

Corporate Parenting Panel

17 January 2025

Supporting Care Leavers into Education, Employment or Training



Report of Helen Radcliffe, Strategic Manager: Progression and Learning, Children and Young People's Services, Durham County Council

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide.

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To update members of the Corporate Parenting Panel about the support provided to Care Leavers, to enable them to progress into sustained post-16 education, employment or training.

Executive summary

- 2 A number of programmes and initiatives supported Care Leavers to make a sustained progression into post-16 education, employment or training during 2024. These included transition support for Children in Care through the DurhamWorks Programme for Schools, as well as a post-16 Care Leaver pathway consisting of DurhamWorks post-16 re-engagement Programmes, a Sessional Employment Programme, a Pupil Premium Plus Post-16 Programme and support for Care Leavers who are in Higher Education.
- 3 This report contains the latest data in relation to the participation of Care Leavers in education, employment or training, as well as information about future proposals.

Recommendation

- 4 Members of Corporate Parenting Panel are requested to:
 - (a) Note the information contained in this report.
 - (b) Support efforts to increase the number of ring-fenced apprenticeship and work experience opportunities for Care Leavers within Durham County Council.

Background

- 5 A number of programmes and initiatives supported Care Leavers to progress into sustained post-16 education, employment or training, during 2024. These included:
- (a) Support for Children in Care to enable them to make a successful progression from Year 11 into post-16 education, employment or training through the DurhamWorks Programme for Schools.
 - (b) Support for Care Leavers to progress into sustained education, employment or training through a post-16 Care Leaver pathway, consisting of:
 - (i) DurhamWorks re-engagement programmes for Care Leavers who become NEET (not in education, employment or training).
 - (ii) A Sessional Employment Programme that provides paid work experience opportunities for Care Leavers within Durham County Council.
 - (iii) A Pupil Premium Plus Post-16 Programme that supports Care Leavers who are enrolled within Further Education or training.
 - (iv) A range of measures to support Care Leavers who are studying in Higher Education.

Pre-16 Support

- 6 Children in Care receive support to help them to progress from Year 11 into sustained post-16 education, employment or training through the DurhamWorks Programme for Schools. This offers pupils individual careers guidance, 1:1 mentoring support, as well as the opportunity to participate in group-based work related learning activities, supported by Business Ambassadors. Attendance at Personal Education Plan reviews is a key feature to ensure there is a partnership approach to transition support. The Workplaces Project provides opportunities for young people in Years 10 and 12, including Children in Care, to find out more about the world of work through bespoke visits to employers.
- 7 During the 2023-24 academic year, DurhamWorks Programme for Schools supported 132 Children in Care. Of these, 114 (86.4%) Children in Care progressed into a positive post-16 education, employment or training destination. Those young people who did not make an initial positive progression are supported by DurhamWorks

post-16 re-engagement offer. The Workplaces Project has supported 27 Children in Care since it commenced in June 2023.

Post-16 Support

- 8 Progression and Learning, the Virtual School and Children's Social Care work collaboratively to ensure that a post-16 Care Leaver pathway is available that offers support and access to opportunities, to encourage sustained participation in education or training and progression into employment. Key features that underpin the pathway include co-ordination of post-16 Personal Education Plans to ensure multi-agency support is available, regular joint surgeries to review and develop interventions for Care Leavers who are NEET, a Sessional Employment programme, co-ordination of a Post-16 Pupil Premium Plus offer for Care Leavers in post 16 education, as well as support to encourage Care Leavers to apply for Durham County Council Apprenticeships.

DurhamWorks Programme

- 9 Care Leavers, who are NEET, receive support through DurhamWorks post-16 re-engagement programmes. These provide one to one careers guidance and wrap-a-round support, assessment of barriers to progression, learning provision, as well as bespoke re-engagement activities to motivate and prepare Care Leavers for progression into education, employment or training.

Sessional Employment Programme

- 10 A Sessional Employment Programme offers Care Leavers the opportunity of paid work experience within Durham County Council. Work placements are identified which meet the talents, interests and aspirations of each individual. Care Leavers can be in education, employment, training, or NEET to access the programme and work placements are paid at the rate of the Durham Living Wage. Since commencement in October 2021, 35 Care Leavers have accessed paid work experience placements, including 2 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children. Examples of placements undertaken include Durham County Council's HR Department, farming in protected landscapes, the Gala Theatre, Durham County Council's Children and Young People's Services, Peterlee Pavilion, Meadowfield depot, leisure centres and children's nurseries. This programme has been identified as an example of good practice both regionally and nationally.

Pupil Premium Plus Post-16 Programme

- 11 Durham County Council continues to deliver the Government's Pupil Premium Plus Post-16 Programme. A dedicated adviser supports Care

Leavers who are enrolled in full-time Further Education at a college or sixth form, as well as those who are in training. There is a financial incentive for Care Leavers in FE, Sixth Form or training, which is paid on a termly basis. This equates to £100 per term for an attendance rate between 90% to 100% and £80 per term for an attendance rate between 80% to 89%. During the 2023-2024 academic year, 142 Care Leavers were supported by the scheme. A number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children who are undertaking ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) courses at a college are also supported by the Programme.

Durham County Council Apprenticeships

- 12 Care Leavers have been supported into Durham County Council apprenticeships over a number of years. Progression and Learning, Children's Social Care and HR colleagues have collaborated to ensure that a number of apprenticeship vacancies are ringfenced on an annual basis for Care Leavers. The original intention was to ringfence at least six apprenticeship positions for Care Leavers each year. However, as a result of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, overall recruitment to Durham County Council apprenticeships declined, which also resulted in a reduction of ringfenced apprenticeship opportunities for Care Leavers. In 2024, two Care Leavers started Durham County Council apprenticeships but none of the vacancies were specifically ringfenced for Care Leavers.

Higher Education

- 13 Children's Social Services Care Leavers Service has a designated Young People's Advisor (YPA) who supports Care Leavers to manage their transition to university and maintains contact with them during their studies. In terms of transition support, this may include help with applying for student finance, ensuring suitable accommodation is available, as well as providing resources such as a handbook of advice from current students, a cookbook, a first aid kit for example.
- 14 In terms of maintaining contact during their studies, regular meetings take place between Care Leavers and the designated YPA at their university and contact is also made with university Care Leaver teams. Support is also provided to Care Leavers in relation to requests for 'staying put' arrangements during holiday periods, graduation costs, as well as with their next steps after university.
- 15 There are currently 36 Care Leavers undertaking Higher Education at universities across the United Kingdom, including 18 Care Leavers who started in September 2024. Examples of courses being studied include Law, History, Computing and Sports Coaching. 10 Care Leavers

graduated in the summer of 2024, including two Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking young people, one of whom is employed by the NHS.

Collaborative Working

- 16 Collaborative working is key to ensuring Care Leavers are supported to progress into post-16 education, employment or training, and is underpinned by a team which is co-funded by the Virtual School and the Progression and Learning Service. This team works very closely with the Children’s Social Care Service to ensure activities to support Care Leavers are well co-ordinated.
- 17 Collaborative working is also a feature of a County Durham Care Leaver post-16 EET group, which brings together representatives from FE colleges, DWP Jobcentre Plus, Higher Education institutions, as well as colleagues from Children and Young People’s Services to review learning provision and support that is available.

Care Leavers Destination Data

- 18 The Progression and Learning Service collects and reports the destinations of all young people aged 16-17 in County Durham to the Department for Education on a monthly basis. This information includes Care Leavers who reside in County Durham and whose Corporate Parent is Durham County Council or a different Local Authority.
- 19 The following table contains average destination data of young people aged 16-17 during December to February in 2023/24, compared to 2022/23 and 2021/22 respectively. December to February is the period used by the Department for Education for annual comparative purposes.

	2023/24		2022/23		2021/22	
	16-17 All	16-17 CL	16-17 All	16-17 CL	16-17 All	16-17 CL
Average Cohort Size	11,351	209	11,239	170	11,172	138
Participating in EET	94.6%	74.8%	94.7%	83.0%	94.4%	75.2%
NEET	4.8%	24.7%	4.8%	16.9%	4.9%	24.6%
Information Not Known	0.6%	0.5%	0.5%	0.0%	0.7%	0.2%
Combined NEET and Not Known	5.4%	25.2%	5.3%	16.9%	5.6%	24.8%

Department for Education: Local Authority CCIS, December to February average. This data is collected and reported to the Department for Education by the Progression and Learning Service.

- 20 The data shows that the proportion of all 16-17 year olds in County Durham who are participating in EET (education, employment or

training), who are NEET (not in education, employment or training), or whose destination is not known has remained relatively stable during the period covered by the table. This is positive when taking into account a number of inter-related challenges that have adversely affected young people's progression into EET, including cost of living pressures, a limited post-16 education and training offer outside of full-time further education/sixth form in County Durham, more young people presenting with mental health and anxiety issues, as well as the enduring legacy of the Covid-19 pandemic. It is also important to note that the overall size of the 16-17 year old cohort has increased.

- 21 The proportion of 16-17 year old Care Leavers who are participating in EET (education, employment or training), who are NEET (not in education, employment or training), or whose destination is not known has fluctuated more during the previous three years, compared to the overall 16-17 year old cohort. This is partly due to the size of the Care Leaver cohort compared to the overall 16-17 year old cohort, which means it is prone to more dramatic changes from one year to the next. It is also due to the fact that in 2022-23, the level and nature of external funding available (e.g. ESF) meant that more re-engagement learning provision was available for Care Leavers, resulting in a lower NEET rate at this time.
- 22 Another factor is the barriers preventing Care Leavers from progressing into sustained education, employment or training. The issues highlighted in paragraph 20 can be more pronounced for some Care Leavers and may also include other factors such as a lack of stable relationships and associated emotional support, increased levels of social isolation, mental health issues resulting from early life trauma, as well as disrupted patterns of previous education. For Care Leavers living in supported accommodation, there can be financial disincentives to progressing into apprenticeships/employment from state benefits.
- 23 The Department for Education publishes comparative data annually on the destinations of Care Leavers aged 17-18 and 19-21. This data captures the destinations of Care Leavers at the time of their birthday and is collected and reported to the Department for Education by the Children's Social Care Service.
- 24 The following table shows the destinations of Care Leavers aged 17-18 and 19-21 for whom Durham County Council is the Corporate Parent in 2024, compared to regional and national averages. The data shows that the proportion of Care Leavers aged 17-18 who are participating in education, employment or training is greater than the average rate for the North East and the proportion who are NEET is lower. In terms of 19-21 year olds, the higher proportion of Care Leavers in County

Durham whose destination is not known affects the accuracy of the participating in EET and NEET rates for this cohort.

	County Durham		North East		England	
	CL 17-18	CL 19-21	CL 17-18	CL 19-21	CL 17-18	CL 19-21
Total Cohort	119	247	760	1,710	14,300	36,370
Participating in EET	65% (77)	47% (116)	61% (470)	50% (850)	64% (9,170)	54% (19,550)
NEET	31% (37)	36% (89)	35% (270)	43% (740)	30% (4,270)	39% (14,300)
Information Not Known	4% (5)	17% (42)	4% (30)	7% (130)	6% (850)	7% (2,520)

Department for Education: Children in Care in England (including Adoption), year ending 31st March 2024.
This data is collected and reported to the Department for Education by the Children's Social Care Service.

- 25 The following table shows the destinations of Care Leavers aged 17-18 and 19-21, for whom Durham County Council is the Corporate Parent, in 2024, compared to 2023 and 2022 respectively.

	2024		2023		2022	
	CL 17-18	CL 19-21	CL 17-18	CL 19-21	CL 17-18	CL 19-21
Total Cohort	119	247	104	228	84	218
Participating in EET	65% (77)	47% (116)	65% (68)	56% (128)	67% (56)	61% (134)
NEET	31% (37)	36% (89)	24% (25)	29% (66)	26% (22)	29% (64)
Information Not Known	4% (5)	17% (42)	11% (11)	15% (35)	7% (6)	9% (20)

Department for Education: Children in Care in England (including Adoption), year ending 31st March. This data is collected and reported to the Department for Education by the Children's Social Care Service.

Proposals to enhance the support available to Care Leavers

- 26 In order to extend the support that is provided to Care Leavers, a number of proposals have been identified, some of which are dependent on the availability of additional funding in future:
- (a) Enhance the Sessional Employment Programme to broaden the range of paid work experience placements available to Care Leavers, including utilising anchor institutions external to Durham County Council, such as the NHS. This will involve increasing the staff resource available.

- (b) Collaborate with learning providers and HR colleagues in order to develop pathways into entry level job roles within Durham County Council, by using programmes such as the Supported Internship model as a template.
- (c) Improve the tracking of destinations and offer of EET support to 19-21 year old Care Leavers through more dedicated administrative support.
- (d) Utilise funding from UKSPF for a pilot project to support Care Leavers who are living in supported accommodation to access opportunities in education, employment or training in conjunction with a specialist provider.
- (e) Create a renewed focus across Durham County Council to increase the number of ring-fenced apprenticeship and work experience opportunities available for Care Leavers.

Conclusion

- 27 This report has provided information about the current support that is available to enable more Care Leavers to participate in sustained education, employment or training.

Recommendation

- 28 Members of Durham County Council's Corporate Parenting Panel are requested to:
- (a) Note the information contained in this report and the presentation that will be given at the meeting.
 - (b) Support efforts to increase the number of ring-fenced apprenticeship and work experience opportunities for Care Leavers within Durham County Council.

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

None.

Finance

DurhamWorks pre-16 and post-16 programmes are funded by Durham County Council's core budget and UKSPF. The current UKSPF allocation expires in March 2025 and information is awaited regarding the level of funding for 2025-26. Other funding sources are being sought for some of the future proposals outlined in this report.

Consultation

None.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

None.

Human Rights

None.

Crime and Disorder

None.

Staffing

None.

Accommodation

None.

Risk

None.

Procurement

None.