



SYP's Response to the Consultation on 'Developing a universal definition of 'care experience''

31.01.2025

Summary of recommendations:

Recommendation 1: There should be an inclusive and broad universal definition of care experience which does not exclude people because of the type of care they received.

1. Do you agree or disagree that there is a need for a universal definition to describe 'care experience'?

Agree strongly

2. What are your views on the potential advantages of developing a universal definition of ‘care experience’?

Please explain your answer

While the definition will refer to care experienced people of all ages, the Scottish Youth Parliament works with young people and therefore our consultation response focusses on the ages we represent of young people aged 12-25.

The Scottish Youth Parliament (SYP) supports calls for a universal, inclusive definition of ‘care experience’ in order to improve the support and services offered to young people with care experience, and to better create a shared understanding of what it means to be care experienced. This is in line with calls made by our partners at Who Cares? Scotland. Listening to the voices of care experienced young people on issues which affect them is in line with SYP’s 2021-2026 Manifesto policy which received 83% support and says:

“Children and young people from seldom heard groups (such as immigrants and refugees, gypsy traveller communities, single parents, disabled people, Armed Forces, care experienced, and justice experienced) must be listened to by policymakers on issues that affect them.”

When asked why a universal definition is important, one MSYP in our focus group said:

“It’s important to provide an accurate definition of care experience to prevent misunderstandings and ensure protection under policy”.

This was reflective of the wider group consensus and with calls made by the care experienced community that a universal definition would reduce stigma and, in turn, provide care experienced young people with greater clarity of their rights and the support which is available to them. It could also prove instrumental in developing a cohesive and consistent support system. When asked what more organisations, the third sector, and decision-making bodies could be doing to better support care experience people, MSYPs said,

“Training - have an understanding of what it means to be care experienced and be able to identify barriers/support”, and;

“Educate people to understand care experience and ensure they recognize that there are varying experiences and circumstances among young people”.

A universal definition would help with this training and education to ensure young people have a better understanding of care experience, especially those who are care experienced but may not be aware of it.

However, such a definition only works so long as it is broad enough to reflect the myriad of unique experiences of young people who are care experienced and that it is produced through meaningful consultation and collaboration with these young people; a definition only works if the people it defines have had their voices heard and incorporated. This, particularly, aligns to UNCRC Article 12 (Respect for the views of the child) and, more broadly, ensuring that a rights-based approach is embedded across all decision-making and policy-creation for care experienced people. It is critical, moreover, that a universal definition is not seen as the fix-all solution to supporting care experience young people - but rather as a positive step in creating a more inclusive and accessible society within which they can realise their rights. On this, one MSYP said,

“Decision-makers should do more, once this definition is in place, to work with care experience young people and not just think the job is done”.

Recommendation 1: There should be an inclusive and broad universal definition of care experience which does not exclude people because of the type of care they received.

As above, a universal definition of care would support care-experienced young people to access services which are available to them now as well as services which should be made available to them in the future. For example, a universal definition would support further calls made by the care experienced community and supported by the Scottish Youth Parliament in The Promise Bill, including ‘Who Cares? Scotland’s’ call that the “The Promise Bill must enshrine a statutory right to independent advocacy”. Through independent advocacy, care experienced young people would have the tools and assistance they need to realise their rights.

No answers to other questions submitted

Further information about your organisation's response

Organisations may use this space to provide additional context for their response. This could be information about, for example:

- any research your organisation undertook to inform the response
- any engagement with your members or audience undertaken to inform the response

This is optional

SYP's response was developed using several approaches to ensure it is representative of the views of young people, and particularly care experienced young people.

Engagement with partners

Who Cares? Scotland are a National Voluntary Organisation partner of the Scottish Youth Parliament. SYP consulted with staff at Who Cares? Scotland in order to ensure recommendations in our response and discussions with our Conveners and Deputy Conveners were informed by the voices of care experienced young people.

Focus group with Conveners and Deputy Conveners

Our Conveners and Deputy Conveners met online on Saturday 25 January. During this time a mini focus group was held by SYP staff, using information from Who Cares? Scotland to support the discussions MSYPs had. Quotes from our focus group are included in this response and, as with all SYP consultation responses, this was approved by our Conveners Group, made up of the young people elected to lead SYP's subject committees.

SYP Policy

At SYP Sittings, the membership gets together and MSYPs have the opportunity to propose Member Motions that will become SYP policy statements. To submit a motion, they will have consulted with young people in their constituencies to demonstrate it is an issue important to young people. At the Sitting, the membership then votes on whether the motion should pass, again based on consultation of the proposed Motions with their constituents. By way of example, at a recent SYP Sitting, SYP79 in July 2023, nearly 5000 young people were consulted before MSYPs voted on Members' Motions.

Policy is also agreed through SYP's Manifesto every five years. The policies in SYP's 2021-2026 Manifesto came directly from young people aged 12-25 across Scotland. The consultation was led by MSYPs and supported by the staff team. Due to the innovative and multifaceted approach we took to this manifesto, we do not have the exact number of young people engaged throughout this process. However, we estimate this to be around 10,000.

Who We Are

Vision

SYP is the democratic voice of Scotland's young people. Our **vision** for Scotland is of a nation that actively listens to and values the meaningful participation of its young people. Our goal is to make this vision a reality, in order to ensure young people in Scotland grow up loved, safe and respected, and able to realise their full potential.

Mission

SYP's **mission** is to provide a national platform for young people to discuss the issues that are important to them, and campaign for changes to the nation that they live in. We support our members in their work by training them, supporting their personal development and empowering them, using a youth work ethos.

MSYPs listen to and recognise the issues that are most important to young people in every community across the country and ensure that decision-makers listen to their voices.

Values

- **Democracy** - We are youth-led and accountable to young people aged 14 to 25. Our democratic structure and the scale of our engagement across Scotland gives us a mandate that sets us apart from other organisations.
- **Rights** - We are a rights-based organisation. We are passionate about making young people aware of their rights, and ensuring that local and national governments uphold their rights.
- **Inclusion and Diversity** - We are committed to being truly inclusive and work tirelessly to ensure policymakers and politicians hear the voices of young people from every community and background in Scotland.
- **Political Impartiality** - We are independent from all political parties. By working with all stakeholders, groups, and individuals who share our values, we deliver the policies that are most important to young people.