

Unit 1: Being looked after quiz: Dispelling the myths (Answers)

Which of the following statements are True and which are False?

1. Looked after children young people are mostly offenders.

False: The majority (over 80% in 2015-15) of both referrals to the Reporter and decisions by a children's hearing about compulsory measures of supervision refer to 'care and protection' grounds. And even where offence grounds are considered, they are often looked at alongside 'care and protection' grounds. In every case the welfare of the child is paramount in decision making. For more information refer to the annual reports of the Scottish Children's Reporters Administration at www.scra.gov.uk.

2. Most children and young people looked after 'away from home' live in children's units / homes.

False: Children looked after 'away from home' do sometimes live in children's unit (other terms include, 'children's home' or children's house). But on average in fact less than 10% of children looked after in Scotland live in group care settings. (Other examples of group settings are residential schools and secure care facilities.) In 2014-15 nearly two thirds lived in family-type settings, such as foster care and kinship care. Part of the reason for this is that residential care tends to be used for older children (over 12 years old).. About 40% of looked after children continue to live with family. This category is termed, 'looked after at home'.

3. Looked after children and young people are unlikely to go to university.

True-ish: A smaller proportion of looked after children go to university than is the case for the population as a whole. But the reality is more complicated than both this statement and the statistics suggest. It is true that only a minority of looked after children progress to higher education directly from school (around 3% in Scotland, compared with almost half of non-looked after peers). This is a direct consequence of looked after children, as a group, being more likely to leave school at 16, and therefore not have qualifications necessary to enter university. The statistics quoted each year about looked after children going to university are based on data about school pupils moving directly into university. But many looked after children have a more circuitous route in post-school education, typically involving attendance at further education colleges, the initial destination for more than a quarter of looked after school leavers. Research finds that the number of looked after children who eventually gain a higher education qualification (such as University degree) is much higher than the statistics would suggest.

However, this, more complex truth, should not detract from the fact that many looked after children choose to leave school early, extending the time it will take them to complete their education, and increasing the risk that they will not find secure employment and satisfying careers.

4. Social workers have the primary responsibility for looked after children and young people.

False: The responsibility legally lies with the child's 'home' local authority and is therefore shared by professionals working for the authority (e.g. teachers) who have direct contact with the young person. Other agencies (such as the NHS and police) also have responsibilities, as part of the 'corporate parent' team.

5. When a child or young person becomes looked after parental rights and responsibilities transfer to the local authority.

False: This is not automatic, and in fact in most cases the parents retain rights and these become shared with the local authority. The implication is that professionals, such as teachers, must clarify (with the child's Lead Professional) the extent to which parents are involved with children and can, for example, continue to participate in parents' evenings, etc..

Children and young people looked after 'at home' have the lowest educational attainment.

True: The attainment (and also attendance) of children looked after at home is lower than the average for all looked after children and significantly below that of children in foster care placements.

6. Children and young people looked after 'away from home' leave care at age 16.

True: Unfortunately, many looked after children and young people do leave care at age 16. However, it should be noted that 'care' (i.e. being looked after) does not end at 16. Local authorities can continue to 'look after' a young person till their 18th birthday (and beyond in some special cases). For the past few decades though, young people have either chosen to leave care, or have been directly or indirectly encouraged to by their local authority (such as by refusing to continue to pay for a residential placement). Such influence by local authorities is not considered good practice, and the Scottish Government is clear that, wherever possible, young people should be encouraged and enabled to stay put in care for as long as possible. Indeed, even when a young person is determined to leave care, a local authority can continue to provide accommodation to them up until their 21st birthday. This can be provided as either part of a package of aftercare support, or under the Continuing Care provisions of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, which enable young people

to remain living in their care placement after they've formally ceased to be looked after.

7. Looked after children and young people are twice as likely to be excluded from school in Scotland as non-looked after children.

True: But in fact the exclusion rate of looked after children is even higher, at about eight times as much. The exclusion rate of all pupils has reduced considerably in recent years but the fall for looked after children has been less dramatic. It's important, however, to note that most looked after children are not excluded from school, and the rate is affected by a small number of pupils who are excluded repeatedly. Moreover, as with all looked after statistics, comparisons between 'looked after' and the population average always give a stark impression; a more nuanced comparison might be with children who are also experiencing social and economic disadvantage.

8. The educational attainment of looked after children and young people varies across Scotland.

True: Statistics and research show that there is considerable variation between local authorities on the educational outcomes of looked after children³.

9. When a looked after child or young person is placed in foster care or residential care in a different part of Scotland, responsibilities transfer to the 'host' authority or agency.

False: A local authority may place a child or young person in another area because no suitable placement is available locally. The placing authority retains responsibility and this means visiting the child or young person and arranging statutory reviews. In practice, the child or young person will be attending a school in the host authority or may attend a residential school. Local authorities are not always as good as they should be in terms of keeping track of the educational development of children and young people placed in another authority. Every school is required to appoint a designated manager, typically a senior manager or member of the pastoral care team, to co-ordinate arrangements for looked after children and young people. This responsibility includes supporting pupils placed by another local authority and co-operating with the placing authority to provide information about progress.

³ See: SPICe briefing www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/43321.aspx.