



Skills  
Development  
Scotland

# Corporate Parenting Plan

2024 – 2027

# Foreword

## The publication of Skills Development Scotland's Corporate Parenting Plan 2024-27 comes at a key moment for the future of the education and skills landscape.

The Scottish Government is currently progressing its agenda of education reform which affects Skills Development Scotland (SDS) and a number of our partner agencies.

Despite this time of change, it remains imperative that we do everything we can to offer the best possible support to those young people who face disadvantages, and this very much includes those who are Care Experienced.

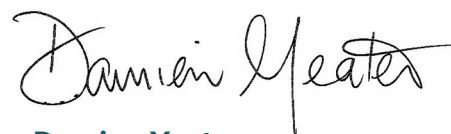
Our latest plan aims to build on the substantial progress made in recent years. After the passing of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act in 2014, followed in 2020 by "The Promise" that every Care Experienced child and young person should grow up loved, safe and respected, the support provided by agencies such as SDS has become a far more salient issue.

SDS has also enhanced its understanding of the needs of Care Experienced young people through detailed customer feedback, our Equality Evidence Review and continued consultation with colleagues and stakeholders.

This has allowed us to identify not only the strengths we have gained as the result of the activities contained in previous plans, but also the areas in which we can continue to improve.

The result is a plan which at its heart contains three commitments against which we will measure ourselves over the next three years. We will listen to Care Experienced young people and act on what they tell us, we will support our colleagues to be caring, active and responsible Corporate Parents, and we will continue to collaborate with our partners with whom we share these goals.

The reforms which are planned for the coming years may affect the ways in which services are delivered, but the current uncertainty has not affected the commitment of SDS colleagues to focusing on the needs of our service users. That will continue to be the case as we work to give Scotland's Care Experienced young people the support they deserve.



**Damien Yeates**

Chief Executive, Skills Development Scotland

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This version was published on 25th October 2024, containing minor corrections to figures on page 9 and 10 in the document originally published on 23rd October 2024.

# 1. Introduction

## About Skills Development Scotland

Skills Development Scotland (SDS) is the national skills agency. Our ambition is that skills contribute to a thriving, productive and inclusive Scotland. We work to achieve this through intelligence-led delivery of Scotland's all-age career service and Scottish apprenticeships, as well as other learning and skills interventions in support of Scottish Government ambitions. While our services are universally available to any individual or business requiring support, they are targeted to help those most in need.

SDS collaborates extensively across the education and skills system. By sharing expertise and intelligence, we enable the development and delivery of innovative solutions to Scotland's skills and labour market challenges. Further details on SDS's strategic approach and operational activities can be found in 'Skills for a Changing World', our **Strategic Plan 2022-27**, published in November 2022.

## Education and skills reform

The Scottish Government is progressing its education reform programme following several independent reviews, including the **Independent Review of the Skills Delivery Landscape** and **Purpose and Principles for Post-School Education, Research and Skills**.

This reform is likely to impact SDS and the products and services it delivers. During this time of uncertainty, we will continue working to enable all people to develop the skills, adaptive resilience, and personal agency to thrive in a vibrant and inclusive labour market. We acknowledge that the detail of this plan might change depending on future decisions made by the Scottish Government.

## 2. Our Corporate Parenting duties

### Defining 'Care Experience'

While there are legal definitions for the terms 'looked-after' and 'care leaver', within SDS we choose to use the inclusive term 'Care Experienced'. By this we mean anyone who is currently in care or has been for any length of time regardless of their age. This inclusive approach includes those looked after at home, or away from home in kinship, residential, foster or secure care. Our intention is to act as Corporate Parent to anyone who identifies themselves within this broader 'Care Experienced' definition, and as such, this term is used throughout this plan.

We also recognise that not everyone who could identify as Care Experienced will choose to do so. The Promise (see page 7) outlines that the term 'Care Experienced' tries to acknowledge that, for some people:

- the sense of being in care is a shared experience
- care is an experience, but not one that totally defines you
- language should put the person it talks about at the centre.

The regular sharing of data between SDS, local authorities and colleges helps to minimise the reliance on self-disclosure so that Care Experienced people can get the support they are entitled to, allowing us and partners to provide effective targeted support.

### What is Corporate Parenting?

As a Corporate Parent we have responsibility to looked-after children and care leavers, and to respond to their needs as any parent or carer would.

Corporate Parents have duties as set out in the **Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 ('The Act')**, which came into effect on 1 April 2015. Part nine of The Act makes specific provision for those who are Care Experienced, providing a legislative framework for Corporate Parenting.

The related statutory guidance defines Corporate Parenting as:

"An organisation's performance of actions necessary to uphold the rights and safeguard the wellbeing of a looked-after child or care leaver, and through which physical, emotional, spiritual, social and educational development is promoted."<sup>1</sup>

Within the Act, SDS was named as one of the public bodies to which Corporate Parenting duties apply.

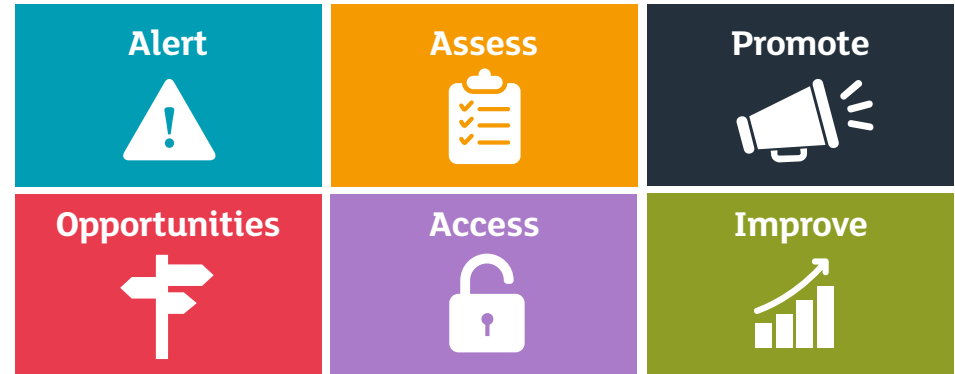
### Our duties as a Corporate Parent

Our role as Corporate Parents and the duties that come with that role are intended to improve the wellbeing of Care Experienced children and young people. The key question we ask ourselves when designing services or opportunities as a Corporate Parent is "Would this be good enough for my child?".

<sup>1</sup> Scottish Government, Statutory Guidance (2015).

The Act (section 58) sets out the following six statutory duties for Corporate Parents, including SDS. Corporate Parents must:

- **be alert:** to be alert to matters which, or which might, adversely affect the wellbeing of children and young people to whom this part applies
- **assess needs:** to assess the needs of those children and young people for services and support it provides
- **promote interests:** to promote the interests of those children and young people
- **provide opportunities:** to seek to provide those children and young people with opportunities to participate in activities designed to promote their wellbeing
- **make sure services are easy to access:** to take such action as it considers appropriate to help those children and young people
- **look for ways to improve:** to take such other action as it considers appropriate for the purposes of improving the way in which it exercises its functions in relation to those children and young people.



Corporate Parents must also publish (and keep under review) detailed Corporate Parenting plans and reports, collaborate with each other, follow directions and guidance, and provide relevant information to Scottish Ministers (sections 60 – 65 of The Act).

## About this plan

Section 61 of The Act requires SDS, as a Corporate Parent, to report on its Corporate Parenting duties. This, SDS's fourth Corporate Parenting Plan, sets out our new commitments for 2024-27.

# 3. Context

## The Promise: Scotland's Independent Care Review

Scotland's **Independent Care Review** was commissioned in 2016 with the aim to be the last care review Scotland needs. The review listened to the experiences of thousands of Care Experienced children, young people and their families and alongside data, research and evidence set out a vision for how Scotland should care. A series of detailed reports were produced alongside an evidence framework.



In 2020, the Scottish Government made a promise that every Care Experienced child and young person should grow up loved, safe and respected. 'The Promise' is now used as the name for the long-term change programme for the improvement of Scotland's care system spanning 10 years (2021-2030). Work to keep The Promise between 2021 and 2030 is shaped by two plans: 2020-2024 and 2024-2030. These plans are owned by The Promise Oversight Board. The new implementation plan 2024-30 was published in June 2024 and builds on the progress made so far in delivering Plan 2021-24.

Five key foundations were identified as what Care Experienced people said needs to change:

- **Voice:** Children must be meaningfully heard and listened to in all decisions about their care.
- **Family:** Where children are safe in their families and feel loved, they must stay.

- **Care:** Where living with their family is not possible, children must stay with their brothers and sisters when safe to do so.
- **People:** The children that Scotland cares for must be actively supported to develop relationships with people in the workforce and wider community.
- **Scaffolding:** Children, families and the workforce must be supported by a system that is there when needed. The scaffolding of help, support and accountability must be ready and responsive when it is required.

The plan uses the five foundations of The Promise to organise the 80+ calls to action.

SDS is involved in the Collaborative Corporate Parenting Network and where possible has reflected the five foundations and calls to action throughout this plan.



## Children's rights

The **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child**, or UNCRC, is a legally-binding international agreement setting out the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of every child, regardless of their race, religion or abilities. The **UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act** came into effect in Scotland in July 2024 and places duties on listed public authorities, including SDS. All Scotland's public authorities are required to take proactive steps to ensure the protection of children's rights in their decision-making and service delivery. Fulfilling children's rights is critical to our work on The Promise and our Corporate Parenting duties.

SDS published its **Children's Rights Report** in 2023. Our service offer supports children and young people to access the information they need to make informed decisions about their future and effectively prepare for, enter and progress in the world of work. We involve children in decision-making both at an individual and service delivery level, giving them a voice in the services which impact them.

To do this we will continue to strengthen the customer voice in our service design and delivery and ensure that information we share is able to be accessed and understood by children and young people. We will also ensure staff have the appropriate knowledge and skills to deliver a children's rights approach in their role.

SDS embeds a safeguarding ethos and practice which is both proactive and responsive towards issues of protection, safety and wellbeing. We work closely with Barnardo's Scotland to deliver a comprehensive colleague learning programme on child and vulnerable adult protection. This is an important part of our protective layering approach to look after vulnerable groups and further supports our active commitment as a Corporate Parent.



## 4. Developing our 2024-27 Corporate Parenting Plan

The development of our new plan has been informed by:

- detailed analysis of customer feedback
- findings from our [Equality Evidence Review](#)
- a range of colleague and stakeholder consultation events.

This section briefly summarises the findings from that activity.

### Research with Care Experienced people

We analysed feedback from the survey responses of our Care Experienced customers and conducted specific research to inform the development of this plan. Analysis of both quantitative and qualitative responses provides insight on what Care Experienced individuals think about:

- our products and services
- the areas we could improve on
- who their greatest career influencers are
- the barriers to careers they face
- the impact of COVID-19 on their educational or career pathways.

We used this intelligence to help shape the content of our Corporate Parenting Plan for 2024-27, targeting any key issues identified.

### Pupils' Voice Survey

The Pupils' Voice Survey is used to gather feedback from school pupils in S4 to S6 on the career services we deliver in their schools. In the 2023 survey, 537 respondents (6.2%) identified as being Care Experienced out of 8,699 respondents in total.

Results show that pupils who identify as Care Experienced, who are part of the targeted pupils' group, respond more positively than those who do not. Specifically, they were more satisfied than their peers with their ability to access CIAG support when needed, the amount of support available, and the range of career services offered. Care Experienced pupils also had higher (7.3 vs 6.7) overall satisfaction with SDS career services than non-Care Experienced pupils. Care Experienced young people liked the type of help provided for their future plans and careers advisers' supportive approach.

Few areas for improvement were suggested. However, suggestions made by Care Experienced young people included wanting to see their careers adviser more regularly and making sure more pupils know about SDS. This finding was later reinforced through our focus group research – detailed on page 11.

## Young People's Career Ambitions Survey

The Young People's Career Ambitions Survey aims to understand the choices, influences, and motivations of young people in making career decisions. A total of 1,414 school leavers from the 2020/21 cohort responded to the survey, with 51 identifying as Care Experienced.

In this survey, Care Experienced young people were positive about the support they received from careers advisers in school, but some suggested they would have benefitted from more frequent engagements with their adviser and opportunities for work experience.

Care Experienced young people reported a range of ideal jobs but most frequently mentioned were in health, social care and social work or art, culture, entertainment and sport. A larger proportion of those who Care Experienced were unsure about what their ideal job/career would be than respondents who were not Care Experienced.

Care Experienced young people are more at risk of dropping out of university early and were more likely to change from education to work because they found an apprenticeship or other work opportunity. The opportunity to earn while learning was more frequently cited by Care Experienced young people (36%) as a desirable job attribute compared to those who were not Care Experienced (24%). This is linked to the finding in the Pupils' Voice Survey that Care Experienced people are more influenced by the need to make money (37% compared to 32% not Care Experienced) reflecting their need to be financially independent as soon as possible.

## Apprentice Voice: Modern Apprenticeships

Through Apprentice Voice we collect feedback from apprentices on their training experience, benefits and outcomes. Feedback is requested at three key stages: six months after they start their apprenticeship (in training), three months after they leave (leavers) and 15 months after that (short-term outcomes). Over 18,000 responses from MAs have been received from the 2022 and 2023 surveys. There were 183 respondents in training who identified as Care Experienced, 152 leavers and 75 at short-term outcomes.

In the latest results for 2023, Care Experienced individuals reported a higher level of satisfaction during their Modern Apprenticeship training (9.3) than non-Care Experienced participants (8.8); satisfaction scores for leavers and short-term outcomes are the same for Care Experienced individuals as the overall group.

Open comments from 2022 and 2023 showed that Care Experienced Modern Apprentices enjoyed gaining their qualification, building confidence and reported positive support received during the process. Care Experienced Modern Apprentices suggested improvements for increasing the availability of assessors and overall support along with refreshing college content.

## Focus groups with Care Experienced young people

We contacted survey respondents willing to take part in further research who self-identified as Care Experienced to ask if they would be interested in sharing their views on and experiences of SDS to help shape our new Corporate Parenting Plan. Focus groups and interviews with Care Experienced people ran over summer 2024 and we compensated participants with a £25 voucher in recognition of the value of their insights and time given.

Participants discussed the importance of careers advisers listening and getting to know them; being able to meet with an adviser in person; and working with the same adviser to build trust. They wanted to meet with an adviser more regularly and suggested other Care Experienced young people needed to be aware of the support on offer. In an education or work environment, young people considered flexibility and understanding as key requirements to allow them to thrive.

## Equality Evidence Review

The SDS Equality Evidence Review, published in April 2023, is a comprehensive literature review analysing what research tells us about the educational and career outcomes of different equality groups. It highlights that Care Experienced children and young people have poorer educational outcomes than their peers. While Care Experienced children's outcomes have improved over the past 10 years, there is still a significant gap compared to all pupils. Care Experienced school leavers are less likely to go into positive destinations than school leavers in general – 86% compared with 95% of all pupils, which may be in part due to Care Experienced children leaving school at a younger age. They consistently obtain

fewer qualifications than their non-Care Experienced peers and are underrepresented in higher education.

The review identified several barriers facing Care Experienced young people transitioning from further and higher education into the labour market, including poor support networks, mental ill health, unstable living arrangements and being unsupported for self-sufficient living. Care Experienced individuals are more likely to be unemployed after leaving school, and be in low-paid, low-skilled and part-time roles indicating the need for improvements to planning and supporting post-school transitions for Care Experienced young people.

## Colleague consultation

We consulted with a range of SDS colleagues to inform the development of this plan. The SDS Corporate Parenting Monitoring Group, Community of Practice, and Equality Programme Board all participated in a series of consultation events during summer 2024.

The feedback from these sessions was collated, and common themes were identified. Key findings are summarised below.

### Identified strengths

- **commitment to Corporate Parenting** – participants agreed that Corporate Parenting is mainstreamed across SDS and that all colleagues have a strong understanding of, and commitment to fulfilling, SDS's role as Corporate Parent
- **stakeholder engagement** – colleagues felt that SDS works well in partnership with other relevant organisations at both a national and local level to improve access and take up of SDS and partner products and services

- **research and insight** – SDS collects and analyses a breadth of customer feedback on Care Experience providing robust evidence for decision making and insights to inform service design and development
- **data sharing** – considerable progress has been made in securing data sharing agreements with all local authorities.

## Identified areas for improvement and future activity

- **Corporate Parent partnerships** – Colleagues highlighted an opportunity to ensure our collaboration with other Corporate Parents is consistent across different geographies and partners to establish a more aligned, joined-up approach to supporting those with Care Experience
- **person centred career services** – aligned to the Career Review we will ensure an asset-based approach (focusing on an individual's strengths and needs) in the delivery of our career services
- **sharing good practice** – it was felt there is a lot of good practice happening across the organisation but that this needs to be shared more widely across SDS and externally with partners
- **active Corporate Parents** – colleagues in non-customer facing roles should be supported to find ways of being an active Corporate Parent
- **post-school transitions** – it was agreed that SDS should maximise support for Care Experienced young people as they leave school to provide stability and enable smooth transitions.

## Stakeholder consultation

Through our FPG engagements with key stakeholders we were able to benefit from their expertise and knowledge of the young people we are jointly responsible for, as well as the future priorities set out in The Promise Plan 2024-30.

Our Care Experience FPG includes representatives from Action for Children, Barnardo's Scotland, CELCIS, Children in Scotland, Hub for Success, MCR Pathways, The Prince's Trust, Scottish Throughcare and Aftercare Forum (Staf), and Who Cares? Scotland. These stakeholders provided valuable feedback on our draft Corporate Parenting Plan 2024-27 commitments. The FPG also offered suggestions for future activity that could be embedded into our new plan.

We understand from our partners that:

- ownership and buy-in from senior leadership is essential to embedding children's and young people's rights throughout an organisation and ensuring that everyone takes responsibility for their Corporate Parenting duties
- relying on self-reporting of Care Experience comes with potential issues. People may be reluctant to disclose this information for many reasons, including if they do not know why they are being asked or what potential support is on offer. Further, some may not realise that they are Care Experienced or if their experience is "valid", for example people whose experience of care was outwith the UK or was in the past
- while legislation around Corporate Parenting covers up to the age of 26, the impacts of care are lifelong, and it is important to consider lifelong rights

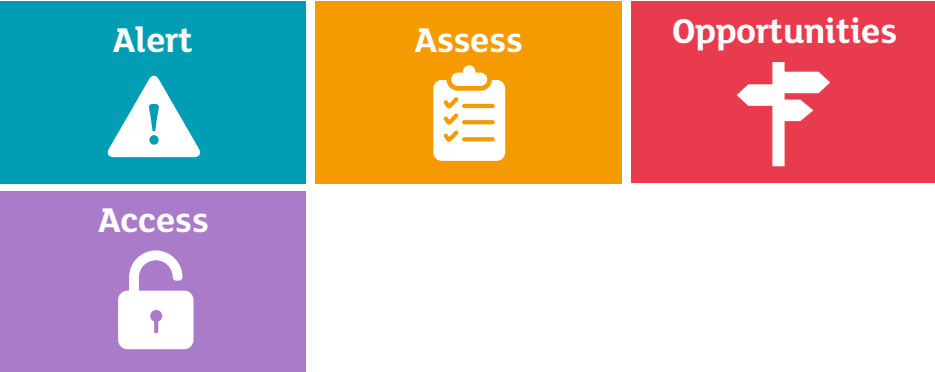
- given our role in school and post-school settings, SDS can be the scaffolding that supports Care Experienced young people during post-school transitions, providing continuity of care during a critical period in their lives
- collaboration with other Corporate Parents and key stakeholders is key to fulfilling our Corporate Parenting duties.

# 5. Our 2024-27 commitments

In line with our Corporate Parenting Plan 2021-24, our commitments for 2024-27 take a thematic approach, highlighting our key priorities as a Corporate Parent over the three-year period. They consider our statutory responsibilities, the priorities identified through our consultation and development phase as well as the ambitions of the Care Review and The Promise. We focused on the context of children’s rights incorporation and our ambitions for the next phase of our Corporate Parenting journey. Our prioritised activity for the 2024-27 plan aligns with our **Strategic Plan 2022-27** and **Equality Mainstreaming Outcomes 2021-2025**.

Our three thematic commitments for the period 2024-27 are introduced in this section. In each case, we added indicative examples of what our activity might look like in practice. These are not intended to be an exhaustive list of forthcoming activity.

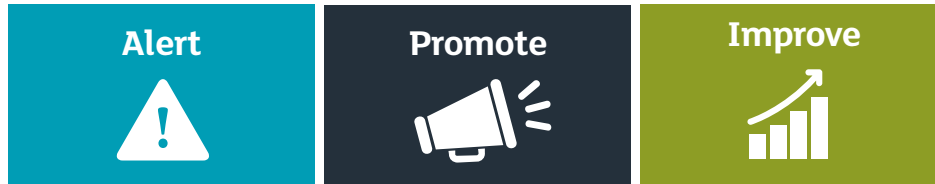
**Commitment one: We will ensure our products and services meet the needs of the Care Experienced community by listening to Care Experienced individuals and acting on what they tell us**



To keep this commitment, we will:

- continue to embed Care Experienced voice in the design and development of our products and services, through targeted engagement, analysis of feedback and co-design approaches, to ensure they remain focused on individual need
- continue work to increase participation and positive outcomes of those with Care Experience in work-based learning programmes, including exploring options to introduce mentoring for Care Experienced apprentices
- revisit our data collection methods to improve Care Experience disclosure rates for customers and colleagues to ensure individuals receive the right level of support
- further strengthen partnership working between SDS and Care Experience advocacy and support organisations through our Care Experience Focal Point Group
- develop further insight and research on Care Experience, including the outputs generated through the SDS-sponsored PhD programme.

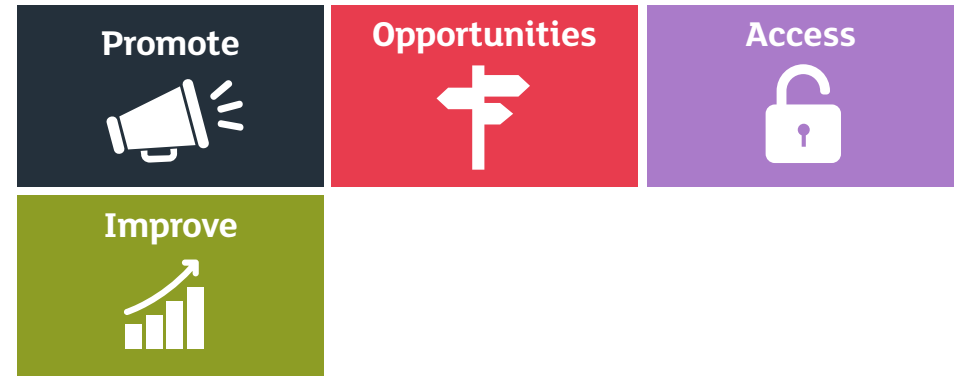
**Commitment two: We will promote the interests of and improve the wellbeing of Care Experienced people by supporting our colleagues to be caring, active and responsible Corporate Parents**



To keep this commitment, we will:

- affirm and further develop our leadership’s commitment to Corporate Parenting
- continue to develop and diversify colleague representation on the SDS Care Experience Community of Practice continue to share good practice, opportunities for customers and emerging thinking across our Corporate Parenting Monitoring Group and throughout SDS
- further engage and encourage colleagues in non-customer facing roles to support Corporate Parenting through education and awareness.

**Commitment three: We will support transitions and improve the outcomes of Care Experienced people through collaboration with other Corporate Parents and the wider Care Experienced community**



To keep this commitment, we will:

- provide continuity of support for Care Experienced young people during their transition from school into further learning or work
- maintain an active role in the Corporate Parents national network facilitated by Who Cares? Scotland
- further strengthen our community ties with local and national Corporate Parents and other relevant partners to improve the consistency and reach of our services to Care Experienced people and to replicate positive practice across Scotland
- roll out the new 16+ Participation Portal, replacing the 16+ Data Hub, to improve the two-way flow of data, including Care Experienced data, with partners.

## 6. Monitoring and reporting

As committed to in our first Corporate Parenting Plan, we will continue to convene a Corporate Parenting Plan Monitoring Group, incorporating key colleagues from across SDS.

The monitoring group is responsible for reviewing activity and progress made against the plan, and for ensuring that our plan remains a live document, with an ongoing profile and prominence within SDS. It meets two to four times a year, as appropriate, and provides regular progress updates to both the executive and non-executive boards of SDS.

We understand that Scottish Government Ministers may call on us to report progress at any time and we will continue to respond to the best of our ability in these circumstances.

This Corporate Parenting Plan 2024-27 is published alongside our Corporate Parenting Report 2021-24. We will report formally against the commitments set out in this plan in 2027.

For further information on SDS's Corporate Parenting Plan please contact [diversity@sds.co.uk](mailto:diversity@sds.co.uk)



If you require this report in alternative formats please contact [equality@sds.co.uk](mailto:equality@sds.co.uk)

**Skills Development Scotland**

Monteith House  
11 George Square  
Glasgow G2 1DY

[www.sds.co.uk](http://www.sds.co.uk)



**Front cover:** Tiffany Cummins, Care Experienced young person