



Education Outcomes for Young People within the Leaving Care After Care Service

<u>For Decision</u> Requires majority decision prior to implementation or action.	<u>For Discussion</u> Requires consideration and debate.	<u>For Noting</u> Contains information Members should be made aware.
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1.0 Background

The Trust delivers a statutory Leaving Care service via the Leaving Care After Care (LCAC) 16+ service. The roles and responsibilities of this service are set out in the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2002 - the context of which is to ensure that young people leaving care aged 16 and over are provided with the best quality care and support to ensure they make a successful transition to adulthood.

The LCAC service works with young people in care aged 16-17 and those who have left care aged 18-21 or up to age 24 in full-time education. The needs and complexity of the young people open to the service has increased over recent years with young people presenting with complexity in relation to mental health needs, substance misuse, child sexual exploitation, child criminal exploitation and homelessness. The majority of admissions to secure accommodation in South Eastern Trust are in relation to young people open to the leaving care service.

The LCAC Service in SE Trust comprises 5 teams across the Trust that deploy a skills mix of Social Workers and Personal Advisors in the following teams:

- Newtownards – covering Ards & North Down area
- Lisburn – covering Lisburn and greater Lisburn area
- Downpatrick – covering the Down area
- Separated Unaccompanied Children Team – Trust-wide
- Supported Lodgings / STAY team – Trust wide

The Social Work role focuses on delivery of statutory functions, assessments and care planning. The role of the Personal Advisor is to provide practical support, in relation to areas such as housing, Education, Training and employment. As per Leaving Care legislation and policies, Personal Advisors are allocated to all children aged 16+ who are Looked After. The role of the Personal Advisor has evolved over the years, primarily due to increase in need and complexity presented by young people known to the service.

There are currently 104 Looked After Children (aged 16/17) and 161 care leavers (aged 18+) open to the Trust service. There are 63 separated unaccompanied children open to the service.

In addition, The Trust has a dedicated service called H.O.P.E. to support young people in relation to education, training and employment. The service is currently working with 47 young people from the LCAC service.

2.0 Key Issues

Research has consistently highlighted that care experienced young people and care leavers are overrepresented in relation to experiencing health/mental health difficulties, housing insecurity including homelessness, entering the justice system and lower educational outcomes. The Standards for Leaving Care Services in Northern Ireland (2012) sets out 8 standards for all young people leaving care. Standard 4 'Enjoying, Learning and Achieving' specifically addresses educational outcomes.

Over recent years, there has been a sustained focus on improving educational outcomes for young people in care and those leaving care. This has including the development of Personal Education Plans and a sustained focus on educational engagement and outcomes via the statutory Looked After Child and Pathway Review processes. The Trust has delivered excellent outcomes for some young people. However, continual improvement is required in this area.

At a national level, Ofsted has introduced a new separate judgement to the framework for inspecting local authority children's services specifically about the experiences and progress of care leavers. The new judgement focuses on the things that matter most to care leavers' lives. The evaluation criteria includes employment, education and training. The National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum, which is attended by representatives from South Eastern Trust, has produced resources mapping the themes from these initial reports that will aid improvements in educational support locally.

Educational outcomes are reported centrally via Delegated Statutory Functions reporting. The Trust also ensures local tracking of outcomes indicators.

In 2023/24, young people achieved a wide range of vocational, further and higher education levels. The Trust provides financial support to all young people in relation to education including payment of university fees, accommodation and materials as required.

3.0 Resources Implications (inc Organisational, Financial, Human Resources)

Despite these positive achievements, there are still many young people accommodated by the Trust who do not achieve their educational potential. One specific concern is young people in residential care.

The Trust Residential and Leaving Care Services are currently working on a proposal to deliver a bespoke programme of educational support in partnership with an external provider to address the main thematic areas of engagement, underachievement, attendance issues and motivation.

The intent of this programme is to target a specific cohort of young people in residential care who are struggling the most in relation to engaging in education, to provide them with a bespoke package of support and improve their attendance, attainment and behaviour.

The service is currently working with finance to identify a funding stream to support this.

4.0 Impact on Safety, Quality and Experience (SQE)

While much positive work has been undertaken to develop new programmes of support, there are a number of actions which, if taken, would lead to improved outcomes for our young people leaving care and subsequently enhance their quality of life experience.

5.0 Key Risks and Proposals to Mitigate

The below proposals were presented to EMT in December 2024 and an action plan has been identified for the service to progress these proposals:

1. Recruit an education worker for Residential care with specific experience of working in the school environment who can support young people and schools to look at alternative ways to keep a young person in school – reduced timetable, day release to Trust work placement, ensuring Personal Education Plans are in place to support young people and ensure school is aware of their care history, ensure school is trauma informed etc.
2. The opportunity to work with children younger than 16 reduce the number of children identifying as Not in Education Training Employment at post 16.
3. Trust commitment to offering Apprenticeship Programmes (these would need to be funded by the Trust Depts.) as part of our Corporate Parenting responsibilities. Job Start has not secured any funding for 2025-26 and is due to end in Feb 2026.
4. Increased opportunities from external organisations to offer Work-based programmes such as Apprenticeships – SPPG working group looking at this at present – Trust may be able to influence opening up local opportunities.
5. Increased partnership working with the Education Welfare service specifically in relation to challenges to suspensions and exclusions decisions.

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