INDEPENDENT EDUCATION ADVICE PROVISION FOR PARENTS IN SCOTLAND
Independent education advice provision for parents in Scotland

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SCOTTISH CONSUMER COUNCIL
Chairman’s preface

Consumers need access to good quality advice if they are to be able to make informed decisions. This applies to education just as much as it does to any other aspect of our lives.

Parents and young people can obtain a wide range of information from the Scottish Office and from local authorities, and can receive good quality advice from local authorities and schools. Often, however, people need or would prefer independent advice. This was a message given to us loud and clear by parents in our previous research into complaints handling in education.

But where do parents and young people in Scotland go for independent education advice?

This report sets out to explore answers to this question. It identifies a range of independent advice providers, looks at the information and advice services they offer, and examines evidence on the demand for education advice.

Sadly, our findings appear to confirm a lack of specialist education information and advice in Scotland, and a lack of structured support for advice agencies. On the plus side, there are a wide range of agencies with the potential to provide education information and advice. However, many barriers exist, such as low levels of awareness among consumers, and a low priority given by schools and local authorities to independent advice. The most effective ways of getting from the current state of education advice provision to easily accessible high quality specialist advice across Scotland must be based on what parents and young people say they need. For this reason, we see this report very much as a first stage along the road of improving independent education advice in Scotland.

We are greatly encouraged by the setting up of the national advice service on special educational needs, under the auspices of Children in Scotland. Meeting the education advice needs of parents and young people more generally might benefit from a similar approach. However, it may be that a completely different approach (such as the Scottish Homelesness Advisory Service) would serve their interests better.

We press on towards the next stage of this important work, which will be finding out about the advice needs of parents and young people themselves. I hope this report will stimulate a debate, and invite you to join us as we seek to improve education advice in Scotland.

Deirdre Hutton
Chairman
May 1999
Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all those advice providers who took part in our survey. Most of them were coping with heavy demand on their services, and we appreciate their taking the time to fill in and return our questionnaire. We are encouraged by their commitment to improving education advice.

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Gillian Roberts
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Deirdre Hutton (ex-officio)
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Summary of the report

This report is about the provision of independent education advice in Scotland. It is based on a postal survey completed by 70 advice providers in Scotland. The survey asked about the nature of their advice provision in education, and about the demand for education advice.

The following findings and conclusions emerged from the survey:

• A wide range of advice agencies, from locally based to national organisations, can potentially provide education information and advice. Most of the advice providers in our survey were front-line services providing advice directly to the public, covering a range of advice issues of which education was only a part. There were no secondary services providing specialist support to advice agencies. This lack of specialist or secondary service could present a problem in terms of the availability of advice services for parents and young people. Research with them is needed to clarify the extent to which such a problem exists.

• Most of the agencies relied on word of mouth as a means of publicity, although almost as many also produced their own publicity material.

• The agencies in our survey largely provided education advice at the levels of responding to straightforward information requests, and help with tasks such as writing letters or filling in forms. More involved assistance, such as counselling or advocacy, were much less likely to be available.

• Information and advice was available on all of the education topics we asked about by at least some agencies. Few, however, offered specialist advice on any of the topics. This reflects the fact that most of the advisers were volunteers providing generalist advice, with only a very few advisers trained or qualified in education law.

• Most local advice agencies felt training opportunities for education advice were inadequate, although the national bodies and the CABx tended to find that there were enough training opportunities. Relationships among advice agencies tended to be good, although poorer relationships were reported with schools and local authorities.

• The advice agencies in this survey had a range of concerns about the availability of high quality impartial advice for parents across Scotland. How these concerns should be addressed needs to be based on research with parents and young people.
• The level of new enquiries was higher to national bodies than to CABx or other advice agencies. This was reflected in the impact of dealing with new enquiries on staff resources, with national bodies more likely to report that dealing with these took up a lot of time. The national bodies also reported some variation in the level of education enquiries according to term times and media coverage, although the impact of these on the level of demand for education advice was not as clear-cut as might have been expected.

• The number of enquiries needing on-going involvement fell some way below the number of new enquiries, indicating the majority of education enquiries handled were one-off.

• National bodies reported increasing demand for education advice in Scotland. The CABx and other advice agencies tended to report no overall trend, although most of these reported increasing trends for advice on specific topics. The topics most likely to be in increased demand were bullying problems, special educational needs, and exclusions. Increasing demand was reported on all of the education topics in our survey by at least some advice providers.

• Very few agencies reported falling demand for education advice, and in each case there were more agencies reporting increases. This may be an indication that parents are switching their enquiries to a different set of advice providers.

• Most advice providers received enquiries from outside their areas of expertise and from outside their geographical areas (in the case of locally based providers). This finding suggests gaps in the availability of education advice. There were advice agencies who said they would give advice (rather than refer to another agency) on enquiries outside their areas of expertise.

The report concludes that there are serious gaps in the provision of independent education advice in Scotland. Measures to tackle these gaps must be based on the advice needs of parents and young people. There is a pressing need, therefore, to find out about their views.
Chapter 1  Introduction

Background

For children to have the most appropriate education that meets their needs, parents and children themselves need to be able to make informed choices and decisions. This, in turn, depends on the availability of good information and advice. Parents and young people can obtain information about schools and other educational matters from their local authority, the government, or from the school. School handbooks, for example, have to be produced by every school and made available to parents. The Scottish Office publishes information for parents about school performance, as well as the Parents’ Charter.

Such information is necessary, and the Scottish Consumer Council (SCC) continues to support its development. We recognise the need to improve information for parents and young people, and have identified areas where information provision is poor\(^1\).

However, in some cases parents and young people will need access to a source of expertise, to help them make sense of the available information, or to find the information they need. For this expertise, parents and young people can contact staff in schools or their local authority. We are aware of, and welcome and support, the good practice being developed by several local authorities in Scotland to help meet the need for information and advice. For example\(^2\):

- **Edinburgh Advice and Conciliation Service**
  Edinburgh’s Education Department operates an Advice and Conciliation service, providing direct access to the education department, to assist in complaints handling. The main aim of the service is to investigate and resolve issues through mediation to promote conciliation towards resolving difficulties. Complaints are investigated fully and impartially. Action is taken when complaints are justified. The service also runs an Advice Helpline, which provides information, help and advocacy to parents and members of staff. Help involves suggesting approaches and ways of dealing with issues, to reduce the number of problems that might otherwise become full-blown complaints. About three-quarters of advice enquiries taken to the advice and conciliation service are from parents, the rest from staff. Lessons drawn from the experiences of handling complaints have been used to train teaching and administrative staff in customer care, effective complaints handling, negotiation and mediation skills.

\(^1\) For example, in our 1998 report *Who Deals with this? Accountability, complaints and contract monitoring in Scottish local authorities*, we found that information about what
• **Falkirk Council One Stop Shops**
  An office network of one-stop shops across the Falkirk council area provides help and information on all council services. The one stop shops are open during normal office hours, and provide a comprehensive housing and finance service, social work and registrar services, trading standards advice and specialist advice on other services, including education.

• **South Lanarkshire Home School Partnership Project**
  This project offers informal and formal channels of information and advice for parents, through teams of workers across the South Lanarkshire council area. A number of Parental Forums have been established, such as school board forums, and special educational needs forums. These are open meetings where parents raise issues or concerns, and have an opportunity to speak directly with elected members and council officers. Parents often benefit from sharing similar experiences with other parents.

But expertise outwith the school or the local authority - independent advice - is sometimes required or preferred by parents. Little is known about the availability of independent advice services for parents in Scotland.

By *independent*, we simply mean not provided by the school or the local authority. We are aware that independent advice does not necessarily mean the same as impartial advice. Importantly, parents may be unaware of when they are receiving partial rather than impartial advice. Several local authorities have voiced their concerns to us that parents may be receiving biased advice from independent sources. While we take these concerns on board, for the time being we focus on independent advice. This is because so little is known about the availability of independent advice in education. It would be appropriate, at a later stage, to consider the issue of impartiality.

A lack of independent advice services for parents in Scotland emerged as an underpinning factor in many of the problems identified in our education review\(^3\). To be able to make appropriate decisions, access services, and resolve problems, parents and children need access to independent advice. In England, for example, parents can use the Advisory Centre for Education, which is also developing local advice services in Wales. No such body exists in Scotland. There are examples of advice provision locally, but the extent of independent advice provision across Scotland is relatively unknown. Anecdotally, we have evidence of an unmet need.

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\(^3\) In 1996 / 97 we conducted a review of the SCC’s education policies. Part of this review was a seminar, held in June 1997, which looked at information, choice, redress and representation for parents and children. Reports of the review and the seminar are available from the SCC.
The SCC decided to carry out research into the availability of and the need for independent advice for parents and young people in Scotland. This report represents the first step of the research: the availability of independent advice services. We intend to use the results of this report to prepare a funding proposal to allow us to carry out research with parents, for their views on their need for independent advice. Over the longer term, we will use all the evidence we gather, to enhance the provision of independent education advice services in Scotland.

**Education advice: what is it?**

The National Consumer Council, in its 1978 report *The Right to Know: a review of advice services in rural areas*, defined advice services. This definition has been widely used since, most notably in the development of housing information and advice in Scotland. Advice services can include the following:

- **Straightforward information**: providing an address or a telephone number.
- **Explanation**: explaining technical terms or clarifying the meaning of an official document.
- **Advice**: setting out options or a course of action.
- **Practical help**: helping consumers to write letters or fill in forms.
- **Referral**: introducing the consumer to another source of help.
- **Mediation**: speaking to another party on behalf of the consumer.
- **Conciliation**: helping people reach agreement, using techniques such as mediation.
- **Counselling**: listening to and helping consumers clarify their feelings.
- **Advocacy**: preparing a case for the consumer, or speaking on their behalf at a court case or appeal.

**Why is advice important?**

Parents are responsible for their children’s education, whether by schooling or by other means. Older children become responsible for their own decisions about education. Advice is necessary for parents to fulfil their responsibilities, and for young people to make responsible decisions. For example:
Can they access the services they need, particularly when there are special needs? Barriers to access include jargon used by professionals, as well as resource and geographical barriers. Lack of knowledge of rights is also a significant barrier to accessing services. Advice may be needed to help people access the services they need.

Responsible parenting requires adequate information about whether their children are receiving the best education. Parents need to be able to find, and to interpret, information about their children’s educational progress, about their children’s school and other schools, and about policies and issues concerning education as a whole. Inappropriate information can be damaging, as ill-informed decisions about a child’s education may be irreversible. Advice can help parents make sense of the information available to them.

Parents and young people need to make choices about educational provision that best meets their own or their children’s needs. But choice can be hampered by attitudinal barriers to the idea of parents having real involvement in education, or choosing non-school options (such as home schooling), as well as by more obvious geographical barriers. Wrong choices can damage a child’s education. Advice can help people explore the choices that are appropriate to them.

Parents must know the arrangements for ensuring their children’s safety at school and on school transport, and they must be able to enforce these arrangements, or change them if they are unsuitable. Poor communication of safety requirements, and inadequate mechanisms of accountability (especially where private contractors are involved, such as in school transport) can act as barriers to children’s safety and protection. Advice may be needed to assess or to challenge the suitability of safety arrangements.

Things will go wrong from time to time during a child’s education, sometimes seriously. Ignoring problems will do nothing to help a child’s education. Proper methods of dealing with complaints will encourage a positive approach, and will generate useful information for service providers. A negative complaints culture, and an unwillingness to accept the need for complaints procedures in education, are significant barriers to redress. Complaints handling can also be made unnecessarily difficult if parents and young people are unsure of their rights and responsibilities. Advice can play a key role in helping to resolve problems sensibly.

Parents and young people must have a voice in decision making at the school, local authority and central government levels. Failure to develop effective means of representation will result in decision making that reflects only the views of providers and professionals.
Barriers to representation include attitudes that providers know best, as well as jargon that excludes parents and young people from real dialogue in decision making. Advice may be necessary to help people participate effectively in decision making.

Independent advice is vital if all of these aspects of decision making and parental responsibility are to be effective. And they must be effective if children are to receive the best education that meets their needs.

Independent advice, therefore, needs to be seen as an integral part of education. As such, attention must be given to quality issues. Advice provision must meet, and be seen to meet, certain criteria and standards. The issue of quality in advice provision is largely outwith the scope of this initial study, although further work in this area will have to develop it.

Who needs it?

Parents and young people, in several different contexts, require access to independent advice. For example, parents with children at primary school will have different advice needs to parents with children at secondary school. Young people themselves will need access to different advice sources. Parents with children who have special educational needs will require access to independent advice, as will parents with pre-school children. Young people need advice about options beyond secondary school, and parents may need information about alternative educational options, such as home schooling.

When do people need advice?

People need to be able to access sources of advice at particular times. Most notably, for example:

- **When parents are new to “the system”,** such as when their child is about to start primary or secondary school. People will need information or advice about options that are available to them. Parents and young people faced with choices (such as which standard grade options to pursue at secondary school) will need advice to help them think through the issues that are important.

- **When a child’s needs develop.** For example some children may experience learning difficulties or have special educational needs, which can change as the child develops. Their options and service requirements, therefore, are likely to change. Parents and young people will need independent advice to consider how best to meet their changing needs.
• **When a problem occurs**, at any stage, people will need to be informed about their rights and responsibilities. A lack of awareness of these can make problems blow up into unreasonable proportions. The role of independent advice is important in helping people resolve difficulties sensibly. This is in the child’s best interests.

• **When the school or local authority makes a decision** that affects an individual, the parent or young person may need independent advice, to be in a position to know whether the decision is good or bad for them. If the decision is not in their best interests, advice may be needed on how to challenge it.

**The SCC investigation**

Parents and young people need access to advice about a whole range of educational issues, and it is important that they are able to access the advice service they need, when they need it, and in a way that they can easily use. Our research is a first step towards improving the availability of independent education advice in Scotland.

We envisage a two-staged approach to this research:

• **The availability of education advice**. The first step we need to take is to identify those agencies with a potential role in providing independent education advice in Scotland. We will attempt to identify those who provide advice about issues relating to pre-school education, primary and secondary schooling, home schooling, and special educational needs. Once a range of agencies has been identified, we will explore the nature of their advice provision. Questions about the type of advice service offered, the education topics covered, staffing resources, training, the co-ordination of advice services, and the demand for education advice faced by these agencies, are important.

• **The need for education advice**. This can only be ascertained by asking parents and young people themselves, and we aim to seek funding to carry out such research, at the end of the first stage.

Our research will not look at advice relating to further and higher education, the careers service, or to independent schools.

It is important to note that we are looking at the provision of advice services, not at information material, such as leaflets or reference books. Even if parents and young people can find the written information that they need, they will often need to speak to someone who can help them use it to make effective decisions.

This report details the findings of the first of these two stages: the availability of independent advice for parents in Scotland.
Methodology

The research methodology comprised two main stages. The first was the identification of advice providers. No readily available list of education advice providers in Scotland was available, therefore we compiled our own. Using directories such as the Consumer Congress Directory, and a list of Scottish members supplied to us by the Federation of Independent Advice Centres, we identified a range of advice providers.

We also sent a letter to all directors of education in Scotland, enclosing a background paper prepared by the Scottish Consumer Council\(^1\). We asked them about sources of independent advice available to parents in their areas. Nine out of the 32 education authorities did not reply. Of those who did, we found a reluctance on the part of some to acknowledge the need for independent advice for parents. Indeed, some were defensive about their own, as opposed to independent, advice. Some, however, were very positive about the exercise, and provided us with examples of how they were attempting to improve advice provision. Some of these examples are listed at the beginning of this chapter.

Education authorities, on the whole, acknowledged the lack of independent agencies offering advice on education in their areas. What advice was available, tended to be focused on special educational needs. Several education authorities expressed reservations about the independence of some advice providers. They pointed out that independence from the local authority was not the only issue, but independence from the topic they are giving advice about. For example, giving advice about an issue that an agency is trying to promote can make them biased. This is an important point, and we see the need to address it as part of a wider consideration of quality and standards in education advice provision.

Not surprisingly, given the general low awareness of independent advice, education authorities reported an increasing use of lawyers by parents.

The information we received from local authorities, along with the agencies we identified through other sources, allowed us to compile a list of advice providers with a potential role in education advice. The second stage of the research was a postal survey of these advice agencies.

\(^{1}\) With regard to special educational needs, we intend to identify bodies with an expertise in the law relating to special educational needs; rather than those who focus on providing information and advice about particular special needs. At the time of writing, the national information and advice service on special educational needs was being set up, funded by the Scottish Office and managed by Children in Scotland.
Before we sent out questionnaires to the advice agencies, we convened a meeting of several people with experience in education advice in Scotland. Those who attended the meeting are listed in the Acknowledgements at the beginning of this report.

At the meeting, the background paper was discussed, as well as the questionnaire itself. Following this meeting, the questionnaire was amended and sent to the advice agencies we had identified. The list of advice agencies is given in Appendix 1, and the questionnaire in Appendix 2.

The following three chapters outline the findings of our survey. Chapter 2 discusses the agencies that provide education advice in Scotland, and looks at some of their characteristics. Chapter 3 looks at the types of information and advice services they provide, their staffing resources, and the education topics they give advice about. Chapter 4 presents findings about the level and trends in demand for education information and advice.

Chapter 5 draws together the conclusions from our findings, and outlines the SCC’s proposals for taking these forward.

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1 The background paper was subsequently amended to form this chapter: it outlined the issues surrounding independent advice in education, and the reasons and scope of our research.
Chapter 2 Who provides education advice in Scotland?

There are a wide range of bodies in Scotland who could potentially provide education information and advice. These range from stand-alone local advice agencies, or larger networks of locally based advice providers (such as the Citizens Advice Bureaux), to national organisations focused on education (such as the Scottish School Board Association) or with remits which include education (for example the large number of disability organisations).

There is currently no single reference point, such as a directory, containing a list of organisations providing education advice. Therefore, as the first part of this study, we compiled our own list. Given the diverse range of potential advice providers, we make no claim that our list is a comprehensive one.

The advice providers

We identified 127 agencies that might provide education information and advice in Scotland, and sent a questionnaire to each of them. They were identified through directories of advice providers in the UK and Scotland, and by a list of Scottish members of the Federation of Independent Advice Centres (FIAC), supplied to us by FIAC. We also included all of the Citizens’ Advice Bureaux (CABx) in Scotland, and members of the Scottish Accessible Information Forum (SAIF). In addition, we used the information given to us by local authorities about independent advice in their areas.

A full list of all those we sent questionnaires to is given in Appendix 1. The questionnaire is given in Appendix 2.

A total of 81 agencies responded to our questionnaire, a response rate of 64%. Of these, 70 provided education information and advice. The survey sample list in Appendix 1 indicates those who responded and who provided education information and advice. The remainder of this report concerns the responses from these 70 agencies that provided education information and advice.

For the purposes of analysis, we have distinguished three broad groups of advice providers. These are national organisations, the Citizens’ Advice network, and all other advice providers (largely locally based, and including the network of law centres). The 70 agencies in this report were:
• Ten national bodies

15 national bodies replied out of the 20 we sent questionnaires to. Five of these did not provide education advice, so were not used in the analysis.

Some examples are:

*The Scottish School Board Association*

The Scottish School Board Association (SSBA) is the membership body for school boards in Scotland. As well as providing support and training to school boards, the SSBA operates a busy advice line for school boards. The advice line frequently receives requests for advice from parents across a whole range of education matters.

*Schoolhouse*

Schoolhouse is a membership organisation of families who educate their children at home. It provides advice to parents in Scotland who may be considering home education as an option, and support to home educating families. The advice and support work is undertaken on a voluntary basis.

*ISEA Scotland*

Independent Special Education Advice (ISEA) provides free independent education advice and support across Scotland to parents who have a child with special educational needs. Funded largely by BBC Children in Need, ISEA operates a telephone help-line, advocacy, and a growing network of volunteer advisers.

*Scottish Pre-school Play Association*

The Scottish Pre-school Play Association (SPPA) is the national body which supports and promotes the playgroup movement in Scotland. It aims to support pre-school services which meet the needs of local communities. It promotes and provides good quality childcare, and lobbies for equality of parental choice in pre-school provision. It provides training and advice to parents on all aspects of running a pre-school group.

*Scottish Refugee Council*

The Scottish Refugee Council provides information and advice and practical support to asylum seekers and refugees in Scotland, and campaigns on issues that affect them. At the time of writing this report, the UK was about to receive refugees from Kosovo, many of whom would have school-aged children and who would need advice about their children’s education.
Other national bodies we sent a questionnaire to but did not hear from, included the Scottish Network for Able Pupils and the Scottish Child Law Centre.

- **35 Citizens’ Advice Bureaux**

  This represents just over half of the CABs that we sent questionnaires to. Some examples are:

  **The network of CABs in Scotland**
  Citizens’ Advice Bureaux are generalist advice centres located across Scotland. Each CAB is an independent locally run charity, which relies mainly on local authorities for its funding. Most advisers are volunteers. In 1997/98 there were over half a million new problems brought to the bureaux for advice, most commonly about benefits, consumer debt, employment and housing. These were handled by over 2,500 volunteers. Over 3,500 problems were about education. The CABs are supported by Citizens Advice Scotland (CAS), which is funded by central government. To be part of the network, each CAB must meet comprehensive membership and monitoring conditions, ensuring quality standards in advice provision.

  **SHAS**
  The Scottish Homelessness Advisory Service (SHAS) is a secondary advice service. This is run jointly by CAS and Shelter Scotland, to provide specialist housing advice support to volunteers in CABs. SHAS is mentioned here as an example of a secondary advice service, which appears to be lacking in education.

  **Easterhouse Youth Information and Advice Project**
  This project is a development of Easterhouse CAB, providing generalist information and advice and representation for young people aged 11 - 25 in the area. The project was new at the time of the survey.

- **25 other advice agencies**

  A total of 32 other advice agencies responded (69% of those we sent questionnaires to), although seven were not used in the analysis, mainly because they told us that they did not provide education advice or were part of a local authority.
Some examples are:

*Law centres*
Law centres provide free or low cost legal advice and representation to people on a range of topics. They are managed by management committees, and all employ lawyers (about 40 lawyers in total). The law centres provide a significant legal resource, particularly in the west of Scotland. There are nine law centres in Scotland who are members of the Scottish Association of Law Centres (SALC), plus two who are not members, and four associate members.

*St Machar Parent Support Project*
The St Machar Parent Support Project is a voluntary organisation within a priority area, providing support and advice to parents in a specific area in Aberdeen. The project offers explanation, advice, practical help, referral, mediation, counselling and advocacy on a range of education matters. In addition, the project runs groups and activities aimed at helping children achieve at school. The project is community led and is run by parents.

*Citizens Advice and Rights Fife*
Citizens Advice and Rights Fife (CARF) is a network of independent advice provision throughout Fife. There are five CARF offices, as well as outreach clinics through council offices all over Fife. CARF provides a free, generalist advice service, given by paid workers and volunteers.

*Remits*
We asked the agencies whether education was their main remit, or whether it was part of a wider remit. Only five agencies said education was their main area of concern. These were the St Machar Parent Support Project, the Scottish School Board Association (SSBA), Schoolhouse, the Scottish Parent Teacher Council (SPTC), and Independent Special Education Advice (ISEA). Two agencies did not answer the question, and the remaining 63 said education was part of a wider remit.

When asked about the most accurate description of their information and advice service, all 69 who answered the question said they provided a front-line advice service directly to the public. None described themselves as a secondary advice service to other front-line agencies.
Publicity

We asked the agencies how parents would find out about their information and advice service. The most common means were by word of mouth (63 of the 67 who responded to the question); the service’s own publicity (62); and through other agencies (50). Table A1 in Appendix 3 shows how many agencies used different methods of publicising their information and advice service.

Sixteen agencies told us about other methods of publicity. Most of these mentioned use of the press, such as local radio or newspaper articles. The CABx also said that other organisations often listed them as a source of advice on their written material. Referral by other agencies, other sources of advice (such as helplines), or by those in contact with parents (for example social workers or lawyers) were also important to publicise advice services. A few agencies mentioned their own proactive work, for example the Skye and Lochalsh Community Advice Service had a mobile unit which went out three days a week, and the St Machar Parent Support Project used door knocking and face to face work with local people. Children in Scotland received calls, and provided information and referral, through their work with parents of children with special educational needs. The SPTC and Schoolhouse were the only organisations to mention the Internet as a means of publicity.

Conclusion

The results of this survey confirm that a wide range of advice agencies, both locally based and national organisations, can potentially provide education information and advice. Most of the advice providers in our survey were front-line services providing advice directly to the public, covering a range of advice issues of which education was only a part. There were no secondary services providing specialist support to advice agencies (such as the SHAS model of housing information and advice). This lack of specialist or secondary service could present a problem in terms of the availability of advice services for parents and young people. Research with them is needed to clarify the extent to which such a problem exists.

Most of the agencies relied on word of mouth as a means of publicity, although almost as many also produced their own material.

The implications of these findings for education information and advice in Scotland are discussed in Chapter 5. The next chapter, however, looks at the nature of education advice provision.
Chapter 3 The nature of education advice provision in Scotland

The previous chapter identified agencies that provide education information and advice in Scotland. This chapter goes on to explore something of the nature of the services provided, based on the responses from the 70 agencies providing education information and advice.

Types of information and advice services

We asked about the type of information and advice provided by agencies, using the definition set out in Chapter 1. The following graph shows the number of agencies providing different types of information and advice services, from straightforward information through to advocacy services.

Graph 1 Types of service available

68 agencies responded to this question.

The most common types of information and advice service offered were responding to straightforward information requests (64 agencies), and practical help such as helping parents write letters or fill in forms (58). Counselling and advocacy services were least likely to be available (12 and 28 agencies respectively). 25 agencies said they provided other information and advice services, such as referral to a more specialist agency, or legal advice. In addition, the Paisley Law Centre ran seminars and training days, and sent us details of a seminar it was holding on education law.
**Education topics**

We asked about the provision of information and advice on particular education issues, such as placing requests or bullying problems. We set out a series of issues, and asked whether the agencies provided information and advice on these, and which ones they specialised in.

The following table shows how the agencies responded.

**Table 1: Education advice topics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Provide information and advice</th>
<th>Specialise in this</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Admissions / placing requests</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Custodial rights</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
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<td>Exclusions</td>
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<td>Bullying problems</td>
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<td>Special educational needs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transport</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude / conduct of teaching staff</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School boards</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-school education</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home education</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Information and advice was provided on all of the topics by at least some agencies. The topics most likely to be covered were bullying problems (51 agencies), exclusions (49), admissions / placing requests (47) and special educational needs (44). Even the least-covered topic (school boards) was still provided by 30 agencies.

Very few agencies, however, specialised in any of the topics: the most commonly provided was special educational needs (only 6 agencies).
Seventeen agencies said they dealt with other issues, in addition to the ones we listed. For example, issues related to benefits, grants and bursaries, whether it was information about the availability of these, to help with filling in forms, to making appeals on behalf of parents and young people. Health issues were mentioned, as were access to school records, appeals against exam results, and independent review of local authority decisions. The SPTC also dealt with PTA matters, parents’ links with schools, the curriculum, insurance, and charitable status. Childline Scotland gave advice on developing peer support\(^1\).

**The advisers**

We asked about the number of people giving advice, and about their training and qualifications.

54 agencies told us how many people could give education information and advice. In total, just under 1,000 people gave education information and advice in the 54 agencies. This ranged from one person to 158 people. The following graph shows how many agencies had numbers of advice providers in particular ranges.

**Graph 2 Number of advisers**

\(^1\) At the time of writing, Childline Scotland was establishing a telephone advice line for parents.
Two agencies had one adviser, while four had more than 50. There were 19 agencies with 2 - 4 advisers. In some cases, agencies gave us an estimate of the number of advisers, giving us a range ("up to..."). We recorded the upper estimate, therefore, the figures presented here are probably an exaggerated reflection of the number of people actually available to give education advice. In addition, many of these were part time rather than full time, which is not reflected in the numbers shown. Most of those providing education information and advice were volunteers who were trained or qualified in advice work (761 volunteers in 35 agencies). Very few advisers were trained or qualified in education law: 10 paid staff in 6 agencies, and a volunteer in one agency.

When asked about training opportunities for people providing education information and advice, 33 agencies said there were not enough, while 31 said there were adequate training opportunities. While this would appear to be roughly half in half, there were differences between the types of advice agency. Most of the national bodies (seven out of the ten), and just over half of the CABx thought the training opportunities were adequate; while other agencies tended to think these were inadequate. Table A2 in Appendix 3 shows how the different types of advice agency responded.

**Co-ordination of local advice services**

We asked about the co-ordination of independent education information and advice in the areas the agencies were based in. Skill sharing is an important result of agencies working together. However, 43 of the agencies in our survey said the provision was not co-ordinated, while only 10 said that it was. The local authority was cited as the body responsible for co-ordinating local advice services in three of these cases. Two agencies said they did the co-ordinating themselves, with the remaining five saying it was either another agency or a partnership, which did so.

Seventeen did not respond to the question.

We asked whether the respondents were satisfied with their relationships with other advice agencies, schools, and local authorities. The following table shows how the agencies responded.

**Table 2: Relationships with other organisations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Good relationship with</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other advice agencies</td>
<td>91% (59 agencies)</td>
<td>3% (2 agencies)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools</td>
<td>65% (42 agencies)</td>
<td>22% (14 agencies)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local authorities</td>
<td>74% (48 agencies)</td>
<td>17% (11 agencies)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

65 agencies told us about their relationships with other advice agencies, schools and local authorities.
Most agencies said they were satisfied with their relationships with other advice agencies (only two said they were not). The picture of relationships with local authorities was less satisfactory (11 agencies expressing a negative view), while relationships with schools appeared to be least satisfactory (over a fifth of agencies were negative about this). We could speculate on the reasons for this (for example, parents may involve an advice agency when they have experienced problems with the school or the local authority), but research with parents and young people is needed for an explanation. One national agency commented that varying policies and practices across local authorities could make it difficult to work across Scotland as a whole.

We asked the agencies to say, from their own experiences, what made for good relationships with other advice agencies, schools and local authorities. Overwhelmingly, the factor that made the difference was regular and direct personal communication. This was important to build up mutual understanding and respect. Honesty in dealing with a problem was also seen as important, as well as a professional attitude. A willingness to “give and take” was important if the bodies were to be seen as putting children’s interests first when a solution to a problem was being sought. Also, knowledge both of the law and of other agencies’ remits was seen as important in developing constructive relationships.

And finally

We invited the advice agencies to tell us about any issues of concern they had about independent information and advice for parents in Scotland. A comment from one of the CABs encapsulated what many of the agencies were saying:

“In general there appears to be a lack of independent

Several others commented that, although the CABs had access to up to date information on education issues,

“Unfortunately, most parents would not think of contacting CAB for assistance in education matters.....Education departments and schools probably would not consider referring parents / pupils to us for independent assistance.”

This was put down to a problem with marketing or publicising CAB services. However, another CAB pointed out:

“Parents are not in the habit of seeking advice / information around this subject. They tend to accept what the school says,” and this was expressed as a matter of concern.
Several agencies simply commented that there was not enough independent advice provision, for example, a comment from a national body:

“Not enough advice available from people who parents will trust.”

Two other national bodies commented:

“There is no truly independent information available”

and

“A truly independent information and advice network is long overdue in Scotland and is certain to be welcomed by the majority of parents”.

There were some comments about the impartiality of advice provided by local authorities, being providers.

Several agencies said there was a need for stronger support, including advocacy for parents. For example, one of the national bodies said:

“We can supply information and advice about what parents’ rights are and what they can do next but often parents need advocacy and local support. There are too few local services offering this kind of support.”

Gaps identified included information and advice services specifically for young people, and the provision of information and advice for families where English is a second language. Such services had to be developed in conjunction with those who would be using them.

Other agencies commented on the state of the provision that did exist, for example, a lack of training support and a lack of co-ordination. This could lead to problems in the quality of advice provision, and in the consistency of advice. One local advice agency, for example, suggested a one-stop shop to ensure a consistent quality of information and advice.
In short, the concerns were:

- A lack of provision
- Questions about expertise of advisers
- Impartiality of advice
- Poor expectations on the part of parents
- Low awareness among parents of any advice services available
- The need for advocacy at the local level
- Advice services for young people
- Information and advice provided in other languages
- Lack of co-ordination of local education advice provision
- Lack of expert support on education law for local advisers

Developing information and advice services that are accessible to parents and young people in their own areas, and to a consistently high standard across Scotland, is the key motivation for this research.

Conclusion

This chapter has revealed something of the nature of education advice provision in Scotland. The agencies in our survey largely provided education advice at the levels of responding to straightforward information requests, and help with tasks such as writing letters or filling in forms. More involved assistance, such as counselling or advocacy, were much less likely to be available.

Information and advice was available on all of the education topics we asked about by at least some agencies. Few, however, offered specialist advice on any of the topics. This reflects the fact that most of the advisers were volunteers providing generalist advice, with only a very few advisers trained or qualified in education law.

Most local advice agencies felt training opportunities for education advice were inadequate, although the national bodies and the CABx tended to find that there were enough training opportunities. Relationships among advice agencies tended to be good, although poorer relationships were reported with schools and local authorities.

The advice agencies in this survey had a range of concerns about the availability of high quality impartial advice for parents across Scotland. How these concerns should be addressed needs to be based on research with parents and young people.

The implications of these findings for education advice in Scotland are discussed in Chapter 5. The next chapter, however, looks at the demand for education advice, as reported by the advice agencies in our survey.
Chapter 4 Demand for education advice in Scotland

The previous chapters have outlined who provides education advice in Scotland, and what sorts of information and advice services are provided. This chapter looks at the demand for education information and advice, as reported by the 70 agencies in our survey.

We asked about demand for advice on particular issues, and about new enquiries as distinct from ongoing enquiries. We were aware that the level of demand on certain issues can be influenced by term times (for example placing requests) and by media coverage (such as bullying), and we asked about this, too.

Level of new enquiries

The following table shows the levels of new enquiries being received by the agencies.

Table 3: Number of new enquiries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New enquiries:</th>
<th>Number of agencies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 2 a week</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>between 2 and 5 a week</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>between 6 and 10 a week</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>between 11 and 20 a week</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>more than 20 a week</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

67 agencies responded to this question

While the level of enquiries reported tended to be quite low, there were differences between the different types of agency. CABx and other local advice agencies tended to report lower numbers of new enquiries, while the national bodies reported higher numbers. Table A3 in Appendix 3 shows the number of new enquiries reported by the different types of agency.
reported by the different types of agency.

We asked about the impact this level of new enquiries had on staff/volunteer time in the agencies. Of the 66 who answered this question, 56 said the level of new enquiries meant they were not often dealing with education enquiries (these were all the CABx plus all but one of the other local advice agencies, and one national body), while three (all national bodies) said there were more education enquiries than they could deal with. The remaining seven agencies said that dealing with education enquiries took up quite a lot of their time (all national and one local agency). Most of the CABx and other local advice agencies, therefore, said they did not often deal with education enquiries; while the national bodies tended to say that education enquiries took up a lot of their time or were more than they could deal with.

Table A4 in Appendix 3 shows the details of how the agencies responded.

**Variations**

The following graph shows how the agencies experienced variations in the level of enquiries, both according to term times and according to media coverage.

**Graph 3 Variation of enquiries**
63 and 49 agencies told us about variations according to term times and media coverage respectively. Just under half of the 63 agencies reported no variation in the level of demand according to term times, while the rest reported some variation (marked in 23 cases, slight in 12). Similarly, about half of the 49 reported no variation according to media coverage, with the rest reporting some variation (15 slight, 9 marked).

National bodies did tend to report greater variations than the CABx or other advice agencies, perhaps because the higher volume of enquiries allowed them to pick up on trends more easily. The evidence about the impact of term times and media coverage on the demand for education advice, however, remains inconclusive.

**Level of on-going enquiries**

We then asked about the numbers of enquiries that needed on-going involvement from the agencies, rather than new or one-off enquiries. The following table shows how the agencies responded.

### Table 4: Number of enquiries needing ongoing involvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>On-going enquiries:</th>
<th>Number of agencies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 2 a week</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>between 2 and 5 a week</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>between 6 and 10 a week</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>between 11 and 20 a week</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>more than 20 a week</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

67 agencies responded

The 57 agencies with less than 2 a week included all of the 32 responding CABx, 22 out of the 25 responding local advice agencies, but only three of the ten national bodies. The two with more than 20 a week were both national bodies.

**Trends in demand for education advice**

Sixty-eight agencies told us about trends in demand for education advice. Twenty reported that education enquiries were increasing, while only one said they were decreasing. 47 out of the 68 agencies said the level of enquiries was neither increasing nor decreasing. While most CABx and the majority of other local advice agencies (17 out of the 25) said the level of enquiries was neither increasing nor decreasing, eight out of the ten national bodies said it was increasing.
We asked about the demand for education information and advice on particular issues. For each issue, we asked whether demand was increasing, decreasing or staying the same. Many of the agencies who had said the overall level of demand was neither increasing nor decreasing, still reported different trends among specific issues. The following graph shows the trends for increased and for decreased demand, as reported by the agencies. Table A5 in Appendix 3 shows whether enquiries were increasing, decreasing, or staying the same for each topic.

Graph 4 Trends in demand

59 out of the 70 agencies responded to this question.

All of the issues were reported to have increased demand by at least some agencies, although demand appeared to be increasing the most for information and advice about bullying problems (28 agencies), special educational needs (14) and exclusions (14 agencies).
Very few agencies reported less demand for issues, and more agencies reported increases in these same issues:

- Off the Record reported less demand for advice about bullying problems; however 28 agencies reported an increase.

- The SPTC reported less demand for advice about special educational needs, while 14 agencies reported an increase.

- The SPTC reported less demand for advice about transport, although increased demand was experienced by 11 agencies.

- The Ethnic Minorities Law Centre experienced less demand for advice about attendance, while five agencies reported increases (St Machar Parent Support Project, Schoolhouse, Perth and Kinross Association of Voluntary Services, ISEA, and Castlemilk Law Centre's Women and Children's Rights Project).

- Gordon Rural Action (GRAIN) and the SPTC were finding less demand for advice about pre-school education, but seven agencies reported increased demand (ISEA, Scottish Pre-school Play Association, Children in Scotland and four local advice agencies).

- St Machar Parent Support Project and GRAIN experienced less demand for advice about school boards, while the SSBA and one of the law centres reported increased demand.

Therefore, while a small number of agencies reported falling trends, others reported higher trends on the same issues. It could be that parents and young people are re-directing their enquiries. Consumer research would clarify what is happening.

The level of enquiries about other issues handled by the agencies (such as benefits or health issues) was reported to be increasing by eight agencies, or the same by seven.

**Enquiries from outside**

We asked about enquiries about issues outwith agencies’ areas of expertise. Only five said they often received such enquiries, while 34 said they sometimes did. Nineteen agencies rarely received enquiries from outwith their area of expertise, with a further 11 saying they did not receive any.
Of the 59 agencies that did receive enquiries from outwith their area of expertise, whether often, sometimes or rarely, we asked how these were normally dealt with. None of the agencies said they would be unable to help in this situation. 24 of the agencies would refer enquirers to another agency, while six would go ahead and give information and advice. 28 would either give advice or refer to another agency depending on the situation.

Similarly, of the 54 agencies providing a locally based service, we asked about enquiries from outwith their local area. 42 in total did receive these: seven received such enquiries often, 25 sometimes, and the remaining 10 did so rarely. Only 12 did not receive enquiries from outside their local area.

Of the 42 agencies that received enquiries from outside their local area, whether often, sometimes or rarely, we asked how these were normally dealt with. Six of the 41 who responded would refer enquirers to another agency, while 23 would go ahead and give information and advice. 12 would give advice or refer to another agency depending on the situation. None said they would be unable to help in this situation.

Most of the agencies, therefore, were receiving enquiries from outside their area of expertise or their local areas. While all of them would be able to help, whether directly or by referral to other agencies, this may be an indication of gaps in advice provision (whether geographically or in terms of expertise). Research with parents and young people will provide evidence on the extent to which such gaps exist.

**Conclusion**

The level of new enquiries was higher to national bodies than to CABx and other advice agencies. This was reflected in the impact of dealing with new enquiries on staff resources, with national bodies more likely to report that dealing with these took up a lot of time. The national bodies also reported some variation in the level of education enquiries according to term times and media coverage. However, the impact of these on the level of demand for education advice was not as clear-cut as might have been expected.
The number of enquiries needing on-going involvement fell some way below the number of new enquiries, indicating the majority of education enquiries handled were one-off.

National bodies reported increasing demand for education advice in Scotland. The CABx and other advice agencies tended to report no overall trend, although most of these reported increasing trends for advice on specific topics. The topics most likely to be in increased demand were bullying problems, special educational needs, and exclusions. Increasing demand was reported on all of the education topics in our survey by at least some advice providers.

Very few agencies reported falling demand for education advice, and in each case there were more agencies reporting increases. This may be an indication that parents are switching their enquiries to a different set of advice providers.

Most advice providers received enquiries from outside their areas of expertise and from outside their geographical areas (in the case of locally based providers). This finding suggests gaps in the availability of education advice. There were advice agencies who said they would give advice (rather than refer to another agency) on enquiries outside their areas of expertise.

The implications of these findings, along with those of the previous chapters, will now be presented in the next chapter.
Chapter 5 Implications for education information and advice in Scotland

This report presents the findings of what has to be seen very much as a first step in finding out about the availability of and the need for education information and advice in Scotland. Many of our findings need to be explored further through research with parents and young people.

The range of agencies in our survey indicates the wide range of potential sources of education information and advice for parents in Scotland, from stand-alone local advice projects to national organisations. However, for most of the agencies, education was only one part of a wider remit. Indeed, many of the CABs in our survey made the point that few parents would associate them with education advice, as they tended to be seen more in terms of welfare, debt or housing advice. Furthermore, most of the agencies in our survey said that the provision of information and advice services was not co-ordinated in their areas. Therefore, although there would appear to be many sources of education information and advice for parents, access to these could well be hampered by a low awareness of their potential for providing education advice, and by a lack of a co-ordinated approach to advice provision locally.

Some of these problems could be overcome through publicity about the advice agencies’ services. Most agencies in our survey did say they produced their own publicity material. However, the most common means of publicity was word of mouth. While this might be effective in some instances, it is unlikely to prove a satisfactory means of publicity even locally. For example, parents may only know about a service to the extent that they have used it for a specific problem reflecting their own circumstances. Even then they may have an incomplete understanding of what the service offers, and so pass on inaccurate information to others. This might explain why, as many CABs pointed out, most people tend not to think of contacting a CAB about an education enquiry.

For many, particularly local, advice agencies, producing and disseminating their own publicity can seriously erode the resources available to the service. For this reason, and because of the nature of education services, it might be assumed that schools and local authorities are best placed to pass on details to parents about sources of independent education advice in their areas.

1 Some local authorities, however, were very helpful indeed, and some examples of local authority good practice are shown in Chapter 1.
However, in our survey, publicity through the school or local authority
was the least used method by far. Indeed, during our preparatory
research, we found a reluctance on the part of some local authorities to
acknowledge the need for independent advice or to give details of local
 provision\(^1\). Nine local authorities did not respond at all to our request for
details of local advice providers. Furthermore, in our survey, more
agencies said their relationships with schools and local authorities were
not satisfactory than said this of relationships with other advice
providers. The reasons behind these findings are not clear. One
possibility could be that schools and local authorities simply do

not see independent advice on education as a priority. Given the
importance to young people and parents of independent advice, and
given the potential role of schools and local authorities in providing
details of advice providers in their areas, this is an issue that needs to
be explored further.

While all of the education topics we asked about were covered by at
least some advice agencies (even the least-covered topic, school
boards, was covered by 30 agencies), there were still some significant
gaps. First, very few agencies said they specialised in any of the topics.
Second, while there would appear to be many people available to give
education information and advice, many of these were in fact part time
volunteers providing generalist advice on a wider range of topics. There
may in fact only be a small number of people available with detailed
knowledge of education law: in our survey, only ten people across six
agencies were trained or qualified in education law. Moreover, there
was no secondary advice service to which advisers could turn for
specialist knowledge of education law.

A third gap was found to be in the type of information and advice service
offered. Responding to straightforward information requests, and
practical help with writing letters and filling in forms, were the most widely
available services. More involved levels of information and advice were
much less likely to be provided, such as counselling or advocacy. Given
that some education problems can be very upsetting for parents and /
or complex, this may be a very serious gap in the provision of education
information and advice.

The advice agencies in our survey had a range of concerns about
education information and advice in Scotland, mainly about the low level
of availability, lack of specialist knowledge and training, and
inconsistency of the quality of advice across the country. Our findings
do seem to support the view that there is a lack of specialist education
information and advice in Scotland, and a lack of structured support for
advice agencies. For example, there appears to be evidence that some
advice providers are unwilling to refer to other agencies, perhaps
because they do not want to be seen as “passing the buck”.
Referral is an essential element of good advice provision, and some attention should be given to supporting advice agencies in feeling positive about referring people on. One possibility may be to encourage advice providers to make contact on behalf of enquirers, in situations where they judge it insensitive to simply give details of another organisation.

The extent of problems in education advice is most important to parents and young people, and only research with them will inform the way forward. This is particularly pressing, given the reported increase in demand for information and advice on all of the education topics we asked about in our survey.

The following questions arising from our research need to be tested with parents and young people:

- Where do parents and young people turn for information and advice on specific education matters?
- How do they find out about the availability of independent advice?
- Do they find it difficult to access high quality specialist advice?
- What are their perceptions of the education information and advice available from the range of national and local advice providers?
- Can parents and young people access the services they need, such as counselling and advocacy?
- When do parents and young people involve advice agencies in resolving difficulties?
- Does this affect relationships with local authorities and schools, or do existing relationships affect the involvement of advice agencies?
- How do parents and young people prefer to access education information and advice? For example, through a national telephone service, or local agencies?
- What gaps would parents and young people identify in the provision of education information and advice in Scotland?

1 In 1993, following Scottish Office consultation about the state of housing information and advice, HomePoint was formed. Its aim is to improve the scope and quality of housing information and advice in Scotland. Its objectives are to identify and meet the needs of consumers, and to improve the standard of housing information and advice provision. HomePoint provided grant support for the establishment of SHAS, which has now secured funding from Scottish Homes and the Scottish Office to provide a secondary support service to CABx.
Education information and advice services must reflect the needs of parents and young people, and must be fully accessible to them. There are many models of advice provision which could be adopted in developing education information and advice in Scotland (for example, the HomePoint model¹, SHAS and other secondary advice services, the Advisory Centre for Education, mediation and advocacy services, national helplines, the CAB network, etc).

From this first step in finding out about current provision, it does seem that much improvement is both needed and possible. The need now for research with parents and young people is clear.
Appendix 1 Agencies who were sent questionnaires

63 Citizens Advice Bureaux (35 responded)

Other advice agencies (including law centres)

Advocacy Project, Glasgow**
Ardler Information Point (Dundee)**
Arran Information and Advice
Banchory Advice Centre
Castlemilk Law Centre, Women and Children’s Rights Project**
Citizen Advice & Rights Fife (3 responded, and all used in the analysis)
Community Advice and Information Service (CAIS), Aviemore**
Community Help & Advice, Edinburgh
Crossroads Youth & Community Association
Dalmarnock Neighbourhood, Glasgow
Drumchapel Law & Money
Dunfermline Advocacy Initiative
East End Advice Centre (Glasgow)*
East End Community Law Centre**
East Sutherland Village Advisory Service**
Edinburgh Community Mediation
Ellon Area Advice Centre
Enable Family Advice Service, Glasgow**
Ethnic Minorities Law Centre**
Fife Advocacy Project
Fife Community Mediation*
Glasgow AMH**
Govan Law Centre**
Gordon Rural Action (GRAIN), Huntly**
Granton Information Centre, Edinburgh
Highland Advice & Information
Inverurie Advice Centre**
Keith Advice Centre
Lanarkshire Ethnic Link
LANCAS, Edinburgh
Laurieston Community Work, Glasgow
Maryhill Representation Unit**
North Ayrshire Law Centre
Dundee North Law Centre**
Off the Record**
Open Door (Fife)
Perth and Kinross Association of Voluntary Services**
Paisley Law Centre**
Rights Office, Edinburgh*
SCARF, Aberdeen*
Skye & Lochalsh Community Advice Service**
Society for the Blind*
St Machar Parent Support Project**
Tannochside Information
The Law Centre Dumbarton**
Torry Resource and Advice Group**
Turriff Advice Centre**

National bodies

Actors Charitable Trust
Citizens Advice Scotland*
Childline Scotland**
Children in Scotland**
Comann Nam Parent*
Enable**
Independent Special Education Advice (ISEA) Scotland**
Legal Services Agency*
National Association for Gifted Children**
One Plus
Schoolhouse**
Scottish Child Law Centre
Scottish Council for Single Parents*
Scottish Network for Able Pupils
Scottish Pre-school Play Association**
Scottish Refugee Council**
Scottish Parent Teacher Council**
Scottish School Board Association**

* = those who responded to the questionnaire, but were not used in the analysis

** = those who responded, and who provided education information and advice
## Appendix 2 The questionnaire

### About your information and advice services

1. **Which of the following does your agency offer on education?**  
   *(Please tick any that apply)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Ticked</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Respond to straightforward information requests</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide advice about options</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help parents write letters / fill in forms etc</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speak to others on behalf of individuals</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselling service provided</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocacy service provided (e.g. representation at appeals)</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other information and advice services provided</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We do not provide education information and advice</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If other information and advice services, please specify which:

2. **Is your information and advice work mainly concerned with education, or is education part of wider issues that you deal with?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concern</th>
<th>Ticked</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education is the main area</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education is part of a wider remit</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. **Which of the following most accurately describes the work of your information and advice service?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work of Service</th>
<th>Ticked</th>
<th>(please go to question 4)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Front-line advice directly to the public</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary advice for other front-line services</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. How do parents find out about your information and advice service?  
(Please tick any that apply)

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The service’s own publicity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>through the school or local authority</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>through other agencies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>word of mouth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other ways</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If other ways, please specify which:

5. Does your agency provide information and advice about the following education issues?  
(Please tick any that apply)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Provide information or advice</th>
<th>Specialise in this</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Admissions / placing requests</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Custodial rights</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exclusions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying problems</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special educational needs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude / conduct of teaching staff</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School boards</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-school education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other issues</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If other issues, please specify which:
6. How many people in your agency give information and advice about education?

Demand for education information and advice

7. How many new education enquiries do you generally receive in a week?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 2 a week</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>between 2 and 5 a week</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>between 6 and 10 a week</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>between 11 and 20 a week</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>more than 20 a week</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8. Does this number of enquiries mean:

| Option                                                        |   |
|                                                              |   |
| We do not often deal with education enquiries                 | ✗ |
| Dealing with enquiries takes up quite a lot of our time       | ✗ |
| There are more education enquiries than we can deal with      |   |

9. In your experience, does the number of new education enquiries vary according to:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>A marked variation</th>
<th>Slight variation</th>
<th>No variation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Term times</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media coverage</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
10. How many education enquiries tend to require on going, rather than one-off, involvement from your agency?

- Less than 2 a week
- between 2 and 5 a week
- between 6 and 10 a week
- between 11 and 20 a week
- more than 20 a week

11. Are education enquiries increasing or decreasing in your agency?

- increasing
- decreasing
- neither

12. In your experience, are people enquiring more, less, or just the same on particular issues?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>More</th>
<th>Less</th>
<th>Same</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Admissions / placing requests</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Custodial rights</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exclusions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying problems</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special educational needs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude / conduct of teaching staff</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School boards</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-school education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other issues</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If other issues, please specify which:
13. **Do you receive enquiries about education issues outwith your agency’s area of expertise?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, often</td>
<td>(please go to question 14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, sometimes</td>
<td>(please go to question 14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>(please go to question 14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>(please go to question 15)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

14. **How do you normally deal with these?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Refer to another agency</td>
<td>(please go to question 14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give information and advice</td>
<td>(please go to question 14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unable to help</td>
<td>(please go to question 14)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

15. **Do you provide a national or a locally based service?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td>(please go to question 18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local</td>
<td>(please go to question 16)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

16. **Do you receive enquiries from outside of your local area?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, often</td>
<td>(please go to question 17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, sometimes</td>
<td>(please go to question 17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>(please go to question 17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>(please go to question 18)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

17. **How do you deal with these?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Refer to another agency</td>
<td>(please go to question 14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give information and advice</td>
<td>(please go to question 14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unable to help</td>
<td>(please go to question 14)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
18. Is the provision of independent education advice co-ordinated in your area?

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>❑ please go to question 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>❑ please go to question 20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

19. Who co-ordinates this?

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Your agency</td>
<td>❑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The authority</td>
<td>❑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A partnership</td>
<td>❑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another agency</td>
<td>❑</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

20. Are you satisfied with your relationships with the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other advice agencies</td>
<td>❑</td>
<td>❑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools</td>
<td>❑</td>
<td>❑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local authorities</td>
<td>❑</td>
<td>❑</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please tell us, from your experience, what makes for good relationships with these bodies:
Training and qualifications

21. How would you describe the training needs of those in your agency who provide education information and advice?

- There are adequate training opportunities
- There are not enough training opportunities

22. Please tell us how many people with the following qualifications give education advice in your agency:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualification</th>
<th>Number of paid staff</th>
<th>Number of volunteers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trained / qualified in advice work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trained / qualified in education law</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledgeable, but no formal qualification in advice work or education law</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

23. Please tell us about any issues of concern you have about independent information and advice for parents in Scotland.
Appendix 3  Additional data

Table A1: Methods of publicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Number of agencies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The service’s own publicity</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Through the school or local authority</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Through other agencies</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word of mouth</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other ways</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

67 out of 70 agencies responded to this question

Table A2: Training opportunities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CABx</th>
<th>Local agencies</th>
<th>National bodies</th>
<th>All agencies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enough training opportunities</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate training opportunities</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

64 out of 70 responded to this question
### Table A3: Numbers of new enquiries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New enquiries</th>
<th>CABx</th>
<th>Local agencies</th>
<th>National bodies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 2 a week</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>between 2 and 5 a week</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>between 6 and 10 a week</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>between 11 and 20 a week</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>more than 20 a week</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

67 out of 70 agencies responded to this question

### Table A4: Impact of enquiries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CABx</th>
<th>Local agencies</th>
<th>National bodies</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We do not often deal with education enquiries</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dealing with enquiries takes up quite a lot of our time</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are more education enquiries than we can deal with</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

66 out of 70 agencies responded to this question
Table A5 Trends in enquiries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>More</th>
<th>Less</th>
<th>Same</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Admissions / placing requests</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Custodial rights</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exclusions</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying problems</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special educational needs</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude / conduct of teaching staff</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School boards</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-school education</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home education</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other issues</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

59 out of 70 agencies responded