**POLICY ● RESEARCH** *B* **UREAU**

# Consultation analysis:

# Raising the educational attainment of children in care

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# Introduction

**Background to the consultation**

In March 2001, the Prime Minister asked the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) to start a new project exploring how the educational attainment of children in the public care could be raised from what is universally acknowledged to be a low level. For example, in 1999/00 70 per cent of care leavers in England aged 16+ did not hold any GCSE or GNVQ qualifications, compared to 5.6 per cent of 16 year olds in the rest of England (Department of Health 2000). As part of this project, between July and November 2001, the SEU conducted a consultation exercise amongst around 3,500 individuals, agencies and organisations working in this area. A letter was sent out, posing forty five specific questions grouped around four key themes:
- The factors that affect the attainment of children in care;
- What works in raising educational attainment for this group;
- The impact and operation of Quality Protects and the Joint Guidance; and
- Future 'next steps' for policy in this area

In total there were 201 written responses to the consultation exercise (Appendix 1), the largest group of which (almost a third) came from social services departments including joint responses from social services and other agencies in collaboration. The next largest group of responses was from the statutory education sector (20 per cent including joint responses). A variety of individuals including foster carers, practitioners from a range of fields, and academics also responded to the consultation (12 per cent). Other responses came from government bodies, voluntary organisations providing services to children in care or to professionals working in social care or education, children's charities and schools. Most of the responses were highly detailed, and though not all provided a commentary on every single one of the forty five specific questions, many provided a wealth of information on local inter-agency arrangements, local outcomes for children in care, and case study information drawn from real practice examples (Appendix 2). The SEU asked a team at the Policy Research Bureau, an independent not-for-profit centre for applied policy research on young people and families, to carry out and write up a summary analysis of the responses.

**The report**

What follows is a synthesis of the key points to arise out of all the responses, analysed using a qualitative data analytical technique known as the 'framework' approach (Ritchie and Spencer 1994). This involved indexing (a qualitative form of coding) the text of all responses, and then transferring the index text onto thematically structured charts which enabled us to review all the data provided on any given theme. From there, a commentary on the responses to each key question or each key theme has been produced. The report is divided into five sections, each covering one of the four main themes, plus an additional section covering some general points that were raised by consultees, as well as learning from overseas. Within each section, we have structured responses around the 45

specific questions set out in the consultation letter. Where relevant, we have provided direct quotes drawn from the actual responses, together with attributions indicating the 'type' of respondent and their serial number within the data set.

Before we begin the analysis proper, though, it is helpful to note a few background contextual points that were raised by respondents, and which perhaps help to set the scene in terms of the bigger picture.

**The wider context/background issues**

*Defining 'attainment'*

It was a consistent theme, implicit in many responses and explicit in some, that the definition of 'attainment' is open to debate. Many respondents complained that the government definition of educational attainment in general was too narrow, ignoring the many other potential indicators of 'progress' or 'success' that might be relevant for young people as they grow up. This was a particularly salient debate where children in care were concerned, since for many of these young people, achievement within the mainstream framework of Key Stage SATs and GSCEs/GNVQs was especially difficult. Many commented that policy needed to be prepared to take a broader view of attainment for looked after children than one that focused solely on formal qualifications, or else we run the risk of overlooking achievement made by these young people in other dimensions of education.

As one respondent put it:

> *What do we mean by achievement? I have three children; I do not expect the same for each. I have worked with several hundred children; my goals for each would be different. Some have achieved success in external exams but some have been encouraged to work on the market or kept in the safe environment of the children's home to allow them to deal with other issues rather than sent into unsympathetic school system. I would not consider the former group more successful… National attainment targets without any analysis of social circumstances or clear definitions makes no sense and represents a*n ignorance that is inexcusable.

[CO9 – Individual response]

*Defining 'in care'*

Another cross-cutting theme touched upon by many was the need to be careful not to treat 'children in care' as if they were a homogenous group. Consultees forcefully made the point that expectations for each child in care differed according to a range of factors, including the age of arrival in care, the reason for admission, and the length of the care episode. Though some children in care could achieve good outcomes, and expectations ought to be set correspondingly high, other groups needed a different approach. For example:

> *…children with severe learning difficulties have no possibility of obtaining exams but do have a chance of increased attainment… Who makes up the group of children with which those in care are compared? It clearly can not be an average child in the community. The comparison must surely be with a young person similarly deprived, neglected and abused who was not received into care.*
>
> [CO9 – Individual response]

In addition, although nationally, looked after children constitute a sizeable group - 58, 100 in 1999/00 (Department of Health 2000), consultees pointed out that in most schools there were only a few children in care. As a result the needs of children in care were not prioritised at the local level, since they seemed to constitute such a small minority. Persuading agencies to see the bigger national picture here is clearly an issue, especially where looked after children are competing for resources with other sections of the local community.

### Good parenting

The responses to the consultation exercise suggested that the concept of 'corporate parenting' has clearly taken root in the practice community, together with an increasing willingness to assess standards of care for looked after children against the standards most parents would want for their own child. Many of the quotes scattered throughout this report point to a 'gold standard' of good enough parenting, and the importance of corporate parents attaining the same standard we would expect of any parent in the community. However, this was not, in the view of some, simply a matter of providing physical care, access to services, and general well-intentioned encouragement. Motivating children in these difficult circumstances involved providing guidance and supervision and imposing the high expectations that parents ordinarily have for their children; in short, to demonstrate respect and care for young people by developing 'contract' in which both child and adults played a part. A number of responses alluded to the way in which we simultaneously stigmatise and neglect young people in the public care by having different standards of parenting for them. Many felt that some children in care are often allowed to live with very few boundaries, more or less pleasing themselves how they spend their day, whereas 'good parents' set and maintain boundaries for developing young people that allow a certain amount of testing, but not an infinite amount. When young people in care are 'allowed' not attend school, this could be viewed as a dereliction of parental duties, and a sign that no-one really cared what happened to them. This in turn could reinforce a cycle of low self-esteem and low attainment in young people, since as one respondent with a background in youth work put it *"freedom, to the adolescent, looks suspiciously like neglect"*.

> *How do we **motivate** looked after children, as individuals, to recognise the value of learning, when their general background, socialisation and survival tactics tend to pull in the opposite direction? There is a question of balancing iron fists and velvet gloves, developing a 'contract' with young people and then, hard though it may be at times, holding them to it*
>
> [CO20 – Individual response]

Another respondent suggested the balance to be struck here was between young people's 'rights' and their own corresponding 'responsibilities' to co-operate with agencies and individuals to care for them:

> [We need to enable care] *staff to distinguish between the rights of young people whilst getting the young people to understand this also means that they have responsibilities themselves. All too often the young people express their rights as 'power' and threaten care staff with inspectors for absolute trivia – i.e. pressure to get out of bed and go to school*

> [CO171 – Individual response]

### *Early intervention*

Lastly, no report on any social policy issue these days would be complete without an exhortation to early intervention and prevention. This one is no exception. A number of responses commented that some of the problems faced by looked after children in the education system could be averted or at least ameliorated were we to invest more in family support to help prevent children coming to care in the first place; or alternatively, in identifying problems at an earlier point in a child's life.

> *I would like to see ….a greater emphasis placed on children's early years experience and school attendance and performance for the <u>total</u> population of children for who social services have an input. In this way children when they enter the care system may not be so lacking in skills and habits regarding school attendance that in turn provides no basis on which realistic improvements can be built. Essentially, I would take the view that family support and preventative work should give prominence to the child's total development as part of the whole social inclusion agenda. By the time children become looked after many are so "turned off" education the degree of change possible is limited*
>
> [CO2 – Govt body]

Another concluded that 'reframing' the key consultation questions in terms of the wider agenda for prevention and for social inclusion could be fruitful:

> *Our initial response to this consultation is one of surprise. Much has changed and is changing around the attainment of children in public care with a significant development of LAC teams at LEA level, the education guidance, PEPs, Quality Protects funding with standard fund, change of direction by OFSTED, all of which will support increased attainment by children in care we hope… Now we should look more widely at children in need services. How well are children on the child protection register doing? How are services across education, health and social services co-ordinated to support children in need? Different thresholds for children in need and different populations. This is the new agenda that has developed for looked after children*

> [CO132 - Joint social services and education]

## References

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Ritchie J and Spencer L (1994) Qualitative data analysis for applied policy research in Bryman A. and Burgess R.G *Analyzing qualitative data* London: Routledge

# Section A

# Factors that affect the educational attainment

# of children in care

## A1. The care environment

**(Q1) Aspects of the care environment that have the strongest influence on the educational attainment of children in care**

- The majority of respondents regarded '**stability**', '**consistency**' and '**continuity**' of the care placement as having the most effect on children's educational attainment [CO8 – Social services; CO47 – Council, CO98 - Joint social services and education]. *"If life at home is settled our pupils are settled"* [CO31 – School]. Stability referred both to:

    -stability of placement type [CO84 – Individual response]
    -continuity of both carers and professionals who were involved in the child's care and upbringing: *"The less change the better"* [CO35 – Individual response]

- Alongside the need for consistency of carers and professionals, most respondents said the **quality** and **attitude** of this person was also of utmost importance. Consultees felt carers who valued education for itself, were "*genuinely*" interested in the child's education, and who held realistic but high expectations based on the child's ability could have a significant influence on educational attainment. *"Carers who encourage and support young people in their learning are of crucial importance"* [CO45 – Social services, CO84 – Individual response]. Many respondents agreed that young people need 'one good carer' who has knowledge of the education system and is willing to act as an advocate on the young person's behalf [CO92 – Social services]. All those responsible for the care of the child (whether foster carers or care staff) needed to take an **active interest** in the child's education. This could be manifested through attending parent's evenings and celebration of achievement events, for example

- The **physical aspects** of the care environment were also deemed important by most consultees. For example, recurring comments were made about the need for a stimulating and 'education friendly' environment. Particularly important were environments that provided access to educational resources such as books, IT and other study aids, and a "*quiet place to study*" and complete homework [CO90 – Social services]

**(Q2) The influence of different types of care environment**

- A few respondents argued that the actual 'type' of care setting was not as significant as the **quality of the provision,** the **support provided** by carers and/or the **relationships forged** between carer and child in the care environment. *"It is not the type that matters, but the relationship between the carer and the child"* [CO155 – Vol Org, CO22 – School]

- However, most consultees felt the type of care environment did have an important influence children's educational attainment. There was **strong support for placing children in a 'family home' setting** wherever possible rather than a residential unit. It was generally felt that the optimum environment for high educational performance was a long-term foster placement, as this was closest to the 'normal' home environment and could make up for the child's pre-care deficiencies and/or provide a stability that could not be offered in a residential unit. "*Over time the trauma* [of being

moved from the family home into care] *can decrease, good relationships within the foster home are built up, and the ability to learn increases.  Additional support from the foster home in terms of building self-esteem, of establishing homework routines, …and lots of encouragement enables a child to blossom"* [CO136 – Social services].

- A number of consultees expressed the view that foster placements were also more beneficial for children in care because the number of children in foster homes was likely to be less than the carer : child ratio of residential units:  *"Foster families and smaller group environment for child care can usually focus on individuals' needs more effectively"* [CO163 – Youth project].  *"Children attain better in a small 'family' secure and consistent placement.  Children in care often struggle with relationships"* [CO169 – Social services]

- Many respondents felt children placed in **residential units did not (or could not) focus on education** to the same degree as foster home placements.  For example, one respondent commented: *"residential homes are often understaffed or rely on unqualified staff whilst having to cope with challenging behaviour"* [CO94 – Govt body].  Another felt residential staff did not put a high value on education:  *"It is as if knowing the child goes to school is enough and that education does not necessarily involve the unit itself"* [CO126 – Social services].  Even if staff were of high quality and were interested in educational matters, because children placed in residential units were more 'likely to be difficult' in nature with some having either complex or 'unmet mental health' needs [CO45 – Social services; CO22 – Govt body, CO151 - Social services], this was seen to place  many demands on staff time and energy, which ultimately resulted in making education of secondary importance

- Another reason for the preference for family settings was that residential environments were felt to **lack continuity of carers / professionals.**  The 'changing staff rotas' and 'shift patterns' of residential staff hindered and disrupted the child's educational performance [CO128 – Education; CO13 – Education; CO31 – School, CO88 - Council].  *"Many residents find the constant staff change-overs and shift swapping difficult to deal with"* [CO84 – Individual response].  *"Environments which are unsettled and where there is not a clear focus for the work …are less likely to be able to provide the structure necessary to support children's learning"* [CO13 – Education, CO2 - Govt body]

- Moreover, children in residential units were described as adversely affected by **negative peer pressure** that promoted a culture of opting out of education.  *"Barriers to* [educational] *progress* [of children in care] *include the negative peer pressure which can operate when the most damaged and troubled young people are brought together, and the population is transient"* [CO13 – Education; CO86 – Education; CO92 – Social services, CO78 – Individual response]

**(Q3 and Q26)  Support needed by foster carers**

- Some consultees felt carers needed help **clarifying their role** and responsibilities towards the child with regards to education, as well as clarifying the roles and boundaries of others [such as the child's natural parents, social workers, school staff]

- Many consultees perceived a greater need for carers to be trained on the **importance and value of education**. Carers need to be trained in the *"vital significance of education in nurturing a child's sense of self-worth"* [CO23 - School]. In addition to this, training also needs to focus on any **skills** that the carer may lack to help them better support the educational attainment of children in their care. Local authorities could provide in basic skills, especially in literacy/numeracy. This would be particularly effective if carers were paid to attend these sessions, and could form part of an accredited course that would recognise the carer as a professional

- A number of consultees believed foster carers needed **further training** in educational issues to help them support the educational attainment of children in their care. A major area on which training was needed was on the education system itself. Specifically, training was needed on:
    - Standard Assessment Tests (SATs) and GCSE examinations
    - educational 'jargon' used by school professionals
    - the organisational structure of schools
    - assessment process for children with Special Educational Needs (SEN)
    - processes involved in appealing against exclusions and non-admittance to a school

One respondent commented: *"Consultation with foster carers (in October 2000) highlighted the need for help with understanding the school and education procedures and policies, such as exclusion policies, or how extra support can be accessed."* [CO8 - Social services]

- There was also a call for greater **support and communication from schools themselves.** For example, carers needed further information on the role of the named Designated Teacher who would take responsibility for the child at school, and regular updates on the child's educational progress, successes and strengths or areas of difficulties. *"*[Foster carers need] *better information about the child, a clearer sense of empowerment to deal directly and immediately with educational issues as they arise and a key contact point for prompt advice on education matters"* [CO100 – Joint social services and education]. It was regarded as important for carers to build a **strong relationship with the school's staff** (especially the Designated Teacher) and collect practical advice from the school on how to support the educational progress of children in their care. Another stated that it was equally important for schools to understand the carers role: *"*[Children in care] *can be referred to as 'Social Services children' and this highlights the 'different' nature of their parenting arrangements, causing alienation. Schools often see the child's social worker as the key figure to relate to in terms of the child. In fact, the key person is the child's primary carer"* [CO140 – Council]

- Consultees also felt carers needed **additional support from their local authority**, which could be provided in the form of financial or practical support. This could include:
    - advice and help on school matters (e.g. through an educational telephone helpline)
    - a funded post within the education department who will be available to support foster carers and involve them in the child's education decision making process

-financial support that will enable carers to purchase resources that can enhance children's education, for example, computers, books, subject materials or payments towards out-of-school-hours learning activities
-generally strengthening links between the carer, social worker and school

- **Practical examples of support already provided** in some local authorities included:

  -A pilot scheme whereby a project worker regularly **telephones** foster carers to ask the carers how they feel the education of children in their care can be better supported.  The scheme's remit also includes negotiating additional educational support for certain children in the school or raising issues of concern such as bullying or a need for emotional support [CO8 – Social services]

  -One authority has produced a **carer's handbook** on key issues such as 'the school organisation, the curriculum, how to get resources, how to be involved in your child's school' [CO152 – Social services]

  -As part of a carer's NVQ induction programme, one authority offered five day's training in 'Improving the education of looked after children',  the use of Personal Education Plans [PEPs] and 'de-mystifying educational jargon' [CO92 – Social services]

  -Another local authority had enlisted the help of foster carers to write their 'policy on looked after children' [CO55 – Youth project]

  -One authority offered a financial contribution to carers:  *"We have introduced a defined element of the allowances paid to each carer which we expect them to use for educational purposes and a grant of £150 per year towards school trips"* [CO126 – Social services]

**(Q4)  Why do children in care for only a short time do less well at age 16 than those who have been in care for a longer period?**

- Generally respondents agreed that those children in care for a longer period performed better educationally[1] that those in care for a short time. **The stability offered by long-term placements** (as opposed to long-term care) was felt to be the major underlying factor.  In addition, children in care for longer had more time to settle, overcome the trauma that had led to being taken into care, and hence to start to focus on other things such as educational attainment.  *"Children in care for only a short time have double the upheaval of being taken into care and leaving care within a short time, while those in care for a longer period must be in successful foster care where some sort of stability and support and emotional bonding have been established"*  [CO13 – Education; CO49 – Social services, CO78 – Individual response]

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[1] NB This was dependent on children being placed in the same care placement for the complete length of the child's care episode

- Children in care for only a short time tended to be a **different and more challenging group** to those in longer-term care.  They tended to be **older**, and have **more entrenched psycho-social problems** as a result of having been exposed to negative influences in the home environment.  *"If a young person becomes 'Looked After' in year 11, it is extremely difficult to adapt to a whole new set of circumstances and achieve full academic potential."*  Staying in care for a longer episode in a stable and secure environment could however make up for the deficits.  One consultee commented: *"One reason for* [children in short term care performing less well educationally] *is that the circumstances leading up to the child being placed in care are recent/have resulted from a very traumatic event which has left the child emotionally scarred.  Such scarring takes time to heal: it is very difficult to concentrate on school work when you feel sick."*  Another noted:  *"Children who have not been in care long are likely to have come from long term unsettled home lives where education may not have been a priority.  They start from a very low base."*  [CO23 – School; CO59 Social services, CO100 - Joint social services and education].  However,  *"If placed in the right environment, those children who are looked after for a longer period can be provided with opportunities to catch up – especially those placed at a younger age"*

- Moreover, short periods in care were likely to be associated with the **type of placement** that is mainly used: "*Short periods also tend to occur at a later age when the likelihood is residential care with all its unsettling influences*"  [CO47 – Council; CO86 – Education; CO92 – Social services, CO153 – Vol Org]

- Some consultees did however note that they had **contrary experiences**, where children in care for a short time had out-performed those placed for longer periods [CO31 – school, CO151 – Social services].  One consultee felt that rather than the length of placement per se, *"it may be the proximity of the care placement in relation to public examinations that result in lower attainment"* [CO130 – Education]

**(Q5)  Educational assessments when a child enters care, and attempts to monitor progress against that baseline**

- Almost all the respondents wrote that the Personal Education Plans **(PEPs) were the main form** of educational assessment now used when a child enters care.  These were mainly carried out by the Designated Teacher and reviewed regularly by social services staff, such as a reviewing officer.  In a number of authorities the PEPs had recently been implemented, thus consultees felt unable to respond to the outcomes of these or the levels of progress made

- Other examples included one given of an Education and Social Services department, who worked collaboratively and monitored attainment from Key Stages One to Four, and used standardised data to predict the expected attainment level for each child for the following year.  This enabled them to monitor whether the child's progress was on target [CO8 – Social services]

- Some respondents were however **unaware of assessments** that took place on children in care, whilst others said a simple general assessment on suitability of school place

was all that was made.  Others pointed out that there was a heavy reliance on school-based assessments and these tended to be used with the entire school population rather than to reflect the needs of looked after children as a specific group

- A small minority of consultees remarked that the level of assessment made on children in care was **insufficient**.  *"Social Services rely on a child's last school placement, which may have been for a short time and will have been made during very difficult home conditions"* [CO55 – Youth project].  Another wrote:  *"Educational assessments are not made as SSD do not consider it to be a priority and the education sector is not aware of a child entering the care system."* [CO35 – Individual response].  In other instances it was mentioned that even though a number of assessments on children in care had been made, these was not adequately reviewed:  *"Often much information exists in the hands of different agencies, but systems and practices to gather and collate this information need to be further developed"* [CO100 - Joint social services and education]

- A few respondents felt that it was important to **refrain from too much assessment and monitoring** of children in care, as this could be experienced as stigmatising and intrusive by children:  *"Looked after children do not like being asked to do things that family-based peers don't have to do"* [CO154 – Council]

## A2.  The learning environment

**(Q6)  The aspects of school that have the strongest influence on the educational attainment of children in care**

- As with the care environment, respondents stressed the need for '**continuity' of school placement** and '**stable**' staffing as important factors in achieving and sustaining the educational attainment of children in care [CO35 – Individual response, CO90 – Social services]

- Many respondents cited the **school's ethos and attitude** towards children in care as having a significant impact on educational attainment.  School traits that were seen to have a positive influence on the educational attainment of children in care included, schools with an 'ethos of inclusion', that valued diversity, had good pastoral care, a 'non-judgmental' attitude, held high expectations of the children with knowledge and understanding of issues faced by children in care, and were flexible [CO49 – Social services; CO86- Education, CO88- Social services]

- Nevertheless, schools needed to strike a balance between understanding the needs of children in care and at the same time making sure the children did not feel 'different' or '*singled out*' from the majority of the school population [CO71 – Joint social services and education]

- The general opinion was that schools placed a **high value on the schools overall educational performance** and not a high enough value on meeting children's individual needs; see also responses to Q24 and Q25).  *"League tables tend to have a strong negative influence on the education of looked after children.  The pressure on schools to perform means that there is a tendency to focus resources on the most able and least troublesome pupils.  Many looked after children do not meet either of these criteria."*  As a result of the pressures on schools to perform well it was believed that some children in care were disadvantaged.  One consultee observed: *"Schools in my opinion are so set on 'academic achievements' they often lack the time to work appropriately with children who have additional needs"* [CO161 – Youth justice].  Another pointed out: *"The education system's attainment targets and the relaxation of the exclusions guidance works against* [creating an atmosphere of inclusion].  *If children in care succeed in being admitted to a failing school, they are more likely to have their negative behaviour and attributes reinforced, and their needs are likely to be lost amongst the collective attention-seeking behaviour and other needs of so many troubled pupils"* [CO153 – Vol Org]

- Respondents viewed **supportive and sensitive teachers** as very important for helping children in care settle at school and consequently perform well educationally.  A designated teacher or a dedicated individual with high aspirations for the child was regarded as instrumental to the child's educational progress:  *"[The strongest influence on educational attainment is] a member of staff who has genuine empathy for the young person, is prepared to advocate; and be flexible in their approach"* [CO92 – Social services]

- The **relationship between child and teacher** was also seen as having an important effect on educational outcomes, and is obviously facilitated where teachers meet the

criteria described above. Children in care had to see the school teacher as someone who was willing to be flexible, 'believed in them', regarded them as someone they could confide in and trust to advocate on their behalf

- A number of respondents highlighted the positive influence of **supportive peers** on the educational attainment of children in care. *"The quality of friendship a child develops is important"* [CO25 learning mentor]. Moreover, if children in care already had good peer support it was necessary to make an effort to maintain these links. Therefore, it was seen as important to cause minimal disruption to the child's school life and not continually move the child from placement to placement. *"Anything that can be done to help children in care maintain these network of friends is extremely important."* [CO78 – Individual response]. In addition to peer support, peer approval and acceptance was also highlighted as having an impact on educational attainment. *"Children in care have low self esteem that can prevent them from attempting to achieve and then failing – 'better not to have tried'. Peer approval is seen as a more effective way of raising their self image"* [CO138 – Youth justice]

**(Q7) The influence of type of school**

- A number of respondents felt the **type of school played a major role** in influencing the educational attainment of children in care: *"Often children feel stigmatised by the nature of the provision made available to them and this inhibits their learning."* [CO2 – Govt body] The **majority of consultees favoured the mainstream setting** and said it was often the only 'normal' place for the child [CO31 – School]. The general view was that any provision other than mainstream could not help the child fulfil their potential, give them equal opportunities or equip them for a future on a par to their peers in mainstream schools. *"Special schools and units are less successful in the same way that the cultures of children's homes lack the core characteristics that promote education. More specialised provision is more restricting in terms of curriculum, expectations and stigmatising resulting in low self esteem, low self efficacy and low motivation to succeed"* [CO45 – Social services]

- Respondents also felt that in addition to the effect on children's educational attainment the type of setting could also influence the child's **self-esteem** and **future life chances**. *"Any marginalisation of children can compound feelings of rejection."* [CO130 – Education] *"It has an impact on their* [Children in care] *self esteem and therefore how they perceive themselves. After all our self esteem is build up on how people see us"* [CO136 – Social services]

- However, some respondents said the type of school allocated to children in care was dependent on the individual child's needs and as long as the provision was **appropriate to meeting these needs** the type did not matter. *"Whatever measure of attainment is used, the critical factor is the match of provision to need, taking all relevant factors into account and not whether the provision is mainstream or not"* [CO86 – Education; CO32 – Education; CO25 – Learning mentor, CO90 – Social services] *"Inappropriate placement, whether with the mainstream or within special provision, can be very damaging"* [CO86 - Education]

- Some respondents felt there needed to be a **wider variety of educational provisions**. If mainstream was not seen as appropriate for meeting the child's educational needs then it was also a possibility that special schools or Pupil Referral Units in their present form were also inappropriate. The main disadvantages of special schools and Pupils Referral Units were the inconsistencies in practice, followed by the fact than only a small proportion of pupils in these settings were entered for public examinations, thus not giving them the chance to attain educational success. *"Most children* [in these schools] *do not have SEN and are capable of normal levels of achievement"* [CO140 - Council]

**(Q8)  Is mainstream schooling the best option for all children in care?**

*Support for mainstream schooling*

- Mainstream schooling was seen as the **best option for the majority** of children in care to enable them to reach their full educational potential. Respondents frequently pointed out that children in care did not need any 'special' type of provision based solely on the fact that they were in care. *"Our approach would be to maximise opportunities for looked after children to participate in mainstream education as a normative experience"* [CO8 – Social services].  One consultee was adamant about the need for children in care to be put in mainstream schools:  *"I would not in any circumstance support alternatives such as special schools for those in care, education by individual tutor at home, residential units or permanent referral units.  All children, and especially children in care, need long term emotional stability and security, access to appropriate members of their birth family, clear framework and boundaries, and a clear sense of values and culture."* [CO78 – Individual response]. Consultees said that some children in care were likely to need a specialised tailored provision but this should be based on the same criteria as it would for any other child in need of a specialised provision.  Other comments highlighting the benefits and importance of mainstream schooling, included:

  - *"Absolutely (it is the best option) – no doubt.  Mainstream schools are able to deliver standards of educational excellence/attainment almost unknown to other provisions"* [CO158 – Vol Org]
  - *"Children in care need the equivalent experiences of other children and not to have any differences accentuated by separation and potential marginalisation"* [CO140 – Council]

- If a special type of educational provision was to be offered to a child in care, then respondents felt this should only be a temporary arrangement with **re-integration** into mainstream schooling as soon as possible.  *"We believe that we should aim for all children to receive mainstream services unless their special needs mean they need special provision. Even then, special services should be aiming to return the child to the mainstream* [setting]*"* [CO154 – Council]

*Against mainstream schooling*

- Despite strong support for mainstream schooling, many respondents did agree that **if a child had needs that could not be addressed in mainstream schooling**, then the best

option was an alternative provision. For example, special schools were seen as more suitable for children in care if they had 'severe and complex difficulties'

- There was also some support for the idea of using alternative educational settings on a temporary basis to help children in the transition to care. Thus, even when children did not have severe or complex learning difficulties, some respondents felt some children in care could still have behavioural difficulties resulting from the 'trauma' of being removed from their family home (or original placement) and taken into care. In these instances consultees felt children may need a 'break' from mainstream schooling '*until things in their life settle*' [CO31 – School]

- Some respondents also felt children in care sometime needed more **individual attention** to help them prioritise education in their life. These respondents did not see the large class sizes of mainstream schools as offering what the child needed. Special schools that offered appropriately skilled staff and had smaller teacher-pupil ratios were deemed to be more effective in these cases. However, it was deemed vital that the school placement was the right one to achieve the optimum of the child's ability. *"Because the risk of social exclusion of young people in care is greater than for the population at large, extra care needs to be taken before a placement is made outside mainstream education. Nevertheless, it should be recognised that placement in special provision is the right decision for some young people in care"* [CO86 - Education]

### Suggested alternatives to mainstream schooling

- The majority of respondents who suggested an alternative to mainstream schooling did so mainly for **older year groups**. The general opinions were that children of GCSE age who had 'missed a great deal of their education' may benefit from either a special college placement or work experience

- College, as an alternative to mainstream schooling for older pupils, was also seen to be more appropriate for those who had experienced numerous school and care placement changes, or for refugees with significant language needs

- Some consultees held the view that for those with complex needs a residential setting with education would be most effective. Others suggested special school settings that offer 'therapy, in a therapeutic setting' for children who have experienced trauma. Another alternative was home tuition for those either awaiting assessment, who were too traumatised by their care experiences or too dangerous to be placed in mainstream schools [CO128 – Joint social services and health]

- One consultee described their ideal alternative educational provision: *"Units on mainstream sites for short-term alternative lesson delivery would provide education that focuses on these skills without exposing them to mainstream peers. There are also others in the schools who would benefit short-term from these more discreet lessons"* [CO155 – Vol Org]

**(Q9)  Identifying and meeting the needs of children with special educational needs (SEN)**

- An overwhelming number of respondents reported that the children in care with SEN were **not** appropriately identified or catered for by the local education authority and/or schools.  The main criticism was that **SEN were not identified early enough** as the procedures in place were too slow:  *"More effort needs to go into early identification of SEN"* [CO02 – Govt body, CO49 - Social services].  Another commented*: "Delay and drift in placing young people* [into a provision appropriate to their assessed needs] *is unacceptable"* [CO45 – Social services].  Some respondents also felt that many professionals made the assumption that children in care were likely to have SEN, and therefore did not carry out adequate screening [ CO130 – Education]

- A few respondents felt some children in care had **slipped through the assessment net** and had hence not had their SEN identified or picked up until they 'arrive at school'.  Explanations for this included children not remaining in their previous home or school placements for long enough to have SEN assessed.  *"The risks of undetected needs are greater for this group due to placement changes and lack of continuity in the allocation of social workers."* [CO 32 – Education, CO57 - Education].  Where children in care had been in a setting for long enough to have had their needs assessed, most respondents felt the needs were appropriately addressed and catered for  [CO22 – Govt body]

- Some consultees believed children who lived at a **family home or with foster carers** were more likely to have their needs assessed and addressed **quicker** than those in residential homes [CO37 – School]

- Those who did feel that SEN were appropriately identified nevertheless felt that not all needs were adequately catered for.  This was either as a result of **funding issues** (e.g. agencies disputing over who should pay for the provision) or a **shortage of places** within relevant provisions  [CO8 – Social services]

- Some respondents said that via the use of Individual Education Plans (IEPs), SEN could be appropriately identified, catered for and regularly reviewed for changes and improvements in child's educational outcomes [CO31 – School]

- One local authority described how strong links between their Looked After Children's team and Health Assessment Needs team had helped them successfully identify the SEN of a number of children in care, or entering care, that had previously gone undetected [CO100 – Joint social services and education]

**(Q10)  Bullying of children in care, and preventive measures**

*Prevalence and causes*

- Most respondents felt **children in care were more likely to be victims of bullying** in comparison to their peers.  A number of respondents referred to the 'Equal Chances Audit' devised by the Who Cares?  Trust (1998) which asked children in care whether they were/had been the victims of bullying.  A number of authorities that responded to the consultation exercise said they had found a high proportion of children in care had self-reported that they had been a victim of bullying and 'taunts'.  It was also found that these children were unlikely to inform carers or schools about it.  For example, in one authority 62% of children in care had said they had been victims of bullying [CO8 – Social services; CO96 – Council, CO128 – Joint social services and health]

- Clearly, in many schools, being in care was regarded as **stigmatising**.  *"There is anecdotal evidence from schools of name calling related specifically to children in the care system, and being described as 'care bears' or 'foster shreddies' for example.  Children report taunts from peers like 'at least I live with my mum' or 'your mum didn't want you'."* [CO130 – Education], and many respondents felt that a number of factors made it hard for looked after children to 'blend in' with their peers, for example:
    -having a different surname from their carer
    -being collected from school by a residential unit's bus or taxi
    -staff in schools drawing attention to the child by 'asking too many questions', or conversely giving special attention to children in care

- Children in care often had poor social skills or difficulty relating to their peers, compounded by having had a number of care and/or school placements that made it **hard to sustain peer relationships**.  *"This can happen both because of other children's lack of understanding about the care situation, and the low self-esteem which children in care can often experience which may affect their behaviour and relationships with others"* [CO13 – Education]

- A few respondents suggested that children who were placed in residential units were likely to experience higher incidents of bullying, compared to those placed in foster homes:  *"The fact that these young people are residing in a Residential Unit may mean that other young people see them as being different.  From my experience young people who don't conform to people's opinions of what is 'normal' are often victimised"* [CO161 – Youth justice]

- However, some respondents reported that in some schools children in care were more likely to be the **perpetrators** of bullying than the victims:  *"I am aware of bullying behaviour being perpetrated by adolescent children in care, possible a veneer of 'being hard' to stop people getting too close/sensing vulnerability"* [CO23 – School]

*Prevention and intervention for bullying*

- Predominately, consultees believed that schools needed to have an effective strategies in place, such as an **anti-bullying policy** which was made appropriate to children in care

- A number of consultees repeatedly wrote that schools also needed to **educate staff and other children** on the issues surrounding those in care and the lives these children lead.  Consultees further suggested that schools need to spend more of the timetabled day on 'circle time' enabling young people to talk with peers about issues effecting them at school and giving them an opportunity to discuss problems including bullying.  *"All schools need to encourage a 'no blame' culture of reporting bullying and dealing with it.  Helping children to find ways to talk to peers about being in care would help"* [CO128 – Joint social services and health, CO86 – Education]

- Consultees felt bullying in schools could be significantly reduced if schools had close and open **lines of communication with carers**.  This required 'carers to be vigilant' and report any concerns with the schools as soon as they arose

- Consultees said **designated / named teachers** for children in care played a crucial role in the child's school life and reducing incidents in bullying.  Their role involved ensuring that children in care have someone that listens to them, talks to them, supports them and is a person who they can trust and feel comfortable with:  *"Young people who are looked after require extra praise, they need to feel as if they are succeeding at school.  This will address low self esteem"* [CO161 – Youth justice]

- Consultees suggested that introducing **'buddying'** systems could also help reduce incidents of bullying, especially when a child is initially admitted to the school.  The general consensus was that having a peer supporting their early days at school could lessen the chance of children in care being bullied

- A few consultees suggested offering **additional funding to carers** of children in care to ensure that they are not seen as differently from their peers due to poor dress or a lack of educational equipment [CO59 – Social services]

- Some respondents said that constant changes in school and care placements hindered the education chances and outcomes of children in care and made them more vulnerable to bullying.  The solution for this was to try and keep the child in one school and **refrain from unnecessary placement movements**

### (Q11)  Truanting and exclusion

*Truancy*

- Not all respondents agreed with the statement that children in care were more likely to truant or be excluded than children in other groups. There were mixed responses from consultees about the likelihood of children in care truanting or being excluded from schools.  Almost an equal number of respondents said children in care were more likely to truant/be excluded as said the opposite

- Those that reported children in care were more likely to truant said this was for a combination of reasons, which ranged from:

    -children in care may feel **stigmatised** and alienated by school thus place a limited value on attending school: *"Looked after children are more likely to face changes of school, isolation and bullying in school, and poor academic attainment. Therefore, school is less likely to be an environment where they feel comfortable and they are more likely to want to truant and show behaviour that leads to exclusion"* [CO8 – Social services]. Another said: *"Many children in care suffer from low self-esteem and their attitude to being in care is complex, raging from embarrassment to anger etc. Often their 'out-of-school' needs are overwhelming for them and so school becomes a place in which it is difficult to cope. Schools need to be seen as a safe haven – the best place to be"* [CO189 – Social services]

    -children in care may be **traumatised and preoccupied** by the emotional sequelae of the circumstances that led to their being in care. They may not therefore place as much value on school as other children. *"Their minds are full of emotional pain and baggage, they are living with strangers and having to be analysed all the time by various professionals. They do not lead normal lives and all these stresses make learning at school difficult, even irrelevant."* [CO136 – Social services]

    - they may also be **disaffected** by frequent changes of school, and children in care may be **involved in peer sub-cultures** that don't value education or may have difficulty 'conforming' to rules

- some respondents also highlighted **logistical problems with monitoring and responding to absences,** such as schools not knowing to whom they should report non-attendance, especially if the children live in residential units

- Those who reported children in care were <u>not</u> more likely than their peers to truant or be excluded explained that factors such as good carer, school links and greater tolerance towards children in care by schools could result in children in care having **higher attendance** rates than their peers and minimal exclusions. *"In my experience the attendance of children in care is very good since the carers with whom we work are very diligent about this"* [CO27 – Learning mentor]

### Exclusions

- On the whole respondents felt that schools did their best **not to exclude** children in care from school by using other forms of sanctions. Where exclusion was deemed the most appropriate sanction, this was after all the other options had been exhausted. Many consultees said that schools were hesitant about excluding children in care. On person said schools in their authority were *"going to great lengths not to exclude (children in care)"* [CO22- Govt body, CO23 – School]

- Respondents said that if schools did exclude children in care it was because the children had emotional and behavioural difficulties that the school found challenging and could not address. Therefore, exclusion was **deemed necessary** for both the benefit of the child in care and the their peers

- Some respondents believed children in care had **disruptive tendencies** due to their early pre-care or in-care experiences: *"Their early experiences have often left neurological impairments in terms of concentration and the ability to self calm.  They have difficulty concentrating for lessons, react poorly to criticism, re-enact past negative interactions with teachers and end up being excluded"* [CO45 – Social services]

- In a few cases, consultees said that schools were maybe more likely and quicker to exclude children in care on the grounds that they will have **immediate alternative day care available**:  *"Some schools seem more likely to exclude children living in children's homes because they know there are professional staff on duty who can look after them."* [CO150 – Council, CO100 – Joint social services and education]

### (Q12)  Prevention of truancy and exclusion by carers

Consultees felt truancy or chances of being excluded could be prevented or significantly reduced if carers were more actively involved in the lives of children in their care.  For example, respondents suggested:

- Carers could establish **greater links with their child's school** and liaise with them as any 'good parent' would.  This means that both the school and carers can intervene when early warning signs of truancy and behaviour that will lead to exclusion emerge. This in turn will send out a message to the child that 'school is important' and their future is valued [CO8 – Social services, CO205 – Joint social services and education]

- Carers could **provide more encouragement and support** to children, in particular praising them when they achieve any successes (academic or other), rewarding them when they make progress, holding high expectations and advocating on the young persons behalf i.e. *"challenge and appeal exclusions".  "Regular rewards for good performance may also help enhance the child's desire to attend and perform well".  "Carers need to exhibit a personal commitment to the child or young person's education.  Attending parents evenings, school play etc, not simply going into school when there is a problem"* [CO45 – Social services; CO78 – Individual response; CO130 – Education; CO165- Vol Org, CO186 - Education]

- **Carers could use practical measures** to prevent truancy such as transporting the child to and from school on a daily basis, keeping in daily contact with the Designated Teacher to discuss any concerns and exchange any information, and making sure the children look presentable:  *"Keep regular communication with schools and the Education Welfare Service.  Be consistent and persistent.  Give positive messages about education. Negotiate re-integration packages for children that are realistic and achievable.  Praise a child for their attainments and listen to what the child is saying.  If in doubt, talk to the school and work in partnership"* [CO57 – Education, CO78 - Individual response]

### (Q13) Prevention of truancy and exclusion by schools

Consultees felt schools could employ a number of approaches to successfully reduce the risk of children in care truanting and/or being excluded from schools.

- Consultees regarded it as necessary for schools to **create a school environment in which children in care feel supported and cared for**: *"Proactive support for the child and school will promote the tendency on the part of the school to 'hold' the child"* [CO8 – Social services] Another said: *"School is a microcosm of society at large, a massive model family and is most children's first experience of the big bad world. If school is a dreary, unfriendly, uncaring and intimidating place, is it any wonder that children later become anti social?"* [CO78 – Individual response]. **Teachers** were also deemed important in supporting the child's school life. Many consultees said that teachers should make more effort to show the child that they are 'welcome and valued' in the school: *"Fundamentally there needs to be a change in attitudes by some teachers towards children in public care. They should be seen as individuals with particular needs and not as a primary source of trouble. The issue, however, is not simply concerned with the individual teacher, schools, social workers and carer but requires a whole local authority approach to support these vulnerable children. Too often children denied a school place are provided with the palliative of a few hours home tuition."* [CO168 – Social services]

- A number of respondents cited **early intervention** as essential for addressing truancy or behaviour that may lead to exclusion. For example, consultees said it was important for schools to identify any barriers to attendance and to *"address these in a comprehensive fashion"* [CO2 – Govt body]

- Schools should only use exclusion as a final outcome when **all other options have been exhausted**: *"Use all means available to improve attendance and behaviour – use exclusion as a last resort – (this is) only a sign the school has failed the child, not the other way round"* [CO184 – Individual response]

- Schools could work in **closer proximity** with carers and the child to address any issues or actions that may subsequently result in truancy or exclusion. They should also liase with carers over appropriate action for 'handling' a child, as well as discussing with carers the procedures that lead to exclusion. If a child had recently moved to a new school, consultees suggested that this transition could be helped if the school provided a **'good induction'** to the school, which would follow on from contact with previous school(s). Ultimately this will help the child settle in school and reduce the risk of truancy and/or exclusion: *"The better a child is integrated into school life, the less likely he/she is to truant"* [CO100 – Joint social services and education]. One consultee suggested ensuring **PEPs** identify areas of risk that define what action needs to be taken and by whom

- Respondents to the consultation felt schools should be more **aware of a child's history and background** as in the long run it could lead to more tolerance by both the child and school

- A number of practical solutions were suggested by consultees:

    -**providing greater individual support to children in care including '**targeted support to those at risk' [CO13 – Education] and providing support through mentors/'buddies'

    -**avoiding permanent exclusions** by 'swapping' a child with another school to 'give them another chance' [CO23 – School]

-operating a **first day response**

*transporting to school, liaising with school and parents/carers, undertaking self esteem work, addressing issues on appropriate behaviour and anger management"* [CO161 – Youth justice]

Suggestions for enhancing the role of the Education Welfare Service included:

-**improving knowledge and understanding** within the EWS about education issues effecting children in care and their needs
-**increasing funding for the service** *"EWOs can be better supported by being better staffed and funded. They are a cheap and effective form of troubleshooting: social services involvement with children at risk is often lengthy and colossally expensive before a child is even taken into care"* [CO78 - Individual response]

**(Q15) Pastoral Support and mentoring programmes. Good practice examples and how PSPs and/or mentoring can be used to help children in care**

- A number of respondents spoke about the **positive effects of PSPs**, that have been used to good effect for children in care and those at risk because they are an 'empowering tool' that offers an opportunity for inter-agency working alongside carers and family members. In addition, it was reported that they can offer a 'committed teacher' to successfully support transitions from one school to another: *"We are certainly finding the PSP a useful strategy to suggest to schools and social workers where behaviour is a cause for concern – particularly at the early stages. It gives a framework for a preventative and positive approach, which is generally the aim of all agencies"* [CO13 – Education]. **Good practice examples** included a consortium of schools that had a programme providing individual support, monitoring and targeting of pupils. They also had a Personal Adviser, funded through ConneXions, to work closely with children in care. This was described as *"vital in determining good progress within schools"* [CO152 – Social services]. Another authority described how their programme 'Teenagers to Work' had helped build sustainable links with members of the local community [CO88 – Council]

- Respondents felt that PSPs that worked towards supporting and engaging pupils could help reduce truancy and exclusions. This was because the child would have regular contact and support from a **consistent adult figure**

- A minority of respondents said that the pastoral support programmes were '**variable**' across schools in both availability and effectiveness [CO130 – Education, CO128 – Joint social services and health, CO96 - Council]

- Some respondents wondered if PSPs had become redundant now, however. *"The components of PSPs should now be included in the PEP….They tend to be confined to the schools or replaced by other plans for a child in care and there is the ever-present danger of losing the child between too many plans"* [CO153 – Vol Org]

- Equally some respondents felt **mentoring programmes were also beneficial** for children in care as they could offer these children *"extra support in a non-stigmatising way"* [CO100 – Joint social services and education] *"Social workers and carers have praised mentoring*

*schemes as being very useful for children in care"* [CO153 - Vol Org]. **Good practice examples** that were offered included one organisation that had a programme that incorporated **young people as mentors**. They found that 'older sibling' relationships helped. The programme organisers further noticed: *"how easily relationships were forged between upper primary children and sixth form mentors"*. The key successes of this programme were highlighted as being able to relate to another person who was not part of 'the system' i.e. not a teacher, social worker or foster carer, and the value of individual attention for the young person. These successes were described as positively impacting on the oral communication skills, self-confidence and school attendance of the children in care [CO80 – Vol Org]

- Some said that mentoring programmes could be highly effective **provided they were delivered by mentors who had the relevant skills and** knowledge to work appropriately with children in care: *"They can be useful if part of the school ethos; what is less useful is if children in care are seen by peers to be treated differently"* [CO55 - Youth project]. One authority found mentoring programmes in their authority to be more effective when the mentor and young person belonged to the "*same gender and ethnic group*" [CO140 – Council]

- Some respondents however viewed **PSPs and mentoring programmes as ineffective and nothing more than a 'paper exercise':** *"Generally (they are) not effective. There is a rhetoric around the various plans but little meaningful delivery"* [CO32 – Education]. One respondents was scathing of the implementation of pastoral support programmes: *"PSPs are too often used for justifying subsequent school exclusions"* [CO158 – Vol Org]. Others felt the success of pastoral support and mentoring programmes were arbitrary as it depended upon the individual child's response to it

- Others felt that whilst in principle pastoral support and mentoring programmes were very useful, the usefulness of this support is often restricted due to **limited resources available to implement these programmes**

**(Q16)  Disapplication of the National Curriculum and National Curriculum flexibilities for children in care**

*Arguments against disapplication/flexibility in the National Curriculum*

- **Most respondents were not supportive** of either disapplication of the  National Curriculum or National Curriculum flexibilities. *"If the National Curriculum is a privileged right available for all children, why should those in care or those with special needs be further disadvantaged by limited exposure to it or by exposure to only a limited and tediously repetitive aspect of it?"* [CO78 – Individual response]. Another pointed out: *"(We are) very wary of disapplication of the National Curriculum for children in care – it feels as though they are being consigned to a lower level of education, denying them the opportunities, and demonstrating that we have lower expectations of them. This is very dangerous and has similarities with the secondary modern and grammar school system that was abolished. If it was not good enough for all our children then it is not good enough for children in care. We*

*should also be providing children with opportunities for a broad education so that they are able to succeed and develop their special interests and skills"* [CO153 – Vol Org]

- The main criticism of the disapplication and flexibilities was that they often clashed with the need to meet GCSE targets. The main issue was the fact that **alternative curriculum achievements were not currently recognised by DH OCO1/2 standards**. This meant that achievements for some young people went unrecognised *"giving exaggerated levels of underachievement"* [CO132 – Joint social services and education]. A suggested solution to this was to 'better resource schools' so that they could afford sufficient assessors to introduce forms of alternative education similar to "*GNVQs, where learning methods and accreditation are similar*" [CO100 – Joint social services and education]

- Others thought these measures (and removing children into alternative forms of provision) were used as an **'easy option'** with struggling children: *"In some cases it is possible that education otherwise than at school is perceived and used as an easier option for children in care than trying to maintain them in mainstream school placements"* [CO130 – Education]. "*Use of disapplication may also be a reaction to the setting of school targets and the perception that some children on the school roll cause the school to 'fail'. We should be setting more sophisticated targets that demonstrate how children improve their results against their baseline on entry"* [CO153 – Vol Org]

### Argument for disapplication/flexibilities

- A number of consultees expressed support for disapplication and flexibility of the National Curriculum for **older pupils**, such as Key Stage 4 pupils, who are already not in mainstream education and have not benefited from Pupil Referral Units: *"KS4 often benefit from a flexible package of education including college and work experience. This might include Youth Awards, other accredited qualifications as well as GCSE"* [CO96 - Council]

- Some respondents said that National Curriculum flexibilities were appropriate when both the young person and professional had agreed that a **vocational route will be best** for the child

- Others said that disapplication and flexibilities **could be a useful tool for re-engaging children into education** and particularly effective with children experiencing emotional or behavioural difficulties. However it was important to ensure that the package provided was 'needs-led' and not simply for the benefit of the schools/teachers [CO150 – Council]

- Some respondents who had reported using disapplication and flexibilities described the effectiveness of these:
  - one local authority had a college that offered **special tailored support packages to GCSE-level** young people. This helped young people to do better in exams and enabled them to "leave statutory education better prepared for later life" with

recognisable qualifications: "*There is definitely more scope to use flexible packages more widely*" [CO90 – Social services]

-another statutory education department described how flexibilities were useful for those pupils who had **dis-engaged from education**. They found that through work-related learning programmes or adaptation of the school timetable young people had successfully re-engaged with education, and some had even decided to continue in further education post-16 [CO13 – Education]

-another described how a local school had created an alternative approach to the delivery of the National Curriculum. Their primary objective in year one was to **maintain attendance** as a first step as *"there was a poverty of any real learning"*. The benefits of the programme began to emerge in the second year: *"here is a real possibility that some of the most disaffected pupils will achieve 5 GCSEs. There has been a steady ratcheting up of expectations so that the culture becomes one of attendance and application, rather than avoidance and misbehaviour"* [CO4 – Individual response]

### (Q17) The role of School Governors and how this role can be enhanced

- A high proportion of the consultees regarded the current role that governors' play in promoting the educational attainment of children in care as **'limited', 'little',** or **'minimal'**. Many respondents felt governors knew little about children in care, and moreover had no specific role to play in promoting their educational attainment. Some also suggested that governors were generally more concerned about the overall position of the school rather than taking an interest in particular groups, which could create a conflict of interest where looked after children were concerned: *"(Governors have) little knowledge of looked after children. They focus on 'majority' (issues) and league tables." "Governors may often have a difficult line to tread where looked after children are concerned because they can often be amongst the most troublesome youngsters in school. The governors' duties to the majority of pupils in the school often override the interests of looked after children"* [CO154 – Council]

  *"For understandable reasons, school governors must be concerned with ensuring the school is 'successful' – which in practice means meeting Government targets and parental expectations. The system needs to focus less on academic results and more on the subtleties of enabling all children to achieve the best they can in school before governors can allow themselves to become overly concerned about children in care"* [CO 51 – Joint social services and education; CO153 – Vol Org, CO154 – Council]

  *"A target of zero (permanent or fixed term) exclusions of looked after children could serve to focus the attention of school governors on the issues about which they are otherwise largely ignorant"* [CO128 – Joint social services and health, CO13 – Education]

- However, some respondents did not take this view, and said that in their local authority governors played a key role in promoting the educational attainment of children in care [CO8 – Social services, CO90 – Social services]. A few described the governors' role as '**crucial**' or 'very important'. One consultee remarked that the governors in their local authority were 'central' and especially effective when they held a dual role

of school governor and council member with a remit to raise issues relating to children in care on the school's agenda and council's corporate parenting meetings [CO86 – Education]

- A few respondents mentioned that the school governors in their area have responsibility for the implementation of the Joint Guidance     [CO71 – Joint social services and education]

Suggestions for how to support the school governor's role further varied:

- On the whole respondents felt that governors needed additional training   on the needs and issues surrounding children in care

- Some suggested that governors needed a 'clearer', more 'defined' role   so that everybody (governors themselves, school staff, carers and individual children) knew their exact role and responsibilities in relation to looked after children

- The majority of respondents spoke of the benefits of establishing a 'nominated' or 'designated' governor post  for children in care, in the same way as there is currently a dedicated school governor post for children with special educational needs. Respondents said that this post could be of benefit for the individual child and school as well as providing additional support for the Designated Teacher, for example: "  It would be a very valuable aid to corporate parenting if a (designated) governor could report to the board annually on the numbers, attendance, and special education needs, attainment and any exclusions of children in public care" [CO13 – Education]

- However, some consultees cautioned that governors already had 'too many demands' placed on them. "I don't know if or how this role could be enhanced – but I doubt the government realises what wide-ranging and onerous duties it has already imposed on governors, who are (let us remember) unpaid and virtually untrained volunteers who carry out a vast and thankless and almost unrecognised task in every school across the land" [CO28 – Individual response]

## A3.  Out of school activities

**(Q18) The importance of extra curricular and 'schools plus' activities in raising educational attainment**

- Almost all the respondents cited out-of-school-hours activities as **'essential'** and **'extremely'** important for raising the educational attainment of children in care. Respondents felt out-of-school-hours activities were particularly important for **raising self-esteem** and **confidence, enhancing social skills, increasing motivation towards education** and **encouraging independence**

- Consultees reported that out-of-school-hours activities showed children in care that learning did not only take place in the classroom, and **promoted inclusion and a sense of 'belonging'**: *"Extra curricular school activities are very important.  They make young people feel they belong and are a part of the school and not different from their peers.  It allows looked after children to mix socially with their school peers, something which can be difficult when sometimes they live in a foster home with many children of differing age ranges and where having friends over for tea or sleepovers is difficult"* [CO59 – Social services]

- Out-of-school-hours activities provided children who had missed out on stages of their education **a chance to 'catch-up'** and encouraged 'a greater learning culture', which ultimately keeps children in care engaged in school and could help towards raising their attendance levels:  *"(Out-of-schools activities are) important for all round education, plus some children would learn social skills, how to interact with others, team work.  (They often do) much better in extra curricular activities and therefore are in a better position to attain in the classroom"* [CO35 – Individual response]

- Out-of-school-hours activities gave children in care a **chance to 'achieve success'** and 'excel' in subject areas or extra-curricular activities that they were interested in, in a non-academic context

- A few consultees said that children in care saw out-of-school-hours activities as the school '**giving them something back**' which could change their educational outlook, help change their attitudes towards school and school staff and make school more enjoyable for them:  *"(They) can make school a good, positive, enjoyable place to be (and are) seen by young people to give them something"* [CO49 – Social services].  *"Also if clubs are run by teachers the child sees them in a different setting, it shows commitment and may be mirrored by that child in the classroom setting"* [CO165 – Vol Org]

**(Q19) Participation by children in care in out-of-school activities**

- Some respondents commented that as schools do not record or monitor attendance to provisions by different groups, they did not know the level of participation of children in care in out-of-school activities

- The majority of respondents however said that the participation by children in care in out-of-school-hours activities was '**variable', 'inconsistent'** and **'limited'**, and certainly 'not as great as other young people'. Factors detracting from participation included children in care being felt to have 'low self-esteem', being 'nervous' or an unable to mix with peers and form friendships as they may 'fear rejection'

- A few respondents said that those young people performing well at school were more likely to attend out-of-school-hours activities when compared to those who found school 'challenging', such as many looked after children

- Some consultees reported a higher proportion of children in care preferring to participate in non-school based out-of-school-hours activities rather than school site-based activities

- A number of respondents highlighted the fact that **children that were living in foster homes had higher levels of** attendance in extra-curricular activities than those in residential units: *"There are many variables in this question, many of which mirror the ordinary population e.g. children tend to become less pro-school as they grow older, children from more affluent backgrounds tend to engage more with extra-curricular activities etc. In general, children in foster care are more likely to be involved in extra-curricular activities, often because of the practical difficulties that face homes in terms of maintaining staffing cover etc."* [CO154 – Council]. Some said that participation levels were dependent on care placement **stability** and to lesser extent **type**: *"In residential settings, out-of-school time can be structured to allow for leisure and recreational activity, but may be less adaptable to individual needs – i.e. where does a child in residential care find space for violin practice?"* [CO100 - Joint social services and education]

- **Carers' attitudes** towards the importance of out-of-school-hours activities was also said to influence participation levels. Some respondents mentioned that carers may not encourage or support participation enough. Others said that carers and social workers might not think about the importance of out-of-school-hours activities when planning care arrangements

- A few respondents suggested that children in care maybe more used to passive activities such as playing on computers and/or watching television and thus regarded out-of-school-hours activities as 'not for them': *"Difficult to generalise, though they may be more used to passive activities, e.g. TV, rather than interactive, social activities"* [CO53 – Youth project]

- Other **practical barriers to participation** included:

  -**transport difficulties** (cited by many as the key factor). *"Children in care are frequently excluded from extra-curricular activities – which often take place after the end of formal lessons – by transport arrangements. Many children in care are located in foster families outside the designated area of their usual school, and are thus transported by taxi (at huge and accumulating expense). Taxi companies seem not to have the necessary flexibility to cope with varying departure times, and have even be known to route a request*

*through social services to collect children early, before the end of school, regularly or permanently, for their own scheduling convenience"* [CO78 – Individual response]

-**(in)accessibility or scheduling of the activities.** For example, some mentioned that many children attended school out of their home borough, therefore some carers might not be able to collect children after activities due to 'the competing demands of other children in their care'

-**funding concerns**. Children in care might be 'too embarrassed' to ask carers to pay for the fees of activities so chose not to attend. Alternatively, there may be debate at the agency level over whose responsibility it is to pay for out-of-school-hours activities

-**lack of knowledge** by carers and children about what out-of-school-hours activities were available or how to get involved

**(Q20)** **Practical steps that could be taken to increase the participation of children in care in out of school activities**

- **Raising awareness of, and actively asking children** (and taking an interest in) 'what children want to do', e.g. **schools** could offer children in care a variety of activities to choose from. In addition to this awareness of available activities should be increased

- **Encourage carer participation** by providing a quiet place for carers to wait whilst the young people are involved in out-of-school-hours activities or admitting carers into activities and facilities for free so that they can supervise and watch

- **Agencies** could enhance participation by providing financial support where needed for fees and to purchase equipment. This could be heightened by more inter-agency linking and possibly incorporated into the planning and review process of children in care. **Carers and social workers** should also receive training on the importance of out-of-school-hours activities for children in care. **Social workers** should also "*make sure activities are followed through by carers*"

- The **local authority** could increase the participation in out-of-school-hours activities of children in care by paying more attention to activities through discussions with the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships, and in practical terms could do more, for example:

  -**ensuring that children are placed in local schools** thus reducing transport/accessibility difficulties: *"Placing Looked After Children in local schools to overcome transport issues and support travel where this is not possible. Offer some activities off the school site so it is not always seen as an extension to school"* [CO136 – Social services]

  -**arranging transport**, especially where accessibility is an issue: *"We should promote equality of access for all children"*

  -**providing leisure cards** to children in care so that they can be admitted to activities/facilities for free or at an agreed reduced rate

## A4.  Local Authorities

**(Q 21)  Variations in attainment of children in care between different local authorities**

- A number of respondents cautioned that some differences may in fact be due to **misleading figures at the local authority level** [CO8 – Social services].  Many authorities only have very small numbers of looked after children [CO153 – Vol Org] and the results may therefore be extremely skewed.  However, there were a range of 'real' factors cited as likely to underlie these variations:

- **Demographic variables** such as differing levels of social deprivation [CO27 – Learning mentor; CO151 – Social services; CO86 - Education]; social differences and differences in the severity of need in the population of looked after children [CO47 – Council; CO71 - Joint social services and education]; differences in the number of children in care

- **Differences in the priority (and funding) attached to looked after children** : "*for some it is just rhetoric*" [CO32 – Education; CO37 – School; CO51 – Joint social services and education; CO57 – Education]

- Real **variation in local authority practice and policies in relation to looked after children**  – e.g. they may have different **thresholds** for admitting children to care, resulting (for example) in older children with more entrenched problems who will have correspondingly lower educational attainment [CO22 – Govt body; CO9 – Individual response; CO53 Youth project; CO57 – Education]. The number of **out of borough placements** may also affect educational attainment adversely, and some local authorities place many children out of borough [CO42 – School; CO128 – Joint social services and health]

- **Differences in number and quality of different types of care placements** – for example, availability of high-quality fostering placements [CO90 – Social services]; the size and status of residential homes [CO130 – Education]; differential pay rates and training opportunities for carers resulting in differences in quality of care for children [CO13 – Education]

- **Absence of dedicated teams** in some areas, which seem to be associated with better outcomes [CO70 – Social services]; and **poorer multi-agency structures** and levels of co-ordination and communication in some areas [CO31 – School]

- **Differences at the local education authority/school level** – for example, in number of classroom assistants [CO59 – Social services] and other "*variations in educational provision*" [CO90 – Social services]

**(Q22)  The role of councillors in promoting the educational attainment of children in care, and how to enhance it**

- Many respondents thought that elected members were an **important and potentially influential** group of people for children in care.  Some reported that councillors in their area took their role seriously and played a useful part in acting as 'scrutineers' [CO42 – School; CO71 - Joint social services and education].  *"(*In name of authority*), cabinet members and senior officers receive regular reports on attainment from the EDPC team"* [CO13 – Education].  Similarly "*in* [name of authority]*, they've taken the role of corporate parent with considerable knowledge and enthusiasm*" [CO96 – Council]

- However, many also felt there was room for improvement.  **Awareness needed to be raised** and that councillors "*need training to enable them to fulfil the role of a corporate parent*" [CO22 Govt Body; CO152 - Social services].  Others thought more could be done to ensure councillors were aware of their legal duties and to help them "*have a role in listening to and consulting with children*" [CO71 – Joint social services and education]

- Several respondents felt the role could be enhanced to include **designated members** for children in care and a **duty to monitor** the progress of looked after children on a regular basis [CO8- Social services; CO22 – Govt body].  Some areas already do this, however [CO57 – Education; CO152 - Social services]

- There were suggestions that councillors could 'visit Designated Teachers' and engage in other activities to both learn more for themselves about the needs of children in care, but also to raise awareness within the electorate to whom they are responsible [CO152 – Social services]

**(Q23) Out of Authority placements – do children placed outside do worse than those within?**

- Many respondents could not answer this question as they had **no statistics** on which to draw [CO152 – Social services]

- However, on the whole there was a strong view that this was indeed the case.  "*This is a universally acknowledged fact*" [CO78 – Individual response], probably for the following reasons:
    -children placed out of borough usually had **more complex needs** or were more challenging than those placed within [CO154 – Council]; by far the most frequent reason given
    -many **children do not wish to be placed away from their home** borough, and this would in turn impact on their engagement with education [CO45 – Social services]
    -there could be communication difficulties and **difficulties in sharing information between local authorities** especially if the geographical distances were considerable, and **lack of clarity and accountability** over who held the 'corporate parent' responsibility [CO132 – Joint social services and education; CO53 – Youth project]

-by definition, out of borough placement represented a **lack of continuity of care**, displacement from family, friends and 'home ground' which tended to have a disruptive effect on educational attainment [CO153 – Vol Org]. As one respondent said: "*the reasons relate less to the quality of any particular LEA, and more to matters of deracination, social upheaval, literal and emotional alienation, and social exclusion*" [CO78 – Individual response]

- Some respondents were hopeful that **tools like PEPs, Designated Teachers** etc could help to establish more continuity in planning and monitoring for children even when they are placed out of borough [CO92 – Social services]

- Others thought performance depended to a large extent on the **quality of the placement** (see Key Factors Section) [CO88 – Council; CO128 – Joint social services and health] and thought that "*some neighbouring local authorities provide a valuable resource to our children in care*" [CO49 – Social services]

**(Q24, Q25)  Difficulties in finding school places for children in care, and likelihood of children in care being placed in 'failing' schools**

- Most agreed that local authorities **did have difficulties** placing children in care. This was viewed against the wider context of "*a chronic shortage of secondary schools*", and the overwhelming view was that **'desirable' schools were reluctant to take children** who they imagined were likely to be disruptive, who had chequered school histories, or who were expected to have low attainment or special needs

- Several reasons were offered for this. In respect of **mainstream schools**:

    -the prevalent performance-monitoring culture of **league tables** in schools, which meant that low achievers threatened to reduce the relative position (and hence desirability to parents) of the school overall, and were therefore less welcome than other children [CO2 – Govt body; many respondents]
    -the **children themselves are often troubled** and troublesome, and schools sometimes cannot meet their needs, or cannot find a way to engage these children [CO45 – Social services]
    -the stiff competition for 'good' schools meant that they were always **full or over-subscribed**. Local authorities usually needed to place looked after children at non-standard times (eg mid year, mid term), which lessened the likelihood of places being available even further [CO13 – Education]
    -some thought however that the '**less successful' schools were in fact more flexible**, and more willing to accommodate the particular needs of children in care , even if they were less good academically [CO45 – Social services; CO59 - Social services]

- In terms of **special** provision:

    -local authorities had difficulties finding places because they often had to look out of the borough to find a **suitable specialist school** for challenging or high need children
    -"*there is a **national shortage** of therapeutic EBD schools*" [CO13 – Education]

- In terms of how these problem could be avoided, few respondents made concrete suggestions, except to say simply that mainstream **schools should be 'forced' to take children within their catchment area** "*by allowing LEAs to direct the admission of children in care regardless of the number on roll*" [CO32 – Education; CO71 – Joint social services and education, CO59 – Social services]

- However, many respondents did also paint a more hopeful picture, saying it was **not always the case** that there were difficulties here [CO47 – Council; CO57 – Education; CO128 – Joint social services and health; CO92 - Social services]. *"(In our area) the significant majority do not present problems with school placement, except a small, 'high-need' group*" [CO151 – Social services]. Clearly, the situation varied from one area to the next

**(Q 27) The impact of Education Action Zones, Excellence in Cities and other initiatives**

- Many respondents either **did not comment** here or said they could not comment because they had no knowledge of these initiatives as they did not have one in their area

- Some thought the impact of these initiatives was more likely to be **felt by children in need generally**, than by children in care specifically [CO45 – Social services]

- Others suggested **EiC was likely to have the greater impact** because of the focus on relevant factors such as removing barriers to education and on mentoring projects, study support centres etc [CO53 – Youth project; CO71 – Joint social services and education; CO92 - Social services]

- Some respondents indicated that the resources accessed though these initiatives had been directed towards relevant provision for children in care and that they had **already had a positive impact** [CO47 – Council; CO70 – Social services; CO100 - Joint social services and education]

## A5.  Making links

**(Q28)  Training and support for social workers**

- A predominant view was that at present, **most social workers did not receive much training** to help them support the education of children in care. [CO27 – Learning mentor; CO22 – Govt body] "*There is none at present*" [CO32 – *Education*].  Social services departments' complained that "*Formal training (in education matters) in DipSW is non-existent*" [CO59 – Social services]

- However, nevertheless many social services and statutory education departments had delivered what were mainly described as '**briefing' sessions** on the relevant issues, including for example "*Briefing and training from two area teams from the SS Education Support Team, the QP Education team, and a module for trainee social workers*" [CO71 – Joint social services and education; CO130 – Education; CO132 – Joint social services and education].  Others reported that there had been "*a rolling programme of training*" [CO152 – Social services], and in many areas the 'looked after children' team were clearly active in supporting and guiding other social care staff [CO86 – Education, CO100- Joint social services and education]

- Others reported that there were **local guidance/protocol documents** for social workers in their area (often drawn up by joint agencies), or specific training on PEPs etc, or advice lines that social workers could call

- In terms of **changes to improve the situation** respondents stressed the following, with some indicating that a major change was needed to make education a compulsory main element of social work training, and to address staff shortages in order to free up time to undertake proper in-service training [CO86 – Education, CO130 - Education]:
  -including a **formal module within the DipSW**, perhaps linked into teacher training courses [CO59 – Social services]
  -providing focussed training on '**local education arrangements'** and on issues like exclusion and expulsion, and the **national curriculum** [CO2 – Govt body, CO27 – Learning mentor]
  -providing **joint education and social services training** [CO67 – Joint social services, education and health]
  -providing **on-going support for social workers to review current individual cases** [CO45 – Social services], including access to the educational psychologist service [CO90 – Social services]
  -reminding all social workers as part of core training and induction of the "***importance of education** for children, and the potential consequences of non-attainment*" [CO153 – Vol Org]

**(Q29)  Training and support for foster carers**

- As with Social Workers, respondents described the current training available for foster carers to help them support the educational attainment of children in their care as **'very little'** and in need of **improvement**.  This was particularly because a large amount of

the training was dependent upon the authority and not incorporated in the foster carers' core training

- Consultees who were aware of adequate and relevant training provided to foster carers gave **examples** including:
  -initial training in the preparatory 'choose to foster' programme
  -joint training with education staff and written advice and guidance
  -specific training programmes arranged on education matters
  -circulation of a newsletter to keep foster carers informed about training opportunities
  -training and support on offer via a telephone helpline
  -PEP training
  -specific training on education barriers e.g. statementing, exclusions and support services
  -others regularly liased with foster carers to ask them what additional training they would find useful

- A few respondents mentioned that a recent 'Equal Chances' audit had identified a number of areas for additional training of foster carers. These were issues surrounding **bullying,** the **role of the statutory education department**, **assertiveness** in education and social care

- A number of consultees said that although they had adequate training in place the **take up was poor**. This was largely because the training was offered during the day when most foster carers would be at work, and was not paid

- As with the training, the levels of actual support offered to foster carers to help them improve the education of children in care was **'low'**. Practical support that was offered included:
  -**financing school trips**, providing equipment and practical support for children falling behind
  -one statu had appointed a **teacher to support** and engage foster carers and regional social workers

In terms of **changes to improve the situation** respondents stressed the following:

- **Incorporating educational matters into foster carers' initial and on-going training**: *"If foster carers are to be recruited as 'professional carers' then education matters should be part of their ongoing training"* [CO71 – Joint social services and education]

- **Greater communication** between social workers, teachers and foster carers: *"Very little* [training], *if any. This should be a key and significant element of a foster carers' initial training. Foster carers should forge strong links with their local schools with the aid of the fostering link worker"* [CO59 – Social services, CO35 – Individual response]

- Increasing foster carers **knowledge and awareness** of barriers to learning through providing information on education issues such as examinations, SEN and exclusions

- Offer an **incentive** to foster carers to engage them: *"It is difficult to engage foster cares in training.  If training for foster carers was made compulsory as it is in education i.e. 5 days annually (and was accredited) attendance at a core annual training programme would be improved"* [CO130 – Education]


**(Q30)   Training and support for schools and teachers**

- Almost all the respondents said that **Designated Teachers** in their borough had been offered training.  This was either through conferences or 'twilight' sessions, though some mentioned mail outs 'with advice on roles and available support'. Many respondents were satisfied with the training on offer for Designated Teachers in their area.  However, they occasionally felt it was 'too ad hoc' for others staff members, but hoped the knowledge held by designated teachers would 'filter down' to other staff members. Others made a strong case for training only Designated Teachers: *"Since blanket coverage would be hugely and ineffectively expensive, changes to make training or support more effective should involve precise targeting of those teachers well placed to make a difference.  Children in care are a tiny majority of the school population, so such training should be offered only to those teachers with direct responsibility for supporting children in care"* [CO78 – Individual response]

- **Other training** offered to teachers mentioned by consultees included:
     -multi-disciplinary training
     -Education Support Team providing telephone advice lines and updates on education legislation

- Some respondents felt the training available for schools and teachers was **'little'** and that: *"People need to make this an important issue on a par with child protection training"* [C31 – School].  Others felt that the **take up of training was poor** due to **failure to provide cover** for teachers to attend training sessions

- In terms of **changes to improve the situation** respondents stressed the following:

     -newly qualified teachers should receive training on children in care (or it should be included in their postgraduate courses at university)
     -in-service training on the backgrounds of looked after children
     -incorporation of the costs of supply cover or release time into education budgets so that key teachers were freed up to attend training, or
     -offer teachers incentives to attend training sessions:  *"Suggested changes to make this training more effective would be some financial incentive, or lessening of workload for designated teachers"* [CO92 – Social services]
     -devise a common database between education and social services departments to aid communication

**(Q31)   Strengths and weaknesses in links between schools, LEAs and Social Service Departments, and their impact on the educational performance of children in care**

- The majority of consultees highlighted **communication and links** between Education and Social Services as a **key strength**.  This was seen as particularly positive in the area of information sharing between agencies:  *"Social services departments which have appointed Education Liaison workers have strengthened links and provided training and resources for children in care, raising attainment levels across a range of qualifications. However, tensions exist where each tries to pass responsibility for provision to the other – this can lead to a profusion of 'education otherwise' placements"* [CO153 – Vol Org]

- Nevertheless, a number of consultees mentioned continuing weaknesses **in communication** between schools, education and social services.  For example, one foster carer wrote:  *"I am a foster carer with* [borough] *who has been trying since September 2000 to get the child living with us assessed for special educational needs.  No decision has been made because the Education Authority and social services department cannot agree who should pay…  their decision making process must be speeded up because a years delay for a young child is too long"* [CO4 – Foster Carer]

- A few consultees said the main weakness they had experienced was that middle managers, front line social workers, head teachers and teachers links had not improved at the same rate – thus there were inconsistencies in delivery

- One consultee said they felt the links *"**between the DfES and DoH at the centre are very weak**"*, whilst another suggested *"The inconsistencies between the two in terms of definition and timescale is very wasteful of time that can be better spent to the benefit of children in care"*  [CO32 – Education, CO86 – Education]

**(Q32)   Improvements that could be made to the links between schools, LEAs and Social Service Departments**

- Greater **clarity of roles** and positions of respective agencies; clarifying who is responsible for paying for key stages of the process

- Closer and more joined-up working between agencies and authorities, especially because some children in care are constantly changing school and care placements.  It was felt that this could largely be achieved through the use of a **joint database** through which key agencies could hold information on children in care and share with others if/when the child is moved

# Section B

# What works?

## Section B: What Works?

**(Q33) Successful approaches in raising the educational attainment of children in care**

- **Valuing education and creating a 'live' agenda for children in care.** This was cited by many consultees as probably the key element of building a successful strategy for raising educational attainment of looked after children. The value put on (and <u>seen</u> to be put on) education by all those involved with looked after children – both individual carers and professionals, and by agencies - was seen as a critical part of an effective approach. The various indicators of this were cited as including:
  -**rigorous tracking of and reporting on attendance** at school;
  "*high expectations of children as well as an understanding of their needs*" [CO22 - Govt body; CO45- Social services];
  -"***taking an interest and providing encouragement***" for individual young people [CO45 – Social services];
  -providing a **clear management lead** at the agency level including the development and application of clear, joint-agency protocols (and one area had seconded a senior social services manager to work within the statutory education department to develop procedures and practice, for example [CO160 – Social services])
  -schools "***embracing their corporate responsibilities towards children in care***"

- **Communication between agencies**, perhaps facilitated by **joint training**, was also stressed as an important contributor to the success stories reported by some consultees: "*We have had successes around interagency work, briefings and training programmes…(which has helped to) promote a culture of inclusion of looked after children by all agencies*" [CO71- Joint social services and education; also CO154- Council]. Another social services department that was proud of its achievement in this area noted that raising the profile of looked after children had been achieved by ensuring that the Corporate Parenting Group included senior managers from a range of agencies, and that "*we have multi-agency meetings to discuss looked after children and the Educational Support Team are represented at LEA meetings*" [CO152- Social services] thus keeping the agenda for looked after children a 'live' one across the relevant agencies

- Several respondents commented on the importance of **information and data management systems** in raising the educational attainment of looked after children. This had proved critical in accurately directing resources to where they were most needed. For some areas, more systematic attempts to collect and analyse data on all looked after children, tracking the relationship between children's needs, educational placement, and attainment has meant they are "*able to target resources at Key Stage 2 and 3 and track pupil attainment*" [CO13 - Education]. At the level of individual looked after children, monitoring of performance by teaching staff (e.g. Designated Teachers) enabled focussed intervention when drops in performance were noticed. At the agency level, overall performance monitoring "*has enabled senior managers to target resources on areas needing it*" [CO152 – Social services]. In addition, related to the issue of inter-agency communication, **joint agency working** in this area (e.g. having a joint

database accessible both to education and social services staff) was felt to be extremely useful, whether for reviewing specific cases or monitoring general trends

- According to many consultees, a consistent component of successful approaches to raising the attainment of looked after children was to have **individually applied resources** – that is, to ensure that resources were targeted at individual children according to individual needs and circumstances, rather than seeing looked after children as a homogenous group for whom group strategies were appropriate. As one response put it: "*There must be an individual approach geared to the child's needs but with joint work between relevant departments*" [CO153 – Vol Org].  Personal Education Plans were positively regarded by many, in this context, provided they were used 'properly' [CO8-Social services]

- Many consultees stressed the benefits and importance of identifying **one named person** to support a child within or outside school.  This could be a member of the teaching staff, as in the **Designated Teacher (DT)** scheme, or just "*one significant adult playing the mentor role*" [CO45- Social services].  This person could provide support both to individual young people, and to the various adults and professionals who were involved in supporting the child.  One example of the "*assignment of a specific teacher to help children in residential care and provide additional tuition*" showed how providing access to a consistent adult support figure with a remit to help with educational issues, and provided to all the children there on a 'home-wide' basis, had proved successful in providing non-stigmatising help and encouragement to struggling young people [CO2 – Govt body].  One statutory education department commented: "*Having Designated Teachers in every school is valuable.  They provide a point of contact (for professionals as well as children); for example, staff can phone the DT prior to transition between schools and ensure successful planning for (the child's) induction*" [CO13 – Education].  Moreover, an individual person in this role was able to "*champion the cause (of looked after children), challenge where appropriate and support the young person through good and bad times*" [CO47 – Council]. This 'advocacy' role for named supporters was heavily stressed by many respondents, and Pastoral Support Programmes were cited by some as promising in this regard.  However, sensitivity is needed in applying these principles: one PRU that had enjoyed "notable successes in returning children in care to mainstream school" felt that it was important not to stigmatise these young people by obviously treating them 'differently' to other children [CO23 – School] and others agreed it was important not to dispense 'special treatment' [CO37 – School]

- The importance of **responding rapidly at key points in the process** was stressed by a number of respondents.  Partly, this was a by-product of better communication and liaison between agencies at critical points. It included issues like "*ensuring admissions and changes of school follow a speedy process, and appropriate support systems for the child*" being put in place without delay [CO160 – Social services], and being able to place children speedily in a new school at points of transition, including "*effective transfer of the child's records*" [CO90 – Social services]

- A number of respondents felt that providing **extra opportunities and support** (for example, "*greater access to literacy, numeracy, the internet, communication facilities, leisure activities and other advantages enjoyed by normal children in the average family*" [CO78 – Individual response] was helpful in raising the attainment of looked after children. This could also be inputted at specific stages in children's educational careers, for example 'catch-up' programmes, including individual tuition especially at Key Stage 4 for those young people who were behind with GSCE course-work had been an effective strategy in some areas [CO128 – Joint Govt body]. In another area, a reading opportunities project, a study support project and a work experience project, were "*all proving successful*" [CO86-Education]

- On a related issue, some respondents stressed the importance of leaving an "**open door**" for young people who had been excluded or otherwise had missed out on education to get back into the system. This could be facilitated, for example as in one borough, via a work-experience or work-placement scheme in which young people could be given an opportunity to 'reapply' themselves and have their confidence rebuilt [CO152 – Social services]

## Q34 Successful strategies employed by mainstream schools

- A number of respondents felt it was **too early** to provide examples of strategies with proven effectiveness

- However, a range of examples were provide by other consultees, some of which were relatively innovative, but others of which had been running for a while and were 'tried and tested'. These included:

- ***Strategies to address individual pupil needs for extra support:***

     -**catch-up programmes** and at primary level *"We have made applications…to the LEA for additional short-term support for children in crisis"* [CO45- Social services, CO153 – Vol Org]
     -**study skills centres** and "*Promoting access to and uptake of study support*" [CO71- Joint social services and education, CO53 – Youth project]. Also provision of learning support units in secondary schools [CO100 – Joint social services and education]
     -**curriculum flexibilities** (to help keep young people engage with school); also part-time or flexible packages at secondary level with careful monitoring of any need to modify the package [CO45- Social services]. Also work experience schemes
     -strategies **to support looked after children in a general sense**, and make sure they were equipped to prosper in mainstream schools, for example:
     -**treating children with respect**, listening and supporting aspirations, whilst providing realistic assessment of difficulties (i.e being honest). "*The most successful approaches are linked to the personalities of the carers/teachers – patience, ability to listen, tactfulness and consistency of approach*" [CO47 – Council, also CO51 Joint social services and education]

-strategies for children to **"survive within the school"** and "*effective school inclusion programmes*" [CO71 – Joint Social Services and education]. Also **peer support** schemes, such as 'lunchtime buddy clubs' [CO130 – Education, CO154 – Council]

-**small groups** for children who are vulnerable and 'time out' to think about/confront problems [CO130 – Social services]

-**learning mentors and advocates** [CO53 – Youth project; CO71 – Joint social services and education]. In one borough, for example, "*all schools will be appointing a senior advocate to support young people in care*" [CO152- Social services; CO100 – Joint social services and education]

-**Pastoral Support Programmes** and counselling

### *'Structural' and professional strategies*

-many consultees said schools in their area were successfully **implementing Designated Teachers**. Some had established DT "*networks for sharing good practice*". However, several stressed that these schemes could not work effectively unless there was dedicated time and resources for nominated staff

-**'SMART' PEPs**, and willingness to work across administrative boundaries to ensure these are completed. For example in one area "*social workers negotiating with teachers out of the borough to complete PEPs has aided the tracking of individual pupils' progress*" [CO92 – Social services]

-**setting clear targets and reviewing progress** with the child as well as with professionals and carers. Also "*screening exam entries and mock exam results with the looked after children team*" [CO88 – Council]

### (Q35) The impact on educational attainment of placing children in care in Local Authority Secure Units (LASUs) and special schools

- Many consultees thought that this type of provision **could be extremely beneficial where the child's needs were substantial**, though the institutions were diverse, and this was reflected in their outcomes [CO47 – Council]. Some pointed out that for children with especially disrupted backgrounds, this might be the first real exposure to educational input that they had experienced for a long time. However, the general view was that this kind of provision "*should improve attainment, but only if the pupil has been correctly assessed and the placement is appropriate to those needs*" [CO8 – Social services]. Many thought that this kind of provision was preferable to being 'left to fail' within the mainstream system

**Positive impact factors** included:

- **Small teaching groups and individual attention** are more easily provided in these types of environment. This means that children's specific needs can be addressed more easily than in the larger classes typical in mainstream provision. Further, young people cannot as easily "opt out" or be distracted in this environment, and their behaviour can be more easily monitored [CO13 – Education; CO59 – Social services, CO178 - Social

services]. "*We have seen some excellent GSCE results being obtained by young people in residential special schools that have been linked to the GSCE system*" [CO86 – Education]

- Some consultees also felt that admission to this kind of provision could be a **psychological "turning point"** for some young people. LASUs might cause children to reflect on their anti-social behaviour, for example "*they are sometime shocked into realisation of the path they are heading down, and are keen to reform and avoid further loss of freedom*" [CO13- Education], or it might reflect the impact of their first 'continuing education experience' that removes them from their previous harmful and disrupted environment [CO153 – Vol Org]

- There could be **positive effects 'by association'** for children of being educated alongside other children all of whom were beginning to make progress. If so, "*success breeds success and the opportunities to make progress encourage all the children to attend and to work*" [CO22- Govt body]

- **Longer stays** rather than short spells might however be needed to realise the potential benefits in full, since there was often much lost ground to be made up. One respondent commented: "*Children who spend three or more months in a LASU often flourish educationally. Some are unable to read on admission, and are failing in (many) other aspects of their work*" [CO22 – Govt body]

However, there were as many if not more **negative comments** about this type of provision as there were positive ones

- Several consultees warned that **children could become 'institutionalised'** by the experience of being placed out of mainstream provision, and also could be "*traumatised…suffering loss and separating from family and friends*" which could in turn have a negative effect on educational progress [CO45 – Social services, CO178 - Social services]

- Some respondents thought the **standard of education was often poorer** than in mainstream education, with education sometimes playing a secondary role within other aspects of a residential placement, especially in residential schools [CO2 – Govt body; CO22- Govt body, CO45 – Social services]. Some of these establishments are not linked into the GSCE system, and as one consultee pointed out: "*where the placement is a residential unit with education provided on site (a 'care' placement) young people tend not to have access to the full curriculum unless specific arrangements are made to attend a mainstream school off-site*" [CO100 – Joint social services and education]

- The **inevitable negative effect of removing children from their mainstream school community** was stressed by several consultees. Some felt that any gains made in residential environments were **difficult to sustain** once the child left [CO130 – Social services], and where children had been placed in special provision out of their home borough there could also be problems finding a suitable place mainstream provision on their return (see also question 24). On leaving these types of placements, there was

also a risk that "*16 year olds drift back to their local area without any planning to engage in education*" [CO45 – Social services]

- **Short stays in secure accommodation were viewed as having a particularly negative effect**, having a disruptive effect on young people's education. "*Continuity is almost always disrupted by their going in and out, and there is variable communication with both prior and future schools*" [CO71 – Joint social services and education, CO128 – Joint social services and health]

# Section C

# Quality Protects and the Joint Guidance

## Section Accessories: Quality Protects and the Joint Guidance

**(Q36) How effectively are Quality Protects (QP) and the DfEE Joint Guidance (JG) on the Education of Young People in Public Care being implemented in practice**

- There was a general view amongst consultees that both Quality Protects and Joint Guidance were **extremely important initiatives** for looked after children and much was hoped for them.  However, though the principles underpinning both QP and the JG were endorsed by consultees, some did feel that the "*practical implications were demanding on already overstretched services*", and monitoring information needed to be fed back to policy makers to overcome some of the practical difficulties with implementation [CO45 – Social services].  The emphasis attached to the collection and analysis of data by these initiatives was welcomed

- **Judgements about how well each was being implemented on the ground varied**, however.  Some were confident that both had already had a far-reaching impact on practice and were clearly in evidence in terms of daily practice.  Many consultees mentioned the importance of innovations such as the introduction of Personal Education Plans and Designated Teachers, and indicated that these were being successfully used within their own areas.  Other respondents however thought that implementation had been somewhat 'patchy', and that whilst some agencies were making good progress, others were not doing so well.  There were also variations within boroughs [CO178 – Social services]

### *Quality Protects*

- Some respondents claimed that "*QP has had a major beneficial effect on practice*" [CO86- Education] and had encouraged a professional and management culture of raised expectations and  "*striving to achieve more*" [CO13 – Education, CO178 - Social services].  It had raised the profile of children's 'life chances', improved the quality of official data collection, and had clarified objectives for agencies to work towards [CO51 – Joint social services and education]

- Others noted that QP money was being used in a very practical and visible way to fund key multi-agency teams, such as Education of Children in Public Care (ECPC) Teams.  Some statutory education departments thought QP had provided an impetus for getting social services departments in particular to push educational of looked after children higher up their own agenda.  For example, One statutory education department commented that "*QP has been responsible for placing education on the social services agenda for the first time – very helpful*" [CO13 – Education]

- On the other hand, another statutory education respondent to the consultation thought that the local education authority was doing well on meeting QP objectives, but that "*progress was slow*" in the social services department because "*SSD has problems with retention and recruitment.*"  They also added "*QP budgets are not being used to promote*

*educational attainment - they are ring-fenced for SSD priorities that may not include education*" [CO32 – Education].  Conversely, a Social service response indicated that QP was being implemented "*more effectively within the SSD than in the Education Departments*" [CO59 – Social services]

- There were indications that QP messages had been particularly "*absorbed and welcomed by social services staff*" [CO128 – Joint social services and health], though no-one commented on how QP had impacted upon the statutory education department, individual schools and other agencies.  However, one respondent commented: "*QP has enabled the LEA and the SSD to plan a common agenda for the future*" [CO132 – Joint social services and education]

### *Joint Guidance*

- There was a view that the Joint Guidance had been helpful within local authorities by helping them "*raise the profile of the education of children in care with senior officers and elected members who are now aware of their role as corporate parents*" [CO13 – Education]

- Respondents indicated that the statutory requirements of the Joint Guidance were generally being implemented reasonably well in their area, with one respondent stating:  "*(Its) effectiveness is demonstrated by the data available on GSCE outcomes, and by exclusion figures etc*" [CO71 – Joint social services and education]

Some **negative** notes were also sounded, however.

- One consultee commented that "*the Joint Guidance sets an enormous agenda, which has resource implications, because there is no clear guidance on priorities*" [CO128 – Joint social services and health], thought the Guidance was "confusing", as it was not clear what was advice and what was a statutory requirement, and reported that to date, only 50% of looked after children in their area had PEPs in place

- Another reported that the "*SSD had (initially) been slow to take ownership*" of the Joint Guidance and thus it had taken time to implement [CO132 – Joint social services and education]

### (Q37)  Effectiveness of Personal Education Plans, Designated Teachers, and the 20-Day Rule

- The general view from consultees was that all of these things were **a very good idea in principle**, though a few complained about the sheer volume of new 'plans' and initiatives that children in care had these days, and added that the simultaneous launch of the Framework for Assessment had not been helpful timing and had delayed implementation of some of the above [CO187 - Education]

### *Personal Education Plans (PEPS)*

- PEPs were **widely welcomed** and it was reported that they had already proved useful where they had been completed [CO32 – Education].  They had "*enabled a greater focus to be put on the educational needs of children in care*" [CO86 – Education] and had been "*a driving force behind changing the local community's attitudes towards education*", including how looked after children were perceived by other pupils and by their teachers [CO126 – Social services; CO178- Social services]

- Some reported "***positive feedback** on the PEP process for improving the communication between all agencies*" and "*providing a clearer understanding of the child's needs*" and a "*focus for discussion*" [CO130 – Education; CO178 - Social services].  Another very enthusiastic response commented: "*the PEPs have increased information-sharing across agencies, and have given us a vehicle to raise issues with senior managers*" [CO152 – Social services]

- However, their **implementation was as yet 'patchy'** (and was 'just starting' in some areas) and many took the view that it was *"too early to comment"* on how effective they were are raising the attainment of looked after children.  "*They are effective when completed together (between child and relevant agencies) and when they are reviewed regularly, but just having a piece of paper is meaningless*"  [CO71 – Joint social services and education]

- Some thought **PEPs needed to be 'SMART'-er** (ie more Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Timed), and also that they were only effective if driven by an effective advocate [CO179 – Social services; CO98 - Joint social services and education]

- A note of caution was however sounded by one respondent, providing an analysis of care users' perspectives from a recent research study for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. This stressed that the **sharing of information** between professionals and agencies (as embodied by the PEP) could be seen by young people themselves as indicating a **lack of respect for their confidential data** [CO26 – individual response]

### *Designated Teachers*

- Again, Designated Teachers were thought to be **a good innovation** but that in many areas it was **"too early too comment" on how effective** they were

- However, others (especially social services) were "**very positive**" and thought the Designated Teacher role was "crucial", "invaluable" and would eventually prove to have major impact on both individual children, and on school policy [CO71 – Joint social services and education; CO 70 – Social services; CO128 – Social services, CO88 - Council].  One respondent stated: "*Designated Teachers have given us a point of contact for schools throughout the country*" [CO152 – Social services]

- Some respondents thought however that Designated Teachers "*don't fully understand their role*" and were **struggling to understand how to reconcile an advocacy role with**

**a teaching/monitoring one** [CO45 – Social services, CO49 – Social services].  Others were struggling to balance the Designated Teacher role with a full-time teaching commitment [CO130 – Education]

- It was also felt important that the Designated Teacher role did not mean that responsibility for looked after children came to be seen as the preserve of **one person**, rather than of all teachers [CO158 – Vol Org]

### The 20-Day Rule

- Judgements about this were **mixed**

- Some felt that the Rule was **useful** in "*stopping a child's education being held up*" and that they had noticed "*improvements across the board*" [CO70 – Education, CO100 - Joint social services and education]

- Others thought it was **too early to know** how well it was working in practice [CO13 – Education, CO8 – Social services], and some reported that to have the desired impact, the Rule needed to be extended to primary education legislation [CO13 – Education].  Some commentators were uncertain about how the rule could be applied to children with **Special Educational Needs**, and a number commented that the Rule seemed to be '**in competition'** with other statutory guidance [CO132 – Joint social services and education, CO45 – Social services]

- **Most however reported problems and said it was "not working" and "not useful**" because it was too challenging a target [CO23 – School; CO45 – Social services, CO194 – Vol Org].  For example, a typical response was "*the 20-Day Rule continues to cause problems as current systems do not support or encourage educational placement resolutions – especially for pupils with additional needs - within that time-frame*" [CO192 – Joint social services and education].  One school felt it was "*an example of children being given rights that cannot be accessed and thus was well-intentioned but unrealistic, because it leads to bad feeling where it cannot be implemented*" [CO23 – School]

### (Q 38 – 40)  Overall impact, factors underlying success and room for improvement: Quality Protects and the Joint Guidance

- Overall, the dominant view expressed by consultees across the board was that **both these initiatives had been very much welcomed** by all agencies, and in many areas were already showing a positive impact.  Many took the view that both QP and the JG had "*brought a helpful focus on the life chances of looked after children*", raised the profile of looked after children in general by bringing their needs further up the agenda, increased awareness of corporate parenting responsibilities, encouraged agencies to look at the 'whole child', encouraged higher expectations, and had assisted in "*forging a common agenda*" across agencies [CO152 – Social services; CO8 – Social services; CO51 – Joint social

services and education; CO92 – Social services; CO130 – Education; CO47 – Council, CO71 – Joint social services and education]. As one respondent summed up, "*In broad terms, (they have) achieved a much greater awareness of the education issues for looked after children*" [CO186 – Education]. And another commented: "*The heightened expectations that are set out in QP have focussed professionals' minds*" [CO152 – Social services]

- Another wrote that the new initiatives had done good work in building on and drawing **together the threads of existing good practice** and knowledge across the country into a coherent framework: *"(They have had a) seminal impact and have been instrumental in allowing practical strategies to be implemented at national and regional level. Before these programmes, there were only isolated pockets of good practice, and much research…."* [CO92 – Social services]

- One key positive impact had been in **improved communication**/liaison between agencies [CO130 - Education], resulting in both a "*strategic and operational effect*"

- The key principles underlying the initiatives were endorsed, and for example "**Personal Advisors**" embodied in both QP and the JG were felt to be a key principle and very important, since many consultees felt that the importance of consistent advocate or "*special adult*" to take an interest in a child's progress was vital in raising attainment [CO20 – Individual response]

- Some areas gave specific examples of ways in which they felt their data demonstrated **improvements**, including:

    -Evidence of **increased consultation with young people**
    -**Closer monitoring** of young people with difficulties
    -Young people being **entered for more exams**
    -More resources for extra-curricular and **out-of-school activities**
    -Improved **access to mainstream education** in some areas
    -Promising improvements for looked after children with **SEN**
    [CO96 – Council; CO100- Joint social services and education; CO42 – School]

### *Factors underlying the success of Quality Protects and the Joint Guidance*

- Where respondents were positive about the impact of QP and the JG, a range of factors underlying their success were cited. One important factor was felt to lie in the **consistency of messages from national government**, which had encouraged effective joint working and "*joint commitment*" at the local level. [CO8 – Social services, CO154 - Council]

- Having **dedicated posts** and **teams** was also felt to be a significant factor underpinning the successes so far of QP and the JG. These had clear roles and responsibilities and were able to "*drive practice forward within the local authority*" [CO13 – Education; CO42 – School; CO100- Joint social services and education]. Others paid tribute to "*the quality of staff working together*" [CO45- Social services]

- The volume of **uptake of training** and **joint training** by staff across agencies was also mentioned as a contributory factor to success by a number of respondents [CO71 – Joint social services and education, CO130 - Education]

- The **dedicated "*ring-fenced, nationally agreed" resources**** provided for QP in particular were seen as vital to its present and future success by many [CO53 – Youth project, CO57 - Education]

- Others felt that success had been due to the **senior support that the initiatives had received** at the local level – for example "*the commitment of senior officers and elected members to supporting these initiatives*" [CO13 – Education; CO57 – Education, CO70 - Education]. Related to this, some pointed to the important effect of having 'education champions' at a senior level who were "*willing to be unpopular*" in both departments [CO153 – Vol Org, CO128 – Joint social services and education]

However, there were also some **limits to the impact** that these initiatives had so far had, according to many respondents. For example:

- Some thought that there had been "***no significant impact** on educational attainment*" [CO32 – Education] or that there had even possibly been a negative impact "*if results improvement is anything to go by*!" [CO71- Joint social services and education]

- Some felt that the impact of QP had been limited **because Local Authority budgets were "*already stretched** and the new money had been used to compensate for other (areas of) underfunding*" [CO9 – Individual response]

- In addition, in some areas **agencies were not achieving joint working** (or joint funding) for QP or the JG.  One very negative view asserted: "*QP should be a joint process with the budget being managed by the SSD and the LEA.  Currently (however), LEAs are delivering parts of their own funding to support this area*" [CO32 – Education].  As one respondent commented, "*We still need joint working because QP is still 'held' by SSD and the Joint Guidance by schools*" [CO136 - Social services]

- Others simply felt that it was **too early to say** yet what the overall impact of the new initiatives had been, and what was needed now was robust longitudinal research focusing on measurable outcomes and controlling for key variables [CO98 – Joint social services and education, CO128 - Joint social services and health]

# Section D

# Next Steps – building on Quality Protects

# and the Joint Guidance

## Section D: Next steps – building on Quality Protects and the Joint Guidance

**(Q42) Quality Protects Targets**

Scattered through the responses were comments on the **QP targets** set as part of the new initiatives. This an area of real debate with strong views on both sides:

- Many respondents felt these were **too low**: "*we need more testing targets for looked after children*" - and that it was stigmatising to looked after children to have lower targets and expectations than for other children in the community [CO2- Govt body; CO22 – Govt body; CO51 – Joint social services and education; CO132 – Joint social services and education, CO67 – Joint social services, education and health] "*If ministers want the same things for children in care as they do for their own children, then the QP targets should undoubtedly be raised*" [CO80 –Govt body]

- Others felt that because some of the **targets were not benchmarked** against attainment for the whole cohort, they were 'meaningless' [CO96 – Council]. It was also suggested that the statutory education sector should set '**convergence targets'** for this group relative to the wider peer group, "*perhaps with a five year time scale*". This would help to see how schools were 'adding value' to the attainment of looked after children [CO130 – Education, CO128 – Joint social services and health]

- On the other hand, many felt that the targets could be **inappropriately high**. Often were not sufficiently '**tied-in' to the educational circumstances of individual** young people, and should be based on "*adding value for each child and be related to their prior attainment*" - not to the wider peer group who might form an inappropriate comparison group [CO13 – Education; CO45 Social services, CO152 - Social services]. The 2003 target of 5 GSCEs at grade A-C was dismissed as "unrealistic" by some

- Thus, for example, some felt **the targets did not work well for young people in special groups** (e.g. refugees, children with disabilities or statements/SEN) who may have limited ability [CO152 –SS; CO86 – Education; CO88 – Council; CO128 –Joint social services and education] "*For some children, one GSCE is not worthwhile, or is beyond their capability*"

- One solution was to make more of a **distinction between achievement** (and progress) and **attainment**. Several respondents said QP targets were at present "crude" and should try to measure the former as well as the latter [CO86 – Education; CO57 - Education]. Many said that the targets should not just be focussed on formal GSCE/GNVQ attainment, which were not achievable for all looked after children, but also take on board other forms of accredited educational qualifications available to young people. "*We need a broader range of educational indicators to take account of the personal development of looked after children – for example the percentage attending out-of-school activities*" [CO70 – Social services]

- **Against the case for change** in the targets were some who felt that though the targets were "challenging", they were "*not unattainable and were helpful, guiding principles*

*pitched at the right level*" [CO92 – Social services], and others who pointed out that if targets were changed, the lack of consistency would undermine their usefulness as indicators of progress in this area [CO90 – Social services]

### *General issues for the future*

- Several respondents reported that they would like to see the **remit and range of <u>QP</u>, in particular, extended**.  Future directions included:

- An increased emphasis on the **early years** dimension

- An increased emphasis on school attendance and performance not just for looked after children, but for **all children involved with social services departments** [CO2 – Govt body]

- There were several areas of potential improvement related to **schools** that were identified by respondents. For example, some felt that there should be more "*specific requirements placed on schools*" as the statutory education sector had weakening powers in this respect [CO154 – Council].  Others drew attention to the need for further work "*with governors to understand philosophy of QP and life issues facing looked after children*"  [CO153 – Vol Org]

- An increase in the 'legislative (or statutory) leverage' and **creating a more consistent national practice picture** under QP by, e.g:

    -legislation that gives "***cross-authority consistency of standards***" when children are placed out of borough [CO8 – Social services] or "*a national monitoring service*" to ensure all children in care receive the same support [CO22 – Govt body]
    -putting the **20-Day Rule into legislation** [CO13 – Education, CO132 - Education]
    -establishing **statutory joint control** to make joint working a reality because "*currently the system allows for local interpretation, which undermines commitment. SSD control all of the budget and therefore set the pace and the priorities. This should be changed to <u>joint</u> guidance and joint control*" [CO32 – Education]
    -ensuring that **QP money was ring-fenced for education** and used "*to focus on the educational attainment of children in care*" [CO132 – Joint social services and education, CO128 – Joint social services and health]

- Some felt that that both initiatives had stretched the capacities of local agencies and that it would help to **reduce the number of requirements** [CO51 – Joint social services and education]. On the same theme, a number of responses called for more **harmonisation** of data requirements and data return timescales across the various government bodies to reduce the burden on agencies: "*Can a simple set of criteria be employed by DfES, Ofsted, DoH, and SSI be used?*" [CO96 – Council; CO100 – Joint social services and education, CO71 – Joint social services and education]

- **Additional funding** and resourcing was wanted by some to pay for joint training and the additional staff time required to implement QP and the JG [CO8 – Social services; CO47 - Council]. There was also awareness that funding for QP comes to an end in 2004 – and a

feeling that areas needed to start planning for this 'now' [CO132 – Joint social services and education]

- To improve the **speed of response** when children enter care, a multi-agency "*quick response teams*" including EWOs, Social Workers and Educational Psychologists might be helpful [CO59 – Social services]. Also to establish a 'fast-track' through the SEN process

- A number of comments also referred to the need to 'educate' or raise the awareness of councillors and school governors [CO128 – Joint social services and health, CO8 - Social services]

- In respect of the **Joint Guidance**, there were relatively few specific suggestions for improvements or policy changes.  Those who commented mainly said the JG was 'sound' and that the only changes that might help were to make some of the measures **more prescriptive** or statutory rather than discretionary [CO71 – Joint social services and education; CO100 – Joint social services and education, CO92 - Social services]

- **For both QP and the JG**, **there were strong indications that major changes could be counterproductive**.  "*At this time, apart from developmental improvements, we would not like to see any changes.  A lot of time and money has been invested in this group of young people.  We need time to examine outcomes, and then consider improvements*" [CO57 – Education]. "*If QP were to be abandoned now, the messages given out to children in care, their carers and professionals…would cause huge disappointment and damage*" [CO153 – Vol Org]

- Finally, amongst all the comments about professionals needing to communicate and work together, research evidence submitted by one consultee stressed the importance of **not 'forgetting' the young people themselves** in all of this.  It was felt to be vitally important to give young people themselves a say in the choice of personal advisors, befrienders and mentors, and to ensure that they felt their views were respected [CO26 – Individual response]

# Section E

# International learning

# and

# other issues

## Section E: International learning and other issues

**(Q43 and Q44)  What can we learn from other countries about how to educate children in care successfully?**

- There were a **limited number of responses** here.  Of the 201 consultation responses only 51 responded to this question with only 33 of these describing good practice examples.

- Some consultees said they were currently **in the process of investigating practices in other countries**.  For example, one authority was presently exploring the links to services in Holland and Germany (with EU funding) [CO8 – Social services]

### *Examples of good practice*

- A few respondents highlighted **Europe as having good practice examples**. One respondent cited a European example of **learning informally through play** as an approach for raising educational attainment:  *"I think the most important thing that we can learn from other countries is the value of early educational experiences for children to provide them with the basis for effective future learning.  I feel the emphasis on formal learning at a very young age in the UK is a disincentive to children who have not had a structured or settled family life.  Greater emphasis on learning through play would I think yield considerable benefits.  The fact that children in Europe start formal education older than children in the UK, but by age 11 have higher academic scores, demonstrates that fundamentally our educational system, by its concentration on formal approaches to learning, is managing to fail great numbers of our children and in the longer term our society and economy"* [CO2 – Govt body]

- Many consultees referred to the teaching practices of other countries as influencing the educational attainment of children in care.

  - *"If this government wishes to provide better opportunities for ALL children to succeed and to find pleasure and fulfilment as well as (or in the absence of) educational attainment, the one valuable thing it could take from Europe is the separation of the academic from other education"* [CO78 – Individual response]

  - *"Teachers exchange reports that are found on the Internet - European Youth Care Exchange"* [CO157 – Joint social services and education]

  - *"There are examples of excellent practice, methods etc in other countries, which we believe are largely – though not exclusively – related to those areas with sophisticated and developed models of wholly inclusive education practice within schools.  (I.e. Kitchener, in Canada)"* [CO158 – Vol Org]

- A number of respondents said there were **noticeable differences in the pay, status and level of qualifications of residential/foster carers** in Northern Europe, namely in

Scandinavia and Germany, when compared to the UK.  For example, one respondent observed:  *"Belgium: the position of residential care workers is more highly regarded than in the UK, with commensurate pay and training.  The result is an ethos of professionalism and a culture that values the education of children in care"* [CO178 - Social services].  Others mentioned:

> - *"Resource levels to encourage local, community based foster carers are more generous in Scandinavia where the system appears to fail fewer children"* [CO53 – Youth project]

> - *"In Sweden, childcare whether in residential homes or foster care has a high status with professional qualifications.  Raising the status and quality of residential care would have enormous impact.  At present the status and remuneration make it difficult to attract staff of high quality"* [CO177 – Education]

> - *"Residential care in Germany is highly regarded and 58 per cent of care leavers achieve the **abitur** (equivalent to A levels).  Children in residential care in Israel also do well academically.  As is well known, residential care workers in continental countries are drawn from a different section of the population to our own and typically have four-year degrees plus a specialist qualification.  It is less well known that foster carers in may countries, especially in Eastern Europe, often have professional qualifications.  Many are teachers or psychologists.  In Poland they are required to be educated to degree level…  New South Wales in Australia is the state with the strongest policy commitment to improve educational opportunities for children in care"* [CO198 – individual response]

**(Q45)  How and why does the educational performance of children in care vary between different groups (e.g. ethnic minorities, boys and girls, disabled young people and young from different socio-economic environments)?**

- A small proportion of consultees responded to this.  On the whole consultees had responded to issues surrounding the variations in educational outcomes of young people with SEN and from different age groups in previous sections (see questions 9 and 21 respectively).  Therefore, comments on these groups were not included here because they were not markedly different.  Many of those that did respond here did not distinguish between the different groups as the general view was that variations in their educational attainment simply **reflected the pattern of the general population**:
  *"The educational performance of children in these groups varies whether or not they are looked after.  The experiences of being looked after may intensify some of these differences but it could also be used to mitigate and/or address such differences"* [CO98 – Joint social services and education]

- However, a few respondents felt that being in care adds to this disadvantage:  *"[They are] perhaps **doubly disadvantaged** due to looked after children status and specific grouping"* [CO88 – Council]

- Some respondents reported that children in care may belong to a number of these groups and this could disadvantage them further, i.e: *"Research and statistics highlight the underachievement of boys, children in care, and children of minority ethnic groups.  Therefore, there are groups that can be **multiply disadvantaged**: black and boy and in care;*

*black and in care; black and boy and disabled and in care, disabled and boy and in care and disabled and in care"* [CO130 – Education]

### Minority ethnic groups

- A small minority of respondents said that children belonging to minority ethnic groups might have **lower levels of achievement**. Respondents suggested that variations in the educational attainment of children in care belonging to a minority ethnic group may be due to: *"Institutional racism, low expectations, English not the first language"* [CO158 – Vol Org]

### Sex

- On the whole, respondents were of the opinion that boys in care underachieve educationally relative to girls. Explanations included:

  - boys are more likely to have an SEN statement, especially at Key Stages 3 and 4, with more boys recorded under the code of practice or EBD statements

  - the negative peer culture of young males in residential units: *"girls perform better than boys within the educational system. This could reflect the levels of maturation by the individual sexes, it may also reflect the fact that studying hard is not seen as a manly pursuit and boys can be teased and bullied if they show too great and interest"* [CO165 – Vol Org]

### Disabled young people

- Some respondents pointed out that there was a higher proportion of disabled children in care: *"There are more disabled children in care than in the population as a whole, again probably of the additional strain they place on families who experience problems raising children with insufficient support. Some of these children never achieve Level 1 in the National Curriculum SAT's"* [CO152 – Social services]

- *"A disabled youngster is less likely to be fostered and therefore less likely to enjoy a stable family environment on which to build educational success"* [CO174 – Education]

### Young people from different social-economic environments/backgrounds

- Many consultees believed that varying social backgrounds have differing effects on attitudes towards education, with children from affluent backgrounds more likely to have a positive attitude towards it. One consultee suggested: *"Young people from poor social/ economic environments/ background disproportionately feed the care system, disproportionately underachieve. Some reasons self-evident, but, strong evidence that the care system exacerbates rather than ameliorates educational disadvantage"* [CO158 – Vol Org]

### Others

- A number of respondents pointed out that of late there had been a **substantial increase in the numbers of refugee children in care**. It was felt that due to language barriers many of these refugees would *"compound already low levels of educational attainment"* [CO94 – Govt body, CO152 – Social services]

## Appendix 1: Overall summary of the responses

| RESPONDENT CATEGORY | NUMBER OF RESPONSES |
|---|---|
| **Agencies** | |
| Social Services | **42** |
| Education | **23** |
| Health | **4** |
| Youth Justice | **3** |
| Schools | **7** |
| *Joint responses* | |
| Social Services/Education | **21** |
| Social Services/Health | **2** |
| Social Services/Health/Education | **1** |
| Voluntary Organisation/Social Services/Education | **1** |
| **Government Bodies** | **3** |
| **Councils (County, Metropolitan, Borough, City)** | **16** |
| **Individual responses (academics, practitioners)** | **22** |
| Carers | **3** |
| Learning Mentors | **3** |
| **Professional Bodies** | **7** |
| **Youth Projects (statutory, private, voluntary sector)** | **18** |
| **Voluntary Organisations** | **25** |
| **TOTAL** | **201**[2] |

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[2] Of the 205 responses to the SEU consultation exercise, four were duplicates.
We also had a collection of individual responses from some groups – these were classed as one response.

## Appendix 2: The total number of respondents that answered each question

| Question | Total Number of Responses | Percentage of Responses |
|---|---|---|
| **SECTION A  Factors which affect the educational attainment of children in care** | | |
| **A1.  The care environment** | | |
| Q1.  Which aspects of the care environment have the strongest influence on educational attainment? | **146** | **76** |
| Q2.  Do different <u>types</u> of care environment influence educational attainment? | **133** | **66** |
| Q3.  What support do foster carers need? | **128** | **64** |
| Q4.  Why do children in care for a short time do less well than those who have been in care for a longer period? | **133** | **66** |
| Q5.  What educational assessment is made when a child enters care? | **130** | **65** |
| **A2.  The learning environment** | | |
| Q6.  Which aspects of school have the <u>strongest</u> influence on educational attainment? | **136** | **68** |
| Q7.  Does the type of school influence educational attainment? | **126** | **63** |
| Q8.  Is mainstream schooling the best option for <u>all</u> children in care? | **134** | **67** |
| Q9.  Where children in care have special educational needs, are these appropriately identified and catered? | **135** | **67** |
| Q10. Are children in care disproportionately likely to be bullied? | **133** | **66** |
| Q11. Why are children in care more likely to truant or be excluded than many of their peers? | **135** | **67** |
| Q12. How can **carers** reduce truancy / exclusion? | **133** | **66** |
| Q13.  How can **schools** truancy / exclusion? | **135** | **67** |
| Q14. What contribution does the Educational Welfare Service make in dealing with problems associated with children in care? | **128** | **64** |
| Q15. How effective are Pastoral Support and mentoring programmes? | **120** | **60** |
| Q16. Are you aware of any examples of disapplication of the National Curriculum / National Curriculum flexibilities? | **117** | **58** |
| Q17. What role do School Governors play in promoting the educational attainment of children in care? | **117** | **58** |
| **A3.  Out of school activities** | | |
| Q18. How important are extra curricular/schools activities? | **133** | **66** |
| Q19. To what extent do children in care participate in such activities? | **122** | **61** |
| Q20. What practical steps might be taken to increase participation in out of school activities? | **126** | **63** |
| **A4.  Local authorities** | | |
| Q21. How would you account for variations in the educational attainment of children in care in different local authority areas? | **122** | **61** |
| Q22. What role do Councillors play in promoting the educational attainment of children in care? | **111** | **55** |
| Q23. Do children placed outside their local authority perform less well than those placed within their local authority? | **110** | **55** |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Q24. Why do local authorities have difficulties finding school places for children in care? | **121** | **60** |
| Q25. Are children in care more likely to be placed in "less good" or failing schools? | **125** | **62** |
| Q26. How can local authorities support foster carers? | **118** | **59** |
| Q27.  What impact have Education Action Zones, Excellence in Cities and other initiatives had on the educational attainment of children in care? | **87** | **43** |
| **A5.  Making links** | | |
| Q28. What training and support do Social Workers receive to help them support the education of children in their care? | **116** | **58** |
| Q29. What training and support is available to foster carers to enable them to improve the education of children in their care? | **110** | **55** |
| Q30. What training and support do teachers receive in supporting children in care? | **118** | **59** |
| Q31. What are the strengths and weaknesses in links between schools, LEAs and Social Services? | **119** | **59** |
| Q32. What improvements could be made to the links between schools, LEAs and Social Services? | **116** | **58** |
| **SECTION B    What works?** | | |
| Q33. What approaches have been <u>most</u> successful in raising the educational attainment of children in care? | **129** | **64** |
| Q34. In mainstream schools which strategies have been most successful for raising educational attainment? | **102** | **51** |
| Q35. What impact do local authority secure units and residential special schools have on educational attainment? | **95** | **47** |
| **SECTION C   Quality Protects and the Joint Guidance** | | |
| Q37. How effective have Personal Education Plans, Designated Teachers, and the 20-day rule been? | **107** | **53** |
| Q38. What impact have Quality Protects and the joint guidance had? | **89** | **44** |
| Q39. What improvements could be made to the implementation of QP and the JG? | **85** | **42** |
| Q40. What were the factors underlying the success of QP and the JG? | **70** | **35** |
| **SECTION D    Next steps** | | |
| Q41. What changes would you like to see to QP, the JG and other arrangements for supporting the education of children in care? | **81** | **40** |
| Q42. Are the QP attainment targets set at the right level? | **89** | **44** |
| **SECTION E: International learning and other issues** | | |
| Q43. What can we learn from other countries about how to educate children in care successfully? | **51** | **25** |
| Q44. Are you aware of any good practice examples in other countries, especially particular projects? | **33** | **16** |
| Q45. How and why does the educational performance of children in care vary between different groups, such as: minority ethnic groups, boys and girls, age groups, young people with SEN, disabled young people, young people from different social/economic environments/backgrounds? | **70** | **35** |