

Webinar: Virtual Schools Head Teachers Network, December 2021

Discussing Scotland's Virtual School Head Teachers' and Care Experienced Teams' Network



VSHT Network _ Care Experienced Teams Live Event

Good morning everyone. I think we will kick off now because, I think the majority of people have joined us and then maybe a couple of people join in as we go along. I'd like to say a very warm welcome to our webinar today focusing on the development of the roles of the Virtual School Head Teacher and care experience teams in Scotland and the network that we at CELCIS host to support this work. My name is Linda O'Neill and I'm the Education Lead at CELCIS and I'm delighted to see so many of you here and really looking forward to sharing the story of how this work has developed alongside my colleagues today. We've got contributions from both CELCIS colleagues and some of our key partners. We will introduce people as we go along. But I just like to start by saying thank you, and welcome to our contributors who you can see on screen. We have Mary Jane Hunter, the Virtual School Lead in North Lanarkshire, Janine McCullough, Senior Education Officer from Education Scotland, Patrick Ward, the Virtual School Head Teacher in Lewisham, and the current chair of the National Association of Virtual School Heads (NAVSH) in England, Andrew Morrison, Quality Manager at Scottish Government, Larissa Gordon, the Virtual School Head

in Aberdeen city and also CELCIS' National advisor to the virtual school network, Joanne McMeeking and Michael Bettencourt Joanne is the Head of our Improving Care Experiences at CELCIS and Michael is an education consultant in the education team. I am also delighted to welcome a number of Scotland's virtual school heads and care experienced teams along today, and would just like to recognize the contribution that they've all made to this event through their work and the network. Before we start, I'm just going to cover off some housekeeping quite quickly. You will see at the top of the screen, it says we're recording this session, and we will be making it available on our website. We will email you all to let you know when it is available, and please feel free to share this with colleagues that you think might be interested. We're using the webinar version of teams, so you will only see the presenters on screen. That means that you aren't able to use your camera or your Mics so you don't need to worry about the doorbell going or the cat climbing up your Christmas tree in the background or anything like that. As it's the webinar version of teams, we will not be using the chat function. But we did ask people for some questions for a panel discussion in advance and just want to say thanks for people taking the time to send these in we will do our very best to get through as many as we can. I will quickly run through our agenda for today. Andrew is going to set the national context for us. And where this particular piece of work fits and supports the national priorities within the Scottish Attainment Challenge and improving educational experiences and outcomes for care

experienced children. Larissa and Michael are then going to share the story of how the roles of the virtual school head teachers and care expedience teams have developed in Scotland over the last few years. What the role is, how it functions, what the role of CELCIS is, in supporting these positions, both locally and nationally, and share some of the learnings that we've gathered so far. Patrick is then going to share some insights from his perspective as an English virtual school head teacher around how the role is developing in Scotland and the reciprocal learning that's taking place between NAVSHT and the Scottish network. And we'll then move on to a panel discussion with Joanne, Mary Jane, Janine and Patrick to answer some of the questions that you've sent in.

I know that some people joining us today won't have worked alongside us before, so I wanted to take the chance to explain just a wee bit about who CELCIS are and what we do. We are the Center for Excellence for Children's Care and Protection, and we are based at University of Strathclyde. We are an improvement center, which works alongside practitioners, children and young people with lived experience and organizations to create and sustain positive changes and outcomes for people with experience of care. We do this by generating and bringing together the best evidence of what works, the voice of children and young people, their families and those who care for them, practitioner wisdom, insight and policy expertise, to help people think about what we can say and do differently to provide the right support at the right

time for all children and young people in need of care and protection. The Promise articulates and we have work in which we really identify with at CELCIS. They've said that we have to hold the hands of those who hold the hands of children and young people, and this is how we aim to work at CELCIS. We're involved in a range of areas of work across the organization and education is one of those areas. And today we're delighted to be able to share some information about one of the areas of our strategic focus - the development of the role of virtual school head teachers and care expedience teams in Scotland - and these roles are improving educational experiences and outcomes for children and young people with experience of care. So without further ado, I would like to invite Andrew to talk about the national context.

Thank you.

Andrew

Thanks, Linda. Some of you might know we had originally planned for the cabinet secretary to be on this slot today. And when we found out that she couldn't attend we has asked her to record a little message, her private secretary then got in touch with me to say that the app they use to manage such messages had crashed while they were uploading it, so we prepared a little script for her, and I'm just going to say exactly what the cabinet secretary would have said to you this morning. Now, I'm not very good at impressions, but you can if you wish, for the next few minutes, at least pretend that I am Shirley-Anne Somerville. In all seriousness though,

the Cab Sec does send her sincere apologies for not being able to join the webinar this morning. She has also asked me to acknowledge all the hard work and commitment of everyone here today who make a real difference to the lives of children and families in Scotland. And also to reiterate that the Scottish Government recognize and acknowledge the impact COVID has had on the workforce, and to pay tribute to the resilience, perseverance and leadership that you've all shown to help steer and nurture the children and young people of Scotland through an incredibly difficult time. All children have a right to an education regardless of the circumstances. For children and young people with care experience, this may mean that additional support is required during their time in school to meet their distinct and often unseen needs. When we launched the care experience children and young people fund in 2018, we made a very deliberate choice to use the term care experienced to ensure anyone who has been or currently is in care would be eligible to benefit from the fund. That fund gives local authorities the invaluable support to implement interventions, such as virtual school head teachers. The fund is also being used to increase attendance and reduce exclusions while supporting programs such as enhanced tutoring and mentoring, which help support vulnerable children and young people and their families to better engage with education. This builds resilience and understanding across the system, enhancing the educational experience of children and young people and helping to meet their needs in a sustainable way. Over £33million was made available during the last parliamentary term through the care

experience children and young people fund. And a further £11.6million is supporting local authorities through the fund this year. That continued additional support for care experienced children and young people is helping contribute to efforts across all services to keep The Promise. On the 23rd of November, the Cabinet Secretary set out plans for the refresh of the Scottish Attainment Challenge over the next four years. The aim is to support recovery from the pandemic and accelerate progress in closing the attainment gap. As part of the Scottish Attainment Challenge Program we have confirmed that the care experience children and young people fund will continue over the next four years. And this will see approximately £11.5million distributed to local authorities in each of those years. As committed corporate parents, the Scottish Government has continued to champion and support our care experienced young people across many aspects of their lives the Attainment Scotland fund is also supporting CELCIS and this network. And that's because this network provides a significant level of support to current and prospective network members on topics such as evaluation, planning, corporate parenting, designing and delivering training, Scottish Government reporting, and developing multi agency relationships. The work has enabled and supported effective spending and evaluation of the care experience children and young people fund. It should also lead to benefits in terms of sustainability and any future scale up of the virtual school head teacher model across local authorities. In recognition of that we have also recently confirmed that our support for CELCIS and this network will also continue.

Finally, nothing is more important than ensuring every child and young person has the same opportunity to succeed in education. Regardless of their background, we can and must deliver that for our children and young people. We must also continue to enrich their education and family life while tackling the impacts of poverty. We are confident that our local authority partners, head teachers, teachers, and virtual head teachers know their learners the best and that means all of us working together sharing best practice in our joint mission to close the poverty related attainment gap. Thanks Linda. I will pass back to you.

Thank you very much for that Andrew, we really appreciate you stepping in on behalf of the Cabinet Secretary as well this morning, and it's great to hear Scottish Government reaffirming their support to support care experience children and young people and the work of the network. So thank you very much for that. I will now hand over to my colleagues, Larissa and Michael, who are going to share a bit about the story of the work so far.

Larissa

Thanks, Linda. And good morning, everyone. And thanks for joining us today. As Linda said, my name is Larissa Gordon, and I'm the virtual school head teacher in Aberdeen city. I'm also seconded one day a week to CELCIS as the national advisor to the virtual school network. So it really is a privilege for me to be able to take this opportunity along with my colleague Michael to share the story so far of the virtual

school and care experience team network in Scotland, from Aberdeen city having the first virtual school in Scotland back in December 2015. Through to where we are now with 17 of the 32 local authorities being part of the network. So we recognize all children and young people have a right to quality education. We also know that for our care experienced children and young people, this may mean that additional support is required during their time in school to meet, as Andrew has said, their distinct and often unseen needs. We know that educational outcomes have improved over the last 10 years. However, Scottish Government statistics show that there's still a gap between those who are looked after and their peers. It's also important to remember that having experience of care is not necessarily a predictor of poorer educational outcomes. The data shows us the importance of providing effective, timely and responsive support to meet the individual needs of children and young people. And it was that evidence and knowledge that led to the recognition initially by Aberdeen city and in due course within other local authorities, that having a specific role with our focus on this group of children and young people really would be of benefit. So the care experience funding from the Scottish Government gave local authorities the opportunity to develop and implement a role that had a specific focus on improving educational outcomes for care experienced children and young people, several areas then deciding to develop a virtual school or to appoint a virtual school head teacher or care experience team. Between July 2018 And February 2019, Linda O'Neill and the education team of CELCIS and I began to get an

increasing number of calls and emails, inquiring about the role of a virtual school and how to implement such a role. So on the back of this, we made the decision to bring people together to discuss this in more depth and explore what the possibilities might be. And it was decided with the support from Aberdeen city that CELCIS would host and convene the network as they had both the expertise and infrastructure in place. Now although at present children and young people are not involved at network level, it's important to have their voices absolutely captured at authority level and this feeds into the work of the group. And the intention going forward is that as we grow as a network, we will seek to involve children and young people more directly. So the question then, what is a virtual school? A virtual school can be described as an organizational framework, which has been adopted by some local authorities as a means by which to offer an additional layer of support for the education of care experienced children and young people, and that might be through an individual person or a team. A virtual school head teacher who is in the virtual school is also a senior member of staff that works at a strategic level within a local authority, and who also works collaboratively with all agencies. The virtual school also describes the care experience children and young people that belong to their local authority, but attend a range of schools, including a significant number who may be living and being educated out of authority. Virtual School head teachers and care experience teams will track the attendance, attainment and progress of those care experience children and young

people, and will work with a range of partners to improve educational experience.

So as the role of the virtual school head teacher is developing organically in Scotland, there is some variation from one local authority to the other with regards to the model. However, all of them provide a continuum of support from operational through to strategic development with the ability to move seamlessly between each really depending on the needs of the individual child and the particular situation. Now, examples of that support may range from building a relationship with a young person who's maybe disengaged from learning, listening to their views, and identifying what the barriers are so that appropriate supports can be put in place, to right through to working at a national level shaping policy and procedures, that will impact on care experience children and young people. Virtual School head teachers also recognize that while working with a child or young person, there's a need to work alongside home and other key partners in order to ensure that there's a coordinated approach with a consistent narrative. And that's about having the skills to identify what's needed, and then develop capacity so that change can be sustained. When working with schools, levels of support can vary from providing advice on strategies and approaches to working alongside the school, foster carers or parents to triangulate communication between all involved in a way that's non-threatening. At a local authority level, it can be about coordinating transition planning meetings, for a child or young person returning to their home local authority,

ensuring everyone then has clarity on what's required to support progress of that plan. So as described, we're working at all levels, from supporting children and families to the implementation of national policies. Our way of working as virtual school head teachers, care experience teams and as a network allows us to align our strategic goals to these national priorities, which supports progress towards key themes in each of these documents. So I'm now going to hand over to my colleague Michael who is going to tell us a bit more about the network and who's involved. Thank you.

Michael

Thank you, Larissa. My name is Michael Bettencourt and I am an education consultant at CELCIS. The network as Larissa described, supported by funding from Scottish Government was established in March 2019. It brings together those virtual school head teachers and care experience teams working in local authorities to provide leadership, infrastructure and a space for people to connect. It has two overarching aims at the child level. It's there to support both educational experiences and outcomes of care leavers. We want our children to go to school, enjoy their time at school and gain the skills and qualifications to move on to the world of work and study. And secondly, the network that is there to support those colleagues, who are relatively new to post carry out a complex role. Members have reported numerous benefits of being part of the group including having that safe space, peer support, and an opportunity to share ideas. The majority of the group are senior members of education staff

with that specific remit for care experienced learners, and typically they've been deputy head teachers in schools. The group in addition to the 17 also includes representation from Education Scotland, Scottish Government and colleagues from CELCIS. We are a mixture of practitioners, researchers and policymakers. It is hard to summarize the work of a group which has been so diverse and over such a long period of time. However, we've met almost every month to discuss an area of strategic focus that has been agreed in advance so we've had themes looking at our response to the pandemic, cross border issues and young people moving, The Promise and young people's participation. The group's grown from an original number of nine to now 17 We are looking forward to welcoming an 18th in New Year. We have increased our coverage of young people from around 40% to an estimated 70%. We're capturing the work of the network in a variety of different ways. We are currently conducting research, following individual interviews with members, which is hoping to describe the key features of the virtual school and care experience network in Scotland. We're uploading case studies to highlight the range of practice at the individual level to understand what virtual schools are doing on a day to day basis. And we've also completed a fairly comprehensive evaluation of the work which highlights a number of themes and all of that work is available on the CELCIS virtual school Head Teacher Network website. Whilst it's hard to quantify, we're also creating connections not only with each other, but with external organizations, including NAVSH, the National Association of virtual school heads in England, which I'm sure

Patrick will talk about. The bulk of the work has been around the implementation of policy into practice, virtual school heads and care experience teams have got significant expertise of what's going on the ground for children and young people. So they've we've have produced practice guidance and contributed to several consultations.

To summarize, the network formally came about in 2019, out of a desire to bring together a group of people who are increasingly being recruited to post since then it's grown and reach and size. Academic research, our evaluation and our observation of practice are remarkably consistent in describing the key features that are contributing to the success of the role. This includes a named person with a specific responsibility for care experience learners, an increase in the understanding of the needs of the group as a whole, not just their educational needs, their holistic needs, raising of aspirations, a role that brings about change and improvement, and a golden thread that runs through all of the research all of our observations and our evaluation, this concept of building relationships and creating links between different parts of a complex system. A particular strength of the role is in its ability to adapt and change. Virtual Schools follow care experience young people at each age and stage of their journey through education. We are aiming to offer the right support at the right time, we increasingly use this expression to describe what we're doing, we're inhabiting that space between policy, ambition and practice. We are actively grappling and working to implement policies to ensure that

care experienced learners get the support they need and thrive in education. Thank you so much for listening, that was a bit of a whistle stop tour. But I hope it's given you an insight into the work that we've been doing with our colleagues from a number of local authorities across Scotland, I'm going to hand over back to Linda.

Thank you very much to Michael and Larissa for that. Like Michael said, it's a wee bit of a whistle stop tour, it's quite difficult to encapsulate a couple of years of work and 10 minutes, but we hope that that's giving you a bit of an idea about how the work has developed and progresses over the over the last few years. I'm now going to introduce you to Patrick Ward, who is the virtual school heads in Lewisham. And the current chair of NAVSH, which is the National Association of virtual school heads in England. And Patrick and NAVSH have been a huge support to us over the last couple of years as our as our network and the roles have developed, so we've invited Patrick along today to invite him to give us some reflections on how the roles are developing in Scotland based on his experience in England. So thank you very much, Patrick.

Patrick

Thank you, Linda. And thank you for inviting me also to everyone at CELCIS. I'm going to be brief so that we've got plenty of time for an interactive discussion. But I'm going to make two key points. One is that I believe that the virtual school model that we've developed is the best way of

delivering outstanding education outcomes for children in care. Also, that I believe Scotland is far better placed than we are in England to deliver those outcomes in terms of the way you see care and the way you see education. So I'm going to say something just about the journey of virtual schools in England. By the way apologies for the heavy drilling you can hear in the background. I'm having flammable cladding removed from my building in London. Hopefully another indication of the differences between the Scottish and English policy framework and why you do things so much better north of the border at times. So, virtual schools have been statutory since 2014. I've been in post since 2010. So I've seen that journey happen. And I've seen the impact it's made on how you can deliver your role. The principles of a virtual school head is that you're the lead professional, for education within a local authority for children in care. So you lead on corporate parenting, the buck stops with you. The statutory powers sit with a virtual school head, the funding sits with the virtual school head, and they're responsible for bringing together the data and the expertise. Now, I'm arguing that having one individual who's well resourced, and as the right legislative framework around them, being able to intervene in such a vulnerable cohort inherently delivers the opportunity for stronger outcomes. I think even the best possible system will struggle to deal with the intense levels of trauma that this cohort present. I think having that extra layer, within a local authority, with the proper status with the proper tools, ultimately, is essential for giving the young people that extra layer of support that they need. Now, in terms of the

differences as to how that would operate within England and Scotland, I think you've got some key areas, which we are very, very envious of. In Scotland you have The Promise. We have nothing similar to that in England, there's nowhere in England, that there is this commitment from Central and local government to work together in that way to make corporate parenting everyone's responsibility, to make inclusion in education, everyone's responsibility, in that sense a virtual school in England can feel like quite a lonely and attritional role at times. But I believe that you have the framework to not only deliver better practice very quickly than we have in England, but also perhaps to be uniquely placed globally, to deliver outstanding practice for this cohort. Because I think that commitment is incredibly strong and incredibly appropriate for this cohort. Also, you do care in a far more consensual way than we do. It's a very binary model around care in England. Essentially, you're in care or you're not. The day before you go into care, you have almost no support, no statutory support from the local authority. You go into care, you have a virtual school model. Now, to me, that's a very short sighted way of looking at things. And I know that in Scotland, the way you just manage care as a general process, it's far less binary, and it creates far better opportunities for cooperation. Now, there are obviously head teachers in our local authorities in England that do this very well. And there's a certain Michael Roche, I believe, listening from inverclyde, who was once an outstanding head teacher in England and had excellent outcomes for children in care. And I know he's

bringing that practice to Scotland very effectively, I'm sorry to embarrass you very Michael.

So I think that those conditions that you have already really makes this the right time to develop this virtual school model. What we have at the moment is the National Association of Virtual School Heads in England. That's every single virtual school head in the country, every single statutory professional, that are able to work together, share expertise, Joint commission, lobby government, all of the things that you can do better as a group. We're honored to have Larissa Gordon, in Scotland as a member already, she's made a huge impact on NAVSH by sharing the outstanding practice that you have in Scotland. So it's an open invitation to all virtual school heads in Scotland, all education professionals to work with NAVSH to share expertise, to support each other, both in Scotland and in England. Now, I believe my time's running out now. So I'm just going to say I look forward to working with you all in the future. I look forward to being part of the interactive panel that we're going to have next. And thank you again for everyone for inviting me.

Thank you very much for that Patrick and really, really interesting for me to home for all our delegates here today to hear the perspective from an English perspective where that rule has been statutory now for a number of years. So thank you very much for coming along and sharing those insights. I am going to hand over now as Patrick said to our interactive

session which Joanne McMeeking is going to chair, so Joanne I will hand over to you for that.

Thank you, Linda. Happy to jump in and chair for you. And thank you to Patrick, for that really interesting take on the Scottish context. Okay, so who do we have on the panel today? We have Mary Jane Hunter, who is our virtual school leads in North Lanarkshire, welcome Mary Jane, we have Janine McCulloch, Senior Education Officer at Education, Scotland. Welcome to you Janine. And we have Patrick Ward, who you just heard speaking there. And Patrick is the virtual school head teacher at Lewisham, and his chair of the National Association of virtual school heads, and that is NAVSH. Welcome to the panel. And can I just say a big welcome to the audience and to the people who are listening in, we have got probably around 25 minutes to go through a set of questions. And people had helpfully brought some questions to us. So we're sitting with a number of questions that we want to work through, and we're going to direct them to certain folks in the panel as well. So we've got around about 30 minutes, as I said, folks have sent a questions in advance, which is absolutely fantastic. And thank you, for the people for doing that. If we don't get through all the questions, we will promise to spend a little bit of time afterwards with the panelists and work on the answers and make that available on our website and via the video recording from today. So don't worry about that. We'll try and get through everything as best we can. And then finally, before we jump in, we've grouped the questions into themes.

There were some natural themes for us, or rather than lots of separate questions. We're grouping them into themes. And we've also directed some of those questions to certain members of our panels as well in terms of their certain levels of expertise. So without further ado, I'm going to read the first question out, and I'm going to ask Mary Jane to get ready to respond to that. Okay, so the first question that's come in today is the term virtual school can mean different things to different people. How do you help people understand what the role is, and how it can help children and young people? Over to yourself, Mary Jane.

Panel

Thanks, Joanne. Well, for me, I am going to rewind, you know, I can speak about my own personal experience and my understanding of what I thought it was, but I'm not entirely sure it has turned out to be what I thought I was going to do, if I'm perfectly honest. And so all of it looks very different on paper than it does in practice. In when I first came into this post, I - Joanne you may remember this - came to a CELCIS meeting, probably about two days later. And I'll be perfectly honest, I did not know where I was and what I was doing, on God's good earth. That's where I was at that point. But for me, I suppose it was around the understanding part. So the phrase virtual head teacher or virtual school leads, this is before the pandemic let's remember, when everything then became virtual, it was really quite difficult for people to get their head around. How can you be a head teacher when you've not got a school? That kind of thing? So I suppose for

me, it was about how do we make people understand what the role is? How do I understand what my role looks like in my particular council. And also, there was a wee bit around understanding of care experience, to be perfectly honest, so did the people who were working with our most vulnerable children understand that term themselves? So there was a lot of work had to be done and the virtual school head teacher network was really, really helpful. CELCIS were really helpful, certainly for me, in guiding me with some of that. So I was able to work together with other people who are maybe in similar, maybe a wee bit confused states as I was. What came out of that for me was about, I suppose building connections, to be able to support people to understand what the role is about, and how we can support families, young people, schools, and other people working with our children and young people. Basically, at that point, we decided to have some sort of roadshow and put communication out there. So we went to the head teachers meetings, we went round every High School, cluster meetings, every social work department, kinship carers, we meet with WHO CARES? (Scotland) with champions boards, etc. Basically, to say, well, this is what we've here, and this is what it the role is, but what should our virtual school look like? Because for us to provide a service, we needed to provide a service that would meet the needs of the children and our council, so a lot of work has been done around that. We tried really, really hard to go with "what can we do to help?" and take that on board. You know, there's no point in reinventing the wheel. So what's working well, how do we know it's working well? What

are we keeping? What do we need to change? And let's plan around that. The key question for us was how can we help? How do we build a service that meets the needs of what you need and what our young people need to improve outcomes for everybody. And so I've mentioned about building connections, what we didn't do was put out leaflets and that kind of thing, because we weren't exactly sure what our virtual school was going to look like. And I knew that with CELCIS and with the network meetings, we've done some work on information that's gone out and communication. But for us, it was all about building connections, making sure that the team was particularly visible. And getting that information out there. That particularly helped us when the pandemic hit, I'll be perfectly honest, because people knew there is a person in North Lanarkshire, there is a team in this Council, where you can go for a bit of help, and they will find a way of signposting, etc, for you, or finding the resources that you need, especially when schools are closed, and things like that. So I'm trying to keep this short, because I know we've got a lot of questions, and there's a lot more I can say. But some of the things that we do to help our young people are, you know, we work with schools, we work with families, we work the social workers, who work with lots of different people, it's all based around sound relationships, understanding needs, and working together.

That's lovely, thank you very much for that Mary Jane, and what you're flagging very quickly and very soon in that conversation is the importance of connection, the importance

of orientation, especially with a new role. And I can safely say, Mary Jane, you didn't look confused. When I met you several years ago, you clearly had a good sense of what you wanted to do. Okay, so jumping in now. And we're going to put this question to Janine, how is the role of virtual school head teachers and the care experience teams, and the wider work of the network supporting progress towards the ambition set out in The Promise.

And thank you very much. So I think we've heard from Mary Jane, so we know, some of the, the practice of the virtual head teacher. So what I'm going to outline is, one of the things that the virtual head teachers do very, very well is they help schools recognize their place in the scaffolding of care, which is one of the things that was brought through in The Promise. Children spend 26 to 28 hours a week, in school, that's a significant part of their lives, that can make a significant difference to whether their childhood is happy and good or not. So the impact that practitioners within schools have on children and young people, particularly those who require a bit more support for example many of our care experienced youngsters, is vast. So The Promise, I'm going to keep this short, but The Promise, the virtual head teachers support implementation of the recommendations that came out of The Promise, in really a couple of key areas. One where they can really get to the heart of the voice of children, in terms of how they experience their education, because they know their children. That's the next one is about understanding their data. Now, I hate calling it data, because

what I really mean is they know who their care experienced young people are, because they can look at the overview of the data across the local authority, and can really hone down into identifying who their care experienced, young people are, and what are the needs of those different groups of young people and how they are cared for, and what difference that makes in terms of the supports that we put in place for them. So the virtual head teachers are able to pull together that information. So linking up our social work data with our educational data on what this might mean to a child who's care experienced, perhaps in early years, all the way through to a child who is at the point of leaving their school education and hopefully moving on to something positive next, and describing to the practitioners in the schools, what that means for those learners and how they can best support them. So they can pull together that information and that helps in decision making around local resourcing at a local authority level, to support the schools and the practitioners to be able to support the children and young people. They can also identify as an overview, what the workforce needs to support our young people in terms of their own professional learning, and potentially resources. But also within the schools is the best place within those 26 to 28 hours is to ask children, what do you need? And find that out specifically. And of course the different - depending on how children are cared for might make a difference as to what would make a difference in terms of supporting for them. So a good example is that virtual head teachers can identify those young people who are in kinship care, those who are in foster care,

who are in residential homes, and say, what's the difference in terms of how we support these different groups or their families? So they pull that information together. And in terms of the network, they have been sharing this information. And as best as they can, they have been taking this information out into the wider Scotland. So even local authorities that do not have virtual head teachers, they've been able to learn from the experience of the Virtual Head Teacher Network. So that sharing of information of what's working, and what perhaps are challenges at a local authority level, and how we can support schools is absolutely vital, absolutely vital. So that's in brief, just some of the things that I think the virtual schools and head teachers network are bringing to implement some of the recommendations that are out there in terms of The Promise.

Thank you for that Janine and that overview of The Promise. And that the first word you use when you talked about The Promise was the importance of the scaffolding as well, and the role of the virtual school head teachers and care experience teams in the scaffolding of children. And to summarize what you were saying, what I was hearing quite strongly from you was the data. You need to know your population of children as well. Because if you know your population of children well, you're able to identify need, you're able to problem solve, and you're also able to improve your practice and your experiences for your children and young people and ultimately, their educational outcomes. Moving on to the third question, it's quite a long question. So

stay with me on this, and this is going to come across to Patrick. There are some key similarities and key differences between the rules in Scotland and England. If England was at the start of this journey, again, is there anything that you would like to see being done differently? And what would you like to remain the same? That's a cracking question isn't?

It is indeed. Thank you to whoever came up with it. And so one of the things, I would like – in fact the thing, the most important thing, I would like to be different is something that I mentioned earlier. I would like there to be something like The Promise in place in England at the beginning of the virtual school journey. At the moment, we're lobbying government for something called the call to action. It's by the attachment research community. There's an all-party parliamentary group in Westminster, based on the Timpson report, if any of you are familiar with that, which is for all schools to be attachment and trauma aware by 2025. A pretty modest ask if you ask me. But that being in place at the beginning of our journey, would have avoided some of the attritional nature of the journey of virtual schools, I spend a lot of time behaving like a criminal barrister, telling schools what legal powers I'm going to deploy if I don't take this or that vulnerable child, I'd like to spend less time doing that, and more time focusing on the learning of the young people. And I think that's to do with a particular context of England. We have academies and free schools, you don't. We have schools that are completely outside the remit of a local authority, who only answer to central government or private interests, usually from the

financial sector behind them. This creates challenges for the type of work that we do. But having something like that in there at the beginning would be vital. Also, you'll probably know there's an independent inquiry into social care going on at the moment to address this idea that corporate parenting is solely the responsibility for social worker. Corporate parenting is a responsibility of us all within the community. I would like the findings of that report, which I believe are going to conclude that, to be in place at the beginning. These are things I believe, which are more or less fair in Scotland. I know from conversations with Larissa that things aren't perfect. But that's the type of thing that I think I would like to have seen at the beginning. And in terms of what should stay the same. That's also something I alluded to earlier. That there is a statutory key professional, with sufficient authority in every single local authority. The virtual schools in England don't mean different things to different people because there's a defined statutory role. Now I've been virtual school head in a leafy conservative authority in the southeast Surrey, and in a very challenging inner London borough, Lewisham. Obviously I perform those roles in different ways depending on the context, but fundamental expectations of the role around corporate parenting, around how you deploy your legal powers, the funding that you have available. There's very strong ring-fenced funding available to discharge these roles. That definitely should be in place, whichever model you're working, in my view. That's, I think the two ways in which I would answer that question.

Thank you for that, Patrick. And what you're highlighting is some of the differences between Scotland and England. But also acknowledgement from the English perspective that virtual school head teachers have been in statute since 2014. Okay, so I'm going to move on. Thank you for that, Patrick, and I'm going to move on to question four. So I'm mindful that we are on question four and I have 10 questions. So I would look to my colleagues at some point, to give me a bit of a hands up in terms of time as well, which is going to be really important for us. And that goes back to what I said earlier, the importance that we're going to grab the rest of those questions that we don't get through and make sure that would respond back to people as well. So this is a question for Mary Jane, and Mary Jane can I ask you to be quite brief if that's OK. How do virtual school heads ensure that pupil voice is at the center of their practice? And why do you think it's important to include children and young people?

Well, there's lots and lots of different ways we can capture pupil voice, as you'll know, Joanne. And anybody who's probably on this webinar values pupil voice and values the young people because they wouldn't be here otherwise. For me, it's about who we link with and how we link with them, and actually listening. And I don't just mean spending time saying, Right I've heard what you've said, but I'm making the same decision anyway. It's about who are the key players? How are we accessing our young people's opinions? For me, that's including young people in every decision that we make. So for example, I've been very lucky in North Lanarkshire

where I've been kind of almost given free rein to build a team. So I have some teachers, social work staff, etc. And I make sure that I have a young person, or more than one if I can, on every single interview for every single post because I want to see that interaction, I asked them what are the important questions? What do you need me to ask? Can you work with that person? What's your view? Wider than that, I suppose it's around do we know our children? And are we speaking to them in their schools and the children's houses? And are they able to contact us if they have concerns if they want to talk about something? We use lots and lots of contacts to do that - Who cares? Scotland and lots of different people. Other things are around, I suppose interventions and supports that we've put in place. It's really, really important for me that the data, yes, we can gather, but the data does not tell the story behind a young person, or a group of young people. So for me, it's about what are they actually saying about what we're doing? How has it made a difference? And where is the evidence that it's made any difference? So I suppose it's around the feedback from the young people, the people around them, their families and people involved in their lives. So for me, that is a whole theme around pupil voice or young people's voice, because sometimes the beyond pupils, they've actually left school, and the support still needs to be there. But it's about being accessible and making sure that we're listening properly. And we are using their opinions and the feedback that we get in a way that's positive. I am really, really keen. I'm a great admirer of the youth, I think it keeps us all young and they come up with some fantastic

ideas. I haven't you know, walked a mile and a care expedience young person's shoes. With the best will in the world, I think I'm doing the best job I can. But they never cease to amaze me by saying, why don't you try this? Or you could do this a wee bit better. And I think we all need to not be precious, and say, you know something? Okay. Can you help me to do that? That is something that we're trying to support our schools to do. The answers to a lot of the difficulties or challenges faced, we probably already have the solution somewhere, we just need to find the right way of doing it. And who better to tell us but our young people who are hopefully our future workforce.

I think that's a really good place to end that response to that to that question, Mary Jane, and you began to touch on the importance of that kind of dynamic interaction of children and young people, carers and families been absolutely the heart of everything that that happens in everything. You absolutely do. And it does go back as well to the importance of that interaction between best research as well, practitioner wisdom, as well as experience in the views of children and young people as well. And that's where The Promise sits too in terms of pushing that agenda along as well. I'm going to chance my arm here, and I think we've got time for one more question. And that's going to go across to Patrick, if that's OK, Patrick, and again, just asking you to summarize a little bit of your thinking around this question. So here we go. Final question and we're on question number five. So we'll get halfway through Have done grand haven't we've done OK?

What benefits are there to having a network or an association of virtual school heads that meet regularly.

As I mentioned, there are certain things which are constant within virtual schools. But there are certain things where there's huge variables according to the local area. So you're going to have pockets of expertise in different parts of the country. In my area, for example, youth crime is a huge issue. So contextual safeguarding, how you address contextual safeguarding, as a barrier to learning. So that's probably an area in which I'm able to share expertise. And another area it might be training in other areas might be how you manage your journey into and out of care how you work with vulnerable families, and meeting as a network, you get to share these experiences, share this expertise, and create institutional memory within an organization. I think that's absolutely key to the longevity of this piece of work, and also to our ability to lobby government. Because ultimately, that's where the future needs to be - changes to primary legislation changes to funding to create the best possible legislative environment for these young people. You do that far more effectively, as a group of individuals, because anyone in government having to justify where they're allocating budget to an area, they need evidence. They need evidence, they need a narrative, they need to know that what they've been presented with has a certain universality to it. And isn't just specific to a particular area and that can only be achieved by presenting as a network, ideally, as a national network.

Thank you for that, Patrick. And that was well summed up and if I can just skip through what was said here in terms of a summary and then hand over to Linda now to begin to mop up the session, you're clearly seeing that importance of the network around the lobbying as well as really important. And it's also about guiding leadership, as well as in terms leadership of the workforce, too. And I was thinking a little bit when you were speaking there about the importance of best practice and effective practices with the workforce as well, what makes a really good virtual school Head Teacher, what is the guide that you work to, and that's been an important factor in Scotland bringing together a new way of working, that we're in a position as we move forward, that we're really clear together, what makes a difference when you are in this role. And that's absolutely critical. It may sound really fundamental, but it's really, really important. And then for us, when you were talking about lobbying, my head was going to that critical feedback loop with government and the sector. And that's something that we've had very close to this network. We have Scottish Government colleagues, who regularly attend the network and are very supportive of the network. And I know that the members are very appreciative of Scottish Government being part of that. So we've been moving in more of a feedback loop rather than a lobbying role. So that's quite an interesting take in terms of what might be going on in England, and what might be going on in Scotland. So that's a wonderful whistle round for us, we could have probably spent another half hour an hour on this. And apologies to the audience for not getting through it all, I think

it's a conversation that I can have with the team to think a little bit about is this something we would want to do in the future, but give ourselves a little bit more time. So on that note, can I just see a very big thank you to Mary Jane, to Janine, and to Patrick, that was absolutely fantastic to hear your insights, it was very much appreciated. I'm going to hand it over to Linda now.

Thank you very much for Joanne. And just to echo Joanne's thanks as well to Patrick and Mary Jane for that. I don't know about anyone else, but I could certainly have stayed and listened to that discussion and answers to lots more questions for another couple of hours. But I'm sure that our panelists will be relieved to know we have only got until 11 o'clock today. But before we finish up, I wanted to let people know that to coincide with this webinar, we are publishing a new online information resource that has got more details about this work. So in addition to our web page, which contains all the details of the local authorities that are currently involved, and the resources that we've produced so far, our new resource tells the story of this work and details the early impacts and outcomes, and I think Michelle is going to share that with people at the webinar. But we're also going to send out a follow up email, which will take you to a link that you can access it through. And that also contains a short evaluation, which would be really grateful if you could take a few minutes to complete and tell us what you thought of today's event. It really does help us shape up what we do in the future to try and make them as relevant as possible. I

really hope that you have enjoyed today I have certainly enjoyed hearing from the range of different contributors about the key themes that are coming through about children's voice about building connection about collaborative working and about how their work is trying to make a difference in terms of implementing the recommendations with The Promise. If you're currently working in a local authority, or you think you're in a role where you are fulfilling the duties of a virtual school head teacher or a care experience team, or you're thinking about developing that role in your local authority, then please get in touch with us to discuss this in more detail. We're always keen to share our learning and to welcome new virtual school head teachers and care experience teams to our network. And I would just like to finish up today to say that we feel incredibly privileged to have been able to support and contribute to this work over the last couple of years. And we're really looking forward to continuing it in the future. We'd really like to thank all our network members without whom this work just wouldn't be possible, and also recognize the contribution to Scottish Government and Education Scotland who have been pivotal in providing the support, and helping us to progress the work. I'd also like to touch on a lot of what Mary Jane was saying today. And thank the many children and young people who work alongside their virtual school head teachers and their care experience teams locally, who give their time and then insights to network members. Because this has been really, really crucial and making sure that the strategic priorities that we discuss in progressing the network and informed what

children and young people are telling their virtual school head teachers, of what would make the biggest difference to them. So I just like to recognize that over here today. I'd like to thank all of our contributors and our panelists for coming along and sharing their information and reflections with us, and the CELCIS staff team behind the scenes for all the support for the organization and the facilitation of the session. And finally, but certainly not least, I'd like to see a sincere thank you to all of you for coming along today. To find out more about the work and taking the time out of your day to spend it with us. We have really appreciated you taking the time and like to share the information. And we hope that we get the chance to make links with you all in the future. As I said earlier, if there's anything at all that you'd like to discuss in more detail about your work, or if you have any questions about it, please just get in touch with us either through our website or picking up the phone. We're always really happy to talk to other people and organizations that are involved in improving educational outcomes and experiences for care experience children and young people. So thank you again to everyone for coming along today and for the time that you've taken out your day. We hope you enjoy the rest of your day and we hope that you have a very happy and restful, festive period when it arrives. Take care everyone.

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