

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Who Cares? Trust is the leading national charity for children in care and care leavers in England. We are a voice and a champion for children and young people living in care. We inform and support thousands of children in care and care leavers through our magazines and publications designed specifically for them and we influence improvements in policy and practice by ensuring their views and experiences are heard at the highest level. We also develop innovative, collaborative projects which pilot new ways of working, disseminate best practice and encourage more joined up working across the care system.
- 1.2. Our submission only focuses on the experiences of young people who are in care or who are care leavers, and includes anecdotal evidence that we have gathered from our direct work with children in care and care leavers.
- 1.3. We welcome this inquiry by the Select Committee on Social Mobility, and welcome the opportunity to contribute and to put forward the voices and opinions of looked after children and care leavers.

2. What are the most significant factors that affect the social mobility and employment outcomes of young people in the transition from school into the work place?

- 2.1. Many children in care have experience of multiple placement moves throughout their time in care. In 2014, 33% of children in care had two or more placements.¹ Multiple placement moves can result in attachment difficulties, poor experiences of relationships, and a poor educational experience, with changes in school and regular disruption. Without strong relationships, children in care can also lack adults in their lives who are ambitious for them.
- 2.2. A disjointed educational experience can impact on care leavers' employment outcomes. The current education system does not take into account the effect that prior experiences (such as abuse and neglect) and care experiences such as multiple moves and school changes may have on a child. Instead, it relies on chronological testing that is inflexible, which results in many care-experienced young people under-achieving at age 16. Some young people will take resits (and feel supported to do so), while others will not want to do so (or not feel supported to do so) and so have to enter the employment market with poor academic qualifications. Care leavers may take more winding paths or take longer to engage in traditional education, which can limit their opportunities while they are young.
- 2.3. Young people can leave care between 16 and 18 (in 2014, 33% of care leavers who left care did so at 16 or 17).² When they do leave care, they go through a process that can be incredibly stressful and isolating. They may move from a home with supportive and caring adults, and often other young people, to living by themselves, having to cook, pay bills, budget, all while trying to find, or hold down a job. Care leavers are given support through a Personal Adviser (PA). PAs have high caseloads and do not always have the time to spend

¹ Department for Education, Statistical First Release Children looked after in England (including adoption and care leavers) year ending 31 March 2014, 2014, p. 8.

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/359277/SFR36_2014_Text.pdf

² Department for Education, Statistical First Release Children looked after in England (including adoption and care leavers) year ending 31 March 2014, National Tables: SFR49/2014 Table: D3

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption--2>

with the young people to develop CVs and job hunt. They themselves may not have the skills to suitably advise young people about their job hunt or their career path. Parents usually only have one or two children to advise about job applications, whereas a PA may be having to advise multiple young people, at the same time as dealing with housing, financial, emotional and educational worries and crises.

- 2.4. Some care leavers do not have the skills to write CVs and look for jobs, having not learnt these from school or carers, and are not adequately supported by their local authority or PAs to access high quality jobs. They may also lack experiences that children may have had growing up, such as weekend jobs or paper rounds as their care experience may have prevented them from accessing these, often rite of passage, experiences. Often young people access work experience or their first paid roles through their parents or through their parents' network of family and friends. Young people in care are unlikely to have had similar opportunities because they lack those networks, however some local authorities have a policy of providing family firm type opportunities.
- 2.5. Care leavers may have only had exposure to professional roles that they have had contact with, such as social workers, teachers and doctors, all of which require higher education (HE). Their experiences may be limited and they may be unaware of roles they can aspire to that do not require attending university. In addition, their own ambition for themselves may be themselves limited, or limited by their non-linear educational journey, for example some care leavers are unable to access apprenticeships because they do not have the GCSE grades required for entry.

3. There is a group of young people aged 14-24 who do not follow the A-Level and higher education route, and are not classified as NEET. What is known about the young people in this group– who are they, why are they in this position and what are their career trajectories?

- 3.1. 21% of care leavers aged 19 were in training or employment in 2014. 14% were in full time training or employment and 6% were in part-time training or employment. This compares to 26% in education (other than HE) and 6% in HE.³
- 3.2. Some care leavers may be encouraged to remain in education in order to benefit from the additional support that being in education brings to care leavers who are between 21 and 25. Local authorities have a duty to support care leavers with a PA, a pathway plan and support and expenses associated with finding and keeping a job until the age of 21. However, financial and practical support continues for care leavers who are in, or who want to return to education until the age of 25 (or until the end of the agreed programme of study). Care leavers often may be encouraged to study more basic level one or two courses rather than courses that may help them have a good career path. Support from a PA past 21 for all care leavers may help care leavers to feel supported, able to tackle day to day activities and challenges, and able to look for promotions or be ambitious in their chosen career path.
- 3.3. Identifying opportunities and applying for roles is a skill and can often incur costs that care leavers can struggle to meet. Young job seekers need to have the skills necessary to write a CV and fill in an application form, even before having to meet additional costs such as travel to and from interviews and suitable clothes. This can result in care leavers being unable to

³ Department for Education, Statistical First Release Children looked after in England (including adoption and care leavers) year ending 31 March 2014, National Tables: SFR49/2014 Table: F1
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption--2>

apply for ambitious jobs, and are limited to opportunities that do not have associated costs, or are local to where they live.

- 3.4. In addition, not all care leavers want to follow traditional career paths, with some wanting to be self-employed, or use creative or other skills that they have learnt from the care system. However, without proper support and guidance about how to do this, young people can find themselves unable to follow these paths, and unable to access a consistent source of income.

4. Does the current transition system support young people who do not follow the A-Level and higher education route to perform better in terms of employment outcomes? If not, why not? What challenges do these young people face in their ability to transition successfully into the workplace?

- 4.1. We do not believe that care leavers who do not follow the A-level and HE route perform better in terms of employment outcomes, however the data that is collected by the Department for Education on care leaver outcomes is not sufficiently detailed to draw firm conclusions.

- 4.2. Young people with care experience can face a number of challenges:

4.2.1. Young people are not adequately supported by their local authority to find employment, and to stay in employment. Despite having responsibilities to support young people until the age of 21 with the costs of living near their place of employment, some young people are not informed about these responsibilities.⁴ Some young people reported their local authority being highly supportive, providing uniforms, work placements or apprenticeships, while others report being told to get a job, but not being supported to do so.

4.2.2. PAs do not have to be a qualified social worker. In fact, there is no qualification that people have to complete to be a PA, despite having to know about a wide range of issues. Many PAs have high caseloads, and so do not necessarily have the time, or experience to support care leavers well to find a job, to think properly about what they want to do, and help them plan a career path. PAs, with high caseloads, have to be lots of different things to different people. They may be supporting a young person who has no GCSEs to get a job, and someone else who wants to set up their own business.

4.2.3. Young people are often not work-ready, having not had the opportunity to practise being ready for employment through weekend jobs, or having access to other opportunities to develop appropriate skills. This may be because many placement moves or the rural location of their children's home may prohibit this, or that a young person in care has so much else to deal with, that finding a Saturday job is very far down the list.

5. Who should be responsible for improving the system to support the transition into work for school leavers?

- 5.1. For care leavers, there needs to be responsibility taken at a corporate parenting level, and at a more universal level.

⁴ In 2013, The All-Party Parliamentary Group for Looked After Children and Care Leavers carried out 'The Entitlements Inquiry', which asked at least 444 young people if they knew about, and were receiving certain entitlements. Over half of care leavers surveyed didn't know about the entitlement to receive support with employment (see page 9 of the summary report with recommendations: http://www.thewhocarestrust.org.uk/data/files/Entitlements_Inquiry/Entitlements_Inquiry_Summary_Report_-_FINAL.pdf)

- 5.2. Corporate parents (for example local authorities and the Government) must take responsibility for improving services to care leavers with regard to their employment opportunities, improving the support that is available and their access to opportunities, for example by prioritising care leavers for apprenticeships, work experience and mentoring schemes and helping them to overcome barriers to accessing employment, such as travel expenses, uniform and equipment costs. While there is a responsibility on local authorities to provide support, not all care leavers are informed about it, and it is variable both between and within local authorities.
- 5.3. Corporate parents should be, and take responsibility for, being ambitious for care leavers. They should want them to do well, and should enable them to access opportunities to develop the skills needed to enter the workforce. They should ensure that young people are exposed to a variety of potential careers and ensure that carers and professionals know children and young people really well so that they understand where their talents lie, and how they can use them to best effect as adults.
- 5.4. Care leavers should also not be penalised for not being in education past 21, by having access to support available until they are 25, whether they are in education, employment, training or NEET.
- 5.5. However, local authorities need to have universal services to refer their care leavers to. It is unrealistic to expect PAs to know everything, and to be able to meet the needs of all their care leavers, no matter what job they want to do. They therefore need to be able to refer care leavers to experts, such as careers advisors, or for specialist advice on setting up businesses, writing CVs and interview skills.

Evidence submitted by Chloë Cockett, Policy & Research Advisor, on behalf of The Who Cares? Trust

14th September 2015