



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

EDUCATION AND SKILLS COMMITTEE

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Dear Mark

I am writing to you following the Education and Skills Committee's consideration on 1st February of progress made towards recommendations of its predecessor committee. Firstly can I thank you and the officials who support you for the elements of the response that you provided. The Committee is committed to continuity of scrutiny but is very aware that providing such lengthy detailed responses is time consuming for the Government.

As you will see from the Official Report of the meeting the Deputy Convener and I both raised issues relating to kinship care. Our predecessor undertook significant work in this area in relation to attainment and it has generated new early lines of enquiry for this Committee.

As per the Official Report of my comments, I should be grateful for details of planned action by the Scottish Government in relation to the impact of the UK Government decision to limit tax credit claims on funding for formal kinship care of looked after children. In addition, as per Johann Lamont's comments, I should be grateful for details of work undertaken by the Government to monitor the extent to which local authorities are providing social work support that can be accessed for children in kinship care, or indeed any other support services that would be available for children in other forms of care.

If possible I should be grateful for a response by 9th March.

Yours sincerely

JAMES DORNAN MSP
CONVENER

Education and Skills Committee meeting on 1st February 2017 - Extract of the Official Report

James Dornan (Convener) My second comment concerns the recommendations in the report entitled, “The Educational Attainment of Looked after Children”, which are covered on pages 3 to 6 of the table. I draw members’ attention to point 5, on page 5. I understand that the United Kingdom Government will limit tax credit claims so that only two children can be included in a claim. A recent announcement highlighted some exceptions to that, one of which relates to kinship care. Although there are exceptions for some non-looked-after children who are in kinship care, there is no exception for formal kinship care of looked-after children. In the context of the UK Government’s consultation, the Scottish Government states that it

“will be responding to ensure that kinship carers are not disadvantaged in any way.”

I suggest that we write to the Scottish Government to ask what the effects of that change will be on kinship carers in Scotland, and whether there will be a policy response.

Johann Lamont (Deputy Convener) On the issue of looked-after children, the convener mentioned kinship care funding. One of the big issues for kinship care families is the extent to which they are unable to access the resources that looked-after children may be able to access. One of the predecessor committee’s recommendations refers to social work support for young people in care and for looked-after children. The Scottish Government says in its response that it is for local government to manage its own budgets.

I am interested in the extent to which that is actually happening, and I would like to know whether it is happening at all for children in kinship care. There is a thread running through all the work on looked-after children that relates to kinship care. Campaigning groups make an argument about payments, but another point is that, if there are two young people who go through the same trauma, and one ends up being looked after in foster care while one is in kinship care, they will not have equal access to things like educational psychologists or any extra support that might be available.

I would be interested to know whether there is support for children in care at all and the extent to which support is working its way through, and whether there is a particular need to test the system to see if there is access to such services for children in kinship care.