

SQA Corporate Parenting Report 2015-18



Introduction

In this report, we explain what is expected of national corporate parents in Scotland, outline our duties as stipulated in the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, and explain how we have interpreted them in our commitments to you.

We describe what SQA is doing to fulfil these duties, and give you highlights of our corporate parenting work so far. We're keen to tell you about the many events, initiatives, and projects we have been involved in during 2015-18, and have divided these under the five outcomes that we have aligned with our commitments. And we let you know how our SQA colleagues get involved.

Throughout the report you will see evidence of SQA's pride, dedication, and long-term engagement in being a corporate parent, as well as many moments of simple pleasure and personal fulfilment for both SQA colleagues and young people.

SQA was enormously proud to be named as a national corporate parent in April 2015. Over the past three years, we have worked hard to improve the lives and futures of you, Scotland's looked-after children and care-experienced young people.

We fully support the vision of the Scottish Government to make Scotland the best place in the world to grow up. Corporate parenting is an important part of this vision, and empowers SQA to make a real difference to the lives of looked-after children and care-experienced young people like you.

I'm delighted to introduce our first Corporate Parenting Report, which highlights the commitment of everyone at SQA to helping care-experienced young people realise the brighter futures they deserve.

Janet Brown, Chief Executive

David Middleton, Chair

What is corporate parenting?

A corporate parent is an organisation or individual who has special responsibilities for looked-after children and care-experienced young people. They should carry out many of the roles a parent would, and while they may not be able to provide everything a loving parent can, they should still be able to provide the best possible support and care for you.

The idea is to encourage people and organisations to do as much as they can to make sure you feel in control of your life and able to overcome the barriers you face.

The duties of a corporate parent are to:

- be **alert** to matters which might adversely affect your wellbeing
- **assess** what services and support you would benefit from
- **promote** your interests
- provide you with **opportunities** to promote your wellbeing
- take appropriate action to help you **access** those opportunities
- improve our corporate parenting wherever possible

SQA is a committed corporate parent

You probably know us as ‘the exam people’. SQA helps individuals to realise their potential and achieve their ambitions, no matter what their background, by providing a wide range of high-quality, internationally recognised qualifications and associated services. We work with schools, colleges, universities, and training organisations to develop, deliver, and accredit qualifications and assessments. We don’t work directly with young people, but our work has an impact on all young people in Scotland.

We are in a unique position to make some very clear guarantees to you. We are not prepared to accept that education outcomes for looked-after young people remain so poor in comparison with their non-care peers.

We promise that we will:

Do our best to ensure those who work for us, and with us, are aware of your needs and SQA’s responsibilities

Work with you to ensure that you have access to SQA services that meet your needs

Ensure your ambition and achievements are supported, recognised, and celebrated

Improve opportunities for you to access Modern Apprenticeships, internships, routes to work experience, and employment with SQA

Work with other corporate parents to make sure that we are all doing our best for you

The only way is up

You don't need us to tell you what challenges you face as a care-experienced young person. We take time to understand the impact of being in care but, like any good parent, we believe in emphasising the positive, and your incredible potential — now, and in the future.

You will have heard statistics about care-experienced young people that paint a pessimistic picture of your future. We don't accept this as inevitable, and neither should you. We can help you on the way to fulfilling your ambitions.

At SQA, we want to know:

What
inspires
you?

What
worries
you?

What
motivates
you?

What's
holding
you back?

We will listen to you and ensure that what we do is meaningful to you.



We're learning – just like you!



We're learning...

...that by removing the smallest obstacles in your path, we can help you on the way to a bigger future

...to listen better. We want to hear about your concerns and ambitions directly, and build our ideas around those

...how to use our resources, creativity, and influence to make our qualifications and assessments relevant and fair for you

...to work more effectively with organisations like Who Cares? Scotland, and develop initiatives that have a positive, tangible impact on your life

...to help our staff fulfil their aspirations as corporate parents too. We have hundreds of people who are happy to volunteer their time

And guess what? We are learning about the great contributions you can make at SQA when you become our colleagues

How are we doing so far?

It's been an amazing three years. Here's what we've been up to.

We've listened more effectively — We're taking every opportunity to listen to care-experienced young people like you at the events we attend; and we've invited young people to speak to SQA staff about their experience of growing up in care, and the impact this has had on them.

We've prevented children's hearings from clashing with exams — Since 2016, we have shared SQA's examination timetable with the Scottish Children's Report Administration and Children's Hearings Scotland to allow both these corporate parents to ensure that children's hearings are organised outwith examination time.

We've made it easier to get replacement SQA certificates — We've explored options to provide free replacement SQA certificates in certain circumstances for care-experienced learners through a pilot project in Glasgow, and are looking to extend this to other Scottish local authorities.

We've incorporated care experience in our qualifications — Thanks to your input, we're incorporating relevant and appropriate scenarios of young people in care into our qualifications.

We've celebrated Results Day — In partnership with Who Cares? Scotland, we hold an annual Results Day event in August to celebrate with a group of care-experienced young learners as they open their results envelopes.

We've recognised care experience as a protected characteristic — We've made considerable progress in treating 'care experience' as a protected characteristic — as covered by the Equality Act 2010 — like gender, disability, or race. And we're examining how we can review the design of external assessments to reflect this.

We've created an extra Modern Apprenticeship for a care-experienced young person — We work with Who Cares? Scotland and Barnardo's Scotland to promote our Modern Apprenticeship (MA) opportunities and to ensure they are as accessible as possible for you. In 2017, we offered an extra MA to a care-experienced young person.

We've started training our staff to be corporate parents — In partnership with Who Cares? Scotland, SQA has launched in-house, online corporate parenting training. And we've hundreds of staff who regularly volunteer for our corporate parenting initiatives.



In April 2017, we produced a short video clip to mark the two-year anniversary of corporate parenting duties and responsibilities. SQA's video demonstrates some of the work carried out in collaboration with Who Cares? Scotland over our first two years as a corporate parent. [Take a look here.](#)

Putting our promises to work

We took on the Scottish Government's Corporate Parenting duties and used them to inform SQA's commitments to care-experienced young people. But promises aren't enough. In this section, we demonstrate how we are turning our commitments into tangible, practical support. Here, we detail what we have done and what we plan to do to achieve these commitment outcomes.

Transforming understanding

Outcome 1: SQA understands and is alert to the needs of looked-after children and care-experienced young people to inform its policy, planning and practice.

So, what does this mean for you?

SQA develops strong relationships with relevant organisations and other corporate parents, and we keep up to date with research and legislation that's relevant to you. We take every opportunity to speak and listen to care-experienced young people about what would help them. And we make sure that we apply what we have learned throughout our organisation and our work.



Relationships with other organisations

We have developed strong relationships with organisations like Who Cares? Scotland, MCR Pathways, and Barnardo's.

We have a particularly special partnership with Who Cares? Scotland and, in March 2015, we pledged our support for its **'Listen-Act-Unite'** campaign. This campaign brings together young people, members of the public, decision makers, and communities, to establish how to listen effectively to care-experienced young people — how to act on what we hear, and how to unite to create better lives for them.

SQA corporate governance

As a leading public body and a key player in education, skills, and training, we are obliged to establish and maintain certain standards and processes in all our work. Corporate parenting is built into these standards and processes in every part of our business, as shown in the examples below.

- Our Corporate Plan — we specifically talk about promoting equality and improving life chances for vulnerable learners.
- Compliance — we have a framework that ensures we are meeting our objectives.
- Equality and Inclusion Key Partners Group — advises SQA how to improve equality and inclusion, and how to communicate with care-experienced young people.
- Equality Impact Assessment — we continually examine our progress in promoting equality.



Collaborating with other corporate parents

We work with other corporate parents to improve our understanding of what it is like to grow up in care; to discuss ideas and initiatives; and to combine clout and resources.

Since 2016, we have shared SQA's examination timetable with the Scottish Children's Report Administration and Children's Hearings Scotland to allow both these corporate parents to ensure that children's hearings didn't clash with exams. We have since met with colleagues from Renfrewshire local authority education and social work, along with Who Cares? Scotland and SCRA, to consider rescheduling hearings for young people concerned.



Out and about

- Helped Who Cares? Scotland take part in the 2015 and 2017 Edinburgh Police Box Festivals, in collaboration with SQA and Police Scotland, to encourage discussion about corporate parenting within the community.
- Participated in Glasgow City Council's Corporate Parenting Partner event in June 2015.
- Attended and contributed to the Skills Development Scotland consultation event to inform development of SDS's corporate parenting plan in July 2016.
- Connected in particular with the Scottish Funding Council, Skills Development Scotland, Fire and Rescue Service, sportscotland, and a range of local authorities.
- Provided a progress update in April 2017 to the College Development Network on SQA's corporate parenting commitments, and identified proposed ideas for useful collaboration with the college sector.
- Contributed as a corporate parent to 'A Blueprint for Fairness: the final report of the Commission on Widening Access'. Published in March 2016, the report presents a system-wide plan to achieve equal access to higher education.
- Participated in local authority workshops and CELCIS training events as well as participating in a University of Strathclyde/CELCIS online course highlighting the needs of looked-after children and young people and how their care should be approached.
- Presented at the Promoting Inclusion and Transforming Lives conference in June 2017 in Dundee. Input at the conference focussed on SQA's recent research in relation to 'care-experience friendly' question papers.
- Participated in the CELCIS Care to Achieve Seminar to look at more specific data gathered by other corporate parents in the extended care family.
- Participated on a number of external forums including the Children and Young People's Commissioner Group and Glasgow Corporate Parents Collaboration Group.

Access to SQA

Outcome 2: Looked-after children benefit from access to a range of SQA services designed to meet their emotional, mental and physical needs.

What does this mean for you?

We are analysing our qualifications and assessment practices from your point of view, to ensure they are relevant and meaningful to you. We're looking at how we can adapt assessment to help you, and we're making it easier for you to get replacement SQA certificates.

Making it easier for you to get a replacement SQA certificate

Frequent changes of address between, say, residential care homes and foster carers' homes, or perhaps a change of name on leaving care, can mean some care-experienced young learners do not receive their original SQA certificate, or lose it.

In August 2016, SQA colleagues met with Glasgow City Council's Care Leavers' Service to consider a pilot project to authenticate SQA qualifications for our care-experienced young people. With them, we have developed a practical and manageable process to allow care-experienced learners to authenticate their SQA qualifications quickly and easily. Where required, SQA will provide



a replacement certificate to care-experienced young people free of charge, following confirmation with the appropriate local authority of the learner's care status. We're hoping to extend this service across other Scottish local authorities.

Designing qualifications with you in mind

We made a commitment to ensure care-experienced young people are involved in the design of SQA qualifications. We have worked in partnership with Who Cares? Scotland to ensure our young people are fully prepared to take on this responsibility and are confident in supporting SQA's qualifications development process.

Thanks to your input, our Residential Care qualifications and assessment guidance will incorporate scenarios which raise awareness of key themes for care-experienced children and young people.

In collaboration with Who Cares? Scotland, we have drafted guidance for our exam setters and vetters to ensure that external question papers afford care experience the same status as other protected characteristics — like gender, disability, and race — covered by the Equality Act 2010.

During 2016-17, we revised our Assessment Arrangements guidance materials to ensure they reflect the interests and experiences of looked-after children.

'In care, a lot of the time, no-one really cares when you've done well in your exams or had a success. So I think it's really important for SQA as a corporate parent to do things like this, because the young people know that they are worth something... It's the small things that matter.'

Carly Telford

Recognising ambition and achievements

Outcome 3: The ambition and achievements of care-experienced young people are supported, recognised, and acknowledged by SQA.

What does this mean for you?

We want to hear about your ambitions, and we care about your achievements. We know many of them will have been hard won, and we will be there to celebrate with you.

Results Day celebration

We appreciate that many care-experienced young people don't have a network of support in their home life — someone to congratulate them when they pass an exam, or encourage them to try harder next time. In partnership with Who Cares? Scotland, and joined by Fiona McLeod MSP, Minister for Children and Families, SQA launched its first exam results day celebration in August 2015, to give young people a platform on which to have their achievements recognised. For the past two years John Swinney, Deputy First Minister of Scotland and Education Secretary, has joined our celebrations and presented certificates. You can see what some of our young learners thought of Results Day in [this clip](#).

'It was a real joy and privilege to be at the SQA and Who Cares? Scotland event to celebrate the exam success of some of our looked-after young people on results day. What SQA is doing is a great example of good corporate parenting by showing personal support at what will be a nerve-racking time for care-experienced young people as they prepare for the next steps in their life journey. Corporate parenting is not just a responsibility — it is a real opportunity to improve the futures of looked-after children and young people.'

**John Swinney MSP,
Deputy First Minister**



Further opportunities

Outcome 4: Improve access to Modern Apprenticeships, internships, routes to work experience, and employment within SQA

What does this mean for you?

SQA is in a unique position to advise on future opportunities, and indeed to provide them!

Creating and delivering Modern Apprenticeships

Since 2012, the Scottish Government has placed an increasing focus on developing the young workforce, and has committed to creating 30,000 Modern Apprenticeship (MA) places by 2020.

SQA began its own MA scheme in 2012, offering Business Administration apprenticeships. Since the launch, SQA has taken on 18 Business Administration MAs, including 2 specialised placements in Business Systems and Procurement; 12 apprentices have completed their MA, with 9 securing employment within SQA.

We are working with Who Cares? Scotland and Barnardo's Scotland to promote our MA opportunities, and to ensure they are as accessible as possible to young people with care experience. In 2017, we were delighted to offer an extra Modern Apprenticeship to Toni Durning, a care-experienced young person from Cumbernauld. You can see what this experience has meant to her in [this clip](#).

'The apprenticeship has made me feel more confident and outgoing ... I'm mostly gathering evidence for SVQs, speaking to external companies to provide us with training, and just working along with the team to provide support. Apprenticeships are a really good thing to go for. I forget about my background and focus on the job. The team are lovely, and I also have my mentor and assessor for support. I've become a lot more mature. It has made me feel proud and realise that my background won't hold me back from applying for jobs that I want to go for in the future.'

Toni Durning, SQA Modern Apprentice



Understanding and awareness

Outcome 5: SQA staff and appointees understand and are aware of the needs of looked-after children, care-experienced young people, and SQA's corporate parenting responsibilities.

What does this mean for you?

All SQA staff and appointees are corporate parents too. We are making sure they understand what this means, and are helping them to be the best corporate parents they can be.

Raising staff awareness and understanding

We hold regular equality, diversity, and inclusion events for our staff, which take the form of short talks from inspiring, informative, and thought-provoking speakers. Over the past three years, care-experienced young people have shared their stories with us, and helped us understand, for example, why education outcomes for this group are so low, or what it is like to be gay and grow up in care.

Online corporate parenting training

In collaboration with Who Cares? Scotland, SQA has developed online corporate parenting training for our staff, to raise awareness and understanding of the experiences of looked-after children. Janet Brown, SQA Chief Executive, introduces the training and emphasises how important this role is to SQA and how seriously it is taken; colleagues from across the organisation introduce each of the four modules. The training content encourages staff to promote the wellbeing of care-experienced young people through the work they do, to consider possible links with their role and the implications for care-experienced young people, and to think about what they can change in their work to ensure that care-experienced young people are being supported.



Kieran John McWhirter, Who Cares? Scotland Trustee and care-experienced young man, speaking to SQA staff during Rainbow Week, August 2017

Getting involved

SQA has a keen army of volunteers who enjoy the 'doing' part of corporate parenting. SQA has set up several initiatives to harness their creativity, empathy, and enthusiasm.

Mentoring opportunities

SQA works with MCR Pathways, a Glasgow-based charity which helps looked-after young people overcome disadvantage by encouraging them to identify, develop, and use their talents; stay on in school; and progress to further and higher education. It matches carefully trained volunteer mentors – including many SQA employees – with care-experienced young people in Glasgow secondary schools to make a life-changing difference.

Fundraising

SQA Chief Executive Janet Brown, alongside a large number of staff from SQA and Who Cares? Scotland, took part in the Glasgow Kiltwalk on 30 April 2017 to raise both money for, and awareness of, care-experienced young people across Scotland. Their efforts raised **£3,000**.



'The Kiltwalk was such a fantastic event and was made even more special for us with proud SQA corporate parents supporting our team. To say you support is one thing, but to walk through pain, blisters, and still keep smiling shows so much more to care-experienced young people.'

Gavin Sinclair, Who Cares? Scotland's Fundraising and Partnership Manager

Responsible Business — volunteering

SQA's Responsible Business volunteering strategy ensures there are plenty of volunteering options for staff to support looked-after children and care-experienced young people.

Who Cares? Scotland Christmas Campaigns

Over the past three years, SQA staff have volunteered to support different aspects of the Who Cares? Scotland Christmas Campaign, to ensure care-experienced young people have a memorable Christmas Day. SQA colleagues have contributed by:

- writing Christmas cards

'It was not until you sat down and started writing the names of the recipients that you realised how many people you were reaching out to and it became "real".' **Adele Pattison, Qualifications.**

- donating, wrapping and labelling gifts

'We filled around 30 Santa sacks full to the top with gifts for everyone. We were so glad to have been part of such a heart-warming and humbling event and it was lovely to see all the gifts from our staff going to give some young people a happy Christmas.' **Lucy Watson (and family), Events, SQA**

'All the young people were quite amazed when the presents came out and couldn't believe the value of the gifts. It's nice to know that other people care.' **Chelsea, aged 21, care-experienced young person and Development Assistant for Who Cares? Scotland**

- decorating the Christmas Day venue, and helping with Christmas dinner. In 2017, three members of staff spent their Christmas Day at the Who Cares? Scotland Christmas dinner attended by over 50 young people.

'It was my first time volunteering on Christmas Day and I loved meeting so many inspiring, passionate people — it truly was a day to remember! See you all again this year!' **Laura Gemmell, NQ Delivery**

'I have to say the Who Cares? (Scotland) Christmas Lunch was a fantastic experience! Spirits were high, the food was amazing, and all who attended were very friendly. It was my first time volunteering on Christmas Day, but rest assured it will not be my last. I felt very honoured to be part of a loving, welcoming family.' **Angela Ray, Operations — Logistics & Customer Engagement**

'It truly was a fantastic day and the set-up was fabulous. It felt privileged to be a part of something so special.' **Elaine McFadyen, Qualifications**

'The Christmas campaign and dinner was a huge success. The support we received from SQA was overwhelming and actually quite humbling. We never anticipated such generosity and support, which made it all the more exciting for us. Talking to young people involved in the appeal, it was clear they were appreciative of what SQA had done and genuinely touched by the commitment shown.' **Gavin Sinclair, Fundraising and Partnership Manager, Who Cares? Scotland**

You can see more pictures from the Care Family Christmas Dinner in [this clip](#).



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