

CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND SKILLS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

UPDATE ON TRAINING AND APPRENTICESHIP ACCESS FOR CARE EXPERIENCED YOUNG PEOPLE AND MEASURES TO REDUCE THE NUMBER OF NEET CARED FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN SUNDERLAND

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

1. Purpose of the report

To update members of the Children, Education and Skills Scrutiny Committee on current training and apprenticeship access for care experienced young people. Including Virtual School's support to reduce the number of NEET cared for young people.

2. Background

2.1 Post 16 Pupil Premium Plus Pilot:

Sunderland Virtual School have been selected to participate in a one-year DfE pilot of Pupil Premium Plus Grant funding (PP+) for post 16 cared for young people, with a focus on improving retention in Education, Employment and Training and raising attainment in Maths and English. Sunderland Virtual School are delivering this in the following three areas:

- Raise the profile of Cared for and Care Experienced Young People in FE/training/apprenticeships through multi agency working practice to improve retention and participation of our young people on appropriate post 16 pathways thus reducing the number of young people not in education, training, and employment.
- Improve the attendance and outcomes for Level 2 English and Maths to improve access to apprenticeships/employment opportunities.
- Better support the delivery of Personal Education Plans at an individual and whole cohort basis to promote progression and attainment.

2.2 This DfE grant has allowed the Virtual School to increase staffing capacity to work more intensively and collaboratively to ensure our young people have successful outcome as they move into adult life.

3. Training and Apprenticeship Access for Cared for/Care Experienced Young People

3.1 Ongoing support from the Virtual School:

- Post 16 Caseworkers offer mentoring and support tailored to meet the needs of each cared for young person to access education, training and employment opportunities. This involves home visits to offer information, advice and guidance, multi-agency working to support, exploring options, accompanying on visits to local providers, interview preparation and in some case creating bespoke programmes to meet the needs of the individual that cannot be met by mainstream provision.
- The expansion of the team and increased hours has allowed team members to offer more intensive support to our young people.
- Virtual School Post 16 caseworkers have extensive knowledge of local training opportunities and work closely with Together for Children Careers Team to source and access appropriate training placements for cared for young people.
- Regular Personal Education Planning (PEP) meetings take place to review work undertaken, identify barriers to engagement and agree actions to provide support and facilitate engagement. Post 16 staff facilitate and attend all PEP meetings and have developed three versions of the Post 16 PEP to better tailor support for young people who are:
 - Engaging in Employment and/or Apprenticeships
 - Enrolled on Education and/or Training Course
 - NEET
- Careers Information Advice and Guidance (CIAG) is an integral part of the PEP and includes an action plan for all Year 11's moving into Post 16 provision. (See Case study - Appendix A).
- Multiagency and focused based approach to maintain engagement in education, training, and employment. Working in close partnership with training providers, colleges, housing providers, foster carers.
- NEET support panel meets monthly and is attended by VS Caseworkers, TfC Careers Team, and Next Steps Activity Co-ordinator. The purpose is to find creative solutions for our post 16 hard to reach young people who are NEET, and to improve retention in EET using a multi-disciplinary approach.
- Virtual School work in partnership with Next Steps Social Workers and Personal Advisers to support care experienced young people with their ongoing education training and employment. Sunderland Virtual School now offer extended support to the end of year 13. This includes education review meetings to which Personal Advisers are invited to ensure a smooth transition between the two services is achieved as young people continue into year 14. (See Case study – Appendix B).
- Virtual School refer for advice and guidance to the Higher Education Specialist Personal Adviser to support with transition and planning for post 18 pathways.

- Virtual School Post 16 Caseworkers regularly co locate to Stanfield Business Centre in order to work closely with Next Steps Social Workers and Personal Advisers providing a wraparound service for the transition of care leavers.
- Excellent working relationships with partners from training providers and some local employers ensure appropriate support and the right course are in place to meet the often-complex needs of our young people.

3.2 Work with Employers and Local Training Providers:

- Virtual School work effectively with some local employers, for example over the past 2 years, Howdens have recruited several Cared for/Care experienced young people across the city and northeast region. Working on an individual basis we are able to identify suitable opportunities for young people with Howdens and alongside the development of good working relationships, the needs of the apprentices are met, and support is effective. Partnership working with Howdens will continue this year with information on opportunities being shared with the Post 16 Virtual School Team. (See Appendix A).
- Working in partnership, post 16 caseworkers for the virtual school, social care colleagues and a variety of local training providers, including Woodshed and Springboard, have developed bespoke courses that specifically meet the complex needs of individual cared for young people. This is particularly important where mainstream provision is either not appropriate or available, working in an innovative way has created more realistic and achievable outcomes for our cared for/care experienced young people.
- Virtual School are always eager to work with employers who may be able to offer employment/apprenticeship/work experience opportunities to cared for and care experienced young people. Examples of employers we are in the early stages of working with are the Waites Group and Everyone Active.
- Virtual School are working collaboratively with partners to develop additional English as a Second Language (ESOL) provision for our Post 16 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) to meet the increasing need in the city. Current figures for Post 16 UASC, who are cared for by Together for Children in year 12, has seen a 58% increase in the last 6 months to a total of 12 young people.
- With our regional and local Further Education college provision currently at capacity, staff in the Virtual School are proactively looking to increase training opportunities in partnership with local training providers for this specific cohort of young people. In its early stages of development, this new provision will include a focus on the development of English alongside vocational training and personal/social development.

- The Virtual School is also part of a North of England regional UASC focus group working on regional solutions to support UASC young people into education and training opportunities, to share good practice with a solution focused approach.

Virtual School Current Participation Figures (16-18 years) on 09.03.23:

Further Education	43
Training	21
Apprenticeships	3
Employment	5
NEET	18
Total Cohort	90

4. Measures to reduce the number of NEET cared for young people

4.1 NEET Preventative work from the Virtual School:

- Regular Personal Education Planning (PEP) meetings take place to review what is going well as well as any needs or concerns when they arise. Agreed targets are set with individualised support to promote retention and prevent disengagement.
- Year 11 Risk of NEET Indicator (RONI) has been created for our current year 11 cohort based on Autumn PEP data on attainment and social, emotional, and mental health indicators. Students are RAG rated and targeted transition work is undertaken in the spring and summer term to support NEET prevention.
- A dedicated member of the Virtual School team has been employed through the Post 16 PP+ pilot to support transition from year 11 to year 12 and provide NEET prevention support and strategies.
- For our UASC cohort, we are providing a core offer of laptops, educational assessments, and targeted language support, using the Flash Academy framework, alongside additional online and face to face EAL tuition where needed in preparation for full time learning.

4.2 Innovation and Sharing Good Practice

- Virtual School are working collaboratively with partners to develop additional Post 16 UASC provision to meet the increasing need in the city. The Virtual School is also part of a North of England regional UASC focus group working on regional solutions to support USAC cohorts from NEET prevention.
- Virtual school are exploring creative bespoke solutions for NEET young people with complex needs such as personal development, preparing for

adulthood and independence and how this can reduce NEET e.g., 1-1 tuition, ASDAN, positive activities.

- Post 16 Caseworkers attend Northeast Raising Aspiration Partnership, which is a Care Experienced Student Steering Group. As part of this group, Virtual School staff encourage schools to refer children and young people (Y7 – Y12) in our care to participate in the ‘Choices Programme’ which is a programme of university visits and activities to raise aspirations around further and higher education (See appendix B).
- Post 16 Caseworkers are setting up a Regional Post 16 Virtual School Steering Group to share challenges and good practice to improve outcomes for cared for/care experienced young people.

Current Cared for NEET Figures as of 09/03/2023:

Current cared for cohort aged 16-18	90
Current NEET Cohort	18
Overall NEET percentage	20%

Please see attached Anonymised Case Studies

Appendix A

Appendix B

5. Recommendation

Members of the Children, Education and Skills Scrutiny Committee are asked to note the contents of the report and offer comments at the committee meeting.

Appendix A

J became cared for in December 2021 following a period of long-term absence from school due to educational neglect. J was at risk of permanent exclusion from his mainstream school for violent behaviour toward another student. Following the intervention of the Virtual School Headteacher, the permanent exclusion was rescinded, and he began attending The Link School late in Year 11. J responded positively to the more nurturing environment and the high staffing ratio at The Link and as a result engaged and progressed well, however; he was only there for a short period until the end of Year 11 with little time to prepare for his GCSEs.

Virtual School Post 16 Caseworker started working with J at the end of year 11 and attended his final statutory PEP and began to look at post 16 options and a comprehensive transition plan he could consider. J engaged well with the intervention and pathway plan and was willing to consider most training/apprenticeship opportunities that were suggested to him. Due to the relationship that J and his caseworker were able to build, J was honest about what he wanted to do and what his goals were. J visited some training providers but decided this route wasn't for him as he wanted to be challenged, busy and to earn his own money. J wanted to find an apprenticeship, but his predicted grades were lower than the entry requirements for the majority of apprenticeship vacancies advertised.

J was NEET from leaving school in the Summer of 2022 but continued to work with his post 16 caseworker to progress his pathway plan. This coincided with J moving to a new foster carer and as a result he became more settled and focussed on his future. VS caseworker approached Howdens on J's behalf as an employer who Together for Children have worked with previously. Howdens were willing to consider young people with lower predicted/achieved grades and look more at a young person's potential and ambition. J was supported to prepare and attend an interview with Howden, and he was offered a start date in November 2022.

J has fully embraced his apprenticeship programme and is enjoying working at Howdens. J is also engaging in functional skills tuition (funded through the new Post 16 PP+ pilot) and organised and delivered by Sunderland Virtual School. This is working well, takes place at Howdens and is supporting J to improve his maths and English grades. On completion of the apprenticeship, J will be offered employment with Howdens once his apprenticeship and this will give him the foundations for successful progression into adulthood.

Appendix B

T became cared for in February 2022, halfway through her first year of A Levels. Priority for the Virtual School was to ensure that school staff, foster carer and Next Steps worked together to support T through this difficult time and minimise the impact on her educational achievement. Education was a priority for T and it was imperative to support her in pursuing her aspirations to progress on to higher education and a career in law.

We held an initial PEP within 20 days of T becoming cared for, which helped to identify any work missed in the initial stages of her transitioning into our care. T had missed

two weeks of school and they agreed a package of support to help T to keep up to date with her studies. T was also encouraged to apply to do an Extended Project Qualification (EPQ) which would support future applications for university/apprenticeships. At the PEP meeting professionals were able to ensure that she had access to the vulnerable young people's further education bursary to support her in accessing her studies. The Virtual School were able to provide T with a laptop and other resources required to complete her A level studies. Clear educational targets were set at the PEP meeting to help monitor T's progress throughout Year 12 and into Year 13.

Regular PEP meetings allowed the VS Caseworker to review progress and respond to T's educational needs, this included supporting with exploring work experience options and arranged an offer from a Solicitor employed by Sunderland Council to act as a mentor/adviser. Virtual School also referred to Choices Higher Education programme and Northumbria's University pilot for care experienced students, although T decided not to attend at this time as she felt she needed to prioritise her studies, she appreciated the support offered and knew this was an ongoing offer.

Following a successful work experience with a law firm, T was offered an apprenticeship in law but decided that she wanted to continue with an application for the higher education route. The PEP enabled professionals and T to discuss her university preferences and agree who would be supporting T with all aspects of university applications and visits so that T had a smooth UCAS application process. VS Caseworker arranged for the Next Steps Personal Adviser to visit T to provide information on support options available to her as a care experienced student at university.

Regular PEPs have also enabled the Virtual School to advocate on T's behalf, for example, T was concerned about her Business Studies grade due to main teacher leaving. School was able to update us on staffing to reassure T and Virtual School asked for additional support to help T feel more confident with Business A level. School agreed for T to attend additional Year 12 Business lessons to help T refresh her knowledge in preparation for A level exams. Business department also offered additional intervention in preparation for exams.

T has now turned 18 and the Virtual School caseworker continues to liaise with T's Personal Adviser, facilitating communications between Next Steps and school. An educational review meeting is planned for the Spring term to ensure T is on track with her A levels. Her Personal Adviser will attend this meeting and offer ongoing support with transition into higher education.

Most recent update from sixth form is that T has improved her Business Studies grade in mock exams and is on track for predicted grades. We will discuss further at the education review and if T still feels worried about Business, Virtual School caseworker will agree some 1-1 tuition to support revision for final exams, which will be funded through the Post 16 PP+ Pilot. In the meantime, T has been offered a place at Manchester University to study law and is proud of this achievement.