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Towards best practice in educating and supporting separated children in Scotland

Executive Summary

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Towards Best Practice in Educating Separated Children (16-18) is a project led by Scottish Refugee Council, Aberlour Childcare Trust and Glasgow Clyde College with Stirling University as academic partner.

For over a decade, Glasgow Clyde College has developed and delivered a language and education course, the “16+ESOL” programme, to separated children aged 16-18 arriving in Scotland alone. During this time, lecturers have worked closely with staff from the Scottish Guardianship Service, a long-standing partnership between Scotland’s refugee charity and Scotland’s children’s charity, to support the welfare and well-being needs of these young people.

The aims of the project are to reflect on and document the teaching practice, curriculum and resources of the “16+ESOL” programme and to research the educational and well-being needs of separated children, considering how these needs are being met inside and outside the classroom as well as considering the “16+ESOL” programme against international practice.

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The research team at Stirling University commissioned by Scottish Refugee Council are Dr Siân Lucas, Dr Maggie Grant and Andrew Burns.

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Research

Lucas, S.E., Grant, M., Burns, A. (2019), *Towards best practice in educating and supporting separated children in Scotland*, Stirling: University of Stirling.

Practice, Curriculum & Teaching Resources

Ma, L. and Richardson, M. (2019), *ESOL 16+ Routes to Learning*. Scottish Refugee Council. Available at www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk



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Towards best practice in educating and supporting separated children in Scotland

This research forms part of the project: *Towards Best Practice in Educating Separated Children in Scotland (16-18)*. The project's goals were threefold: to assess the educational and well-being needs of separated children in Scotland (aged 16-18 years), consider how the "ESOL 16+" Programme (English for Speakers of Other Languages) at Glasgow Clyde College and its partners are meeting these needs inside and outside the classroom, and compare it to international good practice.

The project was organised into two work packages (WP). In this report we present research from WP1, in which we evaluated the language, education and wellbeing needs of separated children and the extent to which these needs are being met by Glasgow Clyde College's ESOL 16+ Programme. WP2 provided an opportunity for the lecturing staff on the ESOL 16+ Programme to reflect on their ways of educating and supporting separated children and to document, develop and refine the ESOL 16+ Programme curriculum and teaching resources. The key output of this work is the *ESOL 16+ Routes to Learning* document, which provides a useful tool for those involved in teaching separated children in multiple settings.

The number of separated young people seeking asylum has increased significantly across the world (UNICEF, 2016) and Glasgow continues to receive the majority of separated children in Scotland. Education is a right for every child, but difficulties with access and suitability of educational opportunities for refugees and asylum seekers have been identified across UK nations (UNICEF, 2019). The New Scots: Refugee Integration Strategy (2018-2022) identifies education and English language skills as key components of integration, and the Scottish Government (2015) recognises that "...without adequate language skills, people can neither fully participate in their local and national communities nor can they meet their full potential".

Separated children have been shown to demonstrate resilience and a range of strengths that can help them to take advantage of opportunities and to overcome barriers (Boyden and Hart, 2007; Hopkins and Hill, 2010). However, disrupted education may mean that separated children have particular learning needs that have to be taken into account to enable them to reach their potential (Abunimah and Blower, 2010).

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The ESOL 16+ Programme is a specialist education programme for separated children between the ages of 16-19 and offers Elementary level (National 2) and Pre-Intermediate level (National 3) teaching covering English, IT and maths. The programme takes 2 years to complete and incorporates creative pedagogical methods and therapeutic elements, including study skills, language and personal and social development, peer support mechanisms and positive role modelling, all of which are commensurate with students' age and circumstances. Many young people achieve the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) ESOL qualification which enables them to progress to further study and/or employment. The programme aims to provide students with routine and a sense of belonging, and recognises that these factors help to reduce isolation. Lecturers monitor students' wellbeing, attendance, and progress. They also liaise with external agencies and partners, support students to access emotional support and legal guidance, and encourage students to engage in activities and groups outside the college.

The research used pluralist methods to explore the research questions, based on a literature review, secondary analysis of student data from Glasgow Clyde College and the Scottish Guardianship service, focus groups with current and former students on the ESOL 16+ Programme, classroom observations, and telephone interviews (with programme stakeholders; professionals working with separated children in other areas of Scotland; and education professionals in Germany, Italy and Greece).

The key findings according to each research question are as follows and are expanded in the full report.

1. What are the educational and wellbeing needs of 16-18 year old separated children arriving in Scotland (entering directly into college or transitioning to college from schools with 1-2 years education)?

Separated children have needs that are shared with all children and young people, as well as needs that are specific to them and their circumstances. Language learning forms part of a wider set of education needs recognised within an ecological model of wellbeing (Scottish Government, 2012).

Four inter-related themes emerged from the focus groups with current and former students. Educational-language needs include language learning alongside the opportunity to try other subjects and activities, in a supportive and encouraging environment. Sociocultural learning needs include understanding the local/national culture, as well as structure and responsibility within the classroom. Psychological/emotional needs include safety and an approach that helps students deal with anxiety and the impact of trauma. Social needs include opportunities to build friendships within and outside the college.

2. To what extent does the model, curriculum and pedagogy provided by Glasgow Clyde College meet these needs?

The classroom environment and the range of activities provided made the programme interesting and relevant to the young people's learning needs, ongoing integration and peer relationships. The programme provides opportunities for students to learn English and to accomplish their learning objectives. Throughout the programme students have opportunities to build friendships, both with classroom peers and in the local community. The trusted relationships with lecturers and the development of friendships created an environment in which the young people felt safe.

Data from focus groups, observations and stakeholder interviews suggest that the safe and caring learning environment provides a base from which young people can build their confidence, self-esteem, and their social networks. The caring attitude of the lecturers was a key feature of the programme and provided an essential foundation for learning. Students valued lecturers who took time to know students' individual needs and offered encouragement and guidance. Stakeholders recognised the commitment of lecturers to the programme and said that they often go "*above and beyond*" for the students.

3. How does the Glasgow Clyde College model of 16-18 year old education for separated children compare to international good practice?

The following factors were identified from a range of perspectives as important elements of good practice in education for separated children:

- Building relationships: between teachers/lecturers and students, but also teamwork between colleagues and positive links with external networks
- Recognising the importance of wider socio-cultural learning
- Individual planning with young people
- Supporting opportunities for young people to spend times with peers in their local community
- Sustaining consistency and continuity to allow programmes to develop and staff to gain experience in supporting separated children

The ESOL 16+ curriculum is designed to include topics and examples relevant to students' lives and allows them to be immersed in the host language supporting socio-cultural as well as language/subject learning. Individualised tailored support is offered to students and teaching makes references to students' identities, histories and current circumstances, as well as their strengths, potential and aspirations. The trust of lecturers and connectedness to organisations encourages students to establish and build links in the wider community. Lecturers' commitment to, and empathy with, separated children were identified as fundamental to their ability to support young people.

The programme helps students to adapt to or re-acquaint themselves with classroom-based teaching. Lecturers balance the need to maintain expectations within the learning environment, while being flexible around the potential for disruptions to the college day, for example for students to attend appointments.

4. In addition to the Glasgow Clyde College model what is required to meet the educational and wellbeing needs of these young people?

In addition to personal commitment, the programme and staff are supported by the college structures and work alongside a range of other professionals and organisations. Because of this, lecturers have the opportunity to develop informal and formal support networks; this has direct benefits to the students who are able to access wider services. It is important that support is offered to enable lecturing staff to

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gain experience, develop and adapt programmes around young people's needs and to build networks that will support students' broader needs.

While English language is recognised as a key means to integration, it is important to recognise the significance of the maintenance and development of young people's home languages in order to ensure students feel equal and valued members of the learning community and that integration is a two-way process (Ager and Strang 2004; 2008; Scottish Government, 2018a).

Students' future trajectories, regardless of whether or not they move on to further training, education or work, are influenced by a range of variables, including the decisions made about their asylum claims. An important area for further exploration, which was not within the scope of the current research, is students' pathways after completing or withdrawing from the ESOL 16+ programme or other courses.

5. How can the curriculum, techniques and model be adopted across Scotland where there are smaller populations of separated children?

Not all separated children in Scotland live in large urban areas like Glasgow, a situation that may become more prevalent once policy measures such as the UK Government's National Transfer Scheme become fully operational and embedded. Scotland's unique geography and population distribution can present challenges for the delivery of services such as education and social care. It was important, therefore, to gain the views of professionals working in authorities with smaller populations of separated children in order to understand how learning from the ESOL 16+ programme may be effectively adapted to meet the needs of such populations.

Interviewees in areas with smaller populations of separated children described how collaborations and partnerships can be effective in meeting the needs of separated children. For education staff who are new to working with separated children and/or working with small groups, access to a network of peers working with separated children may be useful in accessing information, guidance, and support.

As well as ESOL teaching skills and knowledge, educators would benefit from up-to-date knowledge of broader issues such as law and policy changes and their potential impact on students. The curriculum materials that will be made available as part of the broader project could also be usefully complemented by training that draws on the expertise developed on the ESOL 16+ Programme beyond language teaching.



Full report available online at stirling.ac.uk and scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk

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