is a particularly interesting new development but the likely impact of this role is so far unclear.

The term "corporate parent"[5] is now commonly used to emphasise the shared responsibilities which education, health and social work agencies have towards looked after children and young people. A brief overview of the issues which corporate parents face in relation to the education of looked after children and young people is therefore provided in the following section.

2.4 The professional context

The author's initial interest in the issues which form the basis of the work outlined and discussed in this thesis began after stumbling upon and reading Professor Sonia Jackson's 1987 monograph on the education of children and young people in care – arguably the starting point for all UK research and practice activity – and more recently as a result of working as part of a team of researchers commissioned by the Scottish Executive to develop information, training and self-evaluation materials in support of the recommendations of the *Learning with Care* report. Inevitably this thesis examines the organisational and structural issues involved in developing policy and changing practice. However, it is also important to understand how reality is constructed at the level of the individual young person. Personal reality was very well expressed by a 15 year old boy living in a residential setting who was interviewed by one of the author's PGCE students as part of a project.

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[5] The origin of this term is not clear and it does not seem to be a legal term, but it appears to have gained currency as shorthand for collective involvement with children of the public agencies.

Six months ago I was doing credit work. Now I'm doing thick stuff.

I'm not happy. I'm gonnae show them how clever I am.

This powerful statement is redolent with layers of meaning. The boy is apparently capable of high level work but the disruption in his life has put him in low achieving classes. One despairs at the low expectations of his carers and teachers and the implication that he is unsupported in his anger. One can also admire his resilience.

This young person's comments bring to life the complexity of the issues involved. In general, the educational attainment of young people in public care is low. There are explanations for this deficit in terms of the disruption of family life, missed schooling, disability and learning difficulties. But these barriers to learning and achievement are overlain by personal motivation and the expectations of professionals, both factors which can operate in a negative and a positive sense. Before outlining in detail the particular issues upon which this thesis is based, it is important to outline briefly the legal, social, and educational circumstances of "looked after" children and young people.

2.5 Looked after children and young people

The term "looked after" appears to have its origins in the *Children Act 1989* in England and Wales and was subsequently adopted by the drafters of the *Children (Scotland) Act 1995*. Its use emphasises the role of public agencies in assisting and

supporting families, rather than in taking over from them. In Scotland a looked after

child is a person under 18 years of age:

- who is the subject of a supervision requirement made by a children's

  hearing;

- for whom a local authority has responsibility because of legal procedures,

  such as child assessment orders, child protection orders, exclusion of

  alleged abusers orders, children's hearing or sheriff court warrants for

  apprehension or detention;

- who is "accommodated" away from home under arrangements made by a

  local authority;

- who is living in Scotland but is subject to an equivalent order made in

  England and Wales or Northern Ireland.

Statistics detailing the circumstances of children and young people looked after

by local authorities are published annually by the Scottish Executive. The figures for

the year ending 31 March 2004 (Scottish Executive, 2004b) show that 11,675

children and young people were being looked after in Scotland, a 3% increase on the

previous year (see Table 1 below). The proportion of looked after children and young

people aged 0-17 in the population, at just over one per cent, or 10 per thousand

children, has remained relatively constant since 1997. There were over 4,500

"incidences"[6] of children and young people beginning to be looked after during the

year, while only 1,300 young people left care. Although more boys than girls are

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[6] A child may have more than one instance of being looked after during a year.

looked after (boys accounted for 64% of admissions) the number of girls being looked after was up 4% on the year and has increased 9% since 2000. While almost 30 per cent are in the age range 12-17, this proportion has been falling in recent years, while the proportion of very young children in care has increased.

Table 1: Number of children and young people being looked after in Scotland at 31 March 2004 – current statutory reason for being looked after

Statute group	Children looked after on 31 March ...					% of total 2004	% change 2003-2004	% change 2000-2004
	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004			
Accommodated under Section 25	1,343	1,250	1,326	1,288	1,445	12	12	8
Parental Responsibilities Order	322	395	348	362	341	3	-6	6
Supervision Requirement at Home	5,439	4,632	4,682	4,699	4,832	41	3	-11
Supervision Requirement away from Home (excluding Residential Establishment)	2,199	2,875	3,193	3,587	3,568	31	-1	62
Supervision Requirement away from Home (in a Residential Establishment but excluding Secure)	960	959	1,006	817	808	7	-1	-16
Supervision Requirement away from Home with a Secure Condition	87	78	87	56	51	0	-9	-42
Warrant	114	149	180	210	290	2	38	154
Child Protection Measure	119	80	67	75	70	1	-6	-41
Criminal Court Provision	10	38	42	33	54	0	62	441
Freed for Adoption	50	72	80	102	70	1	-31	40
Other	667	368	230	160	147	1	-8	-78
Total	11,310	10,897	11,241	11,388	11,675	100	3	3

Source: Scottish Executive National Statistics

Table 1 above shows the various statutory reasons for these children and young people becoming looked after in 2003-04 and the numbers and proportions of children and young people in each category.

The table indicates that just less than half (41%) of these children and young people were looked after under a "supervision requirement at home". This means that they continued to live at home but they and their family received additional support from the local authority. The remainder were looked after away from home. Most of these children and young people were accommodated under statutory orders made by a children's hearing or sheriff court, though 12% were accommodated under Section 25 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 because, for example, their parents were unable to care for them.

Table 2 below shows the type of accommodation in which children and young people are looked after. The table makes a distinction between being looked after "in the community", a uniquely Scottish category of care, and being "accommodated" – in a children's home for example. Only 13% of looked after children and young people are accommodated. Of those looked after children and young people who are cared for in community settings, almost a third live with foster carers, and just over a half are supported by social workers while continuing to live with their families or other relative carers. Although fewer children and young people are cared for in residential settings today compared to ten years ago, the significance of this form of care includes the fact that many children and young people looked after in other care settings will have spent brief periods of time in residential care (Jackson & Sachdev, 2001).

Table 2: Number of children and young people being looked after in Scotland at 31 March 2004 – type of accommodation

Type of accommodation	Number in each category	*Percentage in each category*
In the community:		
At home with parents	4,982	*43*
With friends / relatives	1,426	*12*
With foster carers	3,461	*30*
With prospective adopters	147	*1*
In other community	92	*1*
Total	**10,108**	*87*
In residential accommodation:		
In local authority home	721	*6*
In voluntary sector home	66	*1*
In residential school	657	*6*
In secure accommodation	80	*1*
In other residential accommodation	44	*0*
Total	**1,567**	*13*
Total children looked after	**11,675**	*100*

Source: Scottish Executive National Statistics

The parents of a looked after child do not routinely lose their normal rights as parents, and, in most cases, these rights are shared with the local authority.

> *…with the exception of those children in respect of whom a parental responsibilities order has been made, the child's parent(s) retain parental responsibilities and rights in respect of the child. In some cases, of course, these rights will be limited, as where the sheriff, in making a child protection order, or a children's hearing, in making a supervision requirement, regulate contact between the child and his/her parent(s) (Fabb & Guthrie, 1997, p. 123).*

Most children and young people become looked after because of difficulties in their home circumstances, including family break-up and an accumulation of the effects of poverty. Statistics do not reveal the family stresses and personal upset which can result when a child or young person becomes looked after. Some children and young people will have had very distressing experiences, including severe neglect, and physical or sexual abuse. Many looked after children and young people require social work involvement for quite complex reasons. Children and young people looked after by local authorities are much more likely to come from disadvantaged backgrounds than better-off circumstances and their families are likely to have experienced multiple social and economic disadvantages. A study of children who had become looked after (Bebbington & Miles, 1989) found that:

- only a quarter lived with both parents;

- almost three quarters of their families received income support;

- only one in five lived in owner-occupied housing.

The experience of being looked after is highly individual. Some young people have stayed in the same foster or residential home for as long as they can remember, and many lead happy and stable lives. Being looked after may bring the relief of being safe and well cared for. However, it also usually involves adjusting to a new home, perhaps a change of school and being uprooted from a familiar neighbourhood and friends. Around 20% of 16 and 17 year old care leavers in 2004 had moved more than three times, according to the official statistics (Scottish Executive, 2004b).

Looked after children and young people also have to cope with complex emotions and may experience some or all of the following experiences (Connelly, McKay, & O'Hagan, 2003):

- sudden removal from home;

- intrusive investigation, perhaps including intimate medical examination;

- fear of the unknown;

- mourning the loss of a parent or other family members and friends;

- anxiety about the welfare of their parents or other family members;

- separation from brothers and sisters;

- feelings of rejection;

- feeling excluded from "normal" family life and opportunities;

- embarrassment at being "looked after";

- frequent moves, perhaps with little or no warning;

- changes of school, and maybe periods of non-attendance or not being on a school roll;

- the belief that teachers and "officials" know all about you, or that they don't know you at all. (ibid., p.3)

Although an individual looked after child or young person may not experience all of the difficulties listed above, nonetheless typically he or she will have had a disrupted life, which will usually be prejudicial to success in school and therefore is damaging to educational attainment. There are likely also to be negative consequences for employment and other aspects of a happy and stable adulthood.

I haven't had it as bad as some kids in care have in terms of my
education). I guess I've just been lucky. But to keep having to pick up
your belongings and making new friends gets to be a nightmare and
you never feel properly settled. You never feel you are in a proper,
real family. When you are in care you have hassles at school like
'normal' kids but you also have to deal with the fact that you are in
the care of social services, and that isn't a very secure feeling
(Armstrong, Clarke, & Murphy, 1995, p.41).

2.6 The education of looked after children and young people

A more detailed account of the relevant literature on the education of children and
young people in public care is discussed in Chapter 3. Meanwhile the final two
sections of the present chapter outline the more specific context for the
developmental and research work presented in this thesis.

Academic interest in the educational experience and attainment of looked after
children and young people in the UK has been stimulated by the persistent work of
Professor Sonia Jackson, who published a seminal monograph on the issues in 1987,
based on a review of the research available at the time and her personal experience as
a social worker who also happened to be a qualified teacher and clinical psychologist
(Jackson, 1987). Jackson highlighted the generally negative educational experience
of looked after children and young people, the failure of education and social work
agencies to prioritise education and schooling in making welfare decisions about

children and young people in care, and the virtual absence of education as a topic in the child care literature.

The work of Jackson and others in England began to interest academics and policy makers in Scotland. For example, the then Scottish Office Education and Industry Department and the Social Work Services Group jointly commissioned a literature review on the issue, reflecting: '…increasing concern about how children and young people in public care fare within the education system' (Borland et al., 1998). This review, published by the respected Scottish Council for Research in Education, was highly influential and has arguably been a major stimulus for continuing policy development in Scotland. More general understanding of the policy and practice issues relating to the education of looked after children and young people in Scotland dates to an announcement by Helen Liddell, then Minister of Education at the pre-devolution Scottish Office, on 24th March 1999, in which she introduced a joint task between HM Inspectors of Schools (HMI) and the Social Work Services Inspectorate (SWSI) to investigate the education of children and young people being looked after by local authorities. The joint inspection led to the publication of *Learning With Care* (HM Inspectors of Schools/Social Work Services Inspectorate, 2001), which made nine main recommendations and identified 16 key policy issues. Two of the authors of the report found that there was 'room both for concern and for cautious optimism' (Maclean & Gunion, 2003). The report was based on a fairly small sample (50 children and five local authorities), though there is no reason to suppose that the picture presented was unrepresentative of the situation

throughout Scotland. Maclean and Gunion concluded that the inspection 'reflected previous negative research findings' but they also speculated that there were signs of improvements. The negative aspects highlighted included the following observations.

- Limited planning of care and placements and vagueness about children's attainments.

- High levels of exclusion (half the children and young people had been excluded at least once and some had been excluded many times).

- Just over half of the 25 primary age children were underachieving in comparison with their peers.

- Concern by children and young people about how confidential information would be used by teachers.

- Lack of training concerning the education of looked after children and young people of carers, social workers and teachers.

- Lack of involvement of natural parents in the education of their children.

- Little evidence of local authority policies on the education of looked after children and young people or of arrangements to collect data about their attainments.

The more positive findings were as follows.

- Attendance, availability of school places and continuity of education were better than predicted from previous research.

- Three-quarters (19 out of 25) of the young people at the secondary school stage had gained the, albeit low, national target of gaining two Standard Grade passes.

- No indication that bullying concerning looked after status was an issue for the children in the sample.

- Good access to extra-curricular activities provided by carers or schools.

- Evidence of good educational support from foster or relative carers, though the support provided in residential establishments was found to be more variable.

- Good working relationships between senior managers in education and social work.

The *Learning With Care* report also paved the way for some important initiatives instituted by the new Scottish Executive. In October 2001, the then Education Minister, Jack McConnell, announced the distribution of a one-off fund of £10m to be paid to local authorities in financial year 2001-2002. The fund, 'based on £500 per child looked after in a family home and £2,500 for looked after children and young people in local authority or independent homes, or in residential or secure accommodation', was intended 'to provide books, equipment and homework materials for every looked after child in Scotland'(Scottish Executive, 2001b).

McConnell's successor, Cathy Jamieson, in January 2002, announced three priorities for action by local authorities, based on recommendations in the *Learning With Care* report (Scottish Executive, 2002a). The Minister said that:

> *All looked after children should receive full-time education. We expect no less for our own children.*
>
> *All looked after children should have a care plan which adequately addresses educational needs. This is a statutory obligation and has been since 1997.*
>
> *All schools should have a teacher designated to championing the interests of these children.*

She also announced a programme of work to be undertaken during 2002-2003 by a consortium of university and voluntary sector contractors (subsequently known as the *Learning With Care – Improving Outcomes for Looked After Children Project*) to take forward the report's recommendations. The author was a member of this consortium and some aspects of its work are central to this thesis. One year later, the Minister acknowledged progress in relation to the targets she had identified, but firmly pointed to the need for further action (Scottish Executive, 2003a).

> *Access to education is a basic right for every child. Too many of those cared for by local authorities are still being let down. They are being denied the same chances as other children. It is not acceptable that six out of ten young people leaving care at 16 and 17 are doing so without any qualifications.*

In October 2004, The Deputy Education Minister, Euan Robson, announced funding of £6m over two years for pilot projects: ' ... to explore new ways of boosting educational attainment' (Scottish Executive Media and Communications Group, 2004). The aim of the pilot funding for projects in some authorities was to identify practices shown to lead directly to improved experience of education and therefore higher attainment. This experience could help all authorities to institute more positive practices. At the time of writing, in early 2005, bids from local authorities had been submitted but the results had not been announced.

However, it is difficult to see how authorities can successfully make improvements in a problem which has been resistant to change over decades in a situation of limited financial headroom in social work services budgets. At the time of writing, an article in *The Herald* newspaper reported on a study by Professor Arthur Midwinter, a public finance expert at the University of Strathclyde, which showed that local authorities were spending significantly above - on average, 50% more than - the Scottish Executive's provisions for children's services (Smith & Gordon, 2005).

2.7 Educationally rich environments

The *Learning With Care* report noted that the inspection uncovered: 'considerable differences both between authorities, and, in one case, within an authority' (ibid.,

p.36) in relation to the educational support available to children and young people living in residential care establishments. The report also described considerable efforts by one local authority to make its residential units "educationally rich environments". However, the picture in other authorities, according to the authors, was particularly discouraging:

> *In one unit, young people were doing homework on their knees on their beds. This unit reported that its young people had "appalling Standard Grade results". Some units had a rather passive attitude to homework and did not make arrangements to get information about homework from schools. Some of the children interviewed did not feel that they had sufficient support with their homework. In some units there was no computer available and in one unit, staff complained they had no money for basic educational resources such as books, pencils and rubbers. In some of the units the majority of residents were not attending school, either through exclusion or refusal to attend. An educationally negative ethos existed whereby existing residents influenced new residents to reject education. Some staff made efforts to keep the young people involved in educational activities, for example by arranging museum and library visits and encouraging poetry writing. Some also tried to get work from schools for excluded pupils, but they did not always meet with success. Some staff spoke of a sense of demoralisation. They felt unsupported by their management, by their education department and by the young people's schools. (ibid., p.37)*

An educationally rich environment for children and young people accommodated away from home could be defined as the opposite of the negative conditions described in the extract from the report quoted above. A residential unit espousing an

educationally rich environment would typically have an active attitude to school

attendance, the completion of homework and liaison with school. There would be

adequate facilities and equipment for doing homework and completing school

projects. Staff would take an interest in school work and attainment, and would offer

help where possible, particularly in relation to reading and writing with younger

children. Professional support, e.g. from home-school link teachers, would be

available. An educationally rich home would have conducted a self-evaluation to

highlight strengths and weaknesses and would have identified targets for

improvement.

The concept of the educationally rich environment has been approached in

rather pragmatic terms in this thesis and it was not the purpose of the study to

consider any particular pedagogical theories which might have relevance to the

discussion. The concept of educational richness is, however, examined in more detail

in the literature review in Chapter 3, in relation to the analysis of a survey of the use

of self-evaluation indicators reported in Chapter 6 and in relation to the practice of

residential care discussed in Chapter 7.

2.8 Conclusion

This chapter has sought to outline the social policy, legal and professional contexts

within which the thesis is set, and to introduce and define the specialist terminology

used throughout the work. What has become particularly apparent as a result of the process of writing and reflecting on the overall context for the work reported in this thesis, is how it can take a combination of social, political and legal changes before the climate is right for addressing a major issue of public concern. The literature review which follows in Chapter 3 examines current understandings of the key issues pertaining to the education of looked after children and young people and therefore sets out in more detail the policy and research dimensions which underpin the research and development work reported on in this thesis.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

Chapter 2 outlined the broader contexts within which the study is located. This outline provided the general framework for a more focussed discussion of the relevant research and policy literature on the education of looked after children and young people from the late1980s to the present, and its relevance to the policy and practice contexts in Scotland. Chapter 3 reviews the main literature which forms the backdrop to the research questions and is thus concerned in particular with the implications for aims to improve the educational experience and attainment of children and young people in public care, the conditions which are likely to make residential units more "educationally rich" places and the particular locus of self-evaluation indicators in improving the "richness" of the educational environment in residential child care settings.

In an "action research" study it is not uncommon for the literature to be spread across several chapters so that analysis of previous work is integrated with the new material. In this thesis the literature is presented in a single chapter for two reasons. Firstly, even although the studies referred to have been reassessed at various points in the life of the study, it nevertheless seemed sensible to have a separate unit which was wholly concerned with the lines of enquiry that have been pursued and therefore what is so far known about the substantive issue. Secondly, reviewing the literature

in this study was itself an important part of the research approach and was not only about identifying the problems to be investigated; and for this reason the literature seemed to deserve a chapter of its own, even if it turned out to be rather large! The action research approach which influenced and directed the work is discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

The literature was identified systematically by performing keyword searches in various databases (Caredata, ERIC and Web of Knowledge), by using bibliographies in reports and provided by the Scottish Institute for Residential Child Care Library, and more serendipitously as a result of coming across references in news articles and on web sites. The reviewing was confined to literature emanating from UK – or, more correctly, British Isles – sources, for contextual reasons, although the author is also aware of a growing literature emanating from elsewhere in Europe, North America and Australasia.

Inevitably this review provides a backdrop for more particular discussions in relation to the specific issues of what constitutes an "educationally rich" care environment, how this can be audited and developed, and the implications generally for improving the educational opportunities of looked after children and young people. Whilst the review considers the research on looked after children and young people in general, the emphasis is on studies concerned with children and young people living away from home, especially those "accommodated" in residential

settings, such as children's homes or units, and focuses more particularly on aspects related to the concept of an "educationally rich" living environment.

During the past 15-20 years there has been a fairly substantial literature in the UK concerning the education of children and young people looked after in public care settings of one form or another. In the 1980s a number of researchers published critical accounts of the lack of attention given to the education of looked after children and young people. These studies highlighted such issues as the failure to prioritise education in reaching decisions about placing children and young people in care, the absence of an educationally supportive living environment, poor attainment, low rates of progression into further and higher education, lack of training for key professionals and a history of difficulties in inter-agency collaboration. These issues are all entirely negative, but more recently there has been a much greater emphasis both on listening to the views of young people and on identifying positive messages and promoting policies and practices which are likely to lead to improvement.

The issues emerging from the literature reviewed in this chapter are grouped together under four main sub-headings for convenience and conceptual clarity, and also because of their relevance to the research questions. These key issues are:

- the lack of attention to education in care planning;

- educational attainment;

- educationally unsupportive living environments; and,

- the "educationally rich environment".

These four themes provide a useful way of depicting the research landscape, particularly because each one marks an interface between the often distinct worlds of education and social care. The themes are therefore used as headings to structure the remainder of the literature review.

3.2 The lack of attention to education in care planning

A consistent theme in the research literature on the education of children and young people in public care over almost 20 years is the observation that in making decisions about their care and welfare, professionals have often tended to give greater emphasis to social, emotional and behavioural issues, while ignoring or giving lower priority to those concerned with education and attainment (Jackson, 1987; Borland et al., 1998). Given that reception into care is typically precipitated by a crisis, it is therefore unsurprising that social workers and other professionals should concentrate on child protection, living arrangements and behaviour. However, presenting these priorities as an excuse for ignoring, or not giving equal prominence to, a young person's intellectual, cognitive, cultural and sporting developments, is untenable for at least two reasons. Firstly, it is inevitable that social, emotional, educational and health factors are interrelated in complex ways. Secondly, the mythology of prioritising more immediate issues was exploded recently by the *Forgotten Children* report, which demonstrated that in a high proportion of cases important health problems of looked after children and young people went undiagnosed in care, and in

some cases those that had been identified were not effectively followed up (Residential Health Care Project Team, 2004). The literature on the neglect of educational needs in care is equally persuasive.

An early review of the literature on the consequences of residential child care, showed that most research had concentrated on the social and emotional development of the children studied rather than on their intellectual and educational development (Colton, 1988). Noting the danger of assuming that keeping a child with his or her own family is always preferable to residential care because of the role of families in causing social and emotional distress, Colton wrote that: '...it appears imperative that factors within the residential environment likely to cause further damage to the child following admission be identified, in addition to factors likely to facilitate some measure of recovery' (pp.22-23). This comment sums up the professional practice context of the thesis. Typically children and young people received into residential care are educationally disadvantaged and are likely to be attaining below their capabilities. The challenge for teachers and carers is to ensure that accommodated children and young people are not further disadvantaged, and to provide an environment which is both physically and emotionally protective and yet also educationally advantageous.

Social workers' priorities - albeit in relation to placing children and young people in foster care rather than residential care - were studied in a major Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)-sponsored longitudinal research project in

England (Aldgate, Heath, Colton, & Simm, 1993). The researchers found that educational issues and the promotion of talents were ranked bottom of a list of priorities, and the study's results showed that social workers tended to view self-esteem and education as unrelated. They also found evidence that social workers may take an unduly optimistic view of children's performance compared with teachers. The authors pointed out that this finding was supportive of Jackson's (1987) observation that social workers tended to conflate educational performance and behaviour; if a child's behaviour was acceptable, social workers were less likely to show concern about performance.

This apparent tendency of many social workers to underplay educational issues when planning and reviewing care placements was also discussed in a study by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER). The researchers conducted a survey by questionnaire of all social services departments in England and Wales and interviewed a range of child care professionals, managers and young people in care (Fletcher-Campbell, 1990). They found that the focus in child care reviews tended to be on attendance, behaviour and social adjustment at school, rather than on academic matters. Fletcher-Campbell and her colleagues were critical of the planning process, complaining that social workers: '...too often...evaluated schools purely on their social aspects [which they] frequently seem to get out of proportion so that the academic aspect of the school and the child's progress as regards this were ignored' (p.368). The NFER researchers also presented a general picture of poor liaison between education and social services staff, particularly at senior level. They

also found examples of good communication, but these tended to be individual

initiatives; otherwise the report painted a picture of inter-professional rivalries and

misunderstandings which contributed significantly to incomplete planning.

In an intensive study of children returning home after spending time in care

(Bullock, Little, & Millham, 1993), researchers noted how both teachers and social

workers underestimated the extent of the needs for careful planning and supportive

arrangements: '...we found that return to school rarely coincided with the beginning

of term and some older adolescents seemed to be left virtually to themselves to

negotiate re-entry to the education system' (p.181). The researchers however found

that the child-centred nature of primary schools helped to provide support, and

observed that changes in the curriculum and management of secondary schools in

England and Wales contributed to a lack of resources to provide pastoral help for a

group of highly mobile children who had 'acute problems of readjustment'. Low

attainment and poor attendance were complicated by problems of abuse and

offending behaviour: 'Yet, when we scrutinised the return plans for these children,

we found that, in nearly every case, return to school was not considered part of the

return strategy and, when included, was only a minor item' (p.185).

Further evidence of the low priority given to the educational needs of looked

after children and young people was confirmed in a later study carried out by

Edinburgh University researchers on behalf of the former Lothian Regional Council

(Francis, Thomson, & Mills, 1996). The researchers found that an education

representative was present at only 30% of child care reviews, though educational matters were discussed at 90% of them. However, in discussing educational matters the emphasis again appears to have been mainly on the child's behaviour and attendance. They noted with concern the: '...absence of any reference to the children's academic performance or abilities' (p.46).

Researchers have also commented on the problem of "fragmentation" (Fletcher-Campbell, 1997), whereby many adults hold information about a child: '...thus it is difficult to trace the history of young people's educational careers, strengths and weaknesses, interests and achievements' (ibid., p.11). The Edinburgh University researchers found that details of the educational attainment of children and young people in care were typically unavailable: 'School records seemed incomplete and unsystematic' (ibid., p.8). Finally, in an inspection of children's homes in eleven English local authorities, inspectors found that: '...most children's case files lacked educational histories and there was very little evidence of educational planning as part of overall care planning' (Social Services Inspectorate, 1994, p.44).

Despite the increasing body of research evidence emerging in the UK in the late 1980s about the lack of attention being paid to educational matters in care planning and reviewing, very little progress was made in Scotland during the following decade. Thus the authors of the *Learning With Care* report (HM Inspectors of Schools/Social Work Services Inspectorate, 2001) highlighted a general

failure to assess educational progress and needs at the point at which a child or young

person became looked after. Describing the omissions, they wrote:

> *It was unusual for any form of assessment to have been carried out on*
> *the 50 sample children at the time they became looked after. It was*
> *even more unusual to find an assessment which addressed educational*
> *needs. Where educational progress was described it was often*
> *inaccurate (ibid., p.14).*

The inspectors confirmed the findings of previous research in England and Scotland

that reviews of care plans tended to focus more on behaviour and attendance than on

attainment: 'Looked after children and young people being "settled" was often seen

as a sufficient end in itself rather than as a foundation for improving their educational

attainment' (ibid., p.15). They found that discussions of education were more

detailed and more accurate when a teacher was present, but invitations to teachers to

attend reviews seemed to be 'fairly arbitrary' and teachers were apparently more

likely to accept invitations to attend where a child was showing difficulties in school.

Following the publication of this significant report there was considerable

publicity in the generalist and specialist press about the issues raised, as well as

substantial efforts to raise awareness among professionals, particularly through the

Learning With Care – Improving Outcomes for Looked After Children Project which

forms the basis of the professional work outlined and discussed in this thesis.

Omissions in care planning continue to be a matter of concern to researchers

and practitioners. The evidence is contained in a report commissioned by the Scottish

Executive's Social Work Services Inspectorate (Vincent, 2004). The researchers developed an audit questionnaire which was then administered by 29 of Scotland's 32 local authorities in relation to the *Looking After Children* materials - sets of forms designed to guide information gathering, assessment, planning and review of the needs of young people in residential care which were introduced by the Scottish Executive in 1999. In total, the files of 430 looked after and accommodated children and young people were audited. The "Essential Core Record and Placement Agreement" form holds all the personal information about the child, including education, medical and contact details. The auditors found that educational information was fully completed in over 66% of cases and nearly completed in a further 12% of cases. This suggests an improvement on the situation which Francis and colleagues (1996, ibid.) found eight years previously. However, in relation to the provision of more detailed information, Vincent's report is rather less encouraging. The "Essential Background Record" should provide more comprehensive information about the child, but the audit showed that educational information was fully completed in only 37% of cases, nearly completed in a further 17% of cases, only partially or minimally completed in 21% of cases and not completed at all in 23% of cases. Further analysis by the researchers highlighted problems in sharing information between social work and education agencies and, in some cases, they found evidence that agreed protocols for exchanging information within authorities had not been implemented.

The audit also showed that although most files had a completed "Care Plan" - which should summarise the results of assessments and list the outcomes expected from care - and that plans were generally good, a quarter had none. The "Day-to-Day Placement Arrangements Record" summarises how a young person's needs should be best met within a particular placement, e.g. foster care or residential care. While there is a view among some professionals that this record is not always appropriate, e.g. in long-term foster care placements, the extent to which the form was completed varied (71% in the case of children living with prospective adopters and 58% of those fostered or in residential care) and it was also less likely to be completed where children and young people had been accommodated for a longer period. Where forms had been completed, education details were fully complete in just over 66% of cases and information about social and leisure activities had been entered in just over 50% of cases, and had not been entered at all in more than a quarter of cases.

The *Arrangements to Look After Children (Scotland) Regulations 1996* (Statutory Instrument 1996 No. 3262) require that an accommodated child's case should be reviewed within six weeks of the date of placement, with a second review taking place within three months of the first review and subsequent reviews taking place at six-monthly intervals (S.252:9(1)). The *Looking After Children* materials do not contain an education review form; a new pro-forma was designed and field-tested as part of the *Learning With Care – Improving Outcomes for Looked After Children* project but its implementation was delayed for reasons which are not relevant to this thesis. Despite the lack of a pro-forma, educational details were provided to some

review panels. Vincent (ibid., 2004) found that in just under half of cases other reports had been submitted to reviews and education reports were the most likely to have been provided (in 144 out of 275 cases).

The "Assessment and Action Records" forms are designed to assess children's progress and to plan future actions. Vincent found that these forms were the least likely of all parts of the materials to be completed - in 91% of cases in the 23 authorities that had implemented this part of the materials. Overall, auditors found that the quality of the information in these records was poor, and in particular the education section had been fully completed in only 14% of cases and not completed at all in 43% of cases.

The conclusion from this detailed account of the *Looking After Children* materials audit is that care planning practice and related administrative practices in Scotland need to be considerably improved, particularly in relation to the assessment, recording and review of educational attainment and needs.

Another important aspect of care planning relates to the arrangements for supporting a young person moving on to independent living after being in local authority care. Support arrangements up to and at the point of leaving care are known as "throughcare", and those arrangements provided during the first few years of independent living are known as "aftercare". Recent changes in legislation have strengthened the "corporate parent" responsibilities of local authorities in respect of

young people who have been in their care. The *Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act 2001* made provision for an amendment to the *Children (Scotland) Act 1995* to give local authorities an unambiguous duty to carry out an assessment of the needs of young people leaving care and gave Scottish Ministers a power to make regulations about, *inter alia*, the manner in which assistance is to be provided. Legislative responsibility for the benefits system is reserved to the Westminster Parliament and therefore provisions in the *Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000*, which mean that young people aged 16 and 17 who have been accommodated in England and Wales are generally no longer entitled to claim Income Support, Job Seekers' Allowance or Housing Benefit, also apply in Scotland. As a result, local authorities now have responsibilities to make financial assistance available to young people leaving care, as well as providing advice and guidance.

The *Still a Bairn?* report on throughcare and aftercare services for looked after young people in Scotland (Dixon & Stein, 2002) found that while almost two-thirds of the young people surveyed had no Standard Grade qualifications, a quarter of support workers were nevertheless unaware of the educational attainments of the clients with whom they were working. The survey showed evidence of strong links between social work and housing agencies, but links with education and careers services were typically much less strong. In relation to throughcare provision, the researchers questioned whether enough consideration was given to all five main elements of preparation for independent living (self-care skills, practical skills, interpersonal skills, education and identity) and proposed further consideration of

whether more widespread use of the *Looking After Children* "Action and Assessment Records" would assist the planning process in relation to the five areas. In respect of aftercare provision, although most of the local authorities responding to the survey had a strategy for helping care leavers access education, training and employment, 40% did not, and 40% also did not provide their young people with information on these options. Nearly two-thirds of the young people in a follow-up study by the researchers had failed to find stable employment, education or training. Significantly, the report's authors found that good outcomes were linked to the availability of either formal or informal support, or both. A working group set up by the Scottish Executive to give advice on how to improve throughcare and aftercare services for looked after young people proposed a set of expectations, which included the following unambiguous statement.

> *You will receive support to access education, training and employment opportunities, especially through your local careers services (Scottish Executive, 2002b, p.74).*

Responsibility for aftercare careers support lies with Careers Scotland, an agency of Scottish Enterprise. In Glasgow a project called *Positive Futures: Leaving Care Services* has been set up as a partnership between Careers Scotland, the City Council Social Work Services Department and John Wheatley College, a further education institution. The project has creatively exploited different strands of funding streams, including local authority leaving care budgets and the government's New Deal scheme. The resulting package means that looked after young people leaving school and young people who were formerly in care can access a range of support,

and therefore the project is able to assist young people in the age range $15^{3/4}$ to 24. Specialist careers advisers provide advice on post-school education and employment opportunities and key/link workers help to provide emotional and practical support for individual young people. Supported employment workers assist young people to gain employment and help to sustain them in work in the crucial early stages. The partnership with the FE college allows young people with deficits in the core literacy, numeracy and IT skills to receive intensive help in an adult learning environment. One important aspect of the project is its capacity to intervene in relation to the problem of young people in care missing out on opportunities to receive advice about planning their futures. Data published in an evaluation report on the project showed, for example, that the proportion of young people living in residential units 'having appropriate Careers Service involvement prior to leaving school' had increased from 62% in 2000 to 87% after two years, and the involvement of young people aged over 16 in particular had increased from 49% in 2001 to 63% in 2003 (Paul Zealey Associates, 2003).

In summary, the literature indicates that historically care and placement planning and reviewing typically has not addressed educational issues in sufficient detail, if at all. *The Looking After Children* materials provide a framework for conducting detailed assessments but there is evidence that the picture in respect of individual children and young people can often be incomplete, particularly in relation to educational attainments and needs. The likelihood that care leavers will experience difficulties in accessing further education, employment and training opportunities is a

particular concern but collaborative projects involving social work, the careers service and FE colleges are a positive development.

3.3 Educational attainment

Underachievement by looked after children and young people continues to be a major concern for politicians, policy makers and professionals. The sincere desire to raise attainment and therefore improve the life chances of young people leaving public care is an important plank of the Scottish government's social justice policy. There is more than 20 years' worth of evidence to show that most looked after children and young people do considerably less well educationally than their peers. However, much of the evidence comes from snapshot research projects and only recently with improvements in data collection and transfer by national and local government in Scotland has it been possible to conduct more systematic analyses of attainment. The educational attainment of looked after children and young people has been very resistant to improvement but recently better information has provided a clearer picture and has helped to indicate priorities for improving practice. This section of the chapter examines the research evidence gathered over the years and also considers whether there can be justifiable optimism for the future.

In the ESRC-sponsored longitudinal study of children in foster care referred to previously (Aldgate, Colton, Ghate, & Heath, 1992) researchers compared 49

children aged 8-14 in foster families with a control group of 58 children whose families had received help from social workers. The research design involved measuring attainment three times at yearly intervals using standard tests such as the NFER Basic Mathematics Test. The results of the first round of testing (Heath, Colton, & Aldgate, 1989) confirmed findings of much earlier research conducted using data from the National Child Development Study (Essen, Lambert, & Head, 1976) which showed low educational attainment among children in public care. However, the ESRC researchers found no significant differences between the attainments of the foster children and those in the control group, although the foster children did apparently perform better overall on reading and vocabulary tests. The researchers, however, found significant differences between the groups on some other factors, including material conditions, carers' occupations and education, and the level of carers' involvement in their foster children's education and leisure time activities. The foster care children lived in family circumstances more closely resembling those where there had never been any involvement with social services and which were likely to have been stable for some time. Nevertheless their educational attainment was more similar to children from disadvantaged homes. The authors speculated on the reasons for such poor attainment, noting the apparent predictive importance of the children's pre-care history: '...the explanation may lie for example in the social disadvantage and trauma experienced by the foster children before coming into care, their histories of educational disruption once in care, or the continuing stresses and uncertainty associated with care itself' (Heath et al., ibid., p.459).

The question of whether poor school performance could be related to factors in the child's background rather than the experience of being in care was also examined in the Child Health and Education Study (Osborn & St. Claire, 1987). The researchers compared the attainment of groups of children who had experienced separation at different ages and for different reasons. They confirmed the poor performance of children in care and concluded that this was mainly due to their deprived backgrounds. However, they found that children who had been adopted scored above average on behavioural and cognitive measures, despite coming from backgrounds similar to those of the children remaining in care, and the researchers concluded that the advantage of living in child-centred adoptive families had compensated for their earlier disadvantage.

A related question for researchers - and important in the specific context of the present study - is whether a stable care setting can lead to better school attainment. Evidence that continuity of care may be related to higher attainment was supported by the work of Jane Aldgate and colleagues whose research found a significant positive relationship between reading, maths and vocabulary scores and care plans and length of placement. Thus, a planned, long-term care placement appeared to help raise attainment (Aldgate et al., 1992). However, the research found no direct relationship between the number of placements - another common measure of continuity - and test scores. The NFER researcher Felicity Fletcher-Campbell had previously noted that where a child had to move home locality, attending a school close to the new home was usually regarded as preferable to travelling long distances

to a previous school, which would be tiring for young children and could give opportunities for truancy to older pupils (Fletcher-Campbell, 1990). However, the contribution of placement moves to educational disadvantage is quite complex, and, as discussed in the previous section, most observers nevertheless believe that discontinuity is related to poor attainment. Aldgate and colleagues (ibid.) also monitored the children's progress over the two years of their study and found attainment to be unrelated to the amount of contact with birth parents. Children who returned home during the study appeared to improve their attainment, compared with those remaining in foster care, while moves to residential care produced declines in performance, although this effect was not statistically significant. Children who entered care because of suspected child abuse or neglect had lower attainment than those who were admitted for other reasons, supporting Jackson's view that pre-care experiences are important in determining adjustment to schooling.

More recently, the *Learning With Care* report in Scotland (HM Inspectors of Schools/Social Work Services Inspectorate, 2001) found both depressing and also more encouraging findings in relation to the attainment of the children and young people in the inspection sample studied. Slightly more than half of the 25 primary age children in the sample were under-achieving in the "5-14 curriculum" in comparison with their peers. About one fifth were found to be attaining one level below their peers and about one third were attaining two or more levels below. However, three-quarters (19 out of 25) of the sample of young people at secondary school gained at least the national attainment target for looked after young people of

two Standard Grades, though only eight out of 25 obtained the national attainment average of seven Standard Grades and only three achieved the national average of three awards gained at "credit" level. These results were nevertheless considerably better than could have been anticipated from previous research findings (Stein & Carey, 1986; Biehal, Claydon, Stein, & Wade, 1992; Garnett, 1992).

Statistical data concerning the educational attainments of looked after children and young people in Scotland are published annually by the National Statistics Agency of the government. These statistics are compiled from data which in turn are collected by local authorities in a procedure know as the CLAS (Children Looked After in Scotland) return (Scottish Executive Statistics, 2004). The collection, transfer, compilation and analysis of the data from all 32 local authorities in Scotland are extremely complex tasks. The output is presented in 23 separate tables, one of which deals with attainment and another of which details economic activity, including further and higher education and training. In most local authorities, education and social work are organised in separate departments; the social work department will typically have the responsibility for collecting the data on looked after children and young people but will rely on the co-operation of the education department for providing attainment information. There is no reason to question the level of co-operation in data transfer across Scotland, though local authorities until recently varied in the sophistication of their IT infrastructures. In previous years, some attainment data were not available for some authorities and the most recent data include more categories of educational information. The attainment statistics for

16 and 17 year old care leavers have been published nationally only since year

ending March 2002 and information on attainment levels in the 5-14 curriculum was

first provided in year ending March 2004. Thus, it is quite difficult, and too soon, to

make very meaningful year-on-year comparisons. Nevertheless, improving the

quality of attainment data was an important recommendation of the *Learning with*

Care report and the data collection infrastructure in relation to attainment statistics

seems now to be mainly in place. Whether this process is accurately representing the

attainment of looked after young people will be discussed later in this section.

The statistical report for the year ending March 2003 showed that six out of 10

care leavers aged 16 and 17 did not achieve any qualifications, compared with less

than 10% for the whole age group (Scottish Executive, 2003b). The national figures

also show that while 92% of young people in the general population achieved five or

more Standard Grade (or equivalent awards at "level 3"[7]) or above, only 42% of

looked after young people achieved any qualifications (Scottish Executive, 2004b).

Table 3 below is derived from the Scottish Executive's Social Work Statistics

reports for 2003-04. These national figures show that only 27% of care leavers had

gained the social justice milestone of achieving Standard Grades (or level 3

equivalent) in both English and mathematics, a considerably lower figure than was

found in the small sample in the *Learning with Care* report. The table also shows the

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[7] The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (see www.scqf.org.uk) is a system of attainment
from Access 1 (level 1) to doctorate (level 12). Standard Grade courses (roughly equivalent to GCSE)
taken by 14-16 year olds lead to awards at three levels: foundation (level 3), general (level 4) and
credit (level 5).

much higher attainment of young people looked after away from home. The statistics are not sub-divided by type of accommodation, but other evidence indicates that the higher attainment is probably mainly due to the relatively better performance of young people looked after in foster care settings.

Table 3: Care leavers aged 16/17 with one or more level 3 qualifications (2003-4)

Care Leavers	Living at home	Accommodated away from home	Total	English & Maths at Level 3
1,146	35%	52%	42%	27%

The advocacy organisation for young people in care, Who Cares? Scotland, conducted a small-scale survey summarised in the report *A different class?* (Boyce, 2003) which showed that 44% of a sample of 88 young people aged 15-18 looked after away from home had achieved some Standard Grades: an average of four against the national average of seven. A higher proportion of those living in foster care compared to those in residential care achieved some Standard Grades (67% as against 29%). Government figures from England, where statistical analysis based on type of placement has been carried out for a number of years, also show that young people living in residential care have much poorer attainments than young people in foster care. For example, of care leavers in England in the year ending March 31st 2000, 42% living in foster care had gained some GCSE or GNVQ qualifications, compared with only 18% from children's homes and 7% from residential schools (Department of Health Statistics Division, 2001). In Scotland, the *Learning with Care* report acknowledged that the difference in levels of attainment cannot simply be attributed to differences in the quality of care.

Children in residential care were, on the whole, those with more educational difficulties and lower educational achievements. It was beyond the scope of the inspection to evaluate whether they were placed in residential care because of their educational difficulties, or whether their difficulties were caused or exacerbated by their placement in residential care. (p.36)

In 2004, attainment data were presented for the first time using a "unified points score scale" (Scottish Executive, 2004c). The tariff score of a pupil is calculated by adding together all the points accumulated from the different awards he or she attains, similar to the system used for university and college entrance. This approach is a more sophisticated guide to overall attainment because increasingly pupils take a mixture of types and levels of awards.

Table 4 below shows the average tariff scores of pupils in the fourth year of secondary school (i.e. age 15/16). While, unsurprisingly, pupils who are looked after have a substantially lower average tariff score than those not looked after, those accommodated at home appear by this measure to have higher attainment than those looked after away from home. Unfortunately, it is estimated that information on public care status is not completed by schools on Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) statistical returns for a large proportion of looked after young people, possibly as much as 50% and so these statistics are not yet reliable (source: private communication with a National Statistics statistician). This weakness in information gathering indicates the importance of schools and local authorities working harder to co-operate with the SQA and the Scottish Executive to try to present a more

complete account of the educational achievements of the children and young people in their care.

Table 4: Average tariff score of S4 pupils in Scotland, 2002-03

Looked After Status	Number of Pupils	Average Tariff Score
All pupils	61,009	168
Not looked after	60,448	169
Looked after at home	293	65
Looked after away from home	268	50

The *Learning With Care* report only considered children and young people attending mainstream schools in the community from residential units or foster care or relative care placements. It did not consider children and young people placed in residential schools. Statistics provided by Glasgow City Council indicate that 44 out of 56 (77%) of secondary 4 pupils living in residential schools were presented for Standard Grades compared with only 14 out of 38 (37%) living in children's units (Glasgow City Council, 2003). The proportion of those entered gaining an award was however comparable in both settings. Residential schools have traditionally provided a more restricted curriculum than mainstream secondary schools, though this practice is changing. Some residential schools have been able to provide a broader curriculum while also improving their pupils' attainments, contradicting the received wisdom that concentrating on a narrower curriculum is more conducive to effective learning and attainment.

Table 5 below shows some examples of the attainments of pupils at an

independent secondary-stage residential school in Scotland with provision for around

40 young people experiencing significant social, emotional and behavioural

difficulties, compiled using information sourced by private communication with the

school's principal.

Table 5: Standard Grade results at a Scottish residential school

1995	2002
Pupils were entered for Standard Grade examinations in English, mathematics, science and craft & design.	Pupils were entered for Standard Grade examinations in English, mathematics, science, art & design, craft & design, history, modern studies, French and German.
Of the pupils entered for four subjects, 75% gained passes at Grade 6 and above. Of the pupils entered for three subjects, 100% gained passes at Grade 6 and above.	100% of pupils who had been on the roll from August 2001 and who were still on the roll at examination time gained five or more passes at Grade 6 or above. Two pupils gained eight passes; four pupils gained seven passes; three pupils gained six passes; one pupil gained five passes. All pupils who joined the school late or who had not maintained their place gained passes at Grade 6 or above in two, three or four subjects.

The table indicates that the much broader curriculum offered in 2002 (nine subjects

offered) compared with 1995 (only four subjects offered) was followed by much

higher levels of attainment by the pupils. Of course, the higher attainment cannot be

solely attributed to the broader curriculum, and the change in the subjects on offer

has been accompanied by an altered regime in the school, which includes higher

expectations, an emphasis on developing the children's strengths, a more

invigorating learning environment and staff development. A concentration on

"school ethos" also includes greater involvement of the child, parents and representatives of other agencies. When the school was inspected by the Care Commission and HM Inspectors of Education, the inspectors specifically highlighted the: '...high regard the young people had of the quality of education they received and their opportunities for achieving qualifications' (Care Commission and HM Inspectorate of Education, 2003).

Although the picture is still not entirely clear, it would appear that, on present data, young people placed in residential care in Scotland in general attain considerably less well than those who are looked after in foster care. This may be partly a consequence of their difficulties, but may also be an indication that many residential settings are not yet educationally rich environments. Also, young people looked after in residential schools appear to attain better than young people living in residential units. This may reflect both the difficulties that some units have in getting young people to attend school, and looked after young people's perception that some mainstream schools see them as more trouble than they are worth and quickly exclude them - to use the words quoted in one study, 'for daft things' (Dixon & Stein, 2002). Such reactive exclusion of the sort alluded to in the Dixon & Stein research is generally denied by teachers in this author's experience. However, it undoubtedly happens, as is illustrated by the following account of a 12 year old looked after boy with ADHD and Asperger's Syndrome provided by a learning support teacher in a private communication with the author.

Sam [name changed] was excluded from school three times. On two of these occasions the exclusion took place prior to 9 am. These two exclusions were both as a result of him being on top of the school roof and refusing to come down, disobeying the head teacher and causing disruption in the playground. Upon investigation it transpired that Sam got dropped off at school by taxi at 8.20 am. He then spent the time between 8.20 am and 8.55 am unsupervised in the playground. Sam was often a victim of 'fun-taking' in the playground and inevitably reacted to being bullied/wound up by other pupils.

The data on exclusions from school of pupils who are looked after is more fully examined later in this section.

Another feature of the attainment statistics is that they indicate variation in the achievements of looked after young people living in different parts of Scotland. While there is some disparity between local authorities in the proportions of young people in the general population achieving qualifications, ranging from 82% to 97% who gained five or more awards at level 3 or above in 2002-3 (Scottish Executive, 2003c), there is enormous disparity between authorities in relation to the attainments of young people in their care, ranging from 18% to 100% who gained one or more qualifications (Scottish Executive, 2003b). There does not appear to be any obvious correlation between authorities whose general population young people do well and those whose looked after young people do well. Some of this disparity can probably be explained by the fact that many authorities have very small numbers of 16 and 17 year old care leavers and therefore the results are likely to fluctuate year-on-year.

However, if results from local authorities with fewer than 50 care leavers are excluded, the disparity across eight local authorities is very apparent.

Table 6 below shows a comparison between the attainments of the general population and those of 16 and 17 year old care leavers in local authorities with more than 50 care leavers in 2002-3. Both sets of data have also been rank ordered to show relative positions out of all local authorities (three of Scotland's 32 local authorities were unable to provide statistics in that year for the attainment of their looked after young people). Thus, for example, local authority "A" ranks 19th in the attainment of its general population of young people but 4th for the attainment of its looked after population. Authority "E" lies 4th in the general population ranking but is 27th for the attainment of its looked after young people.

Table 6: S4 general population attainments and the attainments of 16/17 year old looked after young people in 2002-03 in local authorities with more than 50 looked after school leavers

Local Authority	General population: 5+ awards at level 3 or higher (%)	Position out of 32 local authorities	Looked after young people: some qualifications (%)	Position out of 29 local authorities
A	91	19	76	4
B	82	32	28	24
C	88	27	44	14
D	85	30	39	19
E	95	4	21	27
F	92	13	20	28
G	93	8	43	16
H	92	13	27	25

It is clearly important to be cautious in drawing conclusions from the comparisons shown in this table, particularly since the criterion levels of Standard Grade (or equivalent) qualifications are different for the two groups. It may also be inappropriate to compare looked after young people with all young people, rather than with other young people from similarly socially deprived backgrounds who are not looked after. Nevertheless, the variation illustrated in the table, while unexplained, does at least point to the need to know more about the different policies and practices of local authorities in relation to the educational provision of their looked after young people.

The figures in Table 7 below are taken from the 2004 Scottish Executive Social Work Statistics report. In this data set, five local authorities had more than 50 care leavers, and the table additionally shows the attainment statistics separated into those young people living at home and those accommodated in foster care or residential care settings. As in Table 6, the figures show achievement of at least one qualification. Additionally, the table, in Column (F), shows the proportion of young people attaining the social justice milestone of English and mathematics Standard Grades (or level 3 equivalent). The pattern of superior performance by accommodated young people is maintained and once again the variation in attainment between authorities is very evident.

Table 7: Attainment of 16/17 year old looked after young people in 2003-04 in local authorities with more than 50 looked after school leavers

(A)Local Authority	(B)Care leavers	(C)At home (%)	(D)Accommodated (%)	(E)Total (%) i.e. mean of (C) and (D)	(F)Attained English & maths at level 3 and above
1	95	37	49	42	32
2	235	22	54	33	21
3	70	16	18	17	14
4	60	35	29	32	10
5	50	35	58	48	42

Thus, it is quite reasonable to question why in one local authority with 60 care leavers only 10% of them gained at least the minimum two Standard Grades, while in another with 50 care leavers four times this number attained the national target level.

In 2004, for the first time, the *Social Work Statistics* report provided information about the attainments of looked after children in the "5-14 curriculum". Table 8 below shows attainments in reading, writing and mathematics for two selected stages: Primary 3 (i.e. ages 7-8) and Secondary 1 (i.e. ages 11-12). The column headed "level" corresponds to the minimum 5-14 attainment levels expected of the majority of pupils at the selected stages of schooling. The figures shown are the proportions of looked after children and young people nationally attaining these minimum levels. The figures shown in brackets are the attainments of the general population children and young people provided for comparison.

Table 8: Attainments at 5-14 curriculum at P3 and S1 in 2003-04

Stage	5-14 Level	Reading %	Writing %	Mathematics %
P3	A or above	74 (88)	69 (85)	89 (95)
S1	D or above	42 (74)	30 (65)	31 (70)

The table shows starkly that the gap in achievement between looked after children and their peers widens with age. The gap at P3 is greatest in reading and writing and least in mathematics. It is possible that reading and writing attainments at this age already show the effects of social deprivation – limited access to books, little reinforcement of vocabulary and reading - whereas mathematics attainment is more indicative of innate ability. At S1 stage the attainment gap in mathematics is even wider than the gaps in reading and writing, as the effects of deprivation and discontinuity become more marked.

It is likely that these national statistics are not yet sufficiently complete to present an accurate picture and may even underestimate the achievements of looked after young people in Scotland who have experienced periods of public care. For example, in 2003 Glasgow City Council reported that out of 125 children and young people in the authority's care, over 70% had achieved one or more Standard Grades (Glasgow City Council, 2003) which is obviously considerably higher than the Scottish average of 42% and the 39% figure for Glasgow published by the Scottish Executive in its Children's Social Work Statistics report (Scottish Executive, 2003b). The explanation for this discrepancy is not easy to discern. Clearly data can never be completely accurate, as a result of missing information and human error. However,

the difference is too large to be explained by errors alone. One possible reason lies in the definitions used in compiling the statistics. The national report provides data on 16 and 17 year old care leavers, while Glasgow's report includes young people who remained in care beyond their 18th birthday - and a high proportion of them have apparently been successful in taking qualifications in school or at a further education college. Changing the definitions – even for the sake of accuracy in reporting – causes problems in making annual comparisons. Nevertheless, in order to have a more complete picture of the eventual attainment of young people who have experienced periods of care, it is important to review progress using a range of different types of data, including national social work statistics, SQA figures, individual local authorities' reports and destination surveys.

There will undoubtedly be a range of explanations for the generally poor attainment of looked after young people. One important reason is clearly the fact that their education is highly likely to be disrupted as a result of exclusion from school. Twenty out of the 50 children in the *Learning with Care* report's sample had been excluded at least once and some had been excluded many times or for lengthy periods, while a study in England found that 37% of looked after children had been excluded from school, officially or unofficially (Social Exclusion Unit and The Who Cares? Trust, 2003). Official guidance (Scottish Executive Education Department Circular 2/98) states that only in exceptional circumstances should any pupil be excluded from school for reasons other than violent behaviour, persistent disobedience, use of illicit drugs and other very serious incidents, and that a child's

looked after status is relevant to any decision to exclude (Scottish Office, 1998).

However, looked after children and young people, while being only about one per

cent of the school population, accounted for around 13% of all exclusions in

Scotland in 2000 (Scottish Executive, 2000), and high rates of exclusion have been

confirmed in other Scottish research (Dixon & Stein, 2002). Reducing the days lost

every year through exclusion from school is one of the Scottish Executive's social

justice targets (Scottish Executive, 1999). In 2002-3 the exclusion rate for all school

pupils in Scotland was 50 per thousand, while the rate for pupils who were looked

after was more than four times as much at 227 per thousand (Scottish Executive

National Statistics, 2004). Exclusions have been falling since 1999 for both the

general school population and also for pupils who are looked after. However, while

official statistics show that overall exclusions decreased by 3% between academic

years 2001-2 and 2002-3, as Table 9 below shows, the number of exclusions of

looked after children and young people increased by 47%.

Table 9: Exclusions of looked after children in Scotland 1999-00 to 2002-03

	Total exclusions of looked after children/young people	Rate per 1,000 looked after children aged 5-15
1999-00	3,141	390
2000-01	1,339	172
2001-02	1,235	154
2002-03	1,819	227

There is no immediate explanation for this dramatic change. Children and

young people are admitted to residential care because of difficulties which can

include unacceptable behaviour in school and erratic attendance. However, it is also

possible that children and young people in residential units are sometimes regarded as qualitatively different to other looked after or vulnerable children by mainstream schools. Residential carers interviewed by the author have spoken of their impressions that schools still appear more inclined to consider exclusion at an early stage in dealing with behaviour-related incidents, by-passing other approaches recommended in guidelines. It is also possible that mainstream schools have worked harder to be more inclusive of some categories of pupils with particular needs than others. Professor Sheila Riddell of the University of Edinburgh was reported as telling conference delegates that teachers had: ' ... sympathy with the idea of including certain types of disabled pupils, but not pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties ... ' (Times Educational Supplement Scotland, 2005). It seems odd that the exclusion rates of looked after children and young people should increase sharply while so much effort has gone into avoidance of disruption to education, for example, through effective approaches to inter-agency working (Stead, Lloyd, & Kendrick, 2004). However, it is also possible that it will subsequently emerge that the 2002 figures were an aberration.

In summary, then, the attainment levels of care leavers in Scotland is typically poor compared to the general population in both the 5-14 curriculum and at Standard Grade or equivalent, and young people in residential care in particular are likely to have the poorest levels of attainment. There is evidence of differential achievement by looked after young people in different parts of the Scotland. Unfortunately the picture is incomplete because of missing data and different collection methodologies.

Rates of exclusion from school are very high among looked after children and young people, and the fall in rates seen in recent years appears to have stalled. Considerable effort has been put into making improvements in educational and support infrastructure in the past three years but it is too early to see any real impact reflected in attainment statistics.

The educational nature of the care environment which seems impervious to the various entreaties by educationists and politicians to improve the attainment of looked after children and young people is now discussed more fully in Section 3.4 which follows.

3.4 Educationally unsupportive living environments

When the Edinburgh University researchers referred to earlier in this chapter conducted interviews with young people in care, they found, with one exception, that all felt that they had coped better educationally before entering care, but, paradoxically, they had experienced positive support in their care placement and appreciated someone they could talk to regarding school issues (Francis et al., 1996). Many observers have pointed out that life chances are generally determined by educational attainment and adversely affected where schooling is disrupted, as it typically is for looked after young people. The Save the Children organisation published a report in which young people who had themselves been in care

participated in gathering data, principally by conducting interviews with 70 young

people who had left care (West, 1995). Over a third of the interviewees reported that

they had received no support at all throughout their school lives. Almost half had left

school with no qualifications. Just over 40% of the sample said they had been

encouraged to continue in education beyond school, and encouragement came mainly

from friends, partners and relatives rather than from teachers and social workers. The

report listed a range of practical and emotional impediments to young people who

have been looked after continuing in education beyond age16. The authors found that

the same barriers looked after young people experienced in school continued to cause

problems in further education and led to several dropping out of college courses. The

observation that difficulties in education often have long-term consequences for care

leavers supported findings from a survey conducted on behalf of the Royal

Philosophical Society which involved collecting data from leaving care projects

working with 1,538 children in England and Wales. The researchers found that half

of the young people surveyed were unemployed, only 9% were in full-time

employment and just 9% were in further or higher education (Broad, 1994).

Thus, there are very good reasons to expect that the education of children and

young people who are received into public care should be given high priority in care

planning. However, the experience of reception into care, compounded by the

consequences of physical and emotional abuse and neglect, typically causes

problems of adjustment in school. Also, several studies provide evidence of

discontinuity as a result of changes of both care placement and school. For example,

in England, David Berridge identified frequent changes of placement as a factor in disrupting schooling, with a third of the 234 children in his study sample having experienced five or more moves since first arriving in care (Berridge, 1985). A later study, conducted in Scotland, found that almost three fifths of school-age children in the sample changed school or alternative educational provision, either on admission to care or at a later change of placement (Kendrick, 1995). Despite greater knowledge about the importance of continuity and national and local government policy aimed at avoiding discontinuity, the problem seems resistant to efforts make improvements as one recent English study found (Dearden, 2004).

> *The majority of young people rated disruption to their schooling as*
> *high or very high and this was attributed to changes in care*
> *placements (between one and 12) and periods of very poor attendance*
> *at secondary school (p. 190).*

The corrosive effect of disrupted schooling on the individual was movingly described by young people across Scotland whose accounts of their experiences were told in the *Care to Learn* report from the Save the Children and Who Cares? Scotland organisations (Ritchie, 2003). The following selected accounts (ibid., p.13) are typical.

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

I've been in 19 different schools. That's how I've missed a lot of
school... (Male, 15)

The effect of frequent placement moves on children's perceptions of their

educational progress was illustrated by a survey of 2,000 children and young people

in public care conducted by the Who Cares? Trust. The diagram in Figure 3 below,

adapted from the Trust's *Remember my messages* report (p.39), shows that the

perception of doing worse in education increases as the number of care placement

moves increases, and also, significantly, the perception of doing better is particularly

high - at 60% - where young people experienced only one placement (Shaw, 1998).

Figure 2: Effect of being in care on success in school – by number of placements
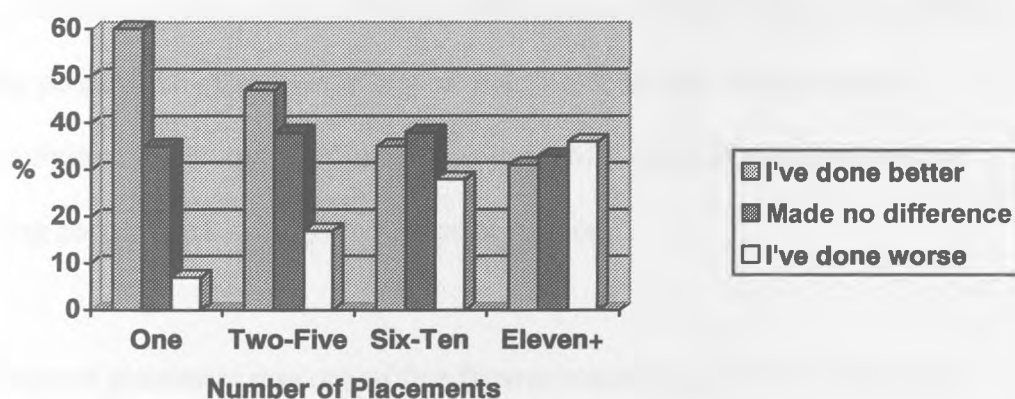
A later study by the Trust, *It's your future,* found that 15% of the 2,000 respondents

had moved school four times or more (Social Exclusion Unit and The Who Cares?

Trust, 2003). The *Learning With Care* report (HM Inspectors of Schools/Social

Work Services Inspectorate, 2001) was slightly more encouraging about continuity

of education, citing for example the use of taxis over substantial distances in rural areas to retain children and young people at their original schools.

These reports paint a generally gloomy picture, but it is not necessarily the case that moving care placement *per se* is the problem, since moves can also be positive experiences, but rather it is likely to be the reasons for and nature of the move and its physical and emotional effect on the child or young person that have damaging consequences for education. It is difficult to provide a nurturing living environment when placements are inconsistent and unplanned. Research on young people leaving care shows that those who experienced high levels of placement instability had the worst adjustment to employment, social relationships, financial management and housing (Biehal, Claydon, Stein, & Wade, 1995). There is also evidence that children and young people who experience many moves in care are very likely to have displayed multiple problems prior to entering care (McCarthy, 2004) and therefore these young people need to be given particular support.

Change of placement was one of five factors contributing to low attainment identified by Professor Sonia Jackson, a key figure both in championing the cause of education for looked after children and young people and in identifying the need for empirical research on the subject. Jackson conducted what was probably the first review of the relevant literature in the UK and interviewed 'providers and receivers of care' (Jackson, 1987). In her influential monograph Jackson described personally experiencing: '...feelings of increasing frustration, until it became clear that the

absence of published material was itself important evidence' (p.4). She listed key books on child care, recent at the time of her writing, which made no mention of educational issues. Almost 20 years later this observation remains largely true.

Jackson's five contributory factors are as follows. Firstly, the pre-care home environment typically will not have been conducive to learning. Secondly, frequent changes of school (which may involve periods of non-attendance) are particularly disruptive to education. Thirdly, carers, social workers and teachers may either have low expectations of children and young people in care, or may make allowances as opposed to giving extra help and encouragement. Fourthly, low self-esteem is a common experience. School failure contributes to a negative self-image, but a sense of failure militates against achievement and can make learning seem irrelevant. Finally, according to Jackson, lack of continuity of care, including the lack of consistent parent figures, means that a child in care can be left with the impression that education and learning are unimportant.

Low expectation of children and young people shown by carers is one example of ways in which living in residential care can limit their achievements. Over a period of some months in 1981-1982, the researcher David Berridge lived for one week in each of twenty children's homes in three English counties to observe at first hand the experience of young people living in residential care. In the book *Children's Homes* in which he subsequently described his observations (Berridge, 1985), four pages were devoted to the educational experiences of the young people.

Berridge found that: '... for a disproportionately high number of children, their schooling experiences were largely unsatisfactory' (p.115). He offered three explanations: firstly, the children tended to be multiply disadvantaged and lacking in self-confidence; secondly, there were problems of continuity; thirdly, and crucially, the educational climate of the care homes was generally poor. Some homes were stimulating but others were, he said: '... dull places in which to live and do little to encourage the child's education' (p.115). A decade after publishing his original research, Berridge revisited the same three local authorities he had studied in his original field work (though some of the sample homes had by that time closed down). The aim of the follow-up study was to analyse: '... changes in the structure and use of residential child care services over a decade' (Berridge & Brodie, 1998). The researchers found that depressingly little had changed over the years in the educational environment of the children's homes. They observed that staff encouraged children to attend school, and homework was usually checked, but they also: '... consistently recorded an absence of books and magazines' (ibid., p.110) and daily newspapers were uncommon. Facilities for completing homework and for private study for older children were sometimes unsatisfactory. The authors used the term "social disconnectedness" to connote a form of unconscious institutionalisation represented by television used as a means of social control rather than as a vehicle for informal discussion of current affairs and as a stimulus for adult-child interaction.

In a more specific study of the education of children and young people in residential care, Berridge and his team examined the educational experience of

residents in three children's homes in one anonymous English local authority (Berridge et al., 1996). On the positive side, the researchers found that young people were well supported and encouraged to attend school and college. However, most of the findings in relation to education were negative. The homes lacked appropriate reading material and reference books, and there was no culture of informal learning. Staff seemed resigned to accepting poor levels of academic achievement and there was a lack of detailed knowledge of schools' expectations of individual young people. Although there was commitment to completion of homework, this was not always supported by an established homework routine. Liaison between homes and schools was inadequate, and while care staff said they attended parents' evenings and other school functions, this apparently contradicted what teachers said. In contrast to this rather gloomy picture, only a few years later the researchers Sinclair and Gibbs were able to report in their account of research conducted in 48 children's homes in England that they found evidence of changing attitudes to education, which they attributed to official guidance and the *Looking After Children* materials (Sinclair & Gibbs, 1998). They found that two-thirds of heads of home had '…extensive expectations in this aspect of their work' (ibid., p.129). These expectations were reflected in active encouragement of attendance at school, good liaison with schools and staff taking an active role in promoting school work and attending school functions. Despite these positive developments, there were significant barriers to achievement, including difficulties associated with the young people themselves, the negative attitudes of some school staff and low priorities of social services' departments.

Just a few years further on, the *Learning With Care* report (HM Inspectors of Schools/Social Work Services Inspectorate, 2001) on the provisions for accommodated children and young people in Scotland found that the educational support provided in residential units was more variable than that evident in foster homes, presumably at least partly explaining the poorer attainment of young people living in residential care. Some units were observed to provide educationally rich environments with considerable emphasis placed on valuing education and study support but others were reportedly providing educationally poor environments.

In the same year, a report commissioned by the children's charity Barnardo's summarised the research basis for understanding the key issues relevant to the educational experience of looked after children and young people living in residential care (Jackson & Sachdev, 2001). The report highlighted nine key issues:

1. High rates of non-attendance at school are common, as a result of exclusions, placement moves or because of lack of effective collaboration between homes and schools.

2. There is typically disaffection with school on the part of the young people, particularly in relation to the academic aspects of education.

3. Problems arising at school which pre-date the move to residential care can be a factor in the breakdown of relationships within the family or foster placement.

4. Research suggests that the attainment of children and young people in residential care is particularly poor and worse than the outcomes of children and young people in foster care.

5. Weaknesses in residential care can exacerbate existing problems.

6. There may be perceptions among professionals of residential care as being concerned with physical, social and emotional aspects of care, while education is the preserve of schools.

7. Deficiencies in the physical environment of residential establishments and a lack of educational materials such as books, stationery, drawing equipment etc., make them uncongenial places for doing homework

8. Young people may experience neglect of their individual interests, aptitudes and limited opportunity to develop important life skills.

9. Care staff may fail to look beyond the boundary of the establishment to access resources within the community, such as public libraries and museums.

Of course, not all residential units are 'uncongenial places' and a supportive residential home environment can help a child or young person to develop the confidence needed to maintain a positive self-image and for the development of personal and academic competence. However, many cared for in residential settings would all too readily identify with the experiences movingly recounted by the young person quoted below:

I knew there would be problems waiting for me. Schoolwork wasn't seen as a priority by many care workers, particularly if they were spending most of their time dealing with disruptive behaviour. I felt like I was being left to fend for myself, I couldn't invite people from school in to do homework with me, and units generally aren't set up to provide the peace and quiet needed to concentrate on homework (Connelly et al., 2003, p.4).

In summary, far from compensating for educational disadvantage caused by family dislocation and social exclusion, admission to care can simply lead to further disruption to education as a result of placement moves, non-attendance at school and the destructive effects of distressing pre-care experiences. Furthermore, despite the stability which a good residential care setting can provide, and the efforts of some units to make improvements, residential care homes in the main, according to research evidence, are educationally depressing environments in which to grow up.

This thesis is concerned with work aimed at countering such inadequate care practice in respect of education, and the underpinning concept of the educationally rich environment which is the end state of efforts to institute change is discussed in the following section of this review.

3.5 The "educationally rich environment"

As outlined in Chapter 2, the term "educationally rich environment" was used by the *Learning With Care* report's authors as a way of focussing on the deficits observed in residential settings, conditions which are both directly damaging to a child or young person's attainment and are also unlikely to lead to productive attitudes to learning. In Section 3.4, above, David Berridge's finding that children's homes were generally unstimulating places in which to grow up was discussed (Berridge, 1985) (Berridge & Brodie, 1998). In her moving account of discussions with 10 adults recalling their experiences of growing up in care, Barbara Kahan quotes one young woman describing the low expectations of her carers who failed to provide the necessary structure for doing homework (Kahan, 1979).

> *I felt that I wanted somebody to expect a lot more and demand a lot*
> *more because I felt I had a lot more to give, and there was no one,*
> *well, not no one to give it to, but no direction in which to turn. I didn't*
> *know which way to turn (ibid., p.154).*

Conversely, Sonia Jackson observed that when education is made the central purpose, residential care can be a positive factor in enhancing a child's progress. In Jackson's case study of one residential home, she found that two key factors contributed to the development of improved attitudes to learning, school attendance and attainment: firstly, the commitment and background of the head of home; and, secondly, the appointment of a liaison teacher (Jackson, 1988). Berridge and Brodie also observed in their fieldwork that there was: ' ... not a particularly strong link

between the severity of young people's problems and the quality of care offered within the homes' (ibid., p.146). They concluded optimistically that this means that there is no reason why good quality care cannot be provided for children and young people with complex problems.

What, then, is an educationally rich environment? How would one recognise it? There are likely to be several answers to these important questions. The Scottish Executive's information booklet for carers, social workers and teachers (Connelly et al., 2003) includes the following list under the heading 'What carers can do':

> *Collaborate with teachers to ensure the child attends school regularly.*
>
> *Become familiar with the courses, qualifications and attainment targets relevant to individual children.*
>
> *Help the child or young person with personal organisation (e.g. planning homework and study, using a homework diary, having the correct books and equipment).*
>
> *Keep in contact with the school (and individual teachers, if appropriate) and act early to avoid escalation of difficulties.*
>
> *Offer support and encouragement.*
>
> *Encourage intellectual activity (e.g. discussion of news, watching TV documentaries, provision of books and newspapers, reading to young children).*

Share enthusiasm for learning or particular expertise in a school subject, creative pursuit or sport with children in your care. (ibid., p.17)

Some of these suggestions are practical or organisational in nature - e.g. 1 and 4 in the list above – and are the sorts of tasks expected of a "keyworker". Others - e.g. 2, 3, 6 and 7 - imply a particular interpretation of the keyworker's task which goes beyond the roles of supporter and co-ordinator roles and become more like those implied by a teaching role (Connelly, 1993). Acceptance of this role not only requires workers and managers to recognise its importance but it also calls for a high degree of personal confidence and an interest in learning. Thus the attitudes and experience of carers and the culture of the home are very likely to be important factors in creating an educationally rich living environment.

One important attitude in carers recognised by many writers is the belief that they can make a difference to the way in which a child or young person responds to learning. It is significant that many young people interviewed speak about adults who 'believed in me' or who 'didn't believe in me'. Thus showing confidence in the young person may be important in the development of self-esteem, and Gilligan has written about the importance of the professional value of helping young people to develop "resilience", the capacity to do well despite adverse experience, a condition he suggests comes from carers and other professionals investing interest, concern and personal commitment (Gilligan, 2000).

The rituals, the smiles, the interest in the little things, the daily
routines, the talents they nurture, the interests they stimulate, the
hobbies they encourage, the friendships they support, the sibling ties
they preserve make a difference. All of these things may foster in a
child the vital senses of belonging, of mattering, of counting. (ibid., p.
45)

The general atmosphere of the residential unit and the expectations of carers appear to be crucial factors in both influencing and supporting the educational aspirations of looked after young people. While it is a major challenge to overcome years of disadvantage, a stable home life can make a huge difference. In a survey by Who Cares? Scotland and Save the Children of the perceptions of young people on their educational experiences in care, it was found that while most of the children under12 years of age questioned were positive about the help they received from residential care staff, older young people were more variable in their experiences of support (Ritchie, 2003). The discrepancy is unexplained, but may be due to older children presenting greater social and educational challenges for care staff. Nevertheless, the contrasting experiences illustrated below in the words of young people, begs the question that if some looked after children and young people can describe supportive actions then should these conditions not be available to all (ibid., p. 34).

They don't really know when I've got homework or not...They don't
ask me, I just do it of my own accord. I do it a bit late night, I
suppose, last minute, like 2 O'clock I'm working on something for the
next morning (male, 15)

For my latest project I got one of the staff to help, and because of all
my hard work and his hard work, I got an A+ for it and I was over the
moon. (female, 15)

A discussion of the educational experiences and attainments of young people accommodated in children's homes and similar residential units needs to take account of the circumstances of the young people and the nature of the institutions. As Malcolm Hill points out, homes now tend to accommodate fewer children than in the past (eight beds would be a typical size), the looked after "children" tend to be adolescents, most stays are short and the young people often have serious developmental or behavioural problems (Hill, 2000). At the same time, despite significant efforts in recent years to improve the educational level and training of residential child care staff, it is still relatively uncommon for workers to be appropriately professionally qualified. For example, in a survey of more than 3,000 workers undertaken for the Scottish Executive, it was found that 83.6% held no recognised qualification in care, community education, social work or teaching (Scottish Institute of Residential Child Care, 2004). There also appears to be some evidence of "leakage" of trained workers: those who become qualified while in post often leave for better-paid positions with more sociable working hours. In short, children's homes typically have the most demanding children and young people and the least qualified and poorest paid workers.

However, one should be cautious about assuming that possession of qualifications is directly related to the quality of care provided. Berridge and Brodie

(1998) found weak relationships between quality of care and having staff who were professionally qualified, having qualified heads of homes, having graduates on staff groups and having experienced staff. The authors were careful to point out that it would be misguided to conclude that these factors were unimportant, particularly as they could have positive benefits, but that in the absence of other critical factors they may be ineffectual. Five factors did appear to show strong positive relationships with quality of care in the care homes studied, with two of these emerging as particularly important. The crucial factors were, firstly, the extent to which the head of home was able to state specific objectives for the home and, secondly, stability in staffing. Other important factors were whether the manager could keep to the main objectives, had some say in admissions and could articulate a clear theoretical/therapeutic orientation or specific methods of caring for children.

Perhaps the simple answer is that an educationally rich home is, what Roger Clough calls 'an environment in which staff can work well' (Clough, 2000). According to Clough, there is a relationship between the degree of control and responsibility which residential carers have over their work and the extent to which residents of homes are able to achieve their potential and gain maximum control and responsibility for their own lives.

Thus, an educationally rich environment in residential settings depends on having in place a combination of factors, including clear objectives for the home, staffing stability, and care staff who are confident, as well as more practical measures

such as good communication with schools, provision of learning resources and good study facilities.

3.6 Conclusion

Research Question 1 asks what the implications of the literature are for the aims of politicians and practitioners to improve the educational experience and attainment of children and young people in public care. There are eight key points which have emerged from this review. These are, firstly, that practice in relation to the assessment, recording and review of educational attainment and needs is not uniformly good throughout Scotland. Some local authorities have developed protocols as a guide to good practice, with particular emphasis on the roles of different agencies working in collaboration, and this seems to be a sensible approach. Secondly, there is evidence of a need for better links between social work and education and careers agencies in relation to preparation for independent living and aftercare services. Carers need to ensure that looked after young people do not miss out on information about career options and receive encouragement to attend university and college open events. Thirdly, the attainment of care leavers is poor in both the 5-14 curriculum and at Standard Grade and equivalent. Children and young people cared for in residential homes have the poorest attainment, probably because they have experienced most discontinuity in their lives. Fourthly, the collection of data for monitoring progress of efforts to raise attainments has improved but it may

also be underestimating both the true achievements of looked after young people and may inadvertently encourage both a narrow view of achievement and also a stereotypical view of young people in care as non-achievers. Fifthly, attainment - of care leavers at least - varies considerably in different local authorities and there is a clear need to develop more understanding about what is proving to be successful practice in some authorities, and, conversely, why some local authorities seem to be lagging behind. Sixthly, rates of exclusion from school are high among looked after children and young people and there is some evidence that schools find it difficult to provide the required support to keep these children and young people engaged in mainstream education. Seventhly, the research evidence suggests that being cared for in a residential care home does not typically stabilise young people's education, and yet stability in care is related to better outcomes. Finally, research confirms the importance of helping young people to develop self-confidence. This appears more likely to result where a care home has clear objectives and stable staffing.

The last point provides a useful link with the fieldwork outlined and discussed in subsequent chapters of this thesis and with the second and third research questions which, respectively, are concerned with the conditions for making residential care units more educationally rich environments, and the development and use of self-evaluation indicators as an aid to audit practice in relation to educational needs and monitor progress. The theory of self-evaluation provides the connection between having clear objectives to guide practice and achieving stability in staffing. Broadly, carers who understand their roles, believe there is clarity of purpose in their work,

feel they are consulted and given responsibility, are more likely to have job

satisfaction and therefore to remain in post, where they can contribute to improving

practice.

Chapter 4 which follows outlines the methodological underpinnings of the

thesis and describes the development work and fieldwork conducted in attempting to

operationalise the concept of the educationally rich care environment.

Chapter 4: Research Design and Methodology

4.1 Introduction

The review of the literature in the previous chapter highlighted, *inter alia*, the importance of having clear objectives in the residential setting. The development work outlined in later chapters involved the design, field-testing and review of self-evaluation indicators for use by residential carers to help them to be clearer about their objectives within the specific context of supporting the education of looked after children and young people. This chapter outlines the research approach adopted in respect of the developmental work. This work, which was undertaken in parallel to reviewing the literature, was broadly qualitative in nature, though quantitative methods were also used. The approach adopted was "action research" and this chapter both discusses the approach and describes in detail the methodological process.

The research and development processes outlined and discussed in this and the following two chapters have grown out of the author's academic and professional work in three particular areas: teaching an elective class between 1999 and 2004 on the Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) programme for trainee secondary school teachers on the education of looked after children and young people;

consultancy work as part of the *Learning With Care: Improving Outcomes for Looked After Children Project* during 2002-3; and on-going collaboration with various individuals and organisations concerned with improving the educational experience and attainment of children and young people in public care between 2001 and 2005.

The action research approach, outlined more fully below, involved four distinct activities, all of which were significantly intertwined: a detailed review of the literature covering approximately a 15-year period; a process of development of self-evaluation (quality) indicators; fieldwork in relation to the use of the indicators; and reflection on the implications for practice in residential care settings arising from both the literature review and the fieldwork. Thus, the work has elements of both academic enquiry and personal professional development.

4.2 The research methodology

It is often possible to justify an approach to research by considering an array of possibilities and rejecting as unsuitable approaches which do not fit well with the aims and questions which direct the overall work. This was not really the way in which action research emerged as the preferred approach in this study. In reality, action research became the only serious contender because, as Wellington suggests: 'If the research is conducted with a view to changing or improving a situation... then

it probably merits the label of action research (Wellington, 2000) p.21. Wellington

also points out however that this rather broad definition may not satisfy some

advocates of action research and while the study outlined here met Wellington's

basic test, it was also characterised by a number of other important features. These

key features of action research, including, for example, intervention in a practice

issue and reflection are discussed in detail later in this chapter.

There are of course other approaches which might have been adopted. The

work was not particularly suited to an experimental-type design, since the real-world

nature of the study would not have afforded the degree of control required by such an

approach. It was also neither wholly a case study nor an ethnographic study, although

there were elements of case study involved in the work carried out in children's

homes. It did include survey as one of the methods used, but the work was not

wholly defined by the survey approach. There were elements of narrative in the use

of quotations from young people and correspondents, but again this approach did not

define the thesis. The only other major qualitative research approach which had

obvious merits for providing an underpinning framework to hold the work together

was "small-scale evaluation". According to one author: 'The generic goal of most

evaluations is to provide "useful feedback" to a variety of audiences...' (Trochim,

2005). This accorded well with the third research question which was essentially

concerned with the impact of self-evaluation indicators in residential units. However,

the work was not solely about measuring the worth of an audit tool, and rather it was

a more dynamic process of engaging with both the practice context and the research literature, and reflecting on how each impacted on and informed the other.

4.3 Phases of the research

There were three distinct phases in the research process. The first occurred between 1997 and 2000 and involved initial systematic searches for articles and reports dealing with the education of looked after children and young people. This led to the preparation of a "synoptic paper" as part of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education, and also to a supplementary paper published by the Open University as part of their Diploma in Social Work programme, firstly in 1998 and in a revised edition published two years later (Connelly, 2000). The synoptic paper contributed substantially to the context setting in Chapter 2 and the review of the literature in Chapter 3. The second phase was conducted during 2002-3 as part of the *Learning With Care: Improving Outcomes for Looked After Children Project*. The author's particular contributions were in co-authoring and editing an information booklet for carers, social workers and teachers (Connelly et al., 2003) and developing and piloting a set of quality indicators for use by local authority managers and in schools and care settings which were subsequently published in revised form as part of the *How good is our school?* (HGIOS) series of self-evaluation indicators (HM Inspectorate of Education, 2003). The process of developing the indicators was

outlined in an article published in the *Scottish Journal of Residential Child Care* (Connelly, 2003) and is also discussed in detail in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

In relation to the broader issues of the education of accommodated young people and the particular issues of the use of quality indicators, the author made the following key contributions to discussions within the relevant professional communities, all largely based on the work which was central to the work discussed in thesis. Thus the author:

- co-presented a research seminar for colleagues (with Kirstie Maclean, the, then, Director of the Scottish Institute for Residential Child Care, at Jordanhill on 16 October 2002);

- organised and presented, (with SIRCC and HMI colleagues) two conferences on the role and tasks of "designated teachers" (in Bellshill on 02 December and in Perth on 10 December 2003);

- spoke about educational issues in relation to residential care at four conferences (Barnardo's "Continuous Care Conference" in Edinburgh on 12 November 2004, SIRCC Annual Conference in Dunblane on 08 June 2004, The Who Cares? Trust in York on 17 June 2004, and a Scottish Executive conference for designated teachers in Edinburgh on 09 November 2004); and

- presented a paper on the attainments of looked after children and young people in Scotland at the *FICE* international conference on 09 September 2004 (Connelly, 2004).

The third phase of the study, conducted during late autumn 2004, involved

conducting a survey of external managers of residential child care establishments in

Scottish local authorities, aimed at examining their perceptions of the use of the

HGIOS self-evaluation indicators and discussing progress with a range of contacts,

including external managers, unit managers and members of a professional network.

These aspects of the work are discussed fully in chapters 6 and 7.

4.4 The action research approach

Action research has its origins in USA in the 1940s as a result of the work of Kurt

Lewin who 'emphasised the value of involving participants in every phase of the

action research process' (Carr & Kemmis, 1986) p.163. Its re-emergence as an

authoritative approach in educational research is generally credited to the work of

Lawrence Stenhouse, for whom action research embodied emancipation and

autonomy (Koshy, 2005). Action research, according to one writer on research

methodology, has particular advantages for practitioner researchers:

> *The essentially practical, problem-solving nature of action research*
> *makes this approach attractive to practitioner-researchers who have*
> *identified a problem during the course of their work and see the merit*
> *of investigating it, and, if possible, of improving practice (Bell, 1999,*
> *p.9).*

The essentially practical, problem-solving and practice-related elements identified in

Bell's definition of action research made it an appropriate approach for providing a

supportive framework for an enquiry concerned with both the research evidence in relation to educational attainment and the professional practice of residential care.

According to another writer on research methodology, "action research" has at least four defining characteristics. Firstly, it is an essentially practical approach, making it suitable for enquiring into real-world problems. Secondly, it has the capacity to deal with change, both in the sense of exploring change in practice and also in terms of self-development. Thirdly, there is an implied cyclical process, in the sense that findings feed directly into practice and the effect is subject to further evaluation. Finally, action research emphasises participation and the researcher's involvement is active rather than passive (Denscombe, 1998).

The work reported in this thesis seemed to relate well to all of these characteristics. It grew out of the author's engagement with the real-world problem of evaluating the educational richness of the residential care environment. It involved reflection on the implications for practice in residential care of the research literature, and field and developmental work. The output from the work fed directly into practice during the life of the study, through publications and conference presentations. The thesis grew alongside an active process of professional development work. Denscombe points out that action research is a strategy and not simply a method, in the sense that it provides a framework for observing and analysing changing practice, but it does not specify any particular methods of data gathering. The specific research methods in the developmental and fieldwork

components of this work are outlined in later chapters, while the theory of action research and its advantages and disadvantages within the context of the work discussed in this thesis are discussed more fully later in this chapter.

The important features of action research which seem most relevant to the present study are its cyclical and participative aspects, as well as its focus on critical reflection aimed at improving practice. The main literature review is presented for convenience in a single chapter however the actual reading was conducted over a period of years. Reading influenced the developmental aspects of the work, for example, in the design of the indicators, while the development phases both provided access to additional relevant reading and helped to identify important questions for reflection. The participative nature of action research implies a "partnership" between the practitioner-researcher and his clients (Dick, 1999). In this case the partners were students in the PGCE (secondary) elective class and education and social work colleagues who were actively involved in various aspects of the developmental process. Reflection was central to the work, not only in relation to the key issue of seeking to improve the educational richness of the residential care environment but also in relation to the author's own development as an academic and a teacher.

As with all approaches to research and professional development, action research has weaknesses as well as strengths. One criticism of action research is that it is apparently atheoretical: '...the action research movement often appears to be

held together by little more than a common contempt for academic theorizing...'

(Carr, 1995). However, this criticism has its origins in assumptions about the separation of theory and practice, and ignores possibilities which come from being a practitioner-researcher, immersed in the emerging issues, and where theory is itself derived from reflection on practice. Another criticism levelled at action research is that it can seem a "soft" option (Koshy, ibid.) and yet the defining characteristics outlined above suggest it is rather a somewhat exacting approach. A third weakness is that the research can appear very messy - and therefore difficult to write up clearly - since the reading, professional action and reflection stages are intertwined. However, the importance of action research lies in its capacity to accommodate the ever-changing professional context in which the inquiry is set.

An example of this feature of action research arose when the author was speaking at a conference of "designated teachers" (i.e. those with administrative responsibility for the education of looked after children and young people), outlining the key issues affecting the educational experiences of children and young people in public care. The presentation included a slide of official statistics showing that exclusions from schools had fallen across a period of three years, consistent with national policy to avoid excluding looked after children and young people. The latest figure showed an inexplicable dramatic increase in exclusions (see Section 4.4 of this thesis). At the coffee break which followed the lecture, a teacher described to the author how his school had been able to use temporary funding made available for establishing a New Community School to provide additional staffing in learning

support. The learning support teachers in that school were important resources in helping to provide alternatives to exclusion. The additional staffing, however, had been lost with the ending of temporary funding, and as a consequence exclusions had again become difficult to avoid. This example illustrates how specific professional experiences can help to interrogate data and lead to tentative hypotheses.

Dick (ibid) suggests two ground rules for conducting action research. Firstly, he proposes using a cyclical procedure, whereby initial research questions and methods are likely to be "fuzzy", but by subjecting the questions to constant refinement and by working rigorously it is possible to be more responsive to the emerging issues than would be the case within a more conventional research approach. Secondly, Dick suggests as much as possible using multiple information sources, an approach which is a significant feature of the work described in this thesis. Key sources in the research process included practitioners, students, literature, survey data, and information collected at different times over a period of several years.

The developmental life of the present work is illustrated in Figure 2 below, based on a representation reproduced on p.11 of Patrick Costello's book *Action Research* (Costello, 2003), which in turn is derived from Denscombe (1998). The figure shows how the research evolved in relation to the five stages of Denscombe's action research model. The model implies that the five stages are worked through in

sequence but that is not quite how the present study developed, as the diagram below

is designed to demonstrate.

Figure 3: An action research representation of the study

Professional practice	Made aware of the "problem" of low attainment of children and young people in public care.
Critical reflection	Read Sonia Jackson's seminal monograph – discussed with colleagues.
Research	Conducted initial literature review for "synoptic paper".
Action	Prepared and taught PGCE elective class on the education of looked after children and young people. Wrote supplementary booklet for Open University course on Social Work with Young People.
Professional practice	"Problem" became Scottish Executive priority and a tender for a project grant to develop materials, including an information booklet and self-evaluation indicators.
Critical reflection	Discussed with colleagues in project working groups.
Research	Further literature searches and reading.
Strategic planning	Plan for involving students in the development of self-evaluation materials, piloting and refining.
Action	Materials introduced to practitioners at launches and conferences. Used in teaching.
Critical reflection	Process of writing thesis helped clarify understanding of the issues.
Research	Further reading from following up others' references and also from "opportunistic" appearances of papers and reports.
Professional practice	Process of writing thesis helped to identify ideas for professional action.

4.5 Ethical and practical considerations

Researchers are required to behave ethically and professionally. In action research,

the relevant ethical principles governing correct behaviour are both those of the

research community and those of the relevant professional reference groups: in the author's situation these are the ethical codes relevant to both teachers and psychologists. It is convenient, therefore, for the purpose of discussion to divide ethical considerations into two categories: those concerning participants and those concerning the researcher (Kumar, 1996).

The participants in this research were variously: students of the PGCE elective module on the education of looked after children and young people, who both raised valuable questions about the issues and who, crucially, helped to develop the self-evaluation indicators; professional colleagues involved in the developmental aspects of the work; and practitioners who responded to the questionnaire and agreed to participate in interviews and other discussions. Ethical behaviour was ensured by providing a clear explanation of the context and purpose of the author's interest. In general, the participative nature of action research helped to keep the work within proper ethical bounds. For example, participation by the students provided opportunities to develop knowledge and skills useful to a trainee secondary teacher. The involvement of colleagues was arguably part of normal academic discourse. Participation by practitioners was more indirect however ethical behaviour was ensured by confining questions to the area of improving professional practice generally, rather than considering the quality of individuals' work. Specifically in relation to the survey of the use of self-evaluation indicators discussed in Chapter 6, the procedure adopted was approved by the author's departmental ethics committee (University of Strathclyde, 2003, 5.2, p.11). The committee was satisfied that

informed consent would be obtained, that appropriate confidentialities would be maintained and that no participant would be harmed by involvement. Indeed there was likely to be a benefit to practice because the author promised to find appropriate fora for communicating useful survey findings.

In relation to the researcher, particular care has been taken to practise ethically, for example, in negotiating access, observing protocol, maintaining confidentiality, behaving rigorously in collecting data and reporting findings, and by endeavouring to engage in ongoing reflection on the issues.

4.6 Conclusion

The approach adopted in the development work which is the basis of this thesis, was action research in which the researcher was engaged in partnership with various groups of collaborators, and in which the work progressed in cycles, intermingling reading, reflection and data-collection. The cyclical process and participative aspects of action research were crucial to considering the research questions which centre on how to intervene in residential care settings in order to help them to become educationally rich environments. In Chapter 5, which follows, the cyclical and participative process of working collaboratively and reflectively with students and colleagues to develop and field-test self-evaluation indicators is described and discussed.

Chapter 5: The process of developing self-evaluation indicators

5.1 Introduction

Chapter 4 introduced the action research approach which was the underpinning framework chosen to hold this work together. Important features of action research are its cyclical and participative characteristics.

The participative process of development of what was initially called an "audit tool", and subsequently became known as quality or self-evaluation indicators for use by local authority external managers, carers/social workers and teachers is the focus of this chapter. This chapter and Chapter 6 (dealing with an analysis of a survey of external managers) and Chapter 7 (concerned with practice in residential units) are closely related. The present chapter outlines and reflects on the approach to developing and refining the indicators and discusses their use in the context of the residential care of looked after children and young people, while the following chapters are concerned with the experience of implementation.

5.2 The development process

As part of a contract awarded by the Scottish Executive, the *Learning With Care –*

Improving Outcomes for Looked After Children Project, the author became

responsible, along with two colleagues, for the development of an audit tool with

quality indicators for use by local authorities, in direct response to Recommendation

7 of the *Learning With Care* report (HM Inspectors of Schools/Social Work Services

Inspectorate, 2001).

> *As part of their quality assurance procedures local authorities should*
> *undertake an audit of their residential units to assess how far they are*
> *educationally rich environments and, where shortcomings are found,*
> *make plans to take appropriate action. (ibid., p.7)*

The Executive's project brief specified the development of an "audit

instrument" which would assist carers and their managers to monitor the quality of

support provided to help children and young people to have satisfying school

experiences, to attain qualifications, and to develop cultural and sporting interests.

However, the original proposal was subsequently modified as a result of the project

team's suggestion that it would be useful to develop a set of parallel quality

indicators which could also be used by schools. The underlying rationale for this

wider view lay in emphasising the "corporate parent" role of local authorities which

effectively requires that different services should work collaboratively to provide

support for looked after children and young people and their families. Thus, for

example, problems of school attendance should not be exclusively the responsibility

of carers and poor behaviour in school is not only for teachers to resolve. It seemed logical to adopt a more holistic approach to assessing and monitoring the conditions for raising attainment among looked after children and young people.

The development of the audit tool was devolved to a sub-group of the project team, which included the author as the principal writer. After considerable discussion, it was decided to adopt the framework advocated by the HMI Audit Unit in *The Quality Initiative in Scottish Schools* (HM Inspectors of Schools, 2000) and adapt it for the three different audiences. This decision was justified in two ways. Firstly, the approach based on self-evaluation by school communities using the framework of *How Good is Our School?* (HM Inspectorate of Education, 2001) and its related series of documentation had gained widespread respect.

> *During its half-decade of use it [i.e the process of self-evaluation] has moved progressively from a peripheral, and even irksome, imposition to a more integral and welcome place within ongoing school life and development planning. Once viewed as the province of senior management, it is now more and more seen as relevant to all staff (MacBeath & McGlynn, 2002, p.135).*

Secondly, it seemed logical to use a format already familiar to one of the target constituencies. The *How Good is Our School?* framework uses quality, or "self-evaluation" indicators to help practitioners to recognise key strengths, identify areas where good quality needs to be maintained or where improvement is needed, highlight priorities for a development plan, and report on standards and quality. In essence, the audit process invites staff groups to ask themselves three questions: How

are we doing? How do we know? and What are we going to do? Self-evaluation indicators assist this process, it is argued, by defining good practice; after reflection and discussion staff can grade their own school or unit on a four-point scale (1 = major weaknesses; 4 = major strengths) in order to identify an agenda for improvement. The principle of ownership, as opposed to external imposition, is important and so quality indicators can be amended for local use and new indicators added, as appropriate. In this way, professional autonomy can be maintained and encouraged.

The initial work to develop two separate sets of indicators for carers and for teachers was conducted in two half-day workshops involving 21 student teachers on the PGCE programme at the University of Strathclyde's Jordanhill Campus, who had chosen to study an elective module on the education of looked after pupils presented by the author. The module was one of a number of specialist electives which formed part of the course known as "aspects of professional development" or APD. An extract from the module outline is provided for information in Appendix 1.

The workshops involved briefing the students on both the context and the development process, supplemented by advice notes and sets of resource material, which included some outline thinking by the project sub-group. The resource material also included information about *How Good is Our School?*, and the *Taking a Closer Look at...* series of specific indicators for particular aspects of the curriculum or cross-school matters associated with this approach, a draft (2002)

version of the *National Care Standards: care homes for children and young people* (Care Commission, 2003), and summaries of some relevant research literature on the attainment of looked after children and young people and education in care.

The students were divided into two main workshop groups, one concerned with devising indicators for school use and the other focussing on indicators in the residential care setting. The instructions given to the students asked them to work together first to brainstorm aspects of practice which should be covered and then to devise statements which could be used to define good practice. The students had previously participated in a series of lectures and discussions about the research and practice issues in relation to the education and attainment of looked after young people, and had made visits to residential settings. They had also had two periods of school placement, during the second of which they had been asked to engage experienced teachers in discussion about the education of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, including those being looked after. The students were highly motivated and although they were mainly relatively inexperienced as teachers, within the group were several people with significant experience of the care system and of looked after children and young people in particular. For example, one of the students had previously been a residential care worker, one had been a part-time art tutor in a children's unit and another had been a community police officer. The workshops were also particularly assisted by the specialist expertise of one of the students who had previously been a management consultant involved in developing quality indicators and who, coincidentally, had close personal experience of the care system.

The principal advantages of adopting this participative approach lay in the collective enthusiasm and objectivity of the students, and the synergy effect of group workshops in developing useful ideas. An obvious disadvantage was the students' relative inexperience both as practitioners and in writing self-evaluation statements. The opportunity to be involved in a real development project, and therefore contribute to the development of good practice, was, however, particularly motivating for the students, a point which several highlighted in their evaluation of the module.

The quality statements were written by the students working in small groups and presented initially to the whole class on flipchart sheets. These were clarified in discussion, typed up and categorised by the author before being presented to the students for further discussion and refinement. The statements produced by this process were further refined by the three members of the project sub-group, and this group also wrote a third set of more managerial indicators for use by local authority managers. The refinement process included the addition of a "description" for each indicator to help users to have a greater understanding of its origin, context and importance in practice. The indicators were then subjected to a further stage of scrutiny by the members of the wider project team. The draft indicators were next subjected to critical comment by volunteers from among a group of practitioners studying for the M.Sc. in Residential Child Care. The questionnaire used for this purpose is provided for information in Appendix 2. Finally, the indicators - at this

point still described as an "audit tool" - were piloted in a small number of residential units in one local authority.

Only the process of development and piloting of the draft quality indicators for care settings are discussed further in this and subsequent chapters because of the specific focus of the thesis in relation to the educationally rich environment in residential units. Evaluation of the use of indicators for schools and local authorities should of course be the subject of further work. The draft indicators for care settings (foster care and residential care) were classified under three headings: Staff Knowledge and Training; Procedures and Arrangements; and Supporting Young People. The six indicators of Staff Knowledge and Training covered aspects such as knowledge of the education system and training in relation to education. The Procedures and Arrangements section included seven indicators, covering aspects such as advocating for the importance of educational attainment in reviewing care plans and working with teachers in relation to school attendance. Supporting Young People included 12 indicators, covering aspects such as helping young people make decisions about disclosure of personal information at school and encouraging reading for pleasure. The final version of these "draft" indicators is reproduced in full for information in Appendix 3. In the actual document used in piloting, the indicators were presented in landscape format and a fourth column headed "notes and action points" was provided for the convenience of staff conducting the audits.

5.3 Piloting the indicators

This section describes the process of piloting the indicators designed for use in care settings. Although the indicators were written in an inclusive way so that they could be used by foster carers and by social workers evaluating provision for children and young people looked after at home or with relatives, they were not piloted with these groups mainly due to lack of time and resources. Also, the priority was to conduct pilot-testing in residential units because of the particular concern for improving the educational environment within these settings.

The approach to the pilot-testing involved gaining the co-operation of external managers in one local authority. The author had developed a good relationship with this authority over a number of years, and, in particular, it had hosted student visits to residential units. Coincidentally, this relationship had been highlighted in the *Learning With Care* report as an example of good practice in establishing collaboration between the education and social work communities. The author was invited to attend one of the regular meetings of external managers and the managers of the authority's five residential units to explain the indicators and to discuss ways in which they could be used. All unit managers agreed to conduct an initial audit and to communicate both the results of the audit and comments on the experience to the author via the external managers. Feedback was subsequently received from four of the five units within the agreed timescale. The unit which did not participate as expected had experienced some disruption. The external managers sent copies of the

four completed audit documents to the author and kept the originals to allow them to follow up progress within the authority. The comments on the experience were communicated by telephone to the author by one of the external managers.

The pilot-testing undertaken in the residential units provided encouraging results. Units tackled the process in different ways. In one unit senior staff completed the audit document independently. In two units the audit was debated at an open staff meeting. In another, both staff and residents completed the audit independently. Table 10 below shows an extract from the audit completed independently by a member of staff in one residential unit. The care worker was able to offer evidence in support of a view that this aspect of staff knowledge and training is a major strength of the unit's practice ('open, regular discussion'), and therefore rated at level "4".

Table 10: Extract from audit completed by a residential worker

Key Feature	Description	Level (1-4)	Comment
Staff know the importance of education and its significance in helping looked after young people to achieve their potential.	There is research evidence indicating that positive school/college experiences can help to minimise the effects of adversity, as well as enhancing feelings of confidence and developing relationship skills.	'4'	'Open, regular discussion informally and in meetings emphasises the importance of education for life long achievement and life choices.'

Table 11 below shows a comparison between the ratings and comments given by a carer and a 16 year old resident in relation to an aspect of the "supporting young people" section of the audit instrument. In this case both the worker and the young

person agreed that this aspect of provision represented a weakness in practice, though the young person rated this aspect more severely. Both described the nature of the inadequacies, though understandably the young person's view was very personal and another young person might have had quite different priorities. The carer's decision to involve a young person in the pilot exercise - something which had not been planned or suggested by the author - was a very interesting by-product of this part of the work, which serves to illustrate two points. Firstly, it demonstrates the possibility of young people being active participants in the self-evaluation process, also a characteristic of action research. Secondly, it illustrates the participative nature of action research, which can accommodate unexpected developments.

Table 11: comments by a care worker and a 16 year old resident

Key feature	Description	Level (1-4)	Comment
Books, newspapers, computers and educational, artistic and other cultural materials are available.	Young people need to have access to writing and drawing materials, reference books and computers to help in completing homework and for intellectual stimulation. Carers should actively encourage young people to purchase books of their own.	2	(carer) "Presently books, computers, space available for study is not adequate and craft materials not always in use due to other priorities. New educational room described before will address this as will an allocation of money to each young person..."
		1	(young person) "We need more books and magazines."

The unit managers all said that they had found the experience of conducting an audit to be helpful in identifying strengths and weaknesses in provision, and in

providing an agenda for discussing standards of practice and identifying areas for development. For at least one unit the experience had stimulated a wider examination of practice in relation to supporting the young people's education. For example, when the author visited some months later the manager and depute were able to describe specific improvement actions. They had turned a former office into a homework room, with a computer, although there had been a delay in arranging internet access because of difficulties experienced by the local authority in providing safe browsing arrangements. A suggestion had been made that staff should have access to the home-school link teacher for consultancy, so they could be clear how to support children and young people in homework between her visits. Arrangements had been made to visit a science park and a theatre. The unit managers had also written a paper on homework for discussion by the staff group. The paper opened with the following statement:

> *In developing a homework programme for the young people we intend to break away from what in the past was perhaps a rather sterile and at times confrontational experience. We propose therefore to incorporate "homework" into a broader package of interest based experiences in an attempt to broaden the knowledge and cultural base of the young people.*

The unit managers said that the staff group were very enthusiastic about the renewed focus on education, and that discussion of the indicators at a staff meeting had highlighted a general feeling that collectively they had skills which could be much better utilised Particular areas of need identified by the staff were IT skills

training, a need for better understanding of the use by schools of "individualised educational programmes" (IEPs), more detailed knowledge of the 5-14, Standard Grade and Higher Still curricula, and to become more confident in supporting young people engaged in preparing "folios" for the Standard Grade English examination. The author arranged staff training in relation to IEPs, curricula and folios as a *quid pro quo* for the unit providing help with the pilot-testing exercise.

Revisions to the audit instrument were made as a result of the feedback from the overall pilot-testing experience. These included making changes to the column headings. Thus "key feature" was changed to "quality indicator" in keeping with usage in other, similar documents; "description" became "rationale" to emphasise the explanatory rather than descriptive nature of the text; "comment" became "notes and action points" to emphasise the need for forward planning. Changes were also made to the text of some of the quality indicators and rationales in order to remove ambiguities and clarify meaning.

5.4 Final revision of the indicators

All three sections of the audit tool - i.e. the indicators for local authority external managers, those for care settings and those designed for use in schools - were subject to a final-stage revision following comments by a school HMI (who had been co-author of the *Learning With Care* report) and a Social Work Services Inspector. This

final version was subsequently distributed to delegates attending the launch meetings for the training and information materials which were the products of the *Learning With Care – Improving Outcomes for Looked After Children Project.*

Once again the work took an unexpected turn. HM Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) and the Social Work Services Inspectorate decided that it would be valuable to publish the indicators within the self-evaluation series of materials designed to support the *How Good is Our School?* approach to auditing provision. It was decided that it should become the first part of a new sub-series of materials dealing with issues relating to (mainly school) inclusion and equality. The justifications for this move were that the materials could both be promoted widely - in hard copy form and on the HMIE web site - and that they could also be used as a basis for HMIE inspections of schools and joint Care Commission/HMIE inspections of residential schools. As a result of this decision, the materials were customised by an independent consultant working for HMIE. The revisions included the addition of explanatory text covering the broader context of the five "national priorities for education"[8], and the use of a different format for the indicators to make them consistent with the appearance of others in the self-evaluation series. A brief extract from the indicators for carers is provided for information in Appendix 4.

It was encouraging for the project team - and mildly flattering - that the materials should receive the *imprimatur* of HMI. However, there were also some

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[8] http://www.scotland.gov.uk/education/nationalpriorities/default.asp

potentially negative consequences resulting from this subsequent editing process. Firstly, the external appearance of the published indicators, although featuring the *Learning With Care* "learning tree and security blanket" logo, identified them with other *HGIOS* materials aimed at schools. An image of the front cover of the booklet containing the indicators, with the logo at the bottom left, is shown in Figure 4 below. Some social work colleagues privately expressed the view that this could prove to be a barrier to promoting the use of the indicators within social work contexts.

Figure 4: Front cover of the indicators published by HMIE
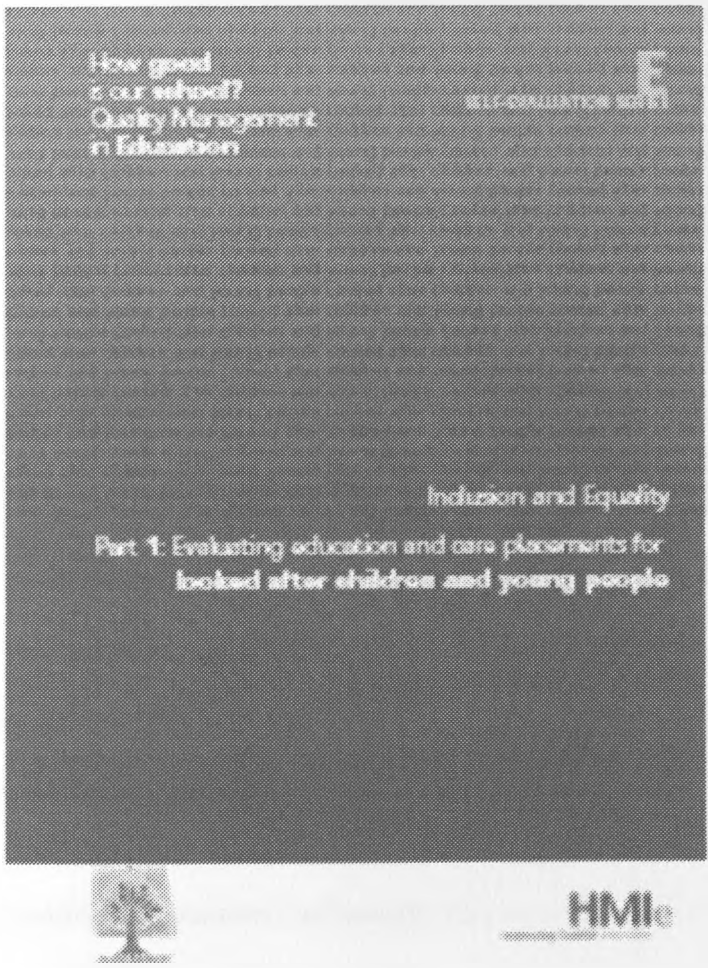
Secondly, and specifically in relation to the indicators developed for use in care settings, the original structure was changed in order to demonstrate the relationships with National Care Standard 13 for Care Homes[9] and National Care Standard 2 for Foster Care[10]. This linkage is logical but two arguably helpful features of the draft materials were unfortunately lost in the process: the three-fold classification of staff knowledge and training, procedures and arrangements, and supporting young people; and the direct correspondence between each individual indicator and its rationale. This point is illustrated in Table 12 below which shows a comparison between the project team's draft version of indicator C4 and its equivalent in the published HMIE version.

Table 12: Comparison between draft and HMIE indicators

Draft version	(C4) Carers ensure that young people have special quiet areas for study, with appropriate space and suitable furniture.	Carers should try to find out how each child or young person works best. Priority should be given to ensuring that there is organised time and support for the completion of homework. Some schools have homework clubs and other alternative study arrangements which might be suitable where young people have difficulties working at home.
HMIE version	How effectively do you encourage and support young people to do their homework? Is there good provision of special quiet areas for study?	*[In the HMIE version there is a general explanation which applies to a series of questions.]*

The author received informal feedback from some external managers and carers suggesting that these changes made the published version less comprehensive and as

[9] http://www.carecommission.com/CareComm.Web/Uploads/Documents/ncs_care_homes_for_young.pdf

[10] http://www.carecommission.com/CareComm.Web/Uploads/Documents/ncs_foster_family_services.pdf

a consequence potentially less "user-friendly" in care settings than the original draft version. The draft version was distributed along with the *Learning With Care – Improving Outcomes for Looked After Children Project* training materials - another product of the project - and there were cross-references to the draft indicators within the training materials. The existence within the professional care community of what are effectively two versions of the indicators is potentially confusing, and this is an issue which will be considered in more detail in Chapter 6.

5.5 Quality indicators and the educationally rich environment

Research question 3 asked: 'How can self-evaluation indicators contribute to improving the "richness" of the educational environment in residential care settings ... ?' It was outside the focus and beyond the resources of this thesis to conduct an evaluation of whether the use of the indicators actually led to improved outcomes for individual children and young people in particular residential units. In any case, a longer-term and more intensive study would be required to do this. However, it is quite reasonable to ask whether conducting what is essentially a pencil and paper audit exercise might actually be capable of improving the quality of the educational experience of young people living in residential care.

The rationale for conducting an audit of provision using the self-evaluation indicators described in this chapter is that they should act as a stimulus for reaching

decisions about policy and practice within the residential unit, as well as identifying specific requirements and taking appropriate action, as in fact had happened in the home described earlier in this chapter. Berridge and Brodie (1998) computed quality ratings for the homes they studied by awarding scores on a series of 13 variables, such as "degree of staff involvement with young people", "adequacy of educational environment" and "community links". They found that those homes with the highest quality ratings also exhibited clarity of role and working methods, "empowerment" of the head of home, and high staff morale. These observations confirmed the findings of other research in the area (Sinclair & Gibbs, 1996). These findings should not be a surprise since, according to Clough, 'Good residential care is produced ... by clarity and agreement about the primary task and core values' (Clough, 2000) p.170.

Despite the fact that "self-evaluation" tools are designed to empower the principal parties of a work setting - teachers, pupils and parents in the school context; carers, young people and their relatives in the residential care context - they are nevertheless part of a much wider managerial tradition of performance measurement and inspection. Empowerment and performance measurement are quite different perspectives and therefore have an uneasy relationship. But it is important to ask whether the indicators developed as part of this study can be justified as a useful tool for measuring and directing improvements in the educationally rich environment. There does seem to be support for a positive view from a number of different sources. Firstly, the underlying principles and format derive from the HGIOS

approach which has gained credibility from practitioners and HMIs. Secondly, there is support from the research literature: specifically in attempting to define key aspects of the residential task in relation to support for education, the indicators do appear to serve a purpose in relation to the observations by Berridge & Brodie (1998) and Clough (2000) that clarity of role and agreement about the task are important precursors of quality in care practice. Thirdly, the fact that the indicators were designed to stimulate discussion by staff teams - and young people, if appropriate - and customised to local needs, also appears to meet the requirements for empowerment and local accountability. And, finally, the different ways in which the pilot testers used the indicators - at staff meetings, "blind" assessment by different people, involving young people - suggests that they have the potential to extend participation to all interested parties.

However, there are also some significant limitations in the approach. The first of these is that quality measurement is often driven by political and managerial imperatives and that is indisputably the case with the self-evaluation indicators which were developed as part of a Scottish Executive contract and arose from government concerns about the poor attainment of looked after children and young people, even if those concerns originally came from the evidence of researchers and lobbying by interest groups. Secondly, it is obviously possible to carry out an assessment of practice in a mechanistic way, by "jumping through hoops" that have been set by others. Users of audit tools have to be convinced of the benefit to them if they are to take the materials seriously. This is clearly difficult if they have been devised by

people external to the residential setting. Thirdly, staff may fear the use of indicators as a weapon in the armoury of the external inspector. Inspection is not usually conducted in a spirit of mutuality, and scrutiny can be a highly stressful experience. Staff might feel inhibited in customising the indicators or devising their own if they thought that their performance would later be assessed using the "official" set. Fourthly, there is just the possibility that using the indicators could become an end in itself: conducting an audit to award scores, with no resulting action, a common failing with quality assurance mechanisms. Finally, despite the positive results from pilot-testing, a built-in limitation of this study is the lack of opportunity to engage in more detailed observation of the use of indicators in the practice setting. Thus one should be cautious in making claims about the value of the tool without further research and analysis.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a detailed account of a development process aimed at producing and piloting self-evaluation indicators for use by child care staff in residential settings to allow them to evaluate the educational "richness" of the home environment. The development process itself proved to be instructive in demonstrating the participative nature of action research, with the involvement of a variety of stakeholders. At the time, this did not seem like "real" research, rather it was more like another aspect of the "day job", but the process of reflection on the

work was nevertheless illuminating. In particular, the use of the students as collaborators demonstrates how it is possible to harness powerful synergies in a motivated group, even when individually they may be relatively inexperienced. Similarly, the pilot-testing in the residential units showed how with a little stimulus and some support an enthusiastic staff group can act creatively to devise their own solutions to problems they have identified. This is encouraging particularly as it relates well to research identifying clear purpose, empowerment and staff morale as key correlates of quality in residential settings. The evidence of the pilot-testing was very encouraging but there was also some nagging doubt about whether these positive experiences would equally apply to the revised HMIE indicators. Despite the positive results from pilot-testing, one should be cautious in making claims about the value of the tool without further research and analysis.

With the products of the *Learning With Care – Improving Outcomes for Looked After Children Project* in the public domain, it seemed important to ask whether they were beginning to make any impact on practice. Chapter 6 describes and provides an analysis of a survey of external managers conducted to gather first-hand impressions of the extent to which the materials had permeated the culture of residential care practice across Scotland, and were beginning to help construct more educationally rich environments.

Chapter 6: Using the indicators: analysis of a survey of external managers

6.1 Introduction

It is a fairly standard approach with national projects aimed at improving practice within public sector organisations such as education and social work to have a "launch" event, or events, and some publicity: typically a mail-shot and perhaps, if one is lucky, Press coverage. In the case of the *Learning With Care – Improving Outcomes for Looked After Children Project* materials, there were two reasonably well-attended launch events, and the materials were also "show-cased" at a number of other national conferences. Press releases were distributed but in the event there was little Press coverage. The danger with any initiative conducted on a national scale is that unless there is systematic follow-up after the initial publicity and enthusiasm, when academics and consultants have moved on to other tasks, the products may gather dust, and the dialogue and ideas for implementation will simply fizzle out. This could have been a particular risk with the self-evaluation indicators for carers, since their introduction and use involved transporting a practice developed over a number of years in schools into care settings, where residential workers were likely to be unfamiliar with the underlying philosophy based on *How Good is Our School* and lacked the organisational culture and practical experience of using similar

sets of indicators, though not of course of reviewing practice and preparing for inspection.

For all of these reasons, it was an important element of the present study to assess the extent of familiarity with the indicators and the ways in which they were being used, as well as to have some insight into the difficulties and needs related to their use. Consequently, approximately 18 months after the launch of the project materials, and a year after the publication of the "HMIE" version of the self-evaluation indicators, a survey was undertaken among external managers of residential establishments in local authorities across Scotland, and discussions were conducted with both external and unit managers who had begun to make some progress with implementation. The survey was conducted by postal or electronic questionnaire, supplemented by telephone interviews with selected managers. Discussions with unit managers were more elaborate but informal in character.

The remainder of this chapter describes the methodological aspects of the external manager survey, presents and discusses the findings in the context of the wider aims of improving the educational quality of residential establishments. Chapter 7, which follows, discusses in more detail how the indicators could be used within residential units in support of efforts to create educationally rich environments.

6.2 Planning the survey

Surveys can be used as a research approach in their own right, but in the context of this study a survey was used as one of a number of methods of collecting useful data within the overall "action research" approach. Like all methods, the survey has both inherent advantages and disadvantages. Among the advantages are the possibilities of having a wide and inclusive coverage of a population, and, with relative ease, gaining a general overview of an issue, problem or context. The disadvantages include difficulties in controlling the research, particularly the time frame, and the danger of sacrificing depth of understanding for breadth of coverage. The aim was to survey the perceptions of external managers of residential homes across Scottish local authorities on their knowledge and use of the self-evaluation indicators. A survey was well suited to the purpose of gaining a general overview and identifying some questions for deeper analysis. The most efficient way to conduct the survey was to use a postal (or electronic) questionnaire, supplemented by telephone interviews among those managers who agreed to be contacted.

The development of the questionnaire followed very closely the advice outlined in Bill Gillham's useful book, *Developing a Questionnaire* (Gillham, 2000). Firstly, a draft set of questions was prepared. This process was aided by an open discussion of the use of the indicators which took place at a meeting of members of a Scottish practitioner network on the education of looked after children and young people which meets about three times per year. In what Gillham calls the "pre-pilot stage",

the draft questions were sent by email to six key people with particular knowledge of the indicators and/or related issues. The six "experts" included practitioners, academics and HMIs. The questions were revised as a result of the comments received. A draft questionnaire was then developed. This was again circulated to the experts for comment. Included in the advice from the experts was a suggestion of reducing the amount of open-ended questions used in order to maximise the return rate achieved from busy managers. This advice was accepted, if somewhat reluctantly: thus the possibility of greater depth of response was sacrificed somewhat for very practical reasons. Another piece of advice related specifically to Q6 (about the impact on unit practice) was the suggestion that respondents should be given the possibility of providing different responses for each residential unit managed, rather than only giving an overall impression covering all units within the authority. The author subsequently regretted following that advice, since it made the question appear rather complex and potentially could have made analysis difficult. The final version of the questionnaire was prepared in both postal and electronic variants. The electronic version is provided for information in Appendix 5.

Writers on survey methods are agreed about the importance of piloting questionnaires. Gillham suggests that this should ideally be done with the researcher sitting opposite the respondents in order to use body language to gain an immediate understanding of reactions to the questions. However, that refinement was not available to the author for purely practical reasons and the next best approach was adopted: two external managers, recommended by contacts, agreed to pilot-test the

questionnaire and give feedback over the telephone. Piloting in this way showed that the questionnaire took about the estimated 15 minutes to complete and only very minor changes to wording and layout were made as a result of testing.

The population of external managers used for the survey was a postal mailing list created by the Scottish Institute for Residential Child Care (SIRCC). A letter was drafted and signed by a member of SIRCC staff (see Appendix 6) and this was mailed together with the questionnaire and a reply-paid envelope to a total of 75 external managers. This approach initially produced a very poor response and subsequently the author made personal contact with managers by telephone, a strategy which improved the response rate although it was very time-consuming. However, it was helpful to the managers contacted, since most preferred to receive the questionnaire by email.

It emerged that the database was out of date: there were incorrect entries, managers had moved to other posts and in some cases, where a number of managers in an authority had received the questionnaire, one had agreed to complete it on behalf of them all. When these corrections were applied to the original list, the available population turned out to be 41 managers. This of course is not the actual population of external managers in Scotland, since not all would have registered on SIRCC's mailing list. Another possible approach would have been to write to Directors of Social Work or Chief Social Work Officers for Scottish local authorities, requesting that the questionnaire be forwarded to appropriate staff. This approach

was rejected after discussion between author and supervisor, on the grounds that it added a step in the contact chain and would probably therefore result in considerable delay. The approach selected had the obvious disadvantages of not being wholly systematic in seeking to survey across Scotland and, possibly, also of not getting the official backing of senior managers, which may have affected the priority given to the task, particularly among a group who will probably have been the recipients of many questionnaires. On the other hand, it was felt that managers who had registered with SIRCC had shown interest in being engaged in discussions about residential care. The database had been used for consultations in the past, apparently with good results. The time of year - early November - was not ideal: managers contacted by phone spoke about meaning to respond but having been ground down by overflowing in-trays and other work demands. An impression of the pressures under which local authority social work managers currently work was also evident, with staff shortage, sickness, office relocation and also the feeling of compulsion to get things done before Christmas festivities began to erode time.

Completed questionnaires were mostly surface-mailed back to the author, though some were attached to emails. As these were received, the quantitative data were entered into SPSS software which was later used for analysis, while the responses to open-ended questions were typed into a simple table format and analysis was performed using the simple method of annotation by pencil and highlighter pens.

6.3 The findings of the survey

A total of 21 responses were finally received; using the more realistic estimate of the mailing list population, this return represents a 51% response rate. According to Gillham (ibid.), a response rate of more than 50%: ' ... has to be reckoned reasonably satisfactory' (p.48) and so this survey just reached this minimum level of representativeness. Another way of analysing the adequacy of the response is to consider how representative the eventual sample was of all 32 Scottish local authorities. Within the 21 responses, 18 authorities can be clearly identified, either because the respondent eschewed anonymity, or because of other identifiers provided, such as compliment slips. Thus, more than half, at least, of Scottish local authorities were represented in the responses to the questionnaire. Of course a higher response rate would have been preferred, but the nature of the questions was such that representativeness of the population is only one aspect of validity which is of relevance. The views of 21 external managers are in themselves valid in gaining a "snapshot" impression of the use of the indicators and identifying issues for consideration.
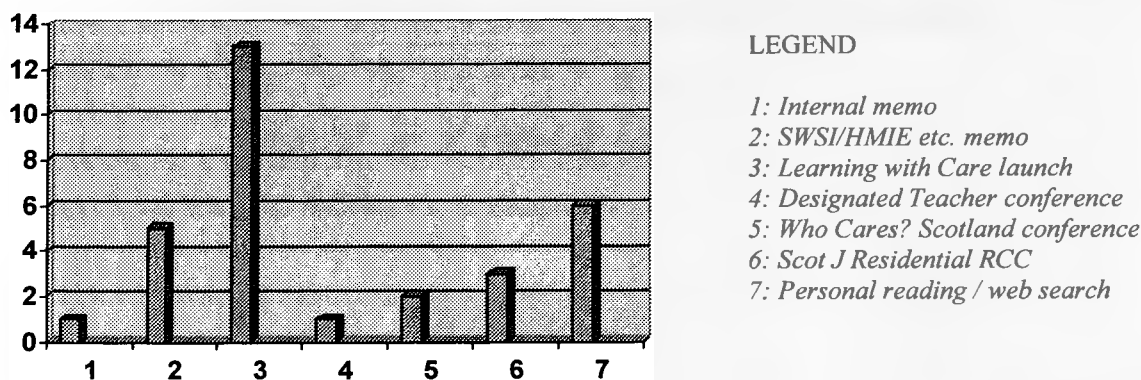
External managers of residential units are known by many different titles, though those most commonly used by the respondents in this survey were "Service Manager" or "Residential Service Manager". The number of units they managed varied from one to 21 (mean: 4.1; SD: 4.4). The total capacity of the units managed by the respondents varied from one to 139 children (mean: 25.4; SD: 30.2) and in

most cases the units were running at, or around, maximum capacity. In five cases the units managed were over capacity.

Most of the managers (18 of 21) said that they had been aware of the indicators before receiving the questionnaire, most commonly as a result of attending a launch event for the *Learning With Care – Improving Outcomes for Looked After Children Project* materials (13 of 21). Figure 5 below shows the full range of information sources by which the managers came to be aware of the existence of the self-evaluation indicators. The chart also shows clearly that the least common source of information was an internal authority memorandum and therefore the approach of one local authority quoted below appears to have been relatively unusual.

We had a series of mandatory two-day training courses with Education and Social Services staff including some foster carers that introduced the Learning with Care material to us all throughout our region in May/June 2004.

Figure 5: How managers were made aware of the indicators


LEGEND

1: Internal memo
2: SWSI/HMIE etc. memo
3: Learning with Care launch
4: Designated Teacher conference
5: Who Cares? Scotland conference
6: Scot J Residential RCC
7: Personal reading / web search

Question 6 was designed to elicit an impression of the impact that the indicators were beginning to make on residential care practice. The question invited respondents either to give a general view encompassing all of the authority's residential units (using column 10) or to give separate responses for individual units (using columns 1 to 9). This question was completed by 14 of the 21 managers and only one of these provided responses for different units, and in this case the data were simply transferred to column 10.

Figure 6 below presents a picture of the managers' impressions of the ways in which the indicators have impacted on practice. The main finding from the responses to this question is that just over half of the managers felt able to say that the indicators had begun to impact on practice in the units they were responsible for. Also, all of these respondents said that the indicators had led to general awareness-raising - 'Generally raising profile of education within units', as one manager described it - and most also said that they had been discussed at management meetings, used in development plans for the service or in unit development planning. Only five respondents said that the indicators had featured in staff training and six said that they had been used by units to audit their practice.

Figure 6: The impact of the indicators on practice

LEGEND

1: General awareness-raising
2: Discussed at management meetings
3: Used in staff training / development
4: Used in development plans for the service
5: Used in unit development planning
6: Used by units to audit practice
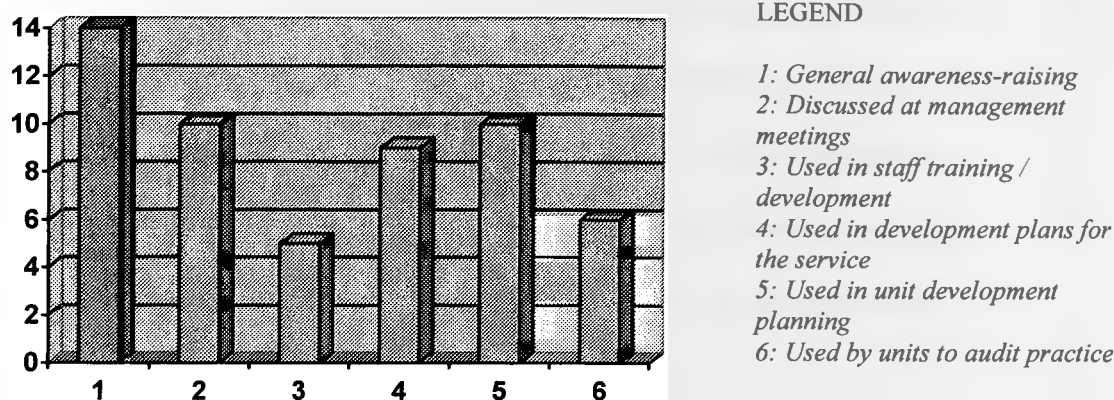
Question 8 asked whether the external managers' responses referred to: '(A) the draft indicators provided with the Learning with Care training materials or (B) those subsequently published as part of the Self-Evaluation Series by HMIE'. Only 13 of the 21 respondents completed this question, with seven ticking 'A' and six 'B'. It is unlikely that the eight non-responders simply missed this question and therefore it is possible that a proportion of the sample was uncertain about the distinction, and in fact this suspicion was confirmed in a telephone interview with one of the respondents. It is important to be cautious about generalising from the rather small sample of respondents to the question. However, if this finding could be extrapolated across Scotland, it would mean that roughly half of external managers of residential units are at least aware of the draft set, while the remainder have knowledge of the HMIE version, depending on the principal source of their information. It would not, of course, in reality be such a simple picture as some managers will be quite familiar with both sets of materials and have at least some understanding of their relationship

with each other. The existence of two "versions" is not necessarily a bad thing. The draft indicators are more elaborate and therefore may be of more practical help to residential staff, but the two sets are not in any sense contradictory. Nevertheless, the existence of two sets, launched in fairly close succession at events designed for slightly different constituencies, and without clear advice about the relationship between the versions, undoubtedly proved to be confusing, as one respondent explained.

> *The Project was "confused" for many people in terms of who was doing what. The idea of drafts is fine but should have been followed by final complete indicators and clear advice...*

Meanwhile another respondent suggested that there had been a problem in the method of distribution and the accessibility of the HMIE indicators.

> *The drafts were distributed but the final finished items were not too widely distributed in quick accessible format.*

The open-ended Question 9 invited respondents to: ' ... describe any plans you have to use the indicators', and the answers from the 11 managers who replied to this question gave some insight into the operational difficulties some were facing and also the different approaches which managers were considering in their plans for using the indicators. Clearly some authorities, although aware of the indicators, for various reasons had been unable to take steps to introduce them within the residential units they were responsible for, even where firm plans had been made, as the three quotations below indicate.

Currently being looked at. Unit manager off sick at present and will

return in [date given]...Will be discussed then.

Our residential service has gone through a period of

restructure...when the most difficult issues are resolved and systems

are in place, the learning with care will have a higher profile...

For a variety of reasons joint training for residential workers,

teachers, foster carers and social workers was not able to proceed as

planned last year. As a result the self-evaluation indicators have not

yet been used. It is planned to run training during 2005.

Broadly speaking, plans to introduce and make use of the indicators can be divided into two types: a more managerial approach on the one hand and a more developmental/collaborative style on the other, as illustrated by the exemplar comments reproduced in Table 13 below.

Table 13: Different approaches in managers' plans for using the indicators

'Managerial' Approach	'Developmental / Collaborative' Approach
End of term report will be provided by unit managers on residents' educational achievements, outcomes and resource requirements.	To have an initial set of discussions with residential managers, to cascade the indicators and their use into the units, with a view to them initially evaluating their levels of encouragement and provision of support. On completing their side to then look at setting up regular meetings with local schools to discuss the ongoing education of all young people who attend that school.

Question 10 was included to gain some indication of whether external managers were aware of the indicators having featured in inspections, either instigated by the authority or involving the Care Commission or HMIE. All 21

responded, with a third (seven) confirming the indicators had been referred to in inspections. The data unfortunately did not provide any additional information about how the indicators were being used by inspectors and whether authorities were using them in their preparations for inspections. However, this information does provide evidence to counter a suggestion made by a manager at the network meeting referred to earlier - and not contradicted by others present - that the indicators were not being referred to in authority inspections.

Question 11 was concerned with the managers' perceptions of the: 'likelihood that the indicators for carers will influence the development of an "educationally rich environment" within the units...' and Question 12 provided an opportunity for explanatory comment. Figure 8 below shows that most managers (17 of 20) were generally optimistic about the capacity of the indicators to influence development. Certainly none of the 20 managers who responded to this question felt that they were unlikely to influence development. One manager said in a follow-up interview that important positive features of the indicators were that they were down to earth and practical:

> *You can present them to people and say: look, here is a framework*
> *you can use to help you to be clear about what you should be doing.*

Figure 7: Likelihood that indicators will influence development of an educationally rich environment

LEGEND

1: Highly likely
2: Fairly likely
3: Neutral

N = 20
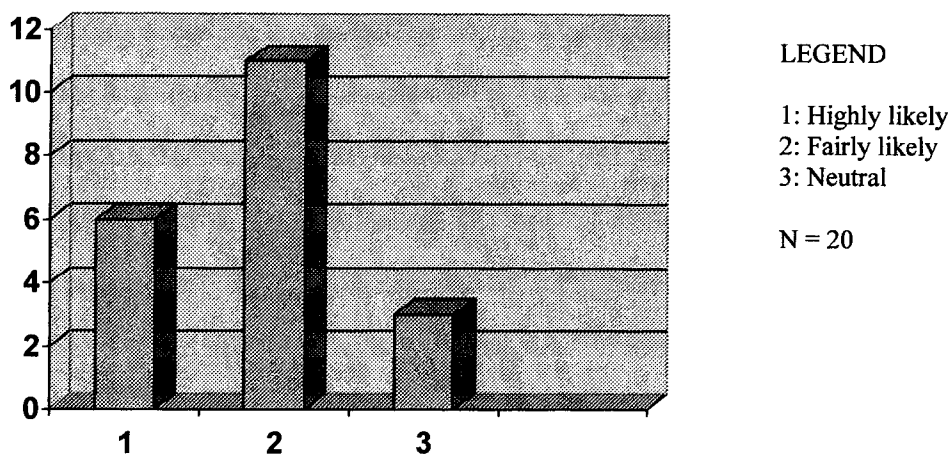
The explanatory comments indicate that managers who expected the indicators to influence development of an educationally rich environment elaborated their view in either a planning sense or a practical sense, as illustrated by the exemplar comments shown in Table 14 below.

Table 14: Managers' views of the expected use of indicators

Planning sense	Practical sense
Used in unit development plans plus liaison with pupil support workers. Specific resources committed. Staff training focussing on foster care.	Simple things like looking at educational materials/computer programmes/support for homework/quiet space/updating materials (books) and encouraging reading.

Despite being a minority view, the comment of one of the managers who ticked the "neutral" box highlights a concern about the availability of appropriate support from key stakeholders for going beyond providing information and so implementing the required changes to practice.

The indicators will be useful in terms of awareness raising. It is not
yet clear whether there will be the commitment to the LWC [Learning
With Care] initiative/training from the partners that would make a
real difference.

Question 13 was open-ended and asked: 'Are there any particular benefits to units in using the indicators?' Fifteen (of 21) respondents provided comments. Of these, seven expressed their value in terms of "focus": 'Staff have found them very helpful - clear and focussed - helpful to planning and evaluation'. Other benefits mentioned included the capacity to identify staff development needs and their potential use in advocacy, e.g.: 'Can be used to argue a case'. Perhaps unsurprisingly, some of the comments used the words 'measurable', 'targets' and 'goals' to describe benefits. In the same vein, the following quotation elaborates on the theme of using the indicators as a way of charting young people's progress. Significantly, the manager quoted highlights a connection between monitoring educational performance and developing better links with schools.

Better outcomes for young people in both formal education
qualifications and also the spin offs in self-esteem, confidence,
opportunities etc. Monitoring their performance in encouraging
young people's education will give staff immediate results for their
efforts. Better links with local schools to ensure goals are worked on
and shared. Numbers of young people without a proper education
provision should diminish. Ultimately it could help to provide
placements that offer young people the constant environment they
need in order to achieve their full potential.

Question 14 invited respondents to indicate the kind of help they might require
to 'encourage staff to make use of the indicators', and Question 15 asked about the
help residential staff themselves might need. In relation to meeting their own needs,
external managers mostly wanted more written information and advice, and
networking opportunities, with training appearing to be less of a priority. However,
all of these forms of support were thought to be important for care staff in the
residential units they managed.

6.4 Discussion

The relatively low rate of return of the questionnaires was a disappointment, but the
survey was nevertheless successful in providing an indication of the extent of
awareness of the indicators among a group of line managers who will inevitably be
influential in introducing them to unit managers and encouraging their use in
children's residential units.

Assuming the sample is representative of external managers throughout
Scotland - and there is no obvious reason to doubt that this is the case, even though it
is by definition a self-selected group - the various information sources have been
successful in drawing at least *external* managers' attention to the existence of the
indicators. However, the fact that the important sources have been external - mainly
through attendance at launch events and by personal reading - rather than from an

internal authority memo, leads to the tentative inference that there has not so far been any drive for implementation from very senior managers, despite the policy imperatives and ministerial concerns in relation to the education of looked after children and young people. This is worrying, particularly given the evidence of considerable variation among local authorities in the attainment of looked after children and young people. Some local authorities have given considerable emphasis to the development of policies and practice guidelines in relation to the education of looked after children and young people; it was not part of this survey to examine whether authorities had embedded the indicators – and the various other support materials produced by the project – into their existing protocols, though this would be an obvious extension of the present work.

It seems fair to conclude from this survey that the impact of the self-evaluation indicators, to date, in residential units has been rather limited, at least according to the views expressed by the external managers surveyed. It is probably realistic that the modal form of impact of the indicators was "general awareness-raising", and also fairly encouraging that their use in development planning was apparently in evidence. However, it is disappointing that they have not yet apparently begun to feature widely in staff training and development. This is particularly the case because the indicators were an integral part of an extensive set of materials designed to support efforts to improve service provision which, in turn, should improve the educational experience of all looked after children and young people.

There is clearly considerable work to be done in explaining the origins of the indicators and in providing a rationale for their use and for the existence of two versions. The fact that the more elaborate "draft" version was distributed with the project materials and then apparently made redundant following the distribution of the HMIE version is obviously potentially confusing, as some of the respondents commented. Also, the draft version was introduced at the project launch events which were well attended by social work delegates, whereas the HMIE version was "showcased" at events organised mainly for teachers and only at one conference attended mainly by social workers. Although the HMIE version was distributed in hard copy format to local authorities, it has been publicly available in the publications section of the HMIE web site for some time, but this may not be commonly visited by social work and social care staff. It is possible that one solution to the problem identified would be to abandon the draft indicators and simply promote the HMIE version. However, the evidence that carers find the greater detail in the draft set to be more immediately useful, and more practical, suggests that it would be unwise to abandon this version. Thus, there is work to be done in providing comprehensive information for managers about the rationale for the indicators and advice about their use, including suggestions about how the two sets could be used in a complementary way.

There is a distinct sense of helplessness for an author involved in the development of materials designed to support practice innovation and yet having virtually no control over their implementation. It is only slightly consoling to

understand that this observation relates more widely to the difficulties experienced by local government, which: ' ... provides a challenging setting in which to develop strategic approaches to service delivery' (Whipp, Kirkpatrick, & Kitchener, 2005, p.53). It is important to understand something of the challenges facing managers within social work departments, and external managers of residential units in particular. The process of chasing responses to the questionnaire by phone calls provided a useful insight into the organisational realities of some departments. Managers in one department could not respond because the office was in "turmoil" as a result of a physical move, and others clearly faced considerable difficulties in managing their desks as well as responding to the needs of the field. Whip et al. (ibid.) have adopted Mintzberg's five-fold structure of organisational forms to help explain the management of social services. They suggested that external managers closely resemble Mintzberg's third organisational form, the "professional bureaucracy". The characteristic of this form is the autonomy and discretion which managers employ, and which can lead to conflicts with organisational demands for standardisation. External managers are typically recruited from posts either identical to or very similar in nature to those of the people they manage, and this poses some difficulties for supervision and in implementing change.

> *The implication is that managers are unable to exert anything like the same degree of control over work as they might in a machine bureaucracy. They may need to rely extensively on influence or persuasion rather than direct orders. Indeed, attempts to be directive may be counter-productive as professionals have considerable ability to undermine decision making. (Whip et al., ibid., p.21)*

The effect of this organisational context is that inevitably the pace of implementation will vary considerably across Scotland, since different external managers prioritise differently and have different management styles, and the burdens on departments are differentially distributed as a result of variations in social and economic pressures. Although quality improvement is often considered to be a top-down, management-led activity, as the name implies self-evaluation indicators are designed to encourage peer-led review and development. External managers are perhaps not vital to the task of implementing the indicators within units. Nonetheless, the reality is that social work management is typically hierarchical and unit managers and their staffs are usually relatively dependent on external managers to provide information and give advice and direction in relation to strategic policy initiatives. They are also important in offering support and providing access to resources for staff training and project start-up grants.

What, then, should be done to influence developments? The experience of the manager who found the indicators to be down-to-earth and practical provides an encouraging starting point. There is, perhaps, a need for some concerted effort in three directions. The priority should be to ensure that there is general awareness of the indicators among senior managers, external service managers and all the other important stakeholders, including residential managers and staff, foster carers, teachers, social workers, and young people and their advocates. This general awareness-raising approach needs to be accompanied by more detailed information about how the training materials can be used along with the indicators as the basis for

efforts to make education more central in the provision of care. The advice should include explanations of the rationale for the indicators and, in the context of care settings, explicit advice about how the two sets can be used in a complementary way.

Secondly, there needs to be more direct support for residential unit teams and others engaged in using the indicators to audit existing practice and institute change. This might involve amending the existing training materials to provide more extensive materials which could be used by facilitators to encourage the use of the indicators in developmental/collaborative ways, and emphasising both planning and practical aspects. These materials could include illustrative examples of ways in which the indicators have already been successfully used. At the time of writing, in March 2005, there were indications from the Scottish Executive that funding would be available to revise the training materials and to make them available in DVD format. This would provide an ideal opportunity also to reconsider the operational approach, to give more emphasis to implementation.

Thirdly, there perhaps needs to be wider discussion with all interested parties, including young people's advocacy groups, about how the indicators should feature in both local authority internal inspection and external inspection by the statutory bodies.

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter has been concerned with analysing the findings of a survey conducted among external managers of residential units across Scotland with the explicit aims of gaining a general overview and identifying questions for deeper analysis in relation to the implementation of the self-evaluation indicators as an aid to developing practice towards the goal of making residential care a more educationally rich environment. The results of the survey suggest that external managers generally are aware of the existence of the indicators and that within some authorities there have been discussions about the locus of the indicators in relation to development planning but in most there has been only very limited related staff development activity.

The co-existence of draft and HMIE versions of the indicators has caused confusion and there is a need to provide support to the field in the form of clear advice about how both sets can be used in a complementary way within residential settings. It was beyond the scope of this survey to report on the true extent of the implementation of the indicators within residential units across Scotland and limited information on their impact came via external managers. However, the conclusion is that there is a need for more detailed information about the rationale and use of the indicators and for support for more direct action to encourage their use.

The capacity of the self-evaluation indicators to stimulate and support development in practice within residential units in support of efforts to create educationally rich environments was an important aim of this study and this theme is explored in detail in the following chapter.

Chapter 7: Reflections on the use of indicators in the residential context

7.1 Introduction

In the conclusion to Chapter 6 it was suggested that there is a need to provide support to the field in the form of clear advice about how both sets of indicators can be used in a complementary way within residential settings. The present chapter is concerned with discussing how the self-evaluation indicators could be used by managers of residential care units and their staffs. The main sources for this discussion are observations arising from discussions with external managers, residential unit managers and members of a Scottish professional forum on the education of looked after children and young people.

The chapter begins with a brief outline of the nature of residential care settings and the tasks undertaken by care staff. Section 7.3 contains a discussion of the use of the self-evaluation indicators in children's homes/units, leaning heavily on the analysis of discussions with various practitioners. This is followed by a section reflecting on the messages from the study specifically for the aims of making residential care settings educationally rich environments.

7.2 The residential care setting and task

Concern for the educational development of between eight and 10 children and young people is just one aspect of the complex and demanding job of the residential child care worker. This section discusses both the care setting and the job task to establish the context for discussions about the potential impact of the indicators.

The residential setting

There were 151 children's homes in Scotland in 2004, with 130 being managed by local authorities and the remainder operated by voluntary and private sector organisations (Scottish Executive, 2004b). There were 843 places available in total and the average number of places for children or young people per home was six. A total of 1,913 staff members were employed in children's homes, with a ratio of 2.4 full time equivalent posts per child.

Children's homes have changed a great deal physically in recent years. Having largely abandoned the large, imposing former country houses or suburban Victorian villas many years ago, local authorities began to use their own housing stock; typically these were two semi-detached houses or a terraced block with the internal dividing walls modified. These homes have the advantage of being in neighbourhoods similar to – and often close by – the children's own family homes. Disadvantages include cheap construction with thin partition walls, meaning that

sounds travel and the fabric does not readily withstand the general wear and tear associated with being home to vulnerable and angry young children and adolescents. Recently, there has been a trend to purchase and adapt villas in owner-occupier neighbourhoods. There has also been a greater interest in providing pleasant living environments, both through the general appearance of house and garden areas but also through the choice of soft furnishings and lighting. Modern equipment means that the single most obvious sign of the institution - the fire escape - is no longer an ugly metal protuberance on the side of the house. Single occupancy is regarded as the norm and children and young people are usually encouraged to personalise their bedrooms with posters and other decorations; in some cases a room will be entirely decorated to the taste of an individual child.

> *...young people do not naturally live in bedrooms in which everything is neat, orderly and in its place. Being able to scatter things around one's bedroom is an important feature of personal identity-development which allows a young person to claim personal space...independence is as much tied up with being free to make your own mess as it is with anything else, and 'belonging' to a home is dependent upon having a little piece of that home that is uniquely yours to mess up as you wish (Davison, 1995, p.138).*

National Care Standards have been developed to protect the rights of looked after children and young people in Scotland. Standard 5 of the National Care Standards: Care Homes for Children and Young People outlines a set of expectations for the living environment (Care Commission, 2003). For example:

1. Your care home is clean, looks attractive and is personalised (for example, it is furnished with a range of personal items and touches) and has good lighting, heating and ventilation.

8. If you cannot have moveable objects for reasons of safety or security, the care home will make your living space as attractive as possible in other ways, for example, using decoration, textiles and colour.

9. You have enough space for individual and group activities. This includes play space or quiet areas, if you want to study.

The residential carer's task

In 1992 the Department of Health in England and Wales commissioned a report into the selection, development and staffing of children's homes. The *Choosing with Care* report was based on evidence gathered from across the UK and in the Netherlands. The authors concluded that it was impossible to make simplistic statements about the type of person who would make the ideal care worker in a children's home, and quoted a submission from the British Psychological Society identifying some general characteristics:

> *...the ability to provide a role model for young people, and to demonstrate a wide range of life experiences...staff in a home should reflect a wide variety of experiences, interests and activities (Department of Health, 1992, p.32).*

Before discussing the role of a residential child care worker, it is worth noting that this role is a product of culture and "fashion". Approaches to residential care are quite different in, say, Japan. In the UK residential carers work in shifts and typically do not live on site. However, 20 years ago it was common for staff to "live-in". This practice was criticised as not maintaining appropriate distance from clients, though exactly this kind of close involvement is prized in foster care (Clough, 2000). In Scotland, as elsewhere in the UK, residential carers have historically been unqualified and had little training, and there has been high staff turnover (see Section 3.5). A major staff training programme is in place as a result of the requirements for carers to register with the Scottish Social Services Council[11]. Standard 7 of National Care Standard: care homes for children and young people, specifies that young people can expect that: 'staff are trained and re-accredited appropriately'. Training leads to Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) awarded by the SQA, which has set up a dedicated unit called Care Scotland because of the scale of the task. However, as was also reported in Section 3.5, the researchers Berridge & Bodie (1998) found only a weak relationship between quality of care and having qualified staff.

The task of caring for children and young people who have in common the fact that they are looked after, but are of varying ages and have individual personalities, is demanding socially, emotionally and intellectually. But exactly what is involved in carrying out the tasks required of a residential worker? Expressed in psychosocial

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[11] See www.sssc.uk.com

terms, the task involves creating an extra-familial living environment, responding to pain and pain-based behaviour and developing a sense of normality (Anglin, 2002). One research project grouped the tasks into five categories and these are shown with one illustrative example for each type in Table 15 below (Whitaker, Archer, & Hicks, 1998).

Table 15: The tasks of residential staff (from Whitaker et al., ibid., p.26, table 1)

Working with the group of young people	Working with individual young people	Surviving as a staff team which meets the needs of children	Working with and being managed by the Department	Working with others in the network
Responding to moods and shifts in mood and to crises.	Becoming a key worker to one or more individual young people; and being involved in work with other young people.	Being part of and helping to build and maintain a staff team with an agreed value base, purpose and function, through staff meetings, handovers, supervision and working closely with other staff.	Keeping and updating all paperwork relevant to the unit, so that it can be available at the reviews and planning meeting for each young person.	Establishing and maintaining relationships with local and special schools, education welfare officers, teachers, the education department and educational psychologists on behalf of every young person.

The term "key worker", referred to in the second column of the table, is commonly used in the UK to describe the role of a carer who takes particular responsibility for an individual child or young person in residential care. A key worker should attend planning and review meetings and school parents' evenings and ensure that a child's birthday is remembered. The key worker role could be undertaken by carers of various grades, including unit managers. Key workers have a "teaching role" in providing help and guidance, a "supporting role", for example, in being encouraging and setting boundaries, and a "co-ordinating role" in collaborating with other agencies and preparing reports (Connelly, 1993).

The teaching role aspect of the key worker's task is clearly crucial in the creation of an educationally rich environment and it is this aspect of the work that the self-evaluation indicators have been developed to support. This point is elaborated further in Section 7.4. Meanwhile the following section discusses the different ways in which the indicators can be used to support the development of a general regime of improvement in relation to education.

7.3 Using the indicators in the residential setting

The discussions in this section, and in Section 7.4 are based on reflections from a combination of relatively informal telephone conversations with three questionnaire respondents (i.e. external managers) who had indicated willingness to talk about their experiences with the indicators, tape-recorded interviews with three unit managers (two from the same unit) and more formalised discussion at two meetings of a Scottish network for practitioners concerned with the education of looked after children and young people. Of course it is important to be cautious in generalising from such an inevitably biased sample, but generalisability was not the main aim of the exercise. The purpose was – in the true spirit of the action research approach - to listen to experienced practitioners who had at least some working knowledge of the indicators, to reflect on the ideas emerging and to make connections with previous research.

These discussions have identified at least four ways in which the self-evaluation indicators can be used. These different aspects are: monitoring practice; collaborative working; empowering staff; and staff development. Each of these aspects is now discussed more fully.

Monitoring practice

The fear that residential staff might be unfamiliar with the practice of reviewing provision in the way that this has become embedded within the culture of schools as a result of the ubiquity of the *How Good is Our School* (HGIOS) materials proved to be relatively unfounded, at least in the views of my collaborators. In fact residential establishments are very used to reviewing their practice in writing unit development plans and in preparing for external inspection by the Care Commission. The indicators appear to provide, as one manager put it, a 'down to earth, user-friendly framework' describing good practice which can be put in place and monitored. In this respect they do seem to offer support in relation to two of the five factors which Berridge and Brodie (1998) found to be related to quality of care, i.e. the extent to which the head of home is able to able to state specific objectives for the home and whether the managers can keep to the main objectives (see Section 3.5). One external manager interviewed who had introduced the indicators as part of training on learning with care said that the units in her authority had pinned up the indicators on a wall in full view of all staff and children as a constant reminder of the importance of planning for education.

Collaborative working

Different organisational structures, professional identities, value positions and understandings of issues, and resource constraints, have long conspired to make collaboration in support of disadvantaged children and young people a difficult prospect (Kendrick, Simpson, & Mapstone, 1996). The placement of indicators for local authority managers, schools and carers within a single manual helps to highlight the importance of collaboration. One simple consequence of this is that the different groups can also see each other's quality statements. These seem to have been positive features of the materials, well received by the managers interviewed. For example, the key question, 'How effective are your procedures for linking with schools and other agencies to support the educational achievement of looked after children and young people' (HM Inspectorate of Education, 2003, p.22), makes very explicit the expectation of good collaboration. The management team in one residential unit said they felt that the existence of the indicators - in schools as well as in care settings - had helped them to become more actively involved in educational planning, whereas they had previously felt peripheral to discussions and were typically contacted only when problems occurred. Now they were routinely involved in educational planning meetings in the children's schools and also at the local authority's Joint Assessment Team (JAT) meetings, whereas previously only external managers or senior social workers would have attended.

One important outcome of the involvement with schools, according to the same managers, had been better understanding in relation to the use of exclusion of pupils: previously staff had felt 'abused' by schools and were quite used to getting phone calls at short notice to collect a child who was causing problems, whereas such reactive approaches had ended as a result of reaching prior agreements about using a range of possible options, such as isolating the child in school, involving the home-school link teacher only using exclusion as a last resort, and always with homework provided.

Another outcome has been an improvement in the quality of the schools' reports for children's reviews. These were now more likely to be detailed and specific. This is very encouraging, given the finding by Francis, Thomson & Mills (1996) that the emphasis at child care reviews tended to be on the child's behaviour and attendance (see Section 3.2). The managers, however, said that they would like to be involved routinely in discussions about a child's personal education plan (PEP) or individualised educational programme (IEPs), where learning difficulties have been identified. Another benefit mentioned was an increased understanding on the part of teachers of the circumstances of accommodated young people.

> *The contact that we have with teachers and with guidance teachers in particular... you find them talking more about the family background...they seem to be taking more of an interest. They attend young people's reviews...it used to be before that the teacher would attend and give the school report, say what they had to say and then leave.*

Empowering staff

The concept of empowerment is particularly important within the context of life in residential care settings. It belongs to a more radical agenda in respect of the values which underpin social care practice (Braye & Preston-Shoot, 1995). The premise of this value base is that life chances are determined by an individual's position within society and that inequality exists in the relative power held by different groups. Braye & Preston-Shoot argue that the implications for social care of adopting empowerment as a significant value are profound. Empowerment in this context is not about individuals exercising their rights, but about groups of people who have traditionally had limited power to influence and control the direction of their lives or work taking on more responsibility.

> *Vital to social care practice is an understanding of the impact of personal experience, and an awareness of how it affects orientation within the professional value system, requiring workers to learn, unlearn or relearn, and leading them to prioritize certain values over others. (Braye & Preston-Shoot, ibid., p. 54)*

Thus workers who are themselves lacking in confidence, inhibited or oppressed, are not well placed emotionally and practically to foster an atmosphere in which children and young people are encouraged to express opinions, make decisions, share responsibilities and develop strengths. In more positive terms, the researchers Sinclair and Gibbs (1998) found empowerment of heads of home to be significantly correlated with measures of what they termed "goodhome", thus apparently

confirming the importance of this concept in the value base of quality residential care.

Discussions with managers and other conllaborators identified three ways in which the indicators can help care staff to feel and become more empowered within the specific context of supporting children and young people in their educational development. Firstly, the detailed statements provided a vocabulary of educational issues which helped staff to feel more confident in having discussions with class teachers, guidance teachers and to become involved in care plan review meetings. Secondly, it was reassuring for staff to see that the indicators identified clear responsibilities for other parties in the corporate parent relationship; thus they were aware that expectations had been identified for local authority senior managers and schools. This helped carers to feel less isolated, though of course it was not a guarantee that other parties would take appropriate action. In one unit which had piloted the use of the indicators, providing an internet connection which would allow children and young people to use their school "log-on" facilities in safety had been highlighted in the original audit. When the unit was visited two years later this facility had still not been provided by the local authority, to the intense frustration of staff and young people. In contrast to this example, a third form of empowerment is the capacity for "leverage", putting pressure on managers to provide resources. An external manager gave the example of a unit being given resources to set up a quiet room for study purposes as a result of identifying the need during completion of the audit.

Staff development

The author provided a mentoring role for one of the units involved in the pilot-testing of the indicators and was able to observe that completion of the audit highlighted a need for staff development. The results of the survey discussed in Chapter 6 indicated that little staff development activity has so far been undertaken. Discussions with managers also confirmed awareness of the need for staff development but limited training activity specifically related to education. This is due in part to the considerable emphasis being given to helping unqualified staff to gain SVQs in care to meet registration requirements. However, discussions also provided anecdotal evidence of positive spin-offs from SVQ training: staff involved in their own education may become more attuned to supporting young people in studies and may feel more confident in offering direct help. Examples were also given of young people providing assistance to staff, particularly in relation to IT skills.

7.4 Reflections on the educationally rich environment

Two of the three research questions identified at the outset of this work were specifically concerned with the educational environment of residential child care establishments: What are the conditions which are likely to make residential units more "educationally rich" places for children and young people to live in? How can

self-evaluation indicators contribute to improving the "richness" of the educational environment in residential child care settings? Reflecting on the experience of this work suggests that these questions can be answered as follows. Firstly, the self-evaluation indicators themselves make a significant contribution to defining what constitutes an educationally rich environment. Secondly, there is support in previous research (Berridge and Brodie, 1998) for a view that using the indicators to identify clear objectives and acting on them will lead to improvements in the quality of support for education. Thirdly, the evidence from the present study suggests that external managers and unit managers are positive about the indicators and have confidence in their value: 'We have agreed what we are going to do and there is a live agenda', as one manager commented. Fourthly, there is a need for staff development to raise awareness about good practice in taking more direct action within residential units to support the education of the children and young people.

Direct action goes beyond effective liaison with schools and sees possibilities for the home itself as an educational resource. Managers with whom this aspect of residential practice was discussed were enthusiastic about developing this aspect of their role and talked about their own efforts in establishing unit book collections, encouraging use of public libraries, organising "educational" trips and providing private tutors for older children. However, they also spoke about needing reassurance that they were interpreting the indicators correctly, requiring help and resources to kick-start ideas and about lacking confidence to engage directly in supporting children's education. Although it was beyond the scope of this study to enquire about

examples of direct educational activities carried out by residential care staff, the external managers and unit managers involved in discussion seemed uninformed about resources specifically designed to support the education of looked after children and young people. For example, *The Who Cares? Trust* has an education department which has produced a range of materials aimed at children and young people and workers. Examples are the Right to Read project (The Who Cares? Trust, 2001) and CareZone[12], which provides secure on-line services for looked after children and young people (The Who Cares? Trust, 2003).

7.5 Conclusion

Discussions with both external managers and unit managers have suggested that the self-evaluation indicators have been well received. Four different ways in which they are used have been identified: monitoring practice within the home/unit; assessing the quality of collaborative working, particularly with schools; empowering managers in negotiations with external managers and care staff in dealings with schools; and identifying staff development needs. However, there is more work to be done, particularly in developing staff confidence in providing direct support for young people in relation to their education and providing information about useful educational resources specifically designed for young people and their carers.

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[12] See www.carezonecommunity.org.uk

These issues are examined now in the final chapter in the broader contexts of the implications of this thesis for the development of policy, and practice and for further research in relation to improving the educational experiences and attainments of looked after children and young people.

Chapter 8: Conclusions

8.1 Introduction

The previous seven chapters have told the story of an action research study which developed in successive stages over a number of years. The story started in 1988 when the author first came across Sonia Jackson's influential monograph on *The education of children in care*. This work made a lasting impression on a former teacher by then working in social care training.

No action research study is ever truly complete and the work reported in this thesis is therefore no exception. The conclusions are presented cautiously because there is much work still to be done. Nevertheless, it is important to draw this stage of the work to a dignified close and to identify the contributions of the research to the understanding of contemporary social welfare policy and practice, and to reflect on the outcomes and the author's personal experience. Consequently this chapter considers the implications of the findings of the study for policy makers and practitioners and for possible further research, and also reflects on the experience of preparing a doctoral thesis for the author's own continuing professional development.

8.2 Implications for social and educational policy

The social policy context was introduced in Chapter 2. The poor attainment of most looked after children and young people, high rates of exclusion from school, low rates of progression to higher education and other educational difficulties discussed in Chapter 3 present significant challenges for society. The fact that there has so far been no apparent progress towards meeting the relevant social justice targets is a particular embarrassment in Scotland where there have been important improvements in other aspects of education, such as the increase in participation in post-school education and progress towards greater inclusion in mainstream schooling. There are some positive signs, however. The improvements in attainment noticed in at least some residential schools and the higher attainment among fostered children and young people suggest that stability and attention to schooling can make a difference, even if pre-care experiences are very difficult to overcome[13]. The widespread awareness of the importance of education among social work and social care practitioners – including the existence of an informal, multi-agency network of practitioners concerned with the education of looked after children and young people in Scotland – represents progress, similar to the changes in attitude and practice reported by Sinclair and Gibbs (1998) in England. This is a good basis for further work.

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[13] As this work was drawing to a close, the author was given sight of a draft report from Glasgow City Council which appeared to show that children looked after by relative carers (e.g. grandparents) had similar attainments to those in foster care, strengthening the stability argument but also identifying another area for further research.

However, the statistics showing that Standard Grade/Level 3 results of looked after young people vary considerably between local authorities should make uncomfortable reading for politicians and local government senior managers, although the geographical variation does at least indicate that all authorities should be capable of meeting the attainment levels of the best. A close examination of the policies and practices of some sample local authorities achieving different levels of attainment among their looked after children and young people would make an interesting study.

However, change takes time. It is important for politicians to understand that attainment will not improve simply because £16m has been provided by the Scottish Executive. Improvement requires attitude change, changes to practice and staff training in both residential child care units and schools. But it is important to recognise progress. It seems impossible to believe that few, in any, social workers would now rank educational issues and the promotion of talents among looked after children and young people bottom of a list of priorities, or to view self-esteem and education as unrelated, as the study by Aldgate et al. (1993) discussed in Chapter 3 found.

The study reported in this thesis was also set within the broader context of the self-evaluation approach to quality improvement. Although it was beyond the boundaries of the present work systematically to observe staff using the indicators on a large scale, the findings from pilot-testing and discussions with external and unit

managers were encouraging. As in schools, the culture of policy and practice review is now well established in residential child care settings and the self-evaluation indicators for carers appear capable of making an important contribution to improving the quality of practice in relation to education. There are two caveats though. Residential units need considerable encouragement from external managers to make use of the indicators a priority and staff also need to feel confident that they will receive support and the resources necessary to implement change arising from conducting audits of their practice. They probably also need more direct help to learn from the good practice experience of others.

Another aspect of social policy referred to in Chapter 2 was inter-agency collaboration. It was also not part of this study to examine collaborative working specifically, but the positive messages from managers who discussed their experience of using the indicators suggests that these have potential for contributing towards making significant improvements in relations between residential child care units and schools. This is encouraging, particularly given the concerns expressed in the report *For Scotland's Children* which identified a clearer vision of children's services working together, a shared commitment to improve services, clarity about roles and responsibilities and transparency about sharing information as key characteristics in the aim towards tackling social exclusion (Scottish Executive, 2001c).

8.3 Contribution of this study

The contribution of this study to the canon of research within the context of the education of looked after children and young people lies in five particular areas. Firstly, in relation to the methodology, the work shows the significant possibilities of the action research approach for the practitioner-researcher. The two key features of the cyclical nature of the work and the emphasis on the participation of fellow-professionals (or other important stakeholders) provide a powerful basis for examining practice within a framework of past research and current policy.

Secondly, the extensive review of the literature, while telling a mainly depressing story of deficits and barriers in relation to the aspirations and attainment of children and young people in local authority care, also shows the emergence of more encouraging messages in recent research. These good messages should begin to inform education and social care practice, particularly if they can be used effectively in the training of managers, carers and teachers.

Thirdly, the analyses of the official statistics on attainment and exclusion from school have identified the stark reality of the situation in relation to the participation in education and the attainments of looked after children and young people in Scotland. They have identified the variation in achievement in different local authorities and the apparent higher achievement of children looked after in foster care settings and in residential schools. These analyses have also highlighted the

need to avoid stigmatising looked after children and young people as lacking in aspirations to achieve and as low achievers. Together, these findings suggest hope for the future, and they also highlight the need for researchers to present a fuller picture of the strengths of children and young people in local authority care.

Fourthly, the study suggests that the self-evaluation indicators which were developed and field-tested as part of the work can play an important part in developing social care practice. The indicators represent a detailed description of the conditions required for an educationally rich care environment, and because they help to clarify the aims of care and the roles of carers, they can contribute significantly to enhancing the quality of care provision. The study shows, however, that managers and carers require considerable additional support and direct assistance to implement the indicators and to institute the consequent changes to unit policy and practice.

Finally, the study has also identified gaps in knowledge and understanding, and therefore some fruitful lines of future enquiry which are identified in the following section.

8.4 Implications for further research

In common with all research studies, the present work has inevitably been highly selective in its focus, but nevertheless it has pointed the way towards possibilities for further investigation. A number of particular lines of inquiry have emerged for further consideration.

1. The apparent likelihood of funding imminently becoming available from the Scottish Executive to update the training materials from the *Learning With Care – Improving Outcomes for Looked After Children Project* and make them available through the more accessible medium of DVD, provides an excellent opportunity to conduct an evaluation of ensuing training activity across Scotland, with a view to meeting the support requirements of trainers.

2. A more intensive observational study of the role of the self-evaluation indicators for carers leading to the development of educationally rich environments in residential child care units is an obvious development of the present work, possibly adapting the methodology of Berridge (1985) and Berridge and Brodie (1998) in relation to the examination of quality care and progressing from their findings, and those of Sinclair and Gibbs (1998), to focus more specifically on educational issues. Dissemination of examples of ways in which using the indicators has led to positive outcomes in relation to education in the

broadest sense for children and young people would make a useful contribution to social care practice.

3. The work discussed in this thesis was concerned only with the residential unit setting, but the indicators were also designed with foster care settings in mind, and therefore a study of their use by foster carers would also be interesting. Another set of studies would involve evaluating the use of the parallel indicators for local authority senior managers and those written for schools. There might also be merit in encouraging and evaluating collaborative auditing by units and schools within what are termed "local learning communities", groupings of schools and related bodies which have formed loose partnerships to collaborate in staff development and other learning activities for children and staff. Interdisciplinary training in the use of the indicators, followed up by mentoring during an implementation phase, perhaps piloted in one local authority, would make an interesting study.

4. The present study was concerned with examining the practice conditions likely to lead to improvements in the educational attainment of looked after children and young people. However, there is an obvious need to look more directly at the day-to-day educational experience of children and young people in public care. In particular, it would be important to describe in detail the conditions that make for good outcomes. Such a study might involve conducting a more

anthropological type of study, similar to David Berridge's approach of living in residential units for a week, or a more longitudinal study, following the experiences of individual children and young people of different ages and in different settings, focussing closely on educational and care planning and review, and on educational and cultural activities.

5. A related study follows from the differential attainments of looked after children in different care settings reported in Chapter 3 (i.e. living with parents, living with relative cares and foster carers, in different kinds of accommodation). There is a need to examine closely the experiences of these different groups of looked after children and young people over a significant period of time, ideally over a number of years.

6. Another related study would examine the relative contributions of particular educational support arrangements, including the provision of home-link teachers, private tutors, mentors and summer schools. In relation to the latter, the University of Strathclyde provides a summer school for pupils between the third and fourth years of secondary schooling who are regarded by their teachers as being capable of getting at least five good Standard Grade passes but who appear to be underperforming. The aim of the summer school is to provide additional support and encouragement to disadvantaged young people to access higher education. A longitudinal study of looked after young

people who attended Summer Academy @ Strathclyde[14] would make a valuable contribution to understanding the aspirations and support needs of this group. The proposed study would be informed by the work of Sonia Jackson and colleagues at the Thomas Corum Research Unit in the Institute of Education, University of London, who have been following three successive groups of young people entering higher education from a background in local authority care (Jackson, Ajayi, & Quigley, 2003). Crucially the Jackson *et al.* report argues that higher education institutions have an important role in raising the aspirations of young people in public care and encouraging them to apply to study.

7. The reported attainments of care leavers appear to vary considerably between local authorities in Scotland and therefore an examination of the relevant policies and practices of sample authorities with a view to identifying the optimum conditions for success is another potential study.

8. Finally, the measures of attainment discussed in Section 3.3 are limited to 5-14 attainment outcomes and National Qualifications. It would be interesting to examine and report the extent to which carers and teachers are able to provide supportive conditions for helping looked after children and young people to develop the hard and soft skills valued by employers.

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[14] See: www.strath.ac.uk/summeracadeny

8.5 Implications for professional practice

There are at least three implications for practice in residential child care. Firstly, the survey provided evidence that external managers were, in general, aware of the existence of the indicators but that the required training to support implementation in residential units has probably not yet taken place in most parts of Scotland. The indicators were introduced at launch events, distributed in hard-copy format to local authorities and published on the HMIE web site. Arguably this is not sufficient. Some direction from the Executive is probably needed to require local authorities to make implementation a high priority. This should be supported by training for managers, making use of the positive experience of units who have already made some progress.

Secondly, the point made in Chapter 7 about the potential value of the indicators in helping to identify clear objectives for education in unit development plans should be emphasised in communications with external managers and in training for unit staffs.

Thirdly, as was also discussed in Chapter 7, there is a need to inform unit staffs about educational resource materials specifically designed for use with looked after children and young people. An emphasis should probably be given to advising staff about ways of providing direct help for older children as a result of the finding by Ritchie (2003) that older young people were more variable in their experiences of

support. This raises a more fundamental point about the extent to which residential care staffs are prepared in terms of education and personal confidence to provide a direct, supportive role in helping children, particularly older children, with their learning. Recent experience of the Scottish Institute for Residential Child Care suggests that a significant proportion of applicants for HNC-level training, required in order to register with the new Social Services Council, have an insufficient level of basic education to allow them to engage satisfactorily with courses (personal communication). This is likely to impact on the ability of staff to feel confident in assuming a teaching role. On the other hand, staff successfully engaged in their own studies may feel more confident in supporting young people – and indeed may receive support and practical help from young people, in ways that many parents have experienced.

8.6 Reflections on personal professional development

Author's note: unlike all of the foregoing parts of this thesis which have been written in the more formal third person, this section uses the first person. The reason for this shift in voice is quite simple: it feels distinctly awkward in a section which consists entirely of reflections on the process of research and preparation of a thesis to refer to myself continually as 'the author'.

Gillie Bolton makes the point that reflecting on practice is more than just examining personal experience.

> *...it is located in the political and social structures which are increasingly hemming professionals in. Their right to make moral and professional judgements is being eroded daily; they are being reduced to technicians, their skills to mere technical competencies. In order to retain political and social awareness and activity, professional development work needs to be rooted in the public and the political as well as the private and the professional (Bolton, 2001, p.3).*

I have never felt at any point in working on this study that I was reduced to being a technician but I understand the danger Bolton warns against. This section is therefore concerned with answering the question: 'What useful professional and personal learning has resulted from doing the work discussed in this thesis?' The most effective way of answering this question is to consider it in relation to the three dimensions of professional development which were introduced in Section 1.3:

- the relevance to the professional community, particularly residential staffs;
- the author's own professional development;
- relevance in terms of the requirements of a professional doctorate.

Relevance to the professional community

It is very clear that the work is highly relevant to the development of local authority policy in relation to managing children's homes/units and to good practice in

residential child care, and especially in staff training. There is a need for additional

briefing of external managers on the use of the self-evaluation indicators and this can

probably be done efficiently by providing additional documentation. Managers of

residential units and their staffs require more support and training to help them to use

the indicators effectively to improve the educational richness of the living

environment. It is also important to exchange good experiences of using the

indicators, and to provide information about things carers can do to support

education, including using resources from organisations like The Who Cares? Trust.

There are also inevitably implications for educationists and teachers collaborating

with social workers and carers but these are more properly the focus of another

study.

Mindful of Bolton's point about the importance of political and social

awareness for effective professional development, it seems to me that there are two

important personal revelations in this work. In the political sphere, the Scottish

Executive's strategy for social justice, expressed in the report *Social Justice: a*

Scotland where Everyone Matters (Scottish Executive, 1999), provides the policy

framework to support the work discussed in my thesis. There is a danger that the

underpinning philosophy rooted in overcoming poverty - including the poverty of

poor education - could be reduced to a concern for meeting attainment targets, and

that the equally important aspects of improving the quality of the learning

environment and emphasising the development of softer skills in confidence,

articulacy and inquiry are given lower priority.

The second point is the importance of listening to professional colleagues, even where these are relatively inexperienced, such as students – and looked after children and young people themselves - since the different perspectives resulting from such interchanges lead to better understanding of the substantive issues.

My own professional development

Bolton suggests that in order to be able to reflect fruitfully on practice: '...the practitioner has to be reflexive as well as reflective' (ibib., p.7).

> *Being reflexive is focusing close attention upon one's own actions,*
> *thoughts and feelings and their effects; being reflective is looking at*
> *the whole scenario: other people, the situation and place, and so on.*
> *(ibid, p.7)*

At a purely personal level, it has been very instructive to begin to understand the amazing power of action research as an approach which has allowed me to bring together, in a meaningful way, aspects of my teaching, research and professional consultancy. Although I kept careful notes related to the key tasks, I now regret not having kept a long-term research diary. I was not persuaded of the value of such a diary but, in omission, I now see its potential power in assisting the reflexive process.

Learning Outcome (ix) of the Ed.D. programme, which was quoted in Section 1.3, seems to me to sum up the main purpose of a thesis, i.e. to demonstrate the ability to communicate ideas and conclusions effectively to specialised and non-specialised audiences. In other words, a thesis is not written simply for the supervisor

and the examiners - although their opinions and judgements are very important - but for a wider community of interest. The task is to write accurately with authority and in an accessible way. It is for others to judge whether I have achieved these requirements. I have already had considerable experience of academic writing, as a result of completing a master's dissertation, and having written book chapters, research reports and papers and other materials for professional audiences. However, this thesis is the largest single work I have attempted and the discipline of trying to tell the story of professional actions while remaining focused and critical has been an extremely challenging, though very valuable, experience.

The requirements of a professional doctorate

A professional doctorate is supposed to be a measure of intellectual autonomy and facility in research skills. The analysis of research data and discussion of issues and ideas contained in this thesis are presented for peer review as evidence of intellectual autonomy. In more practical respects, as well as developing my understanding of the craft skills associated with action research I have also become more skilled in searching for literature using on-line databases and in using specific software packages. The references in this thesis were compiled using the "cite while you write" facility in Endnote ™, and I learned the rudiments of the SPSS ™ package while analysing the questionnaire data reported in Chapter 6. In connection with my involvement in another research project, quite separate from this thesis, I have learned to use the qualitative analysis package N6 ™; although too late - and perhaps

unnecessary - for use in analysing the interview data used here, this new knowledge will be valuable in progressing future work related to the thesis.

It never fails to amaze me how much one can learn from listening to the perspectives of others, particularly those of professionals from outside my own milieu. And so my understanding of the issues in relation to the education of looked after children and young people have been improved by talking to social workers and carers, civil servants and politicians. I did not talk directly to young people in connection with my work specifically for this thesis, for ethical reasons, preferring to rely on secondary sources, though the perspective of young people is a crucial one. Thus it seems appropriate to give the last word in reflection to a looked after young person:

> *In the end I left school with no qualifications and, even worse, with no confidence in my ability to learn. I think both the education and social work system have denied me the opportunity to fulfil my dreams. I wish I could go through the education system again but on my terms, not feeling powerless like the first time (Connelly et al., 2003, p.4).*

8.7 Conclusion

This final chapter of the thesis has summarised the contribution of the work to the canon of research in the area and the implications of the work for social welfare and educational policy, and concluded that self-evaluation indicators can make a positive

contribution to the development of educationally rich environments in residential child care units. Three implications for residential child care practice were identified in particular: the need to give higher priority to providing information and training related to the use of the indicators; the value of the indicators for identifying key objectives for unit development plans; and the need to provide help for staff in relation to supporting particularly older young people with their studies. A number of avenues for further research were suggested, including carrying out a more intensive observational study of the role of the indicators for carers in leading to the development of educationally rich care environments and the need to focus more closely on the educational experiences of looked after children and young people themselves. Finally, the chapter has reflected on the whole experience from the three perspectives of relevance to the professional community, relevance for personal professional development and the requirements of a professional doctorate and confirmed, among other things, the significance of the cyclical and participative elements of action research. So much has been learned as a result of completing this thesis, but the work needed to make significant improvements in the educational experience and attainment of looked after children and young people in Scotland has really only just begun.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: "APD" Outline

Title: Education of Young People who are 'Looked After' by Local Authorities

Module Leader: Graham Connelly

Rationale

'...children looked after away from home are at a particular educational disadvantage. In comparison with their peers they tend to be behind in their attainments, leave school with fewer qualifications and are more at risk of being excluded from school. ... Education has the potential to provide all looked after children with an opportunity to improve their life chances and to help them participate fully in society.'

(from the Foreword to the Learning With Care report, 2001)

About 11,000 children in Scotland are 'looked after,' half of these in settings away from their own homes, such as foster care, residential schools and children's homes. Research suggests that educational considerations are often given low priority when placing children in care. The aims of this module are to examine the needs of looked after young people, and to consider the implications for schools and good practice in teaching.

The topics covered will include:

The characteristics and experiences of young people looked after
Recent research, legislation and the policy context
The messages for inter-agency and inter-professional collaboration;
The implications for school, teachers and carers
Visits to residential establishments and guest speakers

'My APD classes were amongst the most interesting and informative of the PGCE course. I learned many practical skills from this course and feel that it is essential for all beginning teachers to be aware of the issues surrounding looked after young people.' (Comment in evaluation from previous student)

Prescribed texts

Borland, M., Pearson, C., Hill, M., Tisdall, K. and Bloomfield, I. (1998). *Education and care away from home.* Edinburgh: SCRE.
www.scre.ac.uk/pdf/ed_care.pdf
Connelly, G., McKay, E., and O'Hagan, P. (2003). *Learning with Care: information for carers, social workers and teachers concerning the education of looked after children and young people.* Glasgow: University of Strathclyde/HMIE/SWSI.
www.hmie.gov.uk/documents/publication/5679text.pdf
HM Inspectors of Schools and the Social Work Services Inspectorate (2001). *Learning with care: the education of children looked after away from home by local authorities.* Edinburgh: Scottish Executive. www.scotland.gov.uk/library3/education/lacr-00.asp

Appendix 2: Questionnaire for reviewers

Learning with Care Project

Describing an educationally rich environment: an audit tool

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR REVIEWERS

Name: _____   Job Title: _____

Contact tel: _____   email: _____

1. What is your overall impression of this audit tool? In other words, do you feel that it would be helpful to a unit team (and young people) for evaluating provision and pinpointing needs?

2. In general, is the principle of providing descriptions to help explicate the key features sound?

3. Do you feel that the proposed use of the HMIE four-point scale is likely to prove successful?

4. Is the introductory text satisfactory? If not, what requires to be changed, or added?

5. Please feel free to comment on specific key features. (You can do this by writing notes in the comment column of the audit tool.)

Thank you for the time you have given to this task, which is very much appreciated. I would be grateful if you would return your completed questionnaire (and annotated audit tool, if appropriate) in the envelope provided by Friday 24th May.

Graham Connelly (0141 950 3131; g.connelly@strath.ac.uk)

Appendix 3: Quality Indicators for Carers

The Learning with Care report makes clear that where children are removed from their own homes there is a statutory duty to ensure that the care they experience is better than they were previously receiving. In particular, there should be good provision for learning and attainment because of the potential of education to improve life chances and help to overcome disadvantage. The phrase, *an educationally rich environment* is used to describe a residential unit or foster placement where a child or young person's learning and progress in pre-school education, school or college are given high priority. It is impossible to be wholly definitive about what constitutes an educationally rich care environment but it seems likely to include a combination of factors, such as interested, encouraging carers, effective collaboration between the educational establishment and the child's placement, good access to educational resources, and creative use of opportunities within the unit/placement and community.

The table below provides descriptions of quality indicators indicative of an educationally rich environment. It is intended that carers should use the table as an audit tool to evaluate their provision, and highlight both strengths and areas for improvement. Some of these indicators may not be applicable in particular contexts or circumstances, and it is desirable that additional indicators should be added according to local need. The indicators are drawn from four sources: the Learning with Care report (HM Inspectors of Schools and Social Work Services Inspectorate, 2001); National Care Standards (Scottish Executive, 2002); consultations conducted as part of the Learning with Care: Improved Outcomes for Looked after Children project funded by the Scottish Executive; and a wide range of research findings on the education of looked after children and young people.

The table follows an approach similar to that used by teachers to evaluate the ethos and learning environment of schools. The quality indicators can be evaluated against the four levels of performance used by HMI in inspections. These are:

Level

4	very good	- major strengths
3	good	- strengths outweigh weaknesses
2	fair	- some important weaknesses
1	unsatisfactory	- major weaknesses

Evaluating the educational environment

This audit tool has been designed to allow staff teams to evaluate the educational environment of a children's home or other residential unit, and social workers, or foster or relative carers to evaluate the educational environment of a family placement. Most of the quality indicators are applicable across all settings. The term 'carer' is used as a generic term to describe residential care staff, foster carers and relative carers.

It is important to allocate time for reflection and discussion. This could be done during a series of staff meetings, between foster/relative carers and their link social worker, or at a specific development event. Encourage children and young people to participate in the evaluation. If possible, involve other key people such as parents, social workers and link teachers. The indicators are capable of being expressed as questions for individuals and teams (e.g. 'Do carers receive relevant training, support and advice in relation to education?').

The rationales are not meant to be prescriptive, but have been provided to help to illuminate each quality indicator, to highlight aspects which might be considered, and, where relevant, to indicate the sources of the indicator. Try to reach a view about the current level of provision using the four-point scale, and note any considerations such as evidence of good practice or need for improvement. The overall score and scores on individual indicators, while inevitably subjective, should give a baseline against which future progress can be measured. In particular, where an indicator is rated as 'unsatisfactory', this should become an action point. Action points should be drawn together into an action plan which also identifies responsibilities, timescales and resource requirements. A 'notes and action points' column is provided for individual carers and teams to record conclusions, such as strengths, action points and issues for further discussion.

Learning with Care: Quality Indicators for auditing the education of looked after children and young people
Audit Tool for Carers

	Quality Indicator	Rationale	Level (1-4)
A	***Staff knowledge and training***		
A1	Carers understand and demonstrate in their practice the importance of education and its significance in helping looked after children and young people to become more resilient and achieve their potential in all areas of their lives.	There is research evidence indicating that positive school/college experiences can help to minimise the effects of adversity, as well as enhancing feelings of confidence and developing relationship skills. Adults who were previously looked after and who did well at school are generally more successful and fulfilled than most care leavers. Carers can help by rewarding achievements, providing practical and emotional support, and encouraging out of school activities and contact with friends.	
A2	Carers demonstrate in their attitudes and actions encouragement and support for school/college and homework activities.	The ethos of the unit or placement is very important. There should be an expectation that children and young people will attend school and will complete homework. Carers can help by checking homework diaries, ensuring that children understand what is expected of them and providing support where they lack confidence to seek help from teachers. Some carers undertaking courses have found that studying openly is encouraging for young people.	
A3	Carers are knowledgeable about the education system, public examinations and assessment.	It is important for carers to be familiar with how the curriculum is organised and to be aware of important milestones, such as national tests and the requirements of 5-14, Standard Grade, and National Qualifications. Talking with young people about their progress at school/college can help. Carers should make arrangements to obtain school handbooks, and to attend curriculum meetings and other advice sessions run by schools. Carers should consider joining parent-teacher associations and participating in other aspects of school life, such as School Boards.	
A4	Carers are knowledgeable about the legislation, procedures and provisions relating to children and young people with special needs.	Carers should be familiar with local authority guidelines in relation to provision for special educational needs and should co-operate with link teachers, educational psychologists and learning support staff. Carers should develop good links with specialist therapy services (e.g. speech & language therapy), if appropriate.	

	Quality Indicator	Rationale	Level (1-4)
A5	Carers receive relevant training, support and advice in relation to education.	The Learning with Care project includes training materials for use by teachers, social workers and carers. Link teachers and senior members of staff in schools with responsibility for looked after children are important sources of advice and support.	
A6	Where appropriate, carers introduce children and young people to and share their enthusiasm for their own hobbies, interests and sporting pursuits.	Research shows that hobbies and interests learned from enthusiastic carers can both promote resilience and also last into adult life.	
B	**Procedures and arrangements**		
B1	When a child or young person is admitted to care or moved there are effective procedures and safe transport arrangements to ensure progress in education is maintained.	Disruption to education, including changes of school, should be avoided wherever possible. Carers should be aware of the advantages of stability in this important area of the child's life, and should be prepared to advocate on behalf of the young person at care planning and review meetings to ensure that education and schooling are given prominence in discussions. Where necessary, safe and properly vetted transport should be provided to maintain children and young people in their present schools.	
B2	Carers should ensure that schools hold accurate, up- to- date information about the young person's legal status, personal details and contact details for social worker, unit manager, keyworker, foster carers etc. and that schools recognise the sensitive and confidential nature of the information supplied.	The Learning with Care report found that pupil progress records did not always indicate a child or young person's legal status and contact details for social workers and carers were often missing or inaccurate. Although it is the responsibility of schools to keep accurate records, carers can help by providing information and updates. Education and social work departments should have a protocol about sharing confidential information, and this should be available to carers.	
B3	Carers collaborate with social workers and school/college staff in drawing up and reviewing the education section of the care plan (LAC materials), and in reviewing Individualised Educational Programmes (IEPs), Records of Needs and Future Needs Assessments.	A new pro-forma Education Report for child care reviews has been developed as part of the Learning with Care project. It forms a part of the Looking After Children: Good Parenting, Good Outcomes (LAC) materials. Children and young people with special educational needs will have targets for their learning in their IEPs. Carers should be fully involved in setting and reviewing these targets and in procedures for reviewing the Record of Needs, if one exists.	

	Quality Indicator	Rationale	Level (1-4)
B4	Carers advocate on behalf of young people to ensure that high priority is given to educational attainment in reviewing care plans.	The Learning with Care report recommended improvements in the way in which carers and school staff work together to ensure that educational attainment is given sufficient attention in reviewing the care plan. Where the child has an individualised educational programme (IEP), this should influence the care plan.	
B5	Where it is necessary for a child or young person to change school, teachers are consulted about the most appropriate school for him or her to attend	Research shows that such consultation does not always occur. This may mean that educational factors are given insufficient priority in decisions about school changes.	
B6	Carers help young people to attend school or college regularly and work with teachers to ensure that risks of failure to attend are avoided. Where non-attendance is unavoidable, alternative arrangements are provided.	There is evidence that good communication between school and home can be effective in minimising non-attendance. Different approaches may be required to encourage an individual child or young person to attend school and carers need to communicate effectively with school staff to ensure that consistent messages are given to young people. Carers should keep in regular contact with schools, including going to parents' meetings or other school or community events. In some residential units, one member of staff liaises with particular schools, which can help to develop good working relationships. Some young people prefer to have the same carer attend all meetings and in residential homes/units ideally these commitments should be taken into account in drawing up rotas. Carers need to be alert to signs of bullying and explore reasons for a child or young person's non-attendance.	
B7	If a child or young person is excluded from school, carers are able to advise about right of appeal, and will provide support when an appeal is made.	Where exclusion is unavoidable, carers should collaborate with the school and link teacher to ensure that alternative options are explored, or that a suitable home study programme is implemented. Excluded children/young people should be expected to follow routines similar to a school day. Where parents retain parental responsibility, they have the right of appeal against exclusion. Where the local authority has parental responsibility, it has the right of appeal. Young people with 'legal capacity' have the right of appeal against exclusion: Legal Capacity (Scotland) Act 1991. Most young people of 12 years and over are deemed to have legal capacity, but this may also apply to some younger children.	

	Quality Indicator	Rationale	Level (1-4)
C	**Supporting young people**		
C1	Children and young people are supported to achieve the targets that the school sets for them.	Carers should collaborate with school/college staff so that they know how to meet young people's learning needs. For some young people it may be sufficient for the carer to be willing to talk about school work and progress, while for others there may be need to be additional liaison with guidance and learning support staff. A young person's attitude to school and success in education may be influenced by encouragement, interest and support from carers. Carers can help by being familiar with the child's educational targets and, where possible, providing further learning opportunities at home.	
C2	Carers help young people to understand how schools will treat confidential information, and to understand the consequences of - and make decisions about - disclosing information about their home circumstances to teachers.	It is not necessary for all teachers to know details of a pupil's home circumstances; the 'need to know' principle should apply. A designated teacher should have this information and the school should have clear procedures for advising teachers about any learning, behavioural and attendance implications. Young people differ in their attitude to disclosure of sensitive information and require support in managing their relationships with class teachers, guidance teachers and other pupils. Sometimes teachers use confidential information insensitively or judgementally. If this occurs carers should ensure that the school accepts that this is not appropriate.	
C3	Carers collaborate with schools and, where appropriate, link teachers in encouraging completion of homework.	Carers should be familiar with each school's arrangements for administering homework and know what schools expect of parents and carers. The local authority may have a home-link teacher who will provide additional specialist help and advice.	
C4	Carers ensure that young people have special quiet areas for study, with appropriate space and suitable furniture.	Carers should try to find out how each child or young person works best. Priority should be given to ensuring that there is organised time and support for the completion of homework. Some schools have homework clubs and other alternative study arrangements which might be suitable where young people have difficulties working at home.	

	Quality Indicator	Rationale	Level (1-4)
C5	Books, educational toys, newspapers, computers and educational, artistic and other cultural materials are available. Where applicable, these are suitable for children and young people with learning or other disabilities.	Children and young people need to have access to writing and drawing materials, toys, reference books and computers to help in completing homework and for intellectual and developmental stimulation. Carers should actively engage in helping children and young people to research school projects. Carers should actively encourage children and young people to purchase books of their own, and they could be given as presents for birthday and other celebrations, if appropriate.	
C6	The unit/placement has a budget for purchase/replacement of educational material, toys, extra tuition, music lessons and cultural activities.	The Learning with Care report described units where 'staff complained they had no money for basic educational resources such as books, pencils and rubbers.' By contrast, some children's homes have subscriptions for daily newspapers, and can pay fees for private tutoring and music lessons. Unit budgets and foster carer allowances should take account of such needs.	
C7	Carers support and get financial help to allow young people to take part in wider educational opportunities such as school trips, clubs, and help with travel to events or matches. Carers help children and young people to develop and maintain hobbies and interests.	It is important that looked after young people have access to a broad range of educational, cultural and sporting opportunities, and are actively encouraged to participate. Carers may need to remind schools to give sufficient notice of trips to ensure that permission forms can be signed, particularly where time is needed to involve a parent or social worker.	
C8	Unless inappropriate, carers consult/involve natural parents in educational aspects of their child's life.	Parents are usually interested in their child's educational progress and can be an important source of encouragement and support. School staff may need advice and sometimes help from carers with practical matters, such as including parents in correspondence, school reports, curriculum meetings etc., and in advising on the implications for parental involvement with the school of overnight home visits or temporary placements.	
C9	Young people are encouraged to read for pleasure, and to be active, regular users of their local public library.	Carers should be aware of the importance of reading as a foundation of literacy, a source of enjoyment and access to wider learning opportunities. Carers can help by reading to children, suggesting books as presents and making informal visits to public libraries, bookshops and literature festivals.	

	Quality Indicator	Rationale	Level (1-4)
C10	Carers counsel and support children and young people if they have anxieties about school or other concerns which are affecting their ability to study.	The Learning with Care report found that some young people were very anxious about attending Children's Hearings and that this could affect their concentration or behaviour in school. Others were anxious about family problems or about gaps in their own education.	
C11	Carers help to ensure that young people receive appropriate support in considering career options, including access to careers advisers, and planning to meet particular job/educational entrance requirements.	All young people receive career education and participate in work experience. Looked after young people may require additional support and encouragement to access these services. Where non-attendance or exclusion is an issue, it is important to check that these opportunities have not been missed. Helpful career planning information is now available on the internet, for example, at the Continuing Education Gateway site (www.ceg.org.uk) and career advisers can advise carers on suitable approaches for individual young people.	
C12	Carers are able to advise young people about how to apply for and obtain grants for further or higher education and how the social work department, education authority or government will support them financially and in other ways to continue with education after school or college, and during vacations from further and higher education	Career advisers, guidance education teachers and through-care team members can provide information and support for young people and carers. Carers should also consider accompanying young people (and parents, if appropriate) to career conventions and university/college open days. Some colleges and universities offer summer schools aimed at young people from backgrounds with traditionally low participation in further/higher education and carers should be aware of these opportunities. Social work and education departments should have designated budgets to support young people who have been looked after through further and higher education.	

Appendix 4: Extract from HMIE version of indicators for carers

Key questions: How effectively do you support looked after children and young people in their studies and provide an 'educationally rich environment'?
To answer this question refer to:
National Care Standards for care homes for children and young people. Standard 13,
National Care Standards: foster care and family placement services. Standard 2.

Questions to ask	Why is this important?
• How effectively do you encourage and support young people to do their homework? Is there good provision of special quiet areas for study? • To what extent do you understand, and demonstrate, the importance of education in helping children and young people to become more resilient and achieve their potential in all areas of their lives? • How good are you at helping children and young people to develop and maintain hobbies and interests? • How well do you encourage children and young people to read for pleasure, and to be active, regular users of their local public library? What level of financial help do you receive to allow young people to take part in wider educational opportunities such as school trips, clubs, and to help with travel to events or matches? • How knowledgeable are you about the legislation, procedures and provisions relating to children and young people with special educational needs? • How many books, educational toys, newspapers, computers and educational, artistic and other cultural materials are there in your care placement? How suitable are these for children and young people of different ages and abilities? • How well does your care placement use its budget for purchase (or replacement) of educational materials and activities?	The ethos of the care placement is very important. Carers should expect that children and young people will attend school and will complete homework. Carers can help by checking homework diaries, ensuring that children understand what is expected of them and providing support where they lack confidence to seek help from teachers. Some carers undertaking courses have found that studying openly is encouraging for young people. Carers should be familiar with local authority guidelines in relation to provision for special educational needs. The *Learning with Care* report described units where 'staff complained they had no money for basic educational resources such as books, pencils and rubbers'. By contrast, some children's homes have subscriptions for daily newspapers, and can pay fees for private tutoring and music lessons. Unit budgets and foster carer allowances should take account of such needs. Main recommendation 7 in the *Learning with Care* report states: 'As part of their quality assurance procedures local authorities should undertake an audit of their residential units to assess how far they are educationally rich environments and, where shortcomings are found, make plans to take appropriate action.'

Appendix 5: Electronic Questionnaire

SURVEY OF EXTERNAL MANAGERS OF RESIDENTIAL UNITS IN SCOTLAND IN RELATION TO SELF-EVALUATION INDICATORS: *Evaluating education and care placements for looked after children and young people*

Click cursor in shaded areas to begin writing or to check boxes.

1.	Job title of respondent:	
2.	Number of units managed:	
3.	(a) Total Capacity:	(b) No. of places filled currently:

4. Were you aware of the indicators before receiving this questionnaire?
   YES ☐   NO ☐ **If you answered NO please go to Q9**

5. **(If YES to Q4):** How were you made aware of them? (You may tick more than one of a-g.)

   ☐ a. Internal Memorandum
   ☐ b. SWSI or HMIE or Care Commission or other Scottish Executive memorandum
   ☐ c. Learning with Care launch
   ☐ d. Designated Teacher conference
   ☐ e. Who Cares? Scotland conference
   ☐ f. Scottish Journal of Residential Child Care
   ☐ g. Through personal reading / web search
   ☐ h. Other (as noted below):

6. How have the indicators impacted on practice within the residential units you manage? **(If they have not yet impacted on practice go to Q9.)** You can use up to 9 columns to give responses for different units or give a more general view for all the units you manage in column 10. (You may tick more that one of 1-7 in each column.)

   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
   ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐ ☐   1 General awareness-raising
   ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐ ☐   2 Discussed at management meetings
   ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐ ☐   3 Used in staff training / development
   ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐ ☐   4 Used in development plans for the service
   ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐ ☐   5 Used in unit development planning
   ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐ ☐   6 Used by units to audit practice
   ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐ ☐   7 Other (as noted below):

7. If you wish, use the space below to provide more details about the way in which the indicators have been used.

8. Are your answers referring to (A) the draft indicators provided with the *Learning with Care* training materials or (B) those subsequently published as part of the Self-Evaluation Series by HMIE?

    A ☐   B ☐   **(Go to Q10)**

9. Please describe any plans you have to use the indicators.

10. Have the indicators featured in any internal or external inspection of the authority / agency or the units which you manage?

    YES ☐   NO ☐

11. Overall, how would you rate the likelihood that the indicators for carers will influence the development of an "educationally rich environment" within the units that you manage?

    Highly likely   ☐
    Fairly likely   ☐
    Neutral   ☐
    Fairly unlikely   ☐
    Highly unlikely   ☐

12. If you wish, use the space below to add an explanatory comment.

13. Are there any particular benefits to units in using the indicators?

14. What additional help do you require to help you to encourage staff to make use of the indicators? (You may tick more than one of b-e.)

    ☐   a. None
    ☐   b. More written information / advice
    ☐   c. Training event
    ☐   d. Networking opportunities
    ☐   e. Other (as noted below):

15. What additional help do you think residential staff might need to help them make use of the indicators? (You may tick more than one of b-e.)

☐ a. None
☐ b. More written information / advice
☐ c. Training event
☐ d. Networking opportunities
☐ e. Other (as noted below):

16. If you wish, use the space below for any comments/suggestions which you would like to add.

Thank you for taking time to complete this short questionnaire. Your assistance is very much appreciated. Apart from using the information for my personal research I will try to find appropriate ways of communicating findings to practitioners.

The questionnaire can be returned to me by emailing it to g.connelly@strath.ac.uk

If you would be willing to discuss your answers or your thoughts about the self-evaluation indicators and their use, I would be very grateful if you would provide contact details below.

Many thanks,

Graham Connelly

Name:		Tel:	
		Email:	

Appendix 6: Letter accompanying questionnaire

26 October 2004

Dear Colleague

You will be familiar with the Learning with Care materials which were launched in 2003. The materials include self-evaluation indicators designed to be used for evaluating the quality of care placements in relation to education. The indicators were circulated in hard copy to local authorities by the Scottish Executive but are also available in electronic form at http://www.hmie.gov.uk/documents/publication/hgioslac.pdf.

My colleague Graham Connelly is conducting some small-scale research to look at how the indicators are impacting on practice. Enclosed with this letter is a short questionnaire which might take about 15-20 minutes of your time to complete. We would be very grateful for your assistance. The questionnaire can be completed anonymously, though Graham would like to have a more detailed discussion with a small number of managers and there is space to provide contact details, if appropriate. A reply-paid envelope is provided for returning the completed questionnaire. We will report the findings in a suitable way, but individual responses will be treated in confidence.

Yours sincerely

XXXXXX